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## THE FUTURE OF MISSIONS IN INDIA:

A perceptive glance at missions in India and a roadmap for the India Missions Association

*Wati Longkumer*

### INTRODUCTION

India is one of the largest mission fields in the world as a nation. Out of the 1.4 billion Indians only 2.3% identify themselves as Christians and this percentile figure has remained unchanged for the past 60 years. While the Christian population remained static the nation has galloped forward as an emerging economic power and her opinion is sought after and respected in the global political arena. But of late the political radicalization and its treatment of the minority especially the Muslims and Christians has also become a grave political and social concern.

Therefore, in the midst of such developments what is the future of missions in India? This article introduces three general trends that defines Indian mission and four opportunities for missions in India.

### THE FUTURE OF MISSIONS IN INDIA

**Three General Trends that Affects the Cause of the Gospel in India.**

#### 1. Indian Socio-Political Climate

The present climate of open opposition to the spread of the Gospel and targeted intimidation of Christian workers will continue. However, we should do well to be reminded that this is not the first time that Christians in India are facing such opposition. The so-called "Freedom of Religion Act" law is enacted in several states since 1967<sup>1</sup>, an act legally disguised to persecute any religious conversation targeted especially at Christianity. But the fact of the matter is that of late the persecution has intensified in various forms. The Open Doors' World Watch List

that profiles countries where it is most difficult to profess and practice the Christian faith, had ranked India in 28th position in 2014 but in 2022 it has risen to 11th position.<sup>2</sup> Open Doors estimated that in 2021, an average of 73 Indian Christians per day experienced some form of persecution. Such reports can easily be corroborated by any mission leader within the country, leaders who can share testimonies of interruption of Sunday worship service or house prayer meetings under the fabricated charge of forced conversion or attempt to convert with alurement or that they have no permission to conduct public

<sup>2</sup>. <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/>

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1. For further reading: <https://www.indiatoday.in/news-analysis/story/anti-conversion-laws-in-india-states-religious-conversion-1752402-2020-12-23>

worship in private homes, etc. When such incident happens the bewildering part is the action rather the inaction of Police personnel. They will either turn a blind eye to such commotions or at best arrest the victims, that is the Pastors or Christians leaders under “protective custody” but take no action against the perpetrators of the hate crimes.

But despite such opposition it is very encouraging to note that the spirits of believers, more so, that of the grassroots workers are not dampened nor does it impede the work of the Holy Spirit in our country. This is perhaps, because we understand that persecution for the sake of the Gospel is not a new thing for the followers Christ and that this is what our Lord has already foretold.

Having said this, we should be like the sons of Issachar who, “understood the signs of the times and knew the best course of action to take” (1 Chronicles 12:32). As our Lord Jesus says we should be “wise” and “walk circumspectly” in our witness. This means that we may need to re-strategize and look at new and innovative ways of doing missions: Ways and means whereby we will earn the goodwill of the people around us rather than their wrath, like the believers of the early church who “enjoyed the favor of all the people” (Acts 2:47). Gone are the days of door to door evangelism, tract distribution or open air witness, now we need to innovate ways of effective witness.

I do believe that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28). Therefore, we should not despair rather take it as an opportunity to know God's ways and experience his leading afresh.

## 2. Financial Situation

There was a time when resources were readily available for “missions and evangelism” but the situation is fast changing. Globally there is less resource available, nationally receipt and utilization of funding from overseas sources is being scrutinized more intensely. Further, the new directives under the FCRA<sup>3</sup> regulation stipulates that money received from overseas can be utilized specifically only for the designate program for which the funding is received and there is also a cap on the percentage of donation an organisation can spend on administrative overhead.

However, this does not mean that funds are not available nor does it mean that we are not allowed to receive any funding from outside the country. It means that, firstly, we need to be more accountable in managing our resources and programs. Gone are the days when we can use the money we received in any way we see fit, and spend large expenses on administrative overhead including salary, etc. Secondly, it is now prompting us to look at mobilizing resources from within the country, this indeed is a positive development – a step in the right direction

3. FCRA = Foreign Contribution Regulation Act

for self-sufficiency of the church of India. We do acknowledge that there are many mission agencies that raise the bulk of their budget from within the country but more need to be done until we can come to a position when we can all stand on our own feet even and reduce our dependency on overseas contributions.

## 3. Challenges From Within

However, many Christian leaders in India will agree with me that the greatest challenge to the growth and flourishing of Christian faith in India is from within the Church. The first challenge is the lack of unity amongst the faithful. In reality India is not a homogeneous nation but a conglomeration of nations with diversity of cultures, customs, language and religion. And even within the Christian faith, inadvertently, there is diversity in terms of denominations, and language. There has been attempts for unity with the formation of the Church of South India (CSI), the Church of North India (CNI) and the Council of Baptist Churches in North East India (CBCNEI) but these have not been able to bring about the desired unity. The effort for unity is compounded by the emergence of the independent and autonomous churches. They are primarily among the ‘mission fields’ among the newer believers. So now we have the divide between the so called traditional Churches and the new and emerging churches.

Another challenge within the church, is the issue of integrity among the leaders of the church. The arrest of the Moderator of CNI on fraud charges, on 12 September 2022,<sup>4</sup> is just the tip of the iceberg of the cases where church property is being used for personal gains by those appointed to judiciously administer God's property.

Thirdly, the nominalism especially within the traditional church members is another cause of concern. Statistically, the percentile population of Christians in India remain in the region of 2.3% for the past 60 years. There are many Christians who choose not to witness to their neighbors or friends because of the apprehension that they are antagonized and lost their friendship, hence, they prefer to maintain cordial social relations to active witness in obedience to the Great Commission.

However, all is not lost. Because these challenges are being vocalized in the churches and more importantly, there is the “seven thousand”<sup>5</sup> faithful, though a minority and from the marginalized community are ardent in their faith in Christ Jesus and zealous in their obedience to fulfill the great commission.

## Opportunities and Missional shift for the 21st Century India

The India that is marching into the 21st century

4. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bhopal/madhya-pradesh-bishop-pc-singh-arrested-from-nagpur-airport/article-show/94147159.cms>

5. cf. 1 Kings 19:18

is a confident India with growing economic and political clout in the world arena. And as the country progresses the mission challenges also evolves therefore, the church need to keep abreast of the evolving mission scenario and prepare herself to effectively meet the challenges, not as challenges but as opportunities. Below is the list of some of the prominent challenges.

- 1. Rural to Urban:** The population of India is shifting from rural to urban rapidly. The 2011<sup>6</sup> Indian Census indicated that 32% of Indians live in urban area and by 2030 it is projected to increase to 41%. There was a gradual increase of population in India since the last census enumeration in 2001. The urban population in 2001 was 286.1 million, residing in 5,161 urban settlements. By 2011 the urban population had increased by 91 million to 377.1 million, an increase of 31.81% and urban centers raised to 7,935, an increase of 2,774 or 53.75%. India has eight cities among the list of 50 most populated cities in the world. However, roughly 80% of our current mission activity is in rural areas and among the least privileged peoples groups. In the coming years our mission strategy need to take into account the shifting population trends, and proportionately spread our resources both human and financial to address this challenge.
- 2. Youth of India.** India is a young, for 54% of the population is below the age of 25 years and the percentile increases to 70% when we factor in persons 35 years and below. It may be noted that the Government of India consider youth as those 35 years and below for their policy planning. The youth are the future of our nation yet only 0.8% of its population professes to be Christian. Further cursory survey indicates that fewer than twenty national level mission agencies has a dedicated youth outreach ministry department. They may have youth ministry department that caters to the youth of the church but specifically on outreach to youth is missing. Similarly the youth ministry department of the churches focuses primarily on nurture and discipleship of their own members and consider outreach simply as a program. In view of this statistics missions and churches need to develop ministries specifically for youth outreach keeping in mind the mindset and culture of Gen Z post-modern generation.
- 3. Women: Harnessing Power of Women** within the church: 48.5% of Indians are female and amongst the Christian the percentile raises to 53% (3 million) with a men-women ratio of 1000:1009. However, while the womenfolk are relatively successful in the spheres of politics and corporate world the same cannot be said

6. India rely on a decadal Census calculation for all its official programs. The last Census was conducted in 2011 and due to the Covid-19 pandemic the scheduled 2021 census is yet to be conducted.

of the church. The CNI diocese of Kolkata ordained the first women as priest only in 2015, 200 years after the birth of the Church, while the Church of South India ordained the first women priest in 1987. Thus far in the history of the Indian church there is only one woman bishop, Bishop Pushpa Lalitha and was ordained by CSI in 2013. In 2021, out of 286 member Mission of the Indian Mission Association (IMA) only 17 Mission agencies were led by a female a mere 5% leadership representation. As such, though women are a large influential bloc in the church and potential mission mobilizers yet they remain untapped. If women of the churches could be mobilized and trained they could be a potent force in church life and for missions. Not only can they reach their peers but also they can be effective resource mobilizers for missions as evident in the North-Eastern Indian churches.

- 4. Influencing the Influencers<sup>7</sup>** is another mission trend of the future that is slowly gaining ground. Without diminishing our current focus on the “least among us” we need to accelerate our mission to reach the “influencers” of the nation: people who are the decision makers and “movers and shakers” of the nation. Only when we reach these “peoples group” can we see effective transformation of attitude and influence in our society, corporate world and government space and policies.

In the light of the present socio-political scenario and a perceptive look in the future, the time has come for Indian Missions to review and re-strategize on the way we do missions. We will need to review our methods of mission and re-orientate our target groups. While maintaining the good works being done in the rural area with emphasis in church planting, the time has come for us to broaden out mission outlook be it in terms of geographical area of ministry or the nature of ministry focus. We should not allow the present climate of intimidation and harassment by a few radical groups to dictate our ministry, rather using this as a pivot we could retrospect on past performances and re-envision and accelerate our future mission endeavors.

#### **The India Missions Association: Needs, Challenges and her Relevancy<sup>8</sup>**

The Indian Missions Association was established in 1977 with five members; currently there are 296 missions organizations and Churches as members. During its long history IMA has always been in the forefront of missions in India as its catalyst and

7. a phrase coined by Rev. Susanta Patra, former General Secretary of IMA

8. This section is included as directed by the editor to “write something about India Missions Association while under your leadership”. It is an edited and redacted version of policy paper – a decadal road map, presented in 2018 to the general assembly.

mentor. Indeed, in many ways IMA has fulfilled its objectives and has nurtured many leaders and mission agencies.

But in the course of the 40 plus years journey, the dynamics of the very nature, purpose and function of IMA has evolved.

Forty six years ago, when IMA started there were fewer than 10 credible Missions Agencies in India and mission awareness in the churches and amongst believers was just emerging. It is for this reason the leaders then felt the need for unity and fellowship and an umbrella body to represent them both nationally and internationally. Thus the India Missions Association was conceived during the annual meeting of the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) in January 1977.

Originally six Missions came together to initiate the formation of IMA, it increased to nine by the time it was formally registered as a Society. Now we have 296 Registered members, with about sixty member Missions who are actively participating in all its activities.

Then, the IMA members were young, majority still at its initial stage, struggling in every way – financial, personnel and connections, and even in terms of proper skills for the Task. Now, many members have matured in every way with properly articulated policy, financially stable, adequate member of missionaries, able leadership, etc.

Currently, we can broadly categorize our members into three groups:

**1. Matured and Actively supporting IMA ministries.**

Perhaps about 30% of IMA membership will fall under this category. They are members who are matured, and well structured and well governed. In many ways they do not need the help of IMA anymore, rather they prepared to extent help to IMA and its members when needed.

**2. Fellowship Members:** There are some members who are with IMA primarily for the sake of being part of the national grouping and for fellowship.

**3. Dependent:** Then there are members, in fact, the majority members who are desirous of help from IMA: assistance in the form of monetary resources and trainings. In fact, there are many more out side of IMA in this category who would want to join if they are able to see the benefits of being members of IMA.

**The Role of the India Missions Association in the next decade: The Future of IMA, her Relevancy and Role**

Often, doubt arises as to whether IMA has a role to play in the future of missions in India. Doubt arises, because many members of IMA have matured with sufficient funds available, organizations are functioning commendably, so much so that often they are able to function independently relying on their

own network of supporters. But when we see the magnitude of challenges that faces us we realize that we cannot do it alone, we need to come together for in unity there is strength and only through collaborative action can we overcome the challenges. If we remain united and would work together, we can be synergized and these challenges can actually become opportunities.

The India Missions Association began as an umbrella, providing a protective shelter to all those engaged in mission. Today it has evolved from being not only an umbrella but also more importantly a neutral platform where one and all can come for fellowship, network and for collaborative re-envisioning and equipping.

Below are some of the areas that is identified after a thorough study of the past and present accomplishment of IMA and that we as an Association can and should do in the future.

**1. Networking**

One of the Objectives of IMA is “To be a Facilitator for cooperation, partnerships & networks through sharing resources.

Networking has been and will continue to be one of the major activities of IMA. Networking can be both within and without our national boundaries. Networking result in collaborative endeavors, such as the Bandhu Seva Network, India Mission Researchers Network, Church planters network etc.

Networks help Missions for collaborative efforts, share information and resources and also results in comity arrangements. These efforts are vital if we are to reach the majority of our fellow countrymen at the earliest possible time. IMA as an association thus has no conflict of interest with any of the member missions and therefore is able to provide a neutral platform for such networking activities.

**2. Research, Strategic planning, and Vision Casting**

Another objective of IMA is “To be a Catalyst in evolving corporate vision, ethos & strategy”.

I believe this is one of the key mandates of IMA as an association. While every mission develops and focuses on their own vision as per their organisation Vision statement and ability, IMA become the clarion voice to rally the Christian organizations and churches involved in missions to look at the larger picture, that is India, and act collaboratively.

