JOURNAL OF THE ACADEMY FOR EVANGELISM IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Volume Twenty-Two
2006-2007

The Journal (ISSN 0894-9034) is published annually online. Hard copies are $15.00 per single issue or $40.00 per subscription for four issues. Order them from the Managing Editor.

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In This Issue

In behalf of the Academy, I want to acknowledge with much appreciation the work of Dr. Ken Gill over the years as book review editor. Starting next year Dr. Doug Powe will take on that role.

This issue of the journal begins with an incisive analysis of the Natural Church Development project by George Hunter. He examines the organization's claims, methods, conclusions, and not-a-few omissions. The questions he raises might give pause to some thinking of adopting NCD's approach, or at least stimulate some debate.

Atul Aghamkar is an urban missiologist who teaches Christian graduate students in Bangalore, India. However, he received his doctorate in the USA and was recently at Princeton for sabbatical research. He is well qualified, therefore, to bring East and West together, as he seeks to do here in an exploration of a range possible partnerships – domestic and international – in witnessing to the Hindu diaspora in North America.

In her article, "Going to Gathering: Studying an Interdisciplinary Ecclesial Evangelism," Laceye Warner urges us to move beyond truncated views of evangelism to "a theologically and historically robust understanding" that is situated within the broader *missio Dei*.

Paul Dekar offers us his rich reflection on 32 years as a professor of evangelism. Philosophically and practically, he shares his convictions, aims, and practices by starting with his pedagogical assumptions – influenced by Thomas Merton – then by providing examples of how he has applied them in the classroom.

Paul Dybdahl urges us to heed communication theory if we want to effectively communicate spiritual truth. However, he says, "we are perhaps blissfully unaware of even the very basic tenets of communication theory." He commends a receptor-oriented approach that aims not to pronounce truth but to lead people to truth's discovery.

Reflecting on recent travels to the Middle East and other locales where majority populations are Muslim, Robert Tuttle asks if there is hope for better relations between the church and Islam, and for the effective communication of the gospel. He offers a list of priority focuses for the church.

Editor's Page: Net Fishing

In Luke 5:10, Jesus says to Simon, "From now on you will be catching people." The metaphor was fitting. Simon, Andrew, James, and John, Jesus' first recruits, were part of a host fishermen from the towns around Lake Galilee. On any night, there were three hundred boats on the lake.

Shifting Jesus' fishing imagery to our context easily leads to flawed conclusions if we are not careful. I grew up fishing with my dad and brother in lakes and streams. But the fishing Simon and his partners knew was different. We were anglers; they were net fishers.

For example, fishing with rod and reel is for individuals; net fishing is for partners. The boats on Lake Galilee each contained two fishermen. Moreover, as Luke shows, the boats worked in tandem. So catching people (evangelism) is a partnership, a function in which the whole church participates. The Bible's "city on a hill" is not an individual.

Here is a second difference between angling and net fishing. Angling depends on trickery and force. If you are fishing in a stream, you disguise the hook with a worm or other bait, try to set the hook in the fish's jaw, and wrest the fish from the water. The contrast between that and catching schooling fish in a net highlights the distasteful, psychologically manipulative, and high pressure methods of evangelism – the kind we Westerners seem to know best. The fishing Jesus envisioned and showed in his ministry calls for natural, inductive faith sharing in relationships of friendship and trust. It might take longer, but the research of Flavil Yeakley in the 1970s, and many others since then, tells us the results are more lasting.

Another distinction between angling and net fishing is motive. While anglers fish for trophies, net fishers fish for a living – to put food on the table and sustain their families. Oliver Wendell Holmes, in *The Banker's Secret* said, "see how he throws his baited lines about, and plays a man as anglers should play their trout." Holmes didn't know it, but he was giving a perfect description of much Christian evangelism, evangelism that is more interested in spoils than souls.

Finally, net fishers are interested in keeping, not just in catching. The parallel for evangelizing churches is Jesus' call to make disciples and not be content with "decisions."

– Art McPhee

Examining the "Natural Church Development" Project

by George G. Hunter III

Christian Schwarz, son of a German State Church (Lutheran) pastor, formed a team of fellow German church leaders. The team developed a questionnaire and then proceeded to survey 1,000 churches, in 18 languages, in 32 countries, over a 10-year period. Reflecting from their data, they staked out a distinctive claim: church growth necessarily follows from "church health" – as defined by the team's "eight essential qualities of healthy churches."

Schwarz then published a book, *Natural Church Development*. Many church leaders across Europe loved it (in part because it wasn't exported from the USA!). In time, 30 language editions were published. In the USA, Conservative Baptist executive David Wetzler read the book, and he believed in it so much that he mortgaged his home to fund its English translation and publication. Since Wetzler's ChurchSmart Resources published the book in 1996, it has sold more than 100,000 copies in North America, and more than 20,000 American churches have completed NCD's survey. Schwarz claims that when churches focus on attaining the eight known qualities of healthy churches, the churches should experience those very qualities in greater measure, and should grow as a result. Stressing the importance of the adjectives (more than the nouns), Natural Church Development (NCD) features these church health qualities:

1. Empowering Leadership
2. Gift-oriented Ministry
3. Passionate Spirituality
4. Functional Structures
5. Inspiring Worship
6. Holistic Small Groups
7. Need-Oriented Evangelism
8. Loving Relationships

Natural Church Development works with churches looking for greater health and growth. The organization's website (www.ncd-international.org) reports that the NCD has worked with 22,000 churches on six continents, and claims that 85 percent experienced subsequent growth.[1] Their website assures us, "This emphasis on church health has proven to be the key to ongoing growth and multiplication."