Research is important to study the current realities and assesses the needs and gaps in missionsfields and opportunities for missions. As such, research will be one more area where IMA can continue to actively involve in order to effectively steer the Indian missions. Research needs resources and manpower and it is for this purpose the Indian Mission Researchers Network (IMRN) has been formed where majority of Indian mission researchers both of individual and organization has joined hands. IMRN’s objective is to cooperate and share resources for all research needs and more importantly, make it



available to genuine Mission organizations without charge.

Vision Casting and Strategic plan will be possible when we garner credible data and have it analyzed. This will enable us to understand the contemporary reality and its needs and thereby be able to plan ahead for the future. Thereafter, once we have the information in our hand we will be able to assist and advice our member missions on the future directions of missions.

### 3. Leadership Empowerment

Leadership empowerment is an area where IMA has performed well in the past, and we plan to continue to provide this service to the member missions.

Need-Based training and consultation will continue to be one of the flagship programs of IMA wherein studying the need of the hour, consultations or trainings will be conducted. Joint programs with other like-minded organizations will also be conducted.

Advance Mission Leaders Training (AMLT), has benefited many upcoming mission leaders in the previous edition. Therefore, we perceive that it is time again to re-introduce it, albeit a revised curriculum.

Training of Trainers for various ministry specific programs will continue.

### 4. Missionary Orientation

Missionary training was one of the founding objectives of IMA. In pursuance to this founding objective, the Indian Institute of Inter-Cultural Studies (IIICS)<sup>9</sup> was established, and continue to provide services to the marginalized mission agencies and mission workers. However, preparing missionaries just prior to deployment is still a need that is expressed by several Missions. Most larger Mission agencies have their own training and orientation programs but the smaller ones lack such facilities. In response to such feedback, the executive committee has approved in principle to conduct a short-term Missionary Orientation programs.

### 5. Persecution Care

Persecution care is one area where IMA has thus far delegated it to those others who have dedicated ministry on this issue, like the EFI Religious Liberty Commission (EFIRLC), Persecution Relief, Open Doors etc. This was done primarily to avoid duplicity, conflict and confusion. But we are realizing that many of our members are in the front-line and are either highly vulnerable to or already affected by persecution. Therefore, study is being made to establish a "Persecution Care" desk at IMA headquarters. The task of this desk will be (1) to educate our frontline ministers of their legal rights at the same time how to exercise caution and restrain in our ministry. (2) Secondly, to provide for spiritual and emotional support and care to the affected, and (3) thirdly, when necessary to provide material relief to

9. also known as Indian Institute of Missiology (IIM)

the affected.

## CONCLUSION

During its long history IMA has always been in the forefront of missions in India as its catalyst and mentor. Indeed, in many ways IMA has fulfilled its objectives and has nurtured many leaders and mission agencies. But the dynamics of IMA and its relationship with member missions have evolved, and the needs and challenges of India mission is continually changing. Therefore, unless IMA also keep in step with these changes, its relevancy will diminish and there is a danger of even becoming redundant. This opinion is not a negative critic on the past performances but a bold acceptance of the present reality. Such bold acknowledgement and course alignments will enable IMA to continue to play the role of a catalyst and one that come alongside each member mission.

It has always been my conviction that as the General Secretary, I should not bring my own vision to the India Missions Association because, IMA being an Association, the Vision of IMA should be the collective Vision of its members. The general secretary may take the role of a catalyst, guiding the members mission to envision a vision and purpose and thereafter may take the lead role to implement the vision. But the members need to take ownership of the Vision and mandate of the India Missions Association.

As Henry Ford has said, "Coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress; working together is success", let us continue to work together so that we will take IMA into the 50th year with renewed vision of purpose and with zeal.



Wati Longkumer  
wlongkumer@gmail.com

*Dr. Wati Longkumer is the current Head Chairman of the Asia Missions Association. He also served as the General Secretary of India Missions Association. Dr. Wati holds a DD degree, MTh Biblical Studies from Trinity Theological College Singapore, and BD from Union Biblical Seminary Pune, and BA (History Honors)*

# THEMES, MOTIFS, AND PURPOSES OF MAKING INDIGENOUS LOCAL THEOLOGIES

*David Gyeong Han*

The way the gospel was communicated in the colonial era<sup>1</sup> meant that the recipients had never had a chance to fully explore their cultural Christian roots. How Christianity was translated in the West and its forceful transmission to another culture, especially during periods of colonial expansion, meant that the subtle features of the local cultural ideas were not reflected in the making of their theology.

Post-colonial theologians express their suspicion of the colonial Church and Eurocentric theological scholarship to create an encounter between the Biblical text and the cultural context. The culture once condemned as pagan has now been revisited as the subject of Biblical interpretation.

Natural transmission of the Christian faith has been through the languages and cultures of people. However, contextual theology involves broader and deeper interactions with the entire culture since culture broadly defines who people are. This contextual dialogue is perceived not as the encounter between parallel religious systems but as a personal experience of integration.

This process of inculturation is necessary for Indigenous Christians to engage in Christian discipleship fully in their local form of Christianity. The Christian doctrines that were never reflected in the culture of the people tend to be dismissed because those doctrines do not bring relevant attention to who they are as people (Hastings 1950:52). The Christian doctrines as practised in worship and the Christian life provide the ethical guidelines. However, the lack of cultural reflection of Christian doctrines results in something other than Christian discipleship, such as a legal, conceptual, or foreign religion.

## POST-COLONIAL AND LOCAL THEOLOGY

When the colonial periods ended, Christian theologians in the formerly colonized world began their quest for searching for more culturally relevant theologies. Developing Christian theology from one culture based on another naturally involves translation, interpretation, and enculturation (Sanneh 1989). As for the basis for constructing contextual theology, several different theological and sociological themes and motifs have been explored by theologians in the continents of Africa and South America. They not only trailblazed the ways for Post-colonial exploration of Christian theology but also provided tools to Indigenous theologians to initiate their

searches.

### *Cultural Situation as a Context of Theology*

A cultural situation is considered necessary for the formation of theology. A theology can tell us about the theologian's struggle for their own cultural identity. The history of various cultural or theological works in transmitting early Christian thoughts from Judaic to Hellenistic culture can demonstrate how we should treat our cultural efforts, which relate to our theology. Bediako, a Christian theologian of Ghana, asserted that theoretical conclusions also must be made from actual Christian existence. Theology is a by-product and shows the process of Christian self-definition. Thus, theology answers or has to do with culturally rooted questions. Christian writings show us the theological ideas of the authors' encounters and questioning. This notion gives a solid ground to discuss our cultures in relation to Christian belief (Bediako 1992:3-12).

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However, Bediako uses the word culture as a personal situation and a range of personal preferences. Tatian, for example, who belonged to Syriac Christianity, when he spoke to the Greeks about Hellenistic Christianity, expressed disfavour with the idea of Christianity enmeshed with Hellenistic culture — but related Moses' role to the Old Testament and the Hellenistic culture to the New Testament. This was a radical inculturation of Hellenism. Tatian faced accusations from his theological opponents on the Hellenistic side for being a heretic. Others did not see the Syriac side of him either. Later, he let out this anger in his writings that expressed extreme disfavour towards Hellenistic Christianity.

As a Greco-Roman from Carthage in the Roman

<sup>1</sup> Colonial era also includes post- and neo- colonial era during which the euro-western Christian missions to the non-western world continued.

province of Africa, Tertullian kept a distance from Hellenistic culture, whereas Justin and Clement had positive attitudes towards Greco-Roman culture. As Justin did the groundwork, in the light of Christian revelation, Clement worked to integrate the good elements of the culture as the hermeneutical key to the entire religious history of humanity. These theologies arose out of personal situations and identity.

While it gives importance to the cultural situation in forming a theology, Bediako's theology and identity complicate local theology. Bediako's chosen identity with a culture indeed constitutes an essential aspect of local theology, but it provides a motive, not the basis, for constructing a local theology. Local theology deals with the culture that is common to a particular society. Personalized identity is a practice which benefits the postmodern world. But culture, as defined, is a 'cumulative and patterned response to its environment and provides a 'context' which is omnipresent in its territory to shape human belief and behaviour to interact with the environment. Thus, social behaviour is generally patterned in a culture so that the beliefs and behaviour of members of society are directed towards broad channels, whose courses are implicitly known to all. Culture attributes identity to a person, not just a person grasping it from a culture (Knighton 2007: 58-59).

### *Self-Respect for a Local Theology*

An attempt to explicate an Indigenous theology is an assertion of tribal sovereignty (Kidwell, Noley & Tinker 2004). The primary reason for reconstructing one's cultural and religious ideas and connecting and attributing to their own Christian self-understanding is to validate the authenticity of the peoplehood of God. People, for personal reasons, might want to know that God was in another culture accessible to them, even before Christianity arrived. Suppose an Indigenous theology is to be a part of the people's life-giving, life-sustaining social structure, which serves the end of tribal sovereignty. In that case, it must speak not only of past Indigenous experiences and cultures but also to speak to the contemporary reality of their existence (Kidwell et al. 2004). For Tutu, upholding his traditional religious heritages in theologizing is for their self-respect because they had a genuine knowledge of God that they were able to communicate with the deity and speak authentically and the gospel in their own ways (Tutu 1978:366).

However, while self-respect can bestow some degree of national, regional, and tribal identity and respect, the overall construct of a local theology can never solely rest on the theme of self-respect.

### *Translations of Languages and Cultures*

Lamin Sanneh is a historian of Islam and Christian mission in West Africa. A significant area of Sanneh's academic work is the study of world Christianity. He writes extensively about the translation of the Christian message, challenging a good deal of the

accepted history of mission in the modern academy. In *Translating the Message*, he wrote:

In time, Christianity expanded from Europe into Asia and Africa, among other places, and was able to break out of its Western cultural confinement by repeating the process by which the Church's missionary centre shifted from Jerusalem to Antioch and beyond. In some important respects, however, the modern shift was unprecedented, for the extraordinary multiplicity of mother-tongue idioms became the subject of Christian mission rather than the cosmopolitan values of an ascendant West. Nonetheless, the mission-maintained continuity with its apostolic past. In examining the modern missionary phase, however, we should highlight essential signposts in the indigenous culture, especially in the local encounter with the contemporary West. The translation role of missionaries cast them as unwitting allies of mother-tongue speakers and reluctant opponents of colonial domination (Sanneh 1989:94-95).

Christianity was never free from cultural embedding. The diverse expansion of Christianity needs to be seen positively rather than negatively, which, in a practical sense, is the only possible way of passing on the Christian messages. Vernacular language, culture, and history are the actual vehicles of Christian transmission. Even at birth, Christianity was embedded in the Jewish heritage. The Apostle Paul's contribution to the mission to Gentile, Gnostic themes that appeared in the Gospel of St. John, the Hellenization of Christianity, and the lasting prominence of the King James Version are all examples which support the cultural embedding of Christianity. It is misleading to think of the Christian religion as being monolithic from the beginning. There were different Christian traditions; some were not Jewish, and Judaism covered a range of expressions. On the one hand, Sanneh's openness to translate Christianity into language and culture, a pluralistic expansion, gives courage to many post-colonial theologians searching for a unique cultural Christian theology. But on the other hand, to view colonization as the context in which the gospel message was received and understood may justify the historical horrors committed to indigenous people and, as a result, undermine the historical consequences and the associated pain. This logic underpins Bediako's notion of identity, in this case, a collective identity.

Despite Sanneh's ideal position distinguishing the West's political impact from its religious implications, much of the colonial mishaps, including the abolition of language and culture, were carried out against Indigenous people in and through Christian religious institutions. As the Church represents Christian belief, what it has done to the people still affects how they perceive their Christian faith. The same echoes in the case of the Indigenous tribes of Canada



and the Aboriginal people of Western Australia. The cultural package that came with the gospel profoundly impacted indigenous peoples' Christian self-understanding. This topic is discussed in a separate article that engages in a discussion of 'Indian Residential Schools.

Moreover, Sanneh views culture as an obstacle to overcome, not as a resource to enrich to reach the universal understanding of the message. A problem with the vernacular translation is that it uses only the corresponding words or concepts from the culture of the transmitter and does not fully construct a local theology from cultural sources. Moreover, languages neither contain whole aspects of culture nor fully express the cultural dynamic. But, Sanneh's notion of the vernacular gives prominence to language rather than culture, as he views language as a living expression of culture (Sanneh 1989: 200).

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF POST-COLONIAL THEOLOGY

### North American Indigenous Theological Perspectives

Indigenous theological discussions did not begin with systematic talks of God, which is different from the theology of the West. It started as a reaction to the colonial interactions with Western Christianity. LeBlanc classifies the class of Indigenous scholars who engage in these discussions into two camps: 'liberal and acculturative (Leblanc 2015)' The liberal camp comes from a reactive disposition that considers that nothing of value came to them when the white people invaded their lives. In his historical study on four prominent missionaries, Tinker concluded that Euro-American missionaries were part of the colonial conspiracy and their objective was 'the extinction of Indigenous culture' (Tinker 1993). The reason for this determination comes from an observation that the missionaries who came during the colonial period were insensible to the distinction between the Christian gospel and Western culture.

Consequently, eliminating Indigenous culture was an intrinsic part of colonial Christian missions. The acculturative side thinks that when converted to Christianity, one must subscribe to Western culture and values. Both sides appear to share the exact outcome of weakening Indigenous culture. This classification primarily concerns political issues. However, a more dominant theological problem for both is the appropriation of their contextual theology. Simply bringing the cultural expression of Indigenous peoples to churches is what Marc-Ela would call a 'window dressing' (Mugambi 2002:198).

### *Indigenous and Christian: Historical Irony*

Jace Weaver, a Cherokee, is an assistant professor of American studies and religious studies at Yale University and a lawyer. He discloses five vignettes (Weaver 1998:1-2) to revisit the historical atrocities,

contradictions, and ironies during the colonial era and beyond, all in search of a 'community hermeneutic' to dissolve those ironies (Weaver 1998:1-25).

- 1) In 1782, Christian Delaware abandoned their farms and moved to a new town to avoid conflict with Euro-American farmers. As they returned to harvest the fields, they were confronted by a patrol of one hundred militia and massacred as they prayed and sang hymns. Twenty-nine men, twenty-seven women, and thirty-four children were killed.
- 2) In 1838, 16,000 Cherokees were forcibly marched 900 miles from Georgia to present-day Oklahoma, and one-quarter of them died en route along what came to be known as the Trail of Tears. Christian Cherokees sang hymns in their language as they marched.
- 3) In 1862, thirty-six Sioux were hung because of their roles in an uprising against Little Crow, an Episcopalian, who led the brutal treatment. As they were present at executions, they sang the hymn, 'Many and Great, O God.' As the trapdoor dropped, they grabbed each other's hands and sang, I am here! I am here!
- 4) Vine Deloria, Jr. encountered in 1967 a Presbyterian minister who was in charge of the denomination's Indian missions. Deloria listened to the clergyman describing his mission among the Shinnecocks of New York's Long Island and asked how long his Church intended to carry on such work among the tribe who had lived as Christians for more than 350 years. The answer was, 'Until the job is done.'
- 5) Between 1845 and 1848, the confessing Christian faith was a criminal offence in the Creek Nation. The penalty for an infraction was thirty-nine lashes from a cowhide whip. Samuel Checote, who was in his early twenties, was so punished. He was asked as blood flowed to his ankles; will you give up Christ? You may kill me, but you cannot separate me from my Lord Christ. He later served as chief of the tribe and as a clergyman. He was instrumental in abolishing the ban on Christianity. But out of respect for his people, he never admitted having to suffer for his Christian confession.

There was the terrible irony of being both Indigenous and Christian. Indigenous people in the eastern United States made great efforts to adapt and accommodate to Euro-American culture. Many converted to Christianity to protect themselves from further depredations. Adjusting to the culture did not change anything. The profession of Christian faith did not matter. In the end, it only mattered that they were Indians (Weaver 1998:3).

In the early 1990s, two Indigenous scholars addressed the treatments of the Indigenous/Christian encounter: *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* by George Tinker and *First White*



*Frost: Native Americans and United Methodism* by Homer Noley. Despite the basic agreement the two authors share, Weaver finds essential differences. Tinker<sup>2</sup> dismisses the Christian missionaries of all denominations working among Indigenous nations as partners in genocide. Tinker, despite his assertion that the process of Christianization of Indigenous people assumed the internalization of the larger illusion of Indian inferiority and the idolization of white culture and religion, the sphere of his main academic interests stays within liberation discussions of theology (Tinker 1993:3). He points out that the missionaries in the colonial period confused the Christian gospel and their own European/Euro-American culture so that both the Indigenous people and Indigenous culture were devastated (Tinker 1993:4).

He claims this devastation is a 'cultural genocide.' He points out four aspects of cultural genocide: political, economic, religious, and social (Tinker 1993:7). He concluded that the Christian missions overtly attempted to destroy the spiritual solidarity of Indigenous people. An apparent and deliberate pressure was applied by outlawing ceremonial forms, as in the 1890 legislation that banned the performance of the Sun Dance and the Hopi Snake Dance. He used the case of military suppression of the Ghost Dance, which resulted in the massacre of 350 Indigenous women, children, and older people, as solid evidence for cultural genocide (Tinker 1993:7). With this line of reasoning, he questions the genuine motives of the missionaries and points to the destructive forces of colonialism. He holds the missionary intention as cultural genocide as a historical fact (Tinker 1993:17). In one of his writings, Weaver points out that Tinker's declaration stated the missionaries themselves would not have known their sin in this regard. Still, in another writing, he noted, concerning missionary cooperation in Euro-American economic and political power structures, that they should have known what they were about (Weaver 1998:4). Weaver points out the inconsistencies with Tinker's positions and suspicions on the topic.

Noley, on the other hand, consistently asks how the missionaries whose work was so destructive could not have known what they were doing. Noley declares,

Given the political intrigues that spanned most of the eighteenth century, the integrity of missionaries and their mission was in doubt. The biblical dictum 'You cannot serve God and Mammon' (Matt. 6.24) was set aside as missionaries, on the one hand, were offered a religion of love and eternal life, and colonists, on the other hand, were forming a militia to kill tribal people or drive them from their homes to take their land and crop (Noley 1991:43).

Weaver criticized that Tinker's idea of the 'best intentions of the missionaries cannot be reconciled

with 'any amount of Native suffering and any amount of culpability on the part of the evangelists' (Weaver 1998:4). Accepted, Weaver's criticism on Tinker's stance on the topic of cultural genocide by the missionaries, has wider implications for the condition of the European Christian discipleship and the qualifications and motivation of the European missionaries. It is difficult to implicate the lack of knowledge about God's impartiality since the Christian scripture, which was written much earlier, understood these conditions, as written in the OT Bible (Deut. 10.17),

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes.

### *Indigenous Cultural Expressions in Christian Worship*

Twiss, a Sicangu Lakota,<sup>3</sup> was converted to Western Christianity but later became a pan-Indian activist and advocated the Indigenous cultural expression of the Christian religion. He acknowledged the historical inference that Christianity would be communicated to them by white people, as seen through the visions of some Indigenous elders whom he respected. He attributed the preaching of the gospel by great Indigenous elders to the indigenous people with the purity and genuine faith in following Jesus. The gospel they preached was not a 'white men's religion' but a gospel contextualized in Indigenous culture. Quoting from a CBC News headline (2007) about the pastor of a Canadian church prevented the spiritual dance of Indigenous people, saying it had nothing to do with authentic Christian ceremonies. He lamented how little the general understanding of Christianity for diverse cultural groups, especially of the Indigenous people in Canadian society (Twiss 2015:26):

My twenty years of observation and participation in mission activities among First Nations people have made it evident that rather than good news, the 'Good News' story remains highly ineffective among Native people, and for many, it means bad news. After hundreds of years of missionary efforts, an insufficient number of Native people are actively engaged in a life of faith in Jesus and participation in some Christian traditions (Twiss 2015:28).

This study shares the same concern and motivation. Since the contact with Western Christianity, missionary endeavours continued to reach the Indigenous people without significant progress. The minute success was not the absence of effort, as many missions serve Indigenous people. But we need to consider a proper theology to see indigenous people's Christian progress accurately. The salvation of Indigenous people may look different from that of the Christians in the West. A contextualization of Christianity naturally calls for an ideation of the

2. George Tinker: The Clifford Baldrige Professor of American Indian Cultures and Religious Traditions at Iliff School of Theology.

3. Sicangu Lakota also known as Sicangu Oyate or Rosebud Sioux is a federally recognized Amerindian nation located in South Dakota, United States.

doctrines within the scope of the culture. There cannot be a unified expression of Indigenous culture. It is a habit of non-Indigenous to homogenize Indigenous groups, levelling differences among them unconsciously.

### *Religion vs Spirituality*

Slaton highlights the differences between religion and spirituality as an essential topic in the discussions of creating Indigenous theology (Slaton 2013:1). He sees Transcendentalism, an Indigenous philosophy and the Sàmi worldview as spirituality rather than religion. Rather, he defines spirituality independent of religious rituals and solely depends on individuals searching for higher knowledge and contact with some greater force (Slaton 2013:2). He proposes that the three sects share a common nature of mystical spiritualism as they draw from the collective consciousness. Each revolves around a greater understanding of the natural world (Slaton 2013:2).

Slaton sees a similar degree of faith as in Transcendentalism and Indigenous philosophy centred on nature and the unseen cosmos and revolves around 'unnoticed forces' (Slaton 2013). Bear Heart, a current Indigenous shaman, describes a standard mode of Indigenous 'religion':

We didn't spend one hour Sunday morning in a religious situation—we spent each day acknowledging that every day was a holy, sacred day. We have a song in the morning that says, 'I thank you for another day. I ask that you give me the strength to walk worthily this day so that I will not be ashamed when I lie down at night.' It's a song that came to us long before the missionaries (Heart & Larkin 1998:164).

Both Transcendentalism and Indigenous philosophy<sup>4</sup> view 'nature as a divine window to God,' Slaton highlights, as Thoreau's heightened sense of awareness with the need for a relational view of the world (nature) around him, the Native American Church (NAC),<sup>5</sup> through the sacramental use of peyote,<sup>6</sup> attempts to achieve such insights and wisdom along with a relational perspective to the greater universe around them (Slaton 2013:3).

### *Syncretism vs Contextualization*

4. By 'Indigenous philosophy,' Slaton appeared to limit its term 'Indigenous' only in Indigenous peoples in North America, since Indigenous applies to Australia, Latin America, Africa and Asia.

5. Native American Church. Many denominations of mainstream Christianity made attempts to convert Native Americans to Christianity in Indian Country. These efforts were successful for many Native American tribes reflect Christian creed, including the Native American Church. Although conversion to Christianity was a slow process, the tenets of the Native American Church were readily accepted. From Native American Church – *The Encyclopaedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*: [www.okhistory.org](http://www.okhistory.org), retrieved 23 June, 2018.

6. Peyote. *Lophophora williamsii* (/lou' fofərə wtil' æmsiəz/) or peyote (/pé' jouti/) is a small, spineless cactus with psychoactive alkaloids, particularly mescaline. Also, known for its psychoactive properties when ingested, peyote is used worldwide, having a long history of ritualistic and medicinal use by indigenous North Americans (Wikipedia).

But Twiss was cautious about this kind of contextual theology as he expresses the dangers of syncretism (Twiss 2000:127). He expressed difficulties with the theologians seeing the similarities between Christianity and Indigenous cultures and assuming they are the same without qualifications. The definition of the 'unqualified' contextualization that Twiss proposed in 'adopting foreign forms but interpreting them largely in local ways' (Twiss 2000: 127) is somewhat ambiguous. Inculturation describes how the Christian faith interacts with a culture by influencing its people's understanding of the gospel and how it is practised and shared within that culture. The object of inculturation is to enable the gospel message to be readily understood, accepted and lived out in the culture's thought forms as expressed in its vocabulary, art forms and imagery (Escobar & Shenk 2007:185). Hence, contextual theology is less concerned with altering 'the long-standing doctrines of historical Christianity,' which Twiss wanted to defend from syncretism (Twiss 2000), but rather with delivering it in a culturally relevant form.

Moreover, Twiss' criticism of the use of peyote at the Native American Church (NAC) focuses on the prescribed use of the hallucinogenic drug found in peyote as part of their liturgy. He said

Peyote is intended to increase one's receptiveness to God, making the participant more holy and closer to God. This is an attempt to form one new religion out of two old belief systems – a religion that is neither Christian nor traditionally Native. This is syncretism (Twiss 2000:127).

The traditional use of peyote in an ancient tribal religion was to open a pathway to the deities.<sup>7</sup> The *Huichol* religion of the indigenous people of Mexico consists of four principal deities: Corn, Blue Deer, Peyote, and the Eagle, all descended from their Sun God, *Tao Jreeku*. Schaefer interpreted this to mean that *peyote* is the soul of their religious culture and a visionary sacrament that opens a pathway to the other deities (Schaefer & Furst 1997:52-53). Twiss argued that the modern use of the *peyote* in the Christian Church is to replace the redemptive work of Christ, as it is said in the NT that no one can come to God except through Jesus Christ (John 14.6). Any attempt to replace or distort the historical doctrines of justification, sanctification, and salvation is how Twiss defines syncretism (Twiss 2000:128).

However, Bear Heart asserts that the use of *peyote* is symbolic (Heart & Larkin 1998). It is a 'medicine from the Creator' to help people. Prayers are not made to the peyote. The people who participate in the sacramental peyote are not concerned with what it contains but it helps them in the worship of God and they use it as a symbolic sacrament, much as the Christian use of wine in the communion and the

7. *Huichol* are an indigenous people of Mexico living in the Sierra Madre Occidental range in the states of Nayarit, Jalisco, Zacatecas, and Durango.

Jewish people use wine in the Passover celebrations (Heart & Larkin 1998:203). Heart believes that the Native American Church uses the peyote as an awareness of God's care. As another example of the symbolic use of tradition in Indigenous Christian worship, the drum in the *Sàmi* tradition is also an extremely important part of their traditional spirituality, for it possesses an amazing ability to provide insight to those who use it.

Slaton finds the difference between religion and spirituality in the presence or absence of a ceremony. He observes that the symbolic use of the traditional ritual in Christian worship is to find a window into the divinity of God. Religion emphasizes strict form of rituals, whereas spirituality concerns more with the result. The cultural means used in the worship are essential to the group, as they help 'the gospel message to be readily understood, accepted, and applied.' But Slaton admits his view that, in most cases, they are mere traditions that hold psychological and historical significance in maintaining a dying culture (Slaton 2013:4).

In his latest academic contemplation (Twiss 2015) as a participant observer in the Indigenous theological discussions, fifteen years after his initial publication (Twiss 2000), Twiss' view of contextualization tends to shift more progressively, as stated in his latest publication:

As I think contextualization is not a principle, formula or evangelistic strategy. Contextualization is a relational process of theological and cultural reflection within a community - seeking to incorporate traditional symbols, music, dance, ceremony, and ritual to make faith in Jesus an indeed local expression. Critical thinking and detraditionalization are essential to the excellent contextualization efforts among indigenous communities (Twiss 2015:15).

After Twiss understood the compelling need for surviving the gospel within an Indigenous culture and a hegemonic shift from colonization/neo-colonization to decolonization, he embraced a wider definition of contextualization:

In the radically changing ethnic demographics of American culture and the global community, followers of Jesus are presented with great opportunities and challenges for good. We must genuinely appreciate all cultures as being capable of reflecting biblical faith. We must move away from 'American Christian mythology', which undergirds colonization and its resulting paternalism in Indigenous communities. We must embrace new theological perspectives emerging from Native leaders as being 'equal.' These perspectives provide new pathways for the contextualization process (Twiss 2015:16).

The new pathways he suggests identify Indigenous cultural values, spirituality, and ceremonies as central

to the latest approaches to discipleship and leadership development within the community.

Green acknowledges the fact that Twiss was seeking, in his latest thesis (Twiss 2015), 'to take some of the teeth out of the term by redefining syncretism as the exploration of the synthesis of faith, belief and practice in a dynamic process of blending, adding, subtracting, changing, testing and working things out (Green 2015:4).

Nevertheless, there is an Indigenous theological view that considers inculturation to dominate Indigenous people:

The Catholic Church asserted domination over Amerindian belief systems through the doctrine of inculturation, which asserts that God is central to all cultural experiences because culture is based on experiences with nature, and God is the creator of nature. Inculturation is an ongoing reciprocal process between faith and culture: a way of looking at people's customs, rites, and rituals to discover in them the active and saving presence of God. Through inculturation, the Church affirms what is good in culture, purifies what is false and evil, strengthens what is weak, and educates what is ignorant (Kidwell et al. 2004:9).

This view rejects the implied notion that Indigenous cultures are simply different cultural forms of Christianity and sees it as another Christian attempt to dominate and subdue Indigenous cultures.

The focus of missiology of inculturation is not to make an Indigenous culture Christian but instead to bring or to appropriate the culturally relevant Christian gospel to an Indigenous people, as in agreement with the evangelical definition (Escobar & Shenk 2007:185). The concern of inculturation in missiology facilitates an effective way the gospel is communicated to a culture.

The same view, however, insists that the methodology, language, and understandings of Christian beliefs of the colonists and the majority society since the colonial period have largely failed to Christianize the Indigenous population. Different conceptual frameworks and a different understandings of terms made (and make) Christian doctrine particularly unappealing and at times incomprehensible to Indians (Tinker 2008).

### *Theology of Time vs. Theology of Space*

Indigenous cultural ideas are entirely focused on their surroundings and their lives are lived responsibly within their places. Thus, Indigenous theologians may contribute to a theology of space through their writings on theological topics (Baker 2016:234). Western theology often overlooks the subject of space, Baker compares, but Indigenous traditionalism is oriented toward a spatial cosmic paradigm. Baker discusses the cultural facts that are related to a Christian theology of space. Tinker concurs with



this idea that, without understanding the spatiality of Indigenous existence, one cannot understand Indigenous spiritual traditions (Tinker 1996:121). An Indigenous worldview is given shape by a spatial paradigm; because Indigenous traditionalism is influenced so heavily by its environment, Jace Weaver, an Indigenous theologian, also describes the Indigenous worldview as 'geo-mythological' (Weaver 2015:29). The connection between the Indigenous people and their environment is of great significance reflected in all areas of their lives.

Baker highlights the distinction between Western theology and Indigenous theology to stress the comparison that Western theology is focused on time, but Indigenous theology is rooted in the solidarity and kinship with the environments. This was shown in ethical decisions of Indigenous people made in connection with creation and communal dynamic, when spiritual practices are drawn collectively with the tribe, and communal and individual identity are focused on their kinship with their surroundings. Their identity comes from their lands and connects them to their relatives. Without land, they are not a people (Bear-Barnetson 2009:55). Indigenous theology's connectedness to their environment is formed as it is their way of life but is not limited to only space. Tribal land ownership and water ownership is a substantial political issue facing Indigenous peoples.

Baker relates this cultural tendency of Indigenous people to their view of time: they see time as cyclical, causing their philosophies to be apathetic toward the past and future (Baker 2016:236). Furthermore, he discusses the same tendency considering the lack of time in Indigenous languages. But it seems more appropriate to think that their time concept and language habits did not affect their philosophy of life but rather were the result of their lifestyle in their culture for many years.

What remains an essential fact is an understanding of their kinship: the Indigenous idea of kinship includes not only family and relatives but also nature and the surroundings.<sup>8</sup> In the article, Baker relates the time and space dichotomy to the difference between Christian and Indigenous ethics. Christian theology has been primarily concerned with time and history and relegated the importance of place and space. As an effect, its ethics is also derived from past commandments and results in future outcomes. Communal and individual identity found in the idea of the Kingdom of God was to be consummated in the future. But Indigenous theologies contribute to the ethics of the community space and its communal dynamic. Indigenous Christians express their faith on a 'metaphoric map': a map of sacred mountains,

8. The entire seminars at Indigenous Foods and Ecological Knowledge Symposium, hosted by the University of Washington's American Indian Studies Department and Na'ah Illahee Fund, May 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup>, 2018, based their discussions primarily on kinship of Amerindian people. Kinship not only includes people but also plants and animals (From my observation note at the event).

locations for vision quests, and places where particular rituals or dances occur, or so (Charleston 2015:17-18).

### *The Kingdom of God as Space*

In theology, which is based on the cultural understanding of Indigenous peoples, God's created world is a space where God's spirit indwells. However, the fallen nature of the created world poses difficulties to Indigenous theologies because of their strong belief in God's presence in all creation. T.F. Torrance voiced the same concern as he discussed the theology of incarnation since the created world was a God-enclosed space where everything exists in relation to God (Torrance 1969:18). Hence, the Christian idea of space must begin with God's presence relative to and within creation (Bartholomew 2011:319). In developing the spatial understanding of the Kingdom of God, Tinker also noted when Jesus stated the Kingdom not only 'has come near (ἤγγικε v)', which uses a spatial reference meaning 'is at hand (Matthew 3.2) but also is in their midst (Luke 17). Whether this was a spatial or metaphysical meaning, Tinker sees these verses indicating that the Kingdom must in some way be present in every place. Thus, for Tinker, creation is the Kingdom of God (Baker 2016:238).

### *Repentance as Restoration of the Relationship with Creation*

Jesus also proclaimed that because the Kingdom of God is at hand, people are to repent and believe the gospel (Mark 1.15). This repentance is a return to God and the right relationship with all creation. Because we humans are part of creation, we are to live harmoniously with all creations, which to Tinker, is the Kingdom of God. The restored relationship with the Kingdom implies embracing all of life, the entire ecosystem, including people, plants and animals (Tinker 1996:126-128).

Thus, this spatial theology of the Kingdom becomes the basis for eco-theology. Terry LeBlanc, in his lecture at a NAIITS forum,<sup>9</sup> addressed the topic of the kinship of humanity with his interpretation of Romans 8:18-21. Christian theology often deals with the temporal notion of dispensations of God's redemption, and little was said about the responsibility of Christianity to our space. The contribution of Indigenous theology to the Christian theology of space is an 'identification of the Kingdom of God within creation (Baker 2016:239).

### *Balance and Harmony*

The Christian idea of harmony relates to personal or societal peace. But cosmic harmony is often relegated to an area of eschatology in Christian theology. In most Indigenous cultures, the balance of the spiritual and physical is important (Tinker 1996:126). Personal and communal rituals are performed to bring back

9. NAIITS stands for Native American Institute of Indigenous Theological Studies. LeBlanc spoke at the NAIITS forum at Wheaton College in 2012.

cosmic balance and harmony, which is the focal point of the traditionalist theology of Indigenous people (Kidwell et al. 2004:33, 65, 107-109).

Both the Hebrew concept of *'shalom'* and the Cherokee idea of *'eloheh'* relate to a God-given peace for a community which is to be lived out responsibly by the communal members (Woodley 2012:71). *Shalom*, Woodley believes, is the metanarrative of the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament, which was intended to show the way of life (Woodley 2012:11). Thus, ethics for the Indigenous community, in agreement with the idea of the Torah, derives from and is measured by the overall wellbeing of their community and surrounding environment (Kidwell et al. 2004:18). The theory presupposes the notion that the Torah was founded on the collective dynamics of Judean society which shares the idea of ethics in Indigenous communities.

### *Survival of Indigenous Peoples*

The initial drive of the research has come as a question: if Christianity is to offer salvation to everyone, what does the Indigenous salvation look like? An exploration of such a question involves:

- Indigenous culture and worldview.
- Comparative theology with Christianity.
- Historical process and the current dynamic of religious understanding in the Indigenous culture.

The process will render the precise definition of what salvation means to the Indigenous people in relation to the Christian faith.

Robert Thomas is a Cherokee elder, a practitioner of the Cherokee traditional religion, a mentor to a wide variety of younger Indigenous leaders, and an anthropologist at the University of Arizona. A collection of some of his writings, *Getting to the Heart of the Matter*, was produced as a result of the gatherings of the Native Ministries Consortium over twenty-five years. All his writings in the collection reflect his concern and passion for the survival of Indigenous peoples:

American society is well known for its ability to incorporate and absorb disparate social and cultural groups. Some intellectuals have likened America to a significant social and cultural 'cement mixer,' a colossal homogenization machine. Conversely, it is difficult for distinct groups and people to survive, socially and culturally, in such a milieu (Thomas 1990).

He then said that the Indigenous community could survive a profound cultural loss and continue as social groups if the following conditions can be established, as shown by the minority peoples in the Old World, such as the Coptic Christians of Egypt, the Basques of Spain, the Welsh of the British Isles, the Ainu of Hokkaido, and the Maya of Yucatan in Mexico, who have survived in such circumstances with four features in common (Thomas 1990:23):

- A distinct language, even if it simply functions as a ceremonial/holy language.
- A unique religion, even if it is their own version of a world religion.
- A tie to a particular piece of land, a homeland, and a holy land.
- A sacred history which tells you who you are and why you must survive as a people.

To Thomas, to have a unique religion includes having a unique cultural theology of a world religion. In other words, a local theology should and can serve as a part of their cultural representation and be a religion to unite its people.

Given the weight of those scripture passages where the salvation of a group was called for, rather than individual salvation, the Apostle Paul expressed his concern over Israel's salvation, as in Romans 10:1 and elsewhere, the distinctive group identity and cultural survival of the Indigenous people in North America is an essential element in defining their salvation.

This research will encourage Indigenous Christians and missionaries to establish how we should approach and build a solid and viable Indigenous Christian community.

### **Christological Challenges**

One of the most important tenets of the Christian faith is that Christ precedes culture, meaning all cultures are created in Christ. But, in all cultures, the knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth was unavailable and, thus, had to be brought by a Christian mission. Whether this was done effectively by connecting it to the cosmic Christ in every culture needs to be considered.

Indigenous theologians also realized that the contextual theologies among Indigenous people would not occur without an in-depth reflection on the relationship between Christianity and Indigenous cultures or without a corresponding Christological vision. Achiel Peelman, a member of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and Faculty of Theology at Saint Paul University, brings an important discussion of Indigenous Christology to the Indigenous theology,

There can be no Amerindian church without an Amerindian Christ. But who is this Indian Christ...? What is his place in the spiritual universe of the Amerindian peoples? How do they visualize him? What impact does his gospel have on their life? (Peelman 2006).

Christological challenge is not only seen within the churches but also in the larger discussion between Christianity and other religions (Dupuis 1991). As recent demographic inquiries indicate that the majority of Christians living in the Third World witness the passage from a theology almost exclusively associated with Western cultures to a more international and planetary theology (Buhlmann 1976). This is the situation in which the majority of the Indigenous peoples find themselves (Peelman

2006:14).

### *The vitality of the Indigenous Religious Experience*

It is seldom reported that when the missionaries came, they faced the vital religious experiences of Indigenous people. Their ancestral spirituality remains the true place for them even after the definite plantings of the Christian churches. As Peelman notes,

Many historical and anthropological studies of the Indian missions in Canada demonstrate that the Amerindian spiritual universe did resist the formidable confrontation with western civilization and Christianity, even though the churches fulfilled their mission in a culturally aggressive way (Peelman 2006:20).

The study of cultural practice and spirituality is where we find the interpretation of Indigenous religious experience. Peelman asserts that the understanding of 'Amerindian Christ' must be found in Amerindian religious experience.

Whether we consider the Indian missions of Canada a success or failure, we must recognize that this ancestral spirituality remains the true place where we will eventually discover the hidden face of the Amerindian Christ (Peelman 2006:20).

Peelman examines Indigenous spirituality in their cultures to imagine Christ within their cultures. Indigenous Christian peoples find their core spiritual place in ancestral spirituality, and he questions if Christ may be found in that places. Indigenous people answer the question, 'Who do you say I am?' (Matt.16.15), he suggests that can be found among the Innu in Northern Quebec and urban Indians, in the land of Anishinaabe, or for the Wet'suw'eten Indians in British Columbia. Euro-Christianity's heeding to Indigenous wisdom will fully integrate Indigenous Christianity as they seek to find cultural continuity into the broader Christianity.

### *Theological Interpretation of 'Christic Mystery'*

North American Indigenous people responded to the missionary action of the Christian Church with cultural and religious creativity. Their response presents itself as a unique and original answer that transcends the expectations of the missionaries and the objectives of their churches. Peelman continues,

Instead of stating that the Amerindians have become Christian, but that Christianity never became Indian, it would be more exact to say that the Amerindians have not become Christian like us and that they have not spontaneously joined our western churches. After their conversion, they managed to create their own expressions of Christianity on the fringe of the official churches and often in opposition to them. They often reinterpreted the Christian faith from the cultural

vantage point of their religious experience. Some have turned their back on the Church, while others commit themselves to an Amerindian renewal of their Christian communities. All these tendencies represent a broad spectrum of cultural and religious developments which need attention to theological interpretation (Peelman 2006:83).

The critical base of this interpretation is the emergence of the mystical presence of Christ in the mission, which validates the space for an Indigenous interpretation that comes from their cultural and religious experience. This interpretation implies that we cannot deduce Christian missions only in sociology, anthropology, and the Church's mission strategy. However, the mission of the Church is understood to serve the mystery of Jesus Christ, who gave his life for the salvation of the world. Christ himself reveals a mysterious presence among those who welcome his gospel.

Indigenous contextualization attempts were made from the understanding that all humans share one God or a supreme being, albeit in various forms. The idea of one God does not always contain the discussion within the theological limits of Christianity but instead brings it out into the field of comparative religious studies. Peelman's idea of 'Christic mystery' shifts the discussion from comparative religious studies to the Christian theological discussion. The validity of his new insight needs to be further explored in the field of Christian theology.

### **CONCLUSION: CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY**

In constructing a contextual Christian theology in post-colonial terms, theologians have chosen to go down three major paths of theological trends - inculturation, liberation, and reconstruction (Mugambi 2002:190). In the recent past, liberation and inculturation have been the two most fashionable theological responses.

Adams employed reconstruction as a theological method (Adams 2010). Religiosity is reflected in every aspect of human life. By critically analysing the key elements of culture, we understand the religious ideas of the people. These religious ideas provide the windows through which we understand the cultural form of Christianity. He uses the positive elements from a Ghanaian tradition to reconstruct his local theology. But he struggles with selectiveness of the cultural elements that he chooses to give theological meanings, since he sees the other elements in the same tradition are incompatible with the Christian tradition of his choice. Thus, Adams' reconstruction is constrained by the incompatibility with a certain brand of Christian theology (Adams 2010).

However, Adams' methodology, Bediako noted, is unique and innovative that it shows that the religious identity understood from the study of tradition can



now provide a basis of cultural understanding of Christianity.

The real innovation in Adams' work lies in how elements of religious faith embedded in Asante religious worldview and portrayed in Odwira – basically a purificatory and atonement festival – can provide a framework for understanding the cultural shape that Christianity has taken among the Asante. In this process, traditional Christian notions of time and participation in transcendence acquire new dimensions of interpretation. (Adams 2010: Foreword)

The cultural construction of contextual theology aims to see how fundamental religious values can be embedded and survive through the historical process in a local worldview to give a local person an understanding of the gospel. Thus, it is not a theological approach to a culture but a culture that provides a point of view from which Christianity is understood. Cultural construction is an attempt to view and form a local theology. This method deals with more missiological aims than theological or philosophical angles. All elements of Christian doctrine are culturally understood. This method renders a theology free from power struggles and does not produce counterforces since it naturally builds and understands a local theology from its cultural sources. It also evades immediate deconstruction compared to previous theologies since it seeks to build a theology from its own culture.

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However, Indigenous political situations are less than optimistic and much different from that of Africa. Indigenous people live in the small reserves on the vast lands still occupied by Euro-Americans. The general state of Indigenous churches is reflective of their political situation, dependent and reactionary to external church organizations. Indigenous Christianity has not developed its church organisation and theology compared to the African Church. Despite all

the pessimism, the vision to understand Christianity in their cultural terms may give them spiritual hope to sustain themselves as a people of God.

The way of studying examines the method of the cultural construction of contextual theology. The research outcome does not aim to render a complete theology by the conventional measure of Christianity. Still, it shows a shape of Christianity native to and develops within a culture.

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David Gyeong Han  
ekklesia1@mac.com

Dr. David Han is a Professor at Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, Korean-American mission scholar, author, and teacher with an extensive history of working with Indigenous people of Northwest Canada, and research professional with a PhD focused on Indigenous mission studies, cultural appropriation and local theology from Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, Oxford, UK.

# UPDATE ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN ASIA-PACIFIC REGION: POST-PANDEMIC MISSION OPPORTUNITY RE-BIRTH

*Leiton Chinn*

The January, 2019 edition of the 62nd Asia Missions Advance quarterly bulletin featured seven articles pertaining to the theme of International Student Ministry in Asia. The seven reports portrayed the growing presence of international students and ministries among them, in various countries in Asia including China, India, the Philippines, New Zealand, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Australia.

A year later, January, 2020, the wide-open door of missional opportunity for the Church in the greater Asia-Pacific region to engage in ministry among International Students began to close because of the new and emerging spread of the COVID-19 virus. And within three months, by March, 2020, the door was shut to international students traveling to study abroad around the world, including the Asia-Pacific region. The global CV-19 epidemic effected a death to international student mobility. But there was not only the closure that prevented the outflow of students to another country, but some countries brought back students in early 2020. China, which had 1.6 million of its citizens studying abroad, with 280,000 in Australia and New Zealand and 180,000 in Japan and South Korea, saw 200,000 returnees from overseas locations. Now, three years later, after the freeze and death of the former, normal dynamic of a growing trans-national student migration in the pan-Asia Pacific sector, we do see the encouraging signs of new life and re-birth of international students leaving home and selecting Asia and the Pacific as their preferred destination to study.<sup>1</sup>

**Australia** has become the world's second most popular country for international students, and the early data of incoming students projects an avalanche by 2023.<sup>2</sup> China has recently lifted the restrictions for its students to go abroad and about 40,000 are expected to arrive in Australia at this time, adding to the critical need for housing that is in insufficient supply.<sup>3</sup> Besides India and China supplying the largest number of international students in Australia, more students from Thailand, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Nepal, Pakistan, and Vietnam are choosing Australia.<sup>4</sup> One literal 'open-door' opportunity is for the Church to extend hospitality and rent rooms to incoming students from abroad.

**New Zealand**, like Australia, had large numbers of international students in 2019, with 120,000 before the

pandemic struck. Because of extended international travel restrictions and closures, the number plummeted to below 15,000 in 2022.<sup>5</sup> New Zealand's new 5-Step plan to receive international students again, begins with 5,000 students in April, 2023.<sup>6</sup>

**Taiwan** is seeking 200,000 international students<sup>7</sup> mostly coming from Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam. Previously China supplied the largest number of foreign-students, but growing geopolitical tensions between the two nations has significantly reduced the number of Chinese students.

**India**, which had 75,000 international students in 2019, saw the number drop to 20,561 in 2020. An increase of 3,000 students in 2021 was an early indicator of a likely renewal of an influx of students from abroad.<sup>8</sup>

**Singapore** had 1,500 Indian students in July, 2021, but that number significantly increased in less than a year to 10,000 in March, 2022.<sup>9</sup>

**Japan's** international student population decreased from more than 310,000 in fiscal year 2019 to 242,000 in fiscal year 2021. The encouraging news is that around 242,444 foreign students have arrived in Japan since March, 2022 with 110,000 still waiting to enter.<sup>10</sup>

**Malaysia** had about 40,000 new student applications from more than 150 nations, even during the pandemic.<sup>11</sup>

**Nepal** is trying to become one of the growing hubs of education in Asia, as it seeks to attract more students from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup>

**Korea** had a goal to reach 200,000 international students by 2023, but the pandemic impact greatly reduced the numbers during 2020 and 2021. Then the numbers increased from 152,000 in 2021 to 167,000 in 2022.<sup>13</sup>

5. ICEF Monitor, November 30, 2022

6. The PIE News, February 3, 2023.

7. Talent-Strapped Taiwan Seeks 200,000 Overseas Students, South China Morning Post, February 3, 2023.

8. University World News, September 8, 2022

9. The PIE News, July 12,

10. University World News, June 29, 2022

11. The PIE News, March 31, 2022.

12. Number of Foreign Students South Korea 2013-2022, Statista, January 17, 2023.

13. Number of Foreign Students South Korea 2013-2022, Statista, January 17, 2023.

1. Students Return to China, China Insight, March, 2020.

2. Australia Re-Asserts Itself as a Top Study Destination, University World News, Oct 25, 2022.

3. China Return Adds Pressure to Australia's Tight Supply, The PIE News, February 8, 2023.

4. ICEF Monitor, October 19 and November 9, 2022.



**The Philippines** had about 35,000 international students prior to the onset of CV-19, mostly medical students, with many from India, and many returned home. About 8,000 new international students enrolled, with about 3,000 from India.<sup>14</sup>

**Thailand** has about 20,000 international students according to Keystone Masterstudies.com.

How might the re-birth of international student mobility within the Asia-Pacific region be a God-given global missions opportunity? Will the Church in greater Asia be like the tribe of Issachar and understand the times and trends and know what to do about it?

Will the Church be ready and willing to receive the return of foreign students with God's hospitality? One avenue of participating in sharing God's love with international students is to partner with some existing International Student Ministries (ISMs) of local campus ministries, such as the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students in most countries of the Asia-Pacific region. Inquiries about ISMs in the region may be directed to Terry McGrath (ism1@inspire.net.nz), founding director of International Student Ministries New Zealand who has served as the initial Lausanne Facilitator for ISM in the Asia-Pacific Region since 2008, and also Steve Scott (sscott@lausanne.org), the new Lausanne Catalyst for ISM in

the Asia-Pacific region, who is based in Australia.

Some relevant resources on ISM are the Lausanne Global Classroom video series on ISM at: <https://lausanne.org/lausanne-global-classroom/international-student-ministry-episode> and, <https://www.acmi-ism.org/ism-resource-center>.

Additional resources are available at: <https://newwineskins.org/internationalstudentministry-resources#top>.



Leiton Chinn  
[lechinn@aol.com](mailto:lechinn@aol.com)

*Leiton Chinn has been mobilizing the Church for International Student Ministry since 1977 and served as a President of the Association of Christians Ministering among Internationals (ACMI), and as the first Lausanne Catalyst for ISM from 2007-2017. He is a member of the World Evangelical Alliance Mission Commission and currently coordinates the Anglican ISM Network.*

14. This Old City, July 18, 2022.

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# HOW WE ACTUALLY GOT THE BIBLE: A RESPONSE TO BART EHRMAN

Takaaki Hara

## INTRODUCTION

Bart Ehrman is a prominent and influential New Testament scholar and a prolific writer. As an agnostic, he often challenges the traditional, orthodox understanding of Christianity. For instance, in his bestselling *Jesus, Interrupted*, Ehrman tries to undermine the authority and trustworthiness of the Bible. He argues based on the work of Walter Bauer that there were many theologically divergent Christian groups such as the Ebionites, Marcionites, Gnostics, and what he calls proto-orthodox Christians in the first few centuries of the church. Thus, “the problem in the development of the canon of Scripture was that each and every one of the competitive groups of Christians – each of them insisting they were right, each trying to win converts – had sacred books that authorized their points of view. And most of these books claimed to be written by apostles. The canon that emerged from these debates represented the books favored by the group that ended up winning.”<sup>1</sup> Ehrman further notes that “it took at least three hundred years of debate before the question of the canon even began to reach closure. . . . The canon was the result of a slow and often painful process, in which lots of disagreements were aired and different points of view came to be expressed, debated, accepted, and suppressed.”<sup>2</sup> If Ehrman is correct, it will certainly be devastating for Christians who believe that the Bible is the word of God and undermine the very foundation of their faith. Moreover, how can we confidently proclaim our faith to others if we are not certain that the Bible is trustworthy? This article attempts to assess the validity of the claims made by Ehrman. Specifically, we will consider (1) whether the work of Bauer on which Ehrman based his claims is tenable or not and (2) whether all of the 27 books of the New Testament were debated for centuries before they came to comprise the canon.

## APPRAISAL OF WALTER BAUER’S WORK

In 1934, Walter Bauer published a seminal work entitled *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum (Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity)*. His first main thesis was that there existed varieties of Christianities in the beginning, with no single variety having a predominant claim on apostolic roots: “even into the third century,

no separation between orthodoxy and heresy was accomplished in Egypt and the two types of Christianity were not yet at all clearly differentiated from each other. Moreover, until late in the second century, Christianity in this area was decidedly unorthodox.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, Bauer argued that orthodoxy was a later construct. His other main thesis was that the Roman church’s dominance over other areas in the late second century eventually led to the development and supremacy of orthodoxy: “supported by the conviction that Rome constituted the church founded in the world capital by the greatest apostles, Rome confidently extends itself eastward, tries to break down resistance and stretches a helping hand to those who are like-minded, drawing everything within reach into the well-knit structure of ecclesiastical organization.”<sup>4</sup> To be sure, Bauer’s claims are contrary to the traditional understanding of orthodoxy versus heresy: orthodoxy was established upon apostolic roots from the very beginning (cf. 2 Thess. 2:15) and heresy sprang up as an aberrant belief. But is Bauer’s assessment of the first few centuries of Christianity correct?

First of all, it should be noted that Bauer mostly examined the situation of Christianity in the second century, not the first-century New Testament period.<sup>5</sup> Second, in his *History of New Testament Research* William Baird gives the following appraisal: “Bauer has been sharply criticized. He is accused, for example, of arguing from silence, of overstatement, of forcing the material into the mold of his own hypothesis; some contest the details of his analysis.”<sup>6</sup> More specifically, it has been proven that heretical varieties of Christianity did not precede orthodoxy in Asia Minor:

Paul Trebilco, in an analysis of Asia Minor, has shown that Bauer’s thesis fails at a number of key points. While Bauer argued that Docetism preceded orthodoxy in Smyrna and that the Judaizers preceded orthodoxy in Philadelphia, Trebilco points out that Bauer overlooks key pieces of earlier evidence that suggests otherwise, namely the letters in Revelation to these same cities (2.8-11; 3.7-13). As for Hierapolis, Trebilco

3. Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1971), 91, [https://www.sacrificiodelreysagrado.com/wpcontent/uploads/2021/04/walter\\_bauer\\_orthodoxy\\_and\\_heresy\\_in\\_earliest\\_chris.pdf](https://www.sacrificiodelreysagrado.com/wpcontent/uploads/2021/04/walter_bauer_orthodoxy_and_heresy_in_earliest_chris.pdf).

4. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, 306.

5. Coleman A. Baker, “Early Christian Identity Formation: From Ethnicity and Theology to Socio-Narrative Criticism,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 9, no. 2 (2011): 231.

6. William Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, vol. 2, *From Jonathan Edwards to Rudolf Bultmann* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 454.

1. Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (and Why We Don't Know about Them)* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2009), 191.

2. Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted*, 221.

shows that Bauer is leaning on the argument from silence when he assumes that Ignatius did not write a letter to that city because it was dominated by heresy. On the contrary, the earliest sources for Hierapolis actually indicate an orthodox presence – the daughters of Philip settled there at the end of the first century and Papias was the bishop there at the beginning of the second.<sup>7</sup>

What about Egypt? Contrary to Bauer's claim that "until late in the second century, Christianity in this area was decidedly unorthodox," both Clement of Alexandria and Irenaeus testify that Valentinianism arose *after* orthodoxy in the second century.<sup>8</sup> According to Darrell Bock, "Bauer's claims for diversity lack support. Of all the regions he surveyed, only Edessa may be correct. That locale hardly represents the center or hub of Christian development. For all that Bauer claimed with his book and all he gained in clarifying method, Bauer failed to show the extensive, early nature of alternative views."<sup>9</sup>

As for Bauer's claim that the development of orthodoxy was due to the Roman church's control over other regions, it should be pointed out that there existed orthodox churches in other areas such as Antioch, Ephesus, and Jerusalem in this early period. Note also in this regard that the Johannine materials and some of the Pauline epistles were originally written for Christian communities in Asia Minor.<sup>10</sup> This corroborates the existence of orthodoxy outside of Rome. Furthermore, after investigating the unity and diversity of first-century Christianity, James Dunn concludes that he has "*discovered a fairly clear and consistent unifying strand*":

That unifying element was the unity between the historical Jesus and the exalted Christ, that is to say, the conviction that the wandering charismatic preacher from Nazareth had ministered, died and been raised from the dead to bring God and man finally together, the recognition that the divine power through which they now worshipped and were encountered and accepted by God was one and the same person, Jesus, the man, the Christ, the Son of God, the Lord, the life-giving Spirit. Whether we looked at the proclamation of the first churches, at their confessional formulae, at the role of tradition or their use of the OT, at their concepts of ministry, their practice of worship, their developing sacraments, their spiritual experience – the answer came out consistently in more or less the same terms: the cohesive focal point was Jesus,

the man, the exalted one.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, whether or not there was Rome's ecclesiastical control over other locales, it seems clear that orthodox views were much more prevalent than Bauer claimed. Thus far we have seen that the research that was spawned following Bauer's pioneering work suggests that his two main theses are problematic upon closer scrutiny. How about Ehrman's claim that "each and every one of the competitive groups of Christians – each of them insisting they were right, each trying to win converts – had sacred books that authorized their points of view"? Interestingly, Ehrman does not mention the early date of composition of the New Testament books as compared with the apocryphal books that heretical groups adhered to even though he does discuss four criteria (antiquity, catholicity, apostolicity, and orthodoxy) to discern whether a given book is authoritative and thus canonical or not.<sup>12</sup> He correctly observes that "*about a hundred fifty years after Jesus' death we find a wide range of different Christian groups claiming to represent the views of Jesus and his disciples but having completely divergent perspectives*" (emphasis added).<sup>13</sup> Note that all the 27 books that eventually comprised the New Testament were composed by A.D. 100.<sup>14</sup> By contrast, the New Testament Apocrypha and the Gnostic texts cannot be confidently dated prior to the mid-second century.<sup>15</sup> Thus, Christians already possessed some sort of standard or a "measuring stick" (the original meaning of the Greek *kanōn*) with which to evaluate the divergent theological views as they emerged.

## DEVELOPMENT TOWARD THE CANON

Let us now move on to Ehrman's other claim that "it took at least three hundred years of debate before the question of the canon even began to reach closure. . . . The canon was the result of a slow and often painful process, in which lots of disagreements were aired and different points of view came to be expressed, debated, accepted, and suppressed." It is true that the totality of the New Testament canon as we know it today was affirmed in the fourth century – in Athanasius' *Festal Letter* (367), through Pope Damasus I's commissioning of the Latin Vulgate (383), and at such local church councils as the Council of Rome (382), the Council of Hippo (393), and the Council of Carthage (397).<sup>16</sup> However, does this mean that *all* the

7. Michael J. Kruger, *Christianity at the Crossroads: How the Second Century Shaped the Future of the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 149.

8. Darrell L. Bock, *The Missing Gospels: Unearthing the Truth behind Alternative Christianities* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2006), 52-53.

9. Bock, *The Missing Gospels*, 54.

10. Bock, *The Missing Gospels*, 50-51.

11. James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*, 3rd ed. (London: SCM Press, 2006), 403.

12. Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted*, 219-220.

13. Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted*, 191.

14. Paul D. Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), 208.

15. Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament: Countering the Challenges to Evangelical Christian Beliefs* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), 605.

16. Lee Martin McDonald, *The Formation of the Biblical Canon, vol. 2, The New Testament: Its Authority and Canonicity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 316-317.



27 books of the New Testament were in dispute for centuries as Ehrman seems to allude to?

According to Lee McDonald, “it appears that when bishops and councils spoke on the matter of canon formation, they were not defining something *new*, but were rather reflecting and selectively sanctioning that which was already a matter of popular practice and circulation in the churches.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, when we scrutinize the first few centuries of Christian history, it becomes apparent that most of the New Testament books were regarded as authoritative from early on. First, with respect to the oral pre-Gospel traditions Dunn argues that “the Jesus tradition was *already*, in the first century, in the decades immediately following Jesus’ mission, exerting the canonical influence which the great church formally acknowledged so many decades later. The Jesus tradition was already providing a ‘rule’ for Christian living.”<sup>18</sup> Second, the writers of the New Testament books recognized each other’s writings as authoritative. Thus, Paul treated Luke’s Gospel on a par with the Old Testament (1 Tim. 5:18; cf. Luke 10:7). Likewise, Peter acknowledged Paul’s writings as Scripture (2 Pet. 3:15-16). Paul’s letters were also circulated among the churches (Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27).<sup>19</sup>

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### When we turn to the writings of the early church fathers, we notice that they had no reservations to refer to the various New Testament books as Scripture.

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When we turn to the writings of the early church fathers, we notice that they had no reservations to refer to the various New Testament books as Scripture. In fact, Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles observe that “with the exception of 3 John, the early church fathers cited all NT books as Scripture.”<sup>20</sup> The earliest nonbiblical Christian document still in existence is 1 Clement (c. 96). In this epistle Clement “referred to the canonical Gospels, the book of Acts, 1 Corinthians, Philippians, Titus, Hebrews, 1 Peter, and perhaps James much as he did to the OT.”<sup>21</sup> Likewise, Polycarp (c. 69 – c. 155) “may have cited as many as 15 NT books” in his letter to the Philippians and “it is more than likely that Polycarp viewed Paul’s letters

in their entirety as Scripture.”<sup>22</sup> Justin Martyr (c. 100 – c. 165) treated the Gospels or “the memoirs of the apostles” on a par with the Old Testament when he wrote that “on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things.”<sup>23</sup> Perhaps the strongest piece of evidence for the canonical status of the four Gospels comes from the writing of Irenaeus (c. 130 – c. 200), who maintained that the Gospels were precisely four in number, as illustrated by his reference to four zones of the world, four-faced cherubim, and four covenants of God:

It is not possible that the Gospels can be either more or fewer in number than they are. For, since there are four zones of the world in which we live, and four principal winds, while the Church is scattered throughout all the world, and the “pillar and ground” of the Church is the Gospel and the spirit of life; it is fitting that she should have four pillars, breathing out immortality on every side, and vivifying men afresh. From which fact, it is evident that the Word, the Artificer of all, He that sitteth upon the cherubim, and contains all things, He who was manifested to men, has given us the Gospel under four aspects, but bound together by one Spirit. As also David says, when entreating His manifestation, “Thou that sittest between the cherubim, shine forth.” For the cherubim, too, were four-faced, and their faces were images of the dispensation of the Son of God. . . . For the living creatures are quadriform, and the Gospel is quadriform, as is also the course followed by the Lord. For this reason were four principal (καθολικαί) covenants given to the human race: one, prior to the deluge, under Adam; the second, that after the deluge, under Noah; the third, the giving of the law, under Moses; the fourth, that which renovates man, and sums up all things in itself by means of the Gospel, raising and bearing men upon its wings into the heavenly kingdom.<sup>24</sup>

Based on the patristic and manuscript evidence, Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles estimate that the four-Gospel arrangement seems to have been established by the mid-second century at the latest.<sup>25</sup>

How about the collection of Paul’s letters? It seems likely that it actually originated with Paul himself, for “from what is known of ancient letter collections, the author would most likely have made a copy of the letter immediately, kept a copy for himself, and sent a copy to the recipient. . . . Not only was this a

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17. McDonald, *The New Testament*, 316.

18. James D. G. Dunn, “How the New Testament Canon Began,” in *From Biblical Criticism to Biblical Faith: Essays in Honor of Lee Martin McDonald*, eds. William H. Brackney and Craig A. Evans (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007), 128.

19. Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1989), 172.

20. Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 7.

21. Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown*, 6.

22. Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown*, 6-7.

23. Justin Martyr, *The First Apology of Justin* 67.

24. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.11.8.

25. Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown*, 20.

known practice, it is unlikely that Paul would have sent a letter and not kept a copy for himself."<sup>26</sup> Most likely, the Pauline letter collection began circulating soon after his death in the mid- to late 60s and gained canonical status by the last quarter of the first century.<sup>27</sup>

Two more church fathers may be added for our discussion of the canonical status of the New Testament books. First, in relation to the confrontation with Marcion, Tertullian (c. 160 – 220) gave clues concerning which texts he viewed as authoritative: "the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), Paul's letters (Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Thessalonians), John's Letters, and Revelation."<sup>28</sup> Second, in his *Historia ecclesiastica* 6.25 Eusebius (c. 260 – 340) discussed Origen (185 – 253, 254), who regarded the following New Testament books as entirely credible: "Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, an unspecified number of Paul's letters, 1 Peter, 1 John, Revelation, Hebrews (with a question of authorship), and Acts."<sup>29</sup>

Finally, the Muratorian Canon (A.D. 170) deserves a mention. It lists no less than 22 of the 27 books of the New Testament and includes "the four Gospels, at least two of John's letters (and possibly the third), the Acts of the Apostles, Paul's 13 letters, Jude, and Revelation."<sup>30</sup> The Muratorian Canon is significant in that it "is likely the earliest extant canonical list that in all probability documents the existence of the concept of canon already toward the end of the second century."<sup>31</sup>

Thus far we have surveyed how Christians in the first few centuries viewed the various New Testament books as authoritative. Specifically, we have seen that the four Gospels seem to have been regarded as canonical by the mid-second century at the latest while the Pauline letter collection appears to have gained canonical status by as early as the last quarter of the first century. At any rate, it is safe to say that "toward the end of the second century, the major contours of the NT had clearly emerged, setting the framework for the subsequent final resolution of the canonical status of several remaining smaller or disputed books."<sup>32</sup> Thus, even though the canonicity of several New Testament books may have been questioned for centuries, such major doctrines of the Christian faith as the deity of Christ (John 1:1; 10:30-33; Phil. 2:6-11; Col. 1:15-20), his resurrection (Matt. 28:1-10; 1 Cor. 15:3-8), and salvation by faith (John

26. Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown*, 21.

27. Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown*, 22.

28. Jordan Scheetz, "The Books of the Bibles in Early Christianity," *HTS Theologise Studies/Theological Studies* 68, no. 1 (2012): 6, <http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/hts/v68n1/v68n1a27.pdf>.

29. Scheetz, "The Books of the Bibles in Early Christianity," 2.

30. Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown*, 8.

31. Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown*, 8.

32. Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown*, 7.

3:16; Eph. 2:4-9) can be securely established by those books which were deemed canonical by the close of the second century.

## CONCLUSION

In this article we have investigated (1) whether the work of Bauer on which Ehrman based his claims is tenable or not and (2) whether all of the 27 books of the New Testament were debated for centuries before they came to comprise the canon. Contrary to Bauer's claims, we have seen that (1) heretical varieties of Christianity did not precede orthodoxy in Asia Minor and Egypt and (2) orthodox views were much more prevalent than Bauer claimed. As for the canonical status of the New Testament books, the available evidence strongly suggests that a majority of the books were regarded as canonical by the end of the second century.

Ehrman states that "whatever Christian theologians and other believers might maintain about the divine impetus and guidance behind the canonization of Scripture, it is also clear that it was a very human process, driven by a large number of historical and cultural factors."<sup>33</sup> Ultimately, herein lies the crucial and fundamental difference between Ehrman, an agnostic, and Christians on their views of canonization. Ehrman attempts to explain the process of canonization purely in terms of human factors. Christians, however, affirm the work of the Holy Spirit in its process.

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33. Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted*, 221.

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Takaaki Hara  
takaakihara@hotmail.com

Dr. Takaaki Hara works for IFES Netherlands as an international student worker in Amsterdam. Previously, he was engaged in cross-cultural mission with the Shelter Youth Hostel Ministry in Amsterdam for 18 years. Dr. Hara holds an MPhil and a PhD in Linguistics from the University of Oxford and Utrecht University, respectively and is currently studying at Tyndale Theological Seminary, Badhoevedorp, the Netherlands. Among his publication is "Two Greats in the Bible: How the Great Commandment Encompasses the Great Commission," *Asian Missions Advance* 54 (January 2017).





# THE MANIFESTATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IS FOR THE 'COMMON GOOD': A MISSION PERSPECTIVE OF THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

*Peroaiz Sultan*

The topic under study is related to the theology of the Holy Spirit as practiced in the early church under the guidance of mentors like the Apostle Paul. In the context of the Church at Corinth, it raises issues of practicing the gifts of the Spirit for the faith development of individuals for social participation of individuals and groups to experience the power of God while committing to the kingdom of God. This has a visible mission perspective which is the commitment of this writer. This article is a personal reflection shared with an intention to create and raise commitment of love and care among communities.

**The context of 1-Corinthians:** This Epistle came from the pen of the Apostle Paul along with letters to the church at Thessalonica as the earliest New Testament documents. The young churches were establishing as communities of faith and practice and faced challenges to have correct doctrine and related issues sorted out as timely guidance from their leaders.

The church at Corinth first of all faced the challenge of unity. (Chapter one). The disunity was caused by the inclination of the early Christians to take up individual Apostles as leaders over and against others, thus creating schisms leading to group- mindedness, forming groups to oppose others. To strengthen the belief of the believers in God and his Son and his Spirit, St. Paul introduces the Holy Spirit as the power of God and calls them to have confidence in the person and teaching of the Apostle. (1-Cor 2:5, 10-14). Highlighting the Kingdom of God as the power of God and not of human words, Paul shows his commitment to the Gospel of Christ. (4: 15, 20). He also believes and assures the early Christian community that they were the temple of the Holy Spirit who was given to them by the Father; and the Spirit lives among them. (6:19). In the background of Corinthians' weak social ethics like loose marriage practices and eating food (meat) offered to idles and gender imbalance, Paul reminds them of Christian faith in one God and one Lord Jesus Christ (8:6).

In the second half of Chapter 11, he challenged the so-called love feast of the church at Corinth which ended up with a greedy attitude and encouraged them to observe and celebrate the sacrament of Eucharist and related ceremonies in consideration of others around the tables. (11:33). This has implications for churches all over today to revisit their doctrine of the Spirit and his gifts for the broader participation in Church life to benefit God's world for the fullness of God's glory.

In this background, Paul encourages the church at Corinth to reflect upon their doctrine of the Spirit and understanding of the gifts related to him.

## THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT:

There is a variety of the gifts of the Spirit, nine as a recognized list; word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healings, miracles, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in tongues and interpreting different tongues. A thoughtful reflection should help to understand Holy Spirit as their source, their diversity and impact on the receiver and benevolence for general public-coming from God. This sequential of the Spirit is clearly divinely manifested act of God, a great blessing for the world through the commitment and service of the Christian in the Spirit. (12:7).

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**So, the gifts of the Spirit are not handed over as a cluster of divine virtues but as a one single blessing on the Christian to thankfully work them. They are given as the Spirit's manifestation and not the receivers spiritual exaltation over others.**

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This has an immediate mission perspective that the gifts of the Holy Spirit to individuals and groups are to benefit community/society. They are not for personal spiritual pride but for the service to others. They are to be celebrated in the spirit of love and care. The gifts are spread over the individuals as to one message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge, to another faith, to another gifts of healing, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between tongues and to still to another interpretation of tongues. St. Paul has clearly said, "All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as the Spirit determines" (12: 11). First, he says that different gifts are given to different persons in the Church and second, they are given by the one and same Spirit and third that it is the Spirit's choice and discretion the way He distributes them to different people.

So, the gifts of the Spirit are not handed over as a cluster of divine virtues but as a one single blessing on the Christian to thankfully work them. They are given as the Spirit's manifestation and not the receivers spiritual exaltation over others.

The strategic purpose of this giving of the blessings of the Spirit to impact the community in St. Paul's view is to build the Church as a body of different parts

because in baptism all become one and the Holy Spirit is provided as one Spiritual commodity ( 12:12-14).

## **HOW THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT ARE GIVEN AND RECEIVED**

1. Jesus' coming and vocation as the Son of God was influenced by the Spirit and its gifts. Jesus did not receive them as the believers receive them. Jesus stands an example for the believers that while Jesus is one in Trinity with the Spirit, still he upholds the coming of the Spirit and appreciates the impact of the gifts coming with the Spirit from the Father. Luke has recorded the event when Jesus was filled with the Spirit in joy and praised God for revealing the mysteries of the kingdom on children (Youngs) and hiding them from the wise. Jesus declares that only those people know God on whom he would reveal God the Father (Luke 10:21-22). St. Luke has earlier recorded Jesus returning from his overcoming Devils temptations and committing to his vocation to preach the good news of the Kingdom to the poor and the oppressed (Luke 4: 16-19 )- fulfilment of Isaiah 61:1-2. This was fulfilled as the Spirit was given and received. This came in connection with Jesus' preaching of the favoured hour of God for the world- the climax of the God's own mission of sending Jesus to be the Saviour of the world. This is what the Church preaches and lives for. Isaiah 42:1 is God's declaration that His heart was happy with his chosen one and that he sent his Spirit upon him. Importantly this spirit came upon the Messiah of God to establish peace on earth to benefit all nations for which truthfulness is the visible virtue.
2. The Spirit comes as the divine promise of the Father in heaven (Acts 1:4). This comes in the background of Joel 2:28-32). Prophet Joel's vision was pragmatic and focused on Eschaton-the end time. The prophecy of the young people, visions of the older people, the Spirit's coming on all including the male and female slaves would come as wonders of God on earth and those who would have name of God shall be saved. This holds a mission perspective.
3. Acts Chapter 2 is focused on the coming of the Spirit received by the disciples with the gift of speaking in tongues and interpreting the tongues. This great event includes missionary sermon of St. Peter which became a reason of the conversion of 3000 people, a large number to start with.

Many healing accounts of Jesus are recorded with a mention of the Spirit as the power of God and the tangible existence and coming of the Kingdom of God. e.g. (Matthew 12:28). God gives individual Christian his Holy Spirit to maintain holiness in his or her life, says St. Paul (1 Thess 4:7). Holiness has both personal and social implications.

The Holy Spirit is God's presence and power with full divine authority to help humans act as God's hands to work for the goodness which God brings to earth despite human rebellion.

## **SOME MAJOR FACTORS AND ASPECTS OF COMMON GOOD AND MISSION COMMITMENT**

Following may be short listed aspects of what is commonly known as 'common good'. First comes peace, then justice. The issue of equality with a commitment to integrity and dignity of all people along with the development and progress of communities leading to transformation combating poverty and related aspects of betterment are among the key considerations to address the notion under discussion. Rehabilitation of people with odd behaviours and situations like drug addicts and mentally and physical handicapped is also a consideration in the discussion on common good.

We are considering only those aspects of 'Common good' which have conceptual and theological bases. The other aspects of social welfare are important, but we are not discussing them because of shortage of space here.

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**What is the level of the commitment of the Christian who in a way feels proud to claim a gift of the Spirit for the weaker members of the community. How does the message of wisdom speak to the issues of social concern?**

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How do we see the manifestation of the Holy Spirit on individual Christian with specific gift of the spirit especially one from among the nine mentioned above to help bringing about peace and justice in a local community where he or she lives with surety of provision of amenities like clean water, electricity and gas for cooking, also making sure that education is a provision in the range of all children. And how the gifted Christian engage with those who are oppressed and do not have equal opportunities of jobs and whose integrity and dignity is rolled down every day for the sake of their daily wages.

What is the level of the commitment of the Christian who in a way feels proud to claim a gift of the Spirit for the weaker members of the community. How does the message of wisdom speak to the issues of social concern? Equally the message of knowledge which comes under the fear of God has great potential for social change. The third gift of the spirit is described as 'faith' which raises and maintains the level of commitment for the salvation and well being of people we engage at our work and dwelling places. It also

encourages the believer to have faith in themselves of their capacity and others to have collaboration of any activity for the common good. This brings witness to the gospel because Jesus prayed for his disciples (John Chapter 17) to have faith in him as the one who gives eternal life. Gift of healing may involve prayerful concern of the Christian for the healing of those who are physically sick. Jesus prayed for the sick and healed them. Do Christians have a calling to do that? Healing of the whole person becomes a reality under the power of the Spirit. It is also healing of relationship among the community and families, thus maintaining a spirit of unity.

The use of miraculous power as in the case of Jesus and the believer is not to perform wonders for personal glory but bringing peace and love and reconciliation. Prophecy is an activity of the Spirit which is shared with the believer for the common good by reflection on the daily human situation and speak against the exploitative structures which oppress the poor and resourceless. This involves a spirit of sharing God's intention. Distinguishing between spirits as given as a gift of the Spirit is a spirit of discernment between the good and bad ministries. Good and bad trees who bear good and bad fruit. This helps distinguishing among the intentions of humans how they come up to involve in others' affairs.

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### The use of miraculous power as in the case of Jesus and the believer is not to perform wonders for personal glory but bringing peace and love and reconciliation.

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Speaking in different tongues is a unique gift of the Spirit which helps the believers to speak the language of the people. What is needed and what is desired need to be distinguished and a genuine commitment is shown for the wellbeing of all. Finally interpreting different kinds of tongues. This may involve making the members of a community understandable to others, thus developing an atmosphere of mutual respect and honoring one another in common commitment for the kingdom values. It is importantly good to have this realization that along with personal blessing, the gifts of the Spirit have social perspective. Once we are aware of that we may be able to commit afresh to mission commitment of wellbeing of those who are underprivileged. The nine-fold gifts of the Spirit cover all aspects of individual and social life. This shows the fullness of the Spirit of God.

Christian commitment for the common good is a mission commitment. It is carried out joyfully in the fellowship of believers. This happened among the early Christians. St. Luke records the event when they prayed and the room moved where they were and they all were filled with the Holy Spirit and they

preached the Word of God bravely. (Acts 4:31). This is followed by the description of the coherence of early Christian communities who were filled with the Spirit were one heart and soul and they all shared their resources among themselves, and nobody claimed their sources for themselves but shared with others voluntarily. And no one was a destitute among them because they shared their resources with others through the Apostles and God's grace was upon them. (Acts 4:32-35). This kind of caring attitude emerged as a result of the manifestation of the Holy Spirit on the Individual and group of Christians in Jerusalem.

The experience of the Holy Spirit by the Christian believers is not just speaking in strange tongues which no one understands, but to speak the language of the community they live in and give glory to God in a vernacular. Jesus under the power of the Spirit ministered to people. He taught them the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. He gave more practical and tangible interpretations of the law-different from the Pharisees. Therefore, people marveled at his person and works.

The coming of the Holy Spirit is the fulfilment of divine promise for the disciples (believers) to be witnesses of Christ. (Acts 1:8). St. Paul has described the coming of the Spirit to control the believers with regard to their living in God for God's glory and for the benevolence of the people and not to gratify human nature. I would like to conclude with a passage from St. Paul's letter to Romans Chapter 8.

" You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet, your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit , who live in you". (Roman 8:9-11).



Pervaiz Sultan  
pervaizsultan15@gmail.com

*Rev. Dr. Pervaiz Sultan is Academic Dean of Higher Degree Program and Research at Lahore College of Theology, Lahore, former Principal of St. Thomas' Theological College, Karachi.*



# 10/40 WINDOW UPDATE: FROM MISSION FIELD TO MISSION FORCE

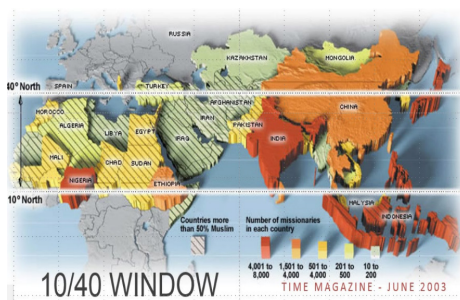
Luis Bush

## THE 10/40 WINDOW

The 10/40 Window contains most of the unreached people groups in our world, and is still our primary mission field today. However, increasingly there is emerging a mission force out of this mission field. The thesis of the 10/40 Window Update is that from a mission field thirty years ago, when the first 10/40 Window booklet was written, and now, the 10/40 Window has become a mission force in our day.

We know that the previous 10/40 Window Update was prepared ten years ago<sup>1</sup> (10/40 Window Update in 2013) to see where the unreached and the least reached areas were located. Included in this purpose was also the knowledge and the intention of where and how we pray for these areas. Through the 10/40 Window we learned that prayer does make a difference. The 10/40 Window led us to realize that, as the Body of Christ, we are being called to pray for and engage the upcoming mission force in the 10/40 Window, to mobilize a new generation of missionaries to fulfill the Great Commission through the worldwide proclamation of the gospel, and to catalyze disciple-making movements (DMMS) such that they become church planting movements (CPMS) among every people group (ethne) in the 10/40 Window and beyond.

## THE UNFINISHED TASK IN MISSION



Jesus defines the way to complete the unfinished task of the Great Commission that will bring about the end of the age in answer to the question of his disciples as he sat on the Mount of Olives in answer to the question of his disciples: "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?" Matthew 24:3b Jesus answers the question regarding the sign of his coming in two parts. In the first part, he describes the nine notable characteristics of the end of the age in Matthew chapter 24 as follows:

- 1) false Christs, (4-5);
- 2) wars and rumors of wars, (6-7);
- 3) famines, (7);
- 4) pandemics, (7);
- 5) earthquakes, (7);
- 6) martyrs, (8-10);
- 7) false prophets, (11);
- 8) increasing evil and loss of fervent love that is, marked by great intensity of feeling, (12); and
- 9) worldwide proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom to all the ethne/people groups, (13-14) (Matthew 24:4-14).

The best way to define and help complete the remaining global missions tasks is to look first to those unreached ethnic groups around the world, and document them drawing from more than twenty-five years of research, documentation, and publication at Joshua Project: People Groups of the World just as Jesus defined the task in His promise to His disciples and then pray, mobilize and go. *And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come* – Matthew 24:14 (ESV)

More than 60% of individuals in the 10/40 Window live among the unreached people groups. The 10/40 Window includes about 70 countries and two-thirds of the world's population. It is also where most of the poor live and is home to Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religions. The 10/40 Window vision focuses on the region of the world with the most human suffering combined with the least commitment to the gospel of Jesus. This is the most challenging geographic region for Christian missions today. While it is the greatest challenge in missions today only about one out of ten missionaries serve in the 10/40 Window.

Evangelical missionary societies use the 10/40 Window map to promote missions in Northern Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. The map itself, however, has received minimal scholarly attention. Using insights from the field of critical cartography, the map has been pivotal in directing missionary zeal.

The 10/40 map has reshaped missionary thinking with its meta-geographical proportions, cartographic language, and accompanying rhetoric communicating several novel key propositions about the mission. It shows that maps matter greatly, and that missionary geography should be taken seriously, adopted, and adapted to enlighten and enable the mission force including and especially in the countries of the

<sup>1</sup> [10/40 Window Update in 2013](#)

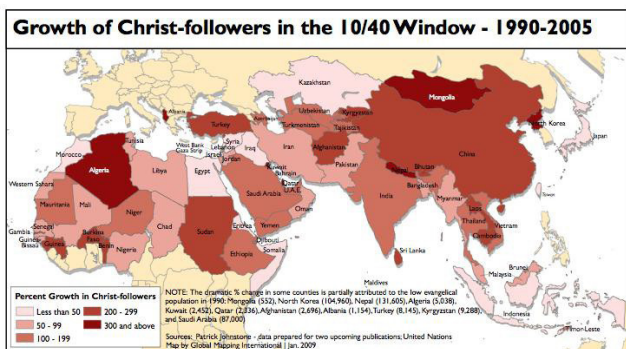
10/40 Window which are from being increasingly transitioning mission fields to becoming mission forces. (NB countries in 10/40 and revised list<sup>2</sup> - (10/40 Window Revised List | Joshua Project) This article highlights some of those nations that model the essence of this article of the 10/40 Window movement from the mission field to a mission force.



### PRAYER DOES MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

In 2008, fifteen years into a worldwide emphasis in missions on the 10/40 Window, there are encouraging indicators that this region has been highly responsive to the presentation of the Gospel. The annual growth rate of Christ followers in the 10/40 Window was almost twice that of those outside the 10/40 Window. Christ followers in the 10/40 Window nations increased from 2.5% of the population in 1990 to 4.7% in 2005. The general population grew at only 1.5% annually, while the population of Christ-followers grew at an amazing 5.4% per year!

10/40 Window Statistics	1990	2005	Average annual growth rate
Christ-followers as a % of total population	2.5%	4.7%	
Estimated population of Christ-followers	87,535,000	205,209,000	5.4%
Estimated total population	3,441,271,000	4,326,363,000	1.5%



### CHINA FROM MISSION FIELD TO MISSION FORCE: ADVANCING THE GOSPEL THROUGHOUT CHINA AND BEYOND

China, officially known as the People's Republic of

<sup>2</sup> [10/40 Window Revised List | Joshua Project](#)

China is the world's most populous country in the world, with a population exceeding 1.4 billion, which is slightly ahead of India<sup>3</sup> (China - Wikipedia). Over the last forty years, the Chinese Church and China have changed significantly. It's a new China! It's a new Church! It's a new world<sup>4</sup> (China Source | China's New Generation). The twenty-year harvest of the 1980s and 1990s following the decade-long Cultural Revolution in China that ended in 1976 could well be called *the greatest historical revival*, but it's a new day. Like the word crisis in Chinese as a symbol is made up of both danger and opportunity so does the situation of China today presents danger and opportunity. Lead Chinese Pastor Ezra Jin Mingri knows and articulates these realities with clarity and conviction.

In the story by award-winning author, Evan Osnos, international correspondent for *The Chicago Tribune* in Beijing, he concludes that "Christianity's rapid rise is reshaping the officially atheist nation, its politics, and the way many Chinese views the world." Osnos highlights Pastor Ezra because he "embodies a historic change. After centuries of foreign efforts to implant Christianity in China, today's Christian ascension is led not by missionaries but by evangelical citizens at home. Where Christianity once was confined largely to poor villages, it is now spreading into urban power centers with often tacit approval from the regime."<sup>5</sup> (JESUS IN CHINA - Chicago Tribune by Jun 22, 2008, by Award Winning Author Evan Osnos ) The Wall Street Journal reported on the emergence of a new church in a new China by telling the story of Pastor Jin Mingri.<sup>6</sup> (China's Banned Churches Defy Regime, by Brian Spegele, updated July 28, 2011 - Wall Street Journal) From being a mission field, China is becoming a mission force in the 10/40 Window.

In his book titled: *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power*, author and journalist, David Aikman writes on the Beijing Forum in the chapter titled: The Back to Jerusalem Movement. "It was at the Beijing Forum where I, Luis, met Pastor Ezra for the first time. When I returned to Beijing, the recollection of the meeting ten years prior came to my mind. They had gathered from the main families of the house church, pastors from the Three-Self Church, and the emerging Third Wave of churches in the city made up of entrepreneurs and the educated. I met with several individuals from the Beijing Forum and others to hear their stories and to bring a challenge of raising up a new generation from the 4/14 Window age group to bless the nation of China.

What I heard over the next few weeks suggested that there has been so much change in the last decade that it's like the emergence of a new China in which a new

<sup>3</sup> [China - Wikipedia](#)

<sup>4</sup> [China Source | China's New Generation](#)

<sup>5</sup> [JESUS IN CHINA - Chicago Tribune by Jun 22, 2008, by Award Winning Author Evan Osnos](#)

<sup>6</sup> [China's Banned Churches Defy Regime, by Brian Spegele, updated July 28, 2011 - Wall Street Journal](#)



Church has emerged on a mission to the countries of the 10/40 Window all the way back to Jerusalem.<sup>7</sup> (China's Next Generation: New China, New Church, New World, by Luis Bush and Brent Fulton | Goodreads)

In the report of Beijing Forum II, held in November 2011, the participants' vision and dreams for the Church in China were agreed to as follows:

- 1) As Christians, we wish to be a blessing to the country of China of which we are citizens.
- 2) We envision an evangelized China and are moving from the coastlands in the east to the relatively less evangelized central and western parts of our country.
- 3) We dream of the unity of the whole Church in China.
- 4) God is calling us to fulfill a cross-cultural vision, not only within our own nation but beyond.
- 5) We are calling forth a mission force numbering 100,000 to take the gospel back along the "Old Silk Road" from where it first came to us in 635 A.D. We call this the "Back-to-Jerusalem Movement" as we intend to take the gospel back to Jerusalem itself where the Commission to be witnesses was first given by the Lord Jesus to his disciples (Acts 1:8). This was a 1930s home-grown movement which began with the idea of carrying the gospel on foot all the way back to Jerusalem by retracing the steps of the Old Silk Road.
- 6) We want the Church outside of China to join us in the Back-to-Jerusalem vision and invite them to help come and prepare us for the cross-cultural mission.
- 7) We desire to bless our country of China by engaging in constructive, compassionate holistic missions to help build our society in the twenty-first century.

## THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCHES IN CHINA

An article in the British weekly newspaper The Economist, dated September 15, 2020, affirms that Protestant Christianity is growing in China despite the government's efforts to contradict this growth. In 2014, Bibles were confiscated and shepherds were arrested. But despite these activities, Protestant Christianity is still the fastest-growing faith in the land. Ezra Jin, a recognized Christian leader in China, reflected on recent political developments and the effect on churches in China. Ezra described the situation for the Church in China since 2018, when an amendment to the constitution of the People's Republic of China removed presidential term limits, allowing them to rule indefinitely. With the new organizational structure for managing religious affairs, religions began to be treated as ideological competitors of the Communist Party.

The nature of church-state conflicts in the following

<sup>7</sup> [China's Next Generation: New China, New Church, New World, by Luis Bush and Brent Fulton | Goodreads](#)

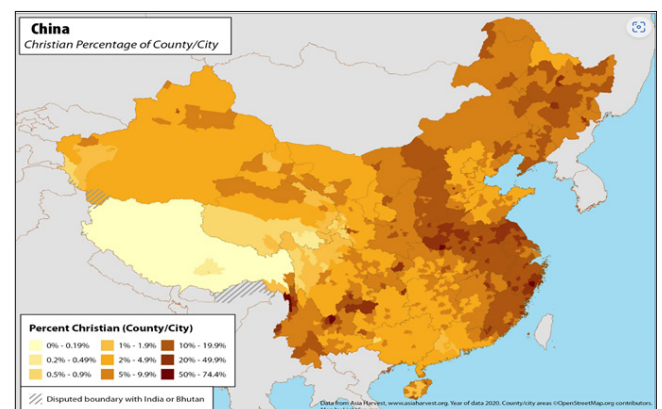
years resulted in persecution and suffering for the Christians. On the 9th of September 2018, Ezra's church was banned, and the government took over the premises. Ezra learned the mystery of suffering. As he read from Isaiah 35:7-8 in the NIV he was greatly encouraged by the prophetic word and what it meant for his homeland. *"The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once laid, grass and reeds, and papyrus will grow. And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness; it will be for those who walk on that Way."* (NIV) Ezra understands the prophecy. *"The waters quench the thirsty soul, and many come to find refreshment in the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior."* This is the story being lived out in China today.

## GROWTH IN NUMBERS

Ezra says of the number of Christians in China: "Our estimate is as follows. 'When the Communist Party took power in China in 1949, there were about 700,000 Christians in mainland China. After thirty years of intense persecution and oppression, the Christian presence was erased from public view. But since 1980, for thirty years, there has been a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the resurrection power has been tangible.'"

Today, in 2023, Ezra estimates that there are more than 80 million Christians in China. So, if we look at the total number since 1949, that's over a hundred times more. Perhaps as many as 22 million Chinese Protestants participate in unregistered "underground" churches, according to a new study by researchers at the University of Notre Dame.

We pray with the Christians in China Psalm 80 and verse 19: "Restore us, O Lord, God of hosts; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved," (December 2022). I think that the strategies to reach the countries of the 10/40 Window as in the example of China is one of the subjects most addressed by churches, mission agencies, and organizations interested in fulfilling the Great Commission given by our Lord Jesus. China is one of the countries where Christianity is growing the fastest in preparation for a great harvest of souls for Christ.





## BACK TO JERUSALEM MOVEMENT IN CHINESE CHURCHES<sup>8</sup>

For the Chinese Churches on the Chinese mainland, the Back to Jerusalem Movement became the catalyst for the evangelical revival of the church and a turning point in their missionary role in the propagation of the gospel.

The vision was birthed among the Chinese in the 1920s, and since that time, the churches of China have sought to fulfill what they believe is their integral role in fulfilling the Great Commission. In 1946, the *Back to Jerusalem Evangelistic Band*, would independently develop a similar vision. However, government restrictions and persecution forced the movement to go underground for decades.

Originally founded in the 1940s as an eschatological movement with the engagement of different indigenous Chinese Christian mission movements, they shared the vision of preaching the gospel westwards towards Jerusalem to prepare for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

By the 1980s, despite persecution, *Back to Jerusalem* was known not only in the western part of China but also by the Chinese house church leaders who fled outside to the West for asylum. The zeal of the Band was passed on through the years, influencing China Mission: Mission China 2030 Movement.<sup>9</sup>

Many Chinese Christian leaders believe they are commissioned by God to fulfill the vision they have received to take the Good News to the nations in the 10/40 Window.

The goal of the Chinese Back to Jerusalem Movement is to evangelize the unreached peoples of the 10/40 Window from the eastern provinces of China, westward towards Jerusalem. It is being called the largest missions movement in history.

## CHINA MISSION: MISSION CHINA 2030 MOVEMENT<sup>10</sup>

Korean Chinese leader Rev. Ezra Jin is the chairperson of Mission China 2030. "Churches in China will commission 20,000 cross-cultural missionaries to spread the Gospel overseas by the year 2030. This is the vision set by Chinese leaders at the 2013 Leadership Summit in Seoul, Korea. The shared mission and goal were also the vision of participants who attended the 2016 "Mission China 2030" summit held in September on the island of Jeju in South Korea. More than 1,000 pastors and individuals who have hearts for missions came to Jeju from all over China and the world to learn from and engage in this event. The theme for the conference was "Son of Peace" based on Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God."

"During the summit, with the guidance of the Holy

Spirit, we explored ways to fulfill the purpose of Mission China," stated Rev. Ezra Jin, chairperson of Mission China 2030" (Mission China 2030 | Christian Reformed Church). (China's Next Generation - New China, New Church)

## THE DECLARATION OF CHINA MISSION 2030

The Declaration of China Mission 2030 affirmed the following:

1. That we are called to be servants of Jesus Christ.
2. That the Bible is the foundation of our faith.
3. That the Back to Jerusalem vision seeks to continue to advance the gospel westward.
4. That we are committed to preaching the gospel overseas, hand in hand with the universal Church, sending out missionaries to the unreached peoples, until the Lord returns.
5. That we seek to mobilize traditional home churches, team-based house churches, new city house churches preparing professionals to evangelize their communities at work.
6. That we plan to release missionary publications to record the vision that readers may run with it. We will have missionary workshops to promote discussions related to advancing the mission of God.
7. That we will engage in prayer promoting a missionary prayer movement.

## CONCLUSION

From being a mission field, the 10/40 Window has become a mission force over the course of the last thirty years. China, as the most populous country in the world with nearly one out of every five people on planet earth, has become a mission force incarnating the reality of the 10/40 Window in our day. This calls for prayer, encouragement and enablement by the Body of Christ worldwide in our day that we may all play our part in advancing the gospel to the glory of God. based on Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God."



Luis Bush  
luis.bush@gmail.com

Dr. Luis Bush introduced the 10/40 Window concept at the Lausanne II conference in Manila in 1989 which brought into focus the region of the world with the greatest human suffering combined with the least exposure to Christianity. led the Latin American missions' movement, called COMIBAM, during its initial phase now with an estimated 26,500 missionaries serving in 160 countries. He served as CEO of Partners International (PI) from 1986 to 1992 Dr. Bush completed a Ph.D. in Intercultural Studies from Fuller School of World Mission in 2003.

8. Jin, Ezra Mingri, [Back to Jerusalem with All Nations.](#)

9. [New China, New Church, New World](#)

10. [Mission China 2030](#)

MAY 22-26, Jakarta, Indonesia

# AMA 2023 CONVENTION

**MISSIONS IN THE POST PANDEMIC ERA: CHALLENGES AND  
OPPORTUNITIES IN THE NEW NORMAL WORLD**

<https://ama2023.asiamissions.net/>

THE ASIA MISSIONS ASSOCIATION is pleased to inform you that the 14th Convention of the Asia Missions Association will take place at the Rose of Sharon Bethel Church of Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia, from May 22-26, 2023.

The theme of the Convention is  
“MISSIONS IN THE POST-PANDEMIC ERA:

Challenges and Opportunities in the New Normal World.”

The Asia Missions Association believes that mission leaders, scholars, and church leaders need to be more aware of the changing environment of global missions in the post-pandemic era and must learn to develop new mission strategies for the new normal world through this convention.

We pray and hope that you will be able to come and join us in this Convention.  
See you in Jakarta!