The "diffusion" of NCD's model has been remarkably uneven. It registers no blip at all on many radar screens. Schwarz' book has never been reviewed in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* or the *Review of Religious Research*. The world's leading sociologist of religion, Rodney Stark, told me that (until I ASKED) he had never heard of Schwarz or his book; several of Stark's peers said the same. Lyle Schaller, who knows more about churches than anyone else who ever lived, told me that he did read *Natural Church Development*, but immediately perceived it to be methodologically flawed – because its conclusions depend entirely upon the subjective self-reporting of core church members.

Conversely, many pastors and other local church leaders swear by it, and many judicatory and denominational leaders are engaged, enamored, even captivated by Schwarz' "new paradigm for church health." Many NCD devotees whom I have interviewed say they found Church Growth writings "too complicated," so they gravitated toward a resource with the appearance of a manual, even a recipe. At least one former Church Growth leader (Bob Logan) has now put his eggs in the NCD basket. Across the Atlantic, the editors of *Church Growth Digest* – which was published in English for European church leaders for 24 years, announced in Spring, 2004 that their journal would hereafter be named *Healthy Church U. K.* Many church leaders on both sides of the Atlantic now speak from the same script: "Church Growth is passé; Church Health has taken its place!"

That claim, of course, makes no more sense than to say that triathlons have taken the place of track and field, or that the Japanese emphasis on "Total Quality" has taken the place of Management. We have explained that "Church Growth" is not primarily about numerical growth, but is a shorthand term for several overlapping interests:

1) The Church Growth movement encourages churches to rediscover their "main business," i.e., the apostolic mandate to reach and disciple pre-Christian people, and peoples.

2) Church Growth exists to inform effective evangelism locally, and strategic mission globally.

3) Church Growth people draw from historical and field studies (as well as from scripture and theology) to inform evangelism and mission; "the numbers" suggest where to do the field research, and membership growth data can "indicate" our greater or lesser effectiveness.

4) Church Growth field research informs us that what makes evangelism and mission effective varies, sometimes enormously, from one people and context (like, say, Inuit people in Pond Inlet, Canada) to another context (like, say, Wall Street people in Manhattan), so ministry must usually be "contextualized" to be most effective. Since "Church Health" does *none* of that, but *only* focuses on "church health," the claim that it has "taken the place of Church Growth" is fatuous. The "Church Health" people have astonishingly little to say about effective evangelism, even less about world mission, and nothing about contextualizing. Natural Church Development's almost exclusive focus is upon the existing churches, primarily in Europe and North America. While "Church Health" has not replaced Church Growth, it has substantially replaced "Church Renewal" – with much of the theology removed. Church Health is "Church Renewal Lite!"

A divided response to NCD can inhabit a single institution; the Doctor of Ministry people at both Fuller and Asbury are much more attracted to NCD than are the school of mission people at the same institutions. Most of the leaders of the American Society for Church Growth, who want the church health and growth that NCD wants, regard the project as promising more than it delivers, as claiming more than it achieves, as methodologically flawed and conceptually dubious.

Furthermore, ASCG people can find little evidence that, when a church's people rate their church as healthy, that growth necessarily (or even usually) follows. For example, Phil Perkins' recent doctoral study of ten team-led Wesleyan churches, all scoring high on the "church health" indicators, showed that the ten churches, together, averaged somewhat less

worship attendance and reported somewhat lower membership than five years earlier; even the six churches in the most healthy category reported, together, statistically insignificant increases in attendance and membership.[2]

Two empiricists, John Ellas and Flavil Yeakley, published in ASCG's journal the only independent statistical analysis of NCD that I have found.[3] That review, plus several discussions of NCD in the Society's meetings and other settings, has focused on these kinds of observations:

1. Regarding NCD's Claim to Originality

Some of the NCD team's work does represent some original, or fairly original, pioneering.

a. Schwarz' survey attempted a "scientific," statistical, quantitative comprehensive study of church (health and) growth, though it was *not* the first quantitative Church Growth study that it claims to be.

b. In a departure from the stream of many Church Growth studies since the 1970's, Natural Church Development focuses on church "health" more than most, though it was not the first, and NCD's allegation that Church Growth writers have been *uninterested* in congregational health is fallacious. "Internal" (or "Quality") Church Growth has always been a prominent featured category in the Church Growth perspective, though Church Renewal people and Spiritual Formation people (and perhaps NCD's people) have contributed more to understanding and advancing Quality Growth than have Church Growth people.

c. NCD's claim that a church experiences new health and growth by focusing on its weaknesses among the eight characteristics of health is fairly original; most scholars in organization leadership have advised organizations to identify, and build upon, their strengths. (The truth is, undoubtedly, located somewhere in between. For instance, if a church's greatest comparative weakness is evangelism, the church would likely grow through

more and better evangelism; but achieving a more "functional structure" might not, by itself, bring greater growth.)

d. Some NCD claims to *original* insight are not warranted. The chapter on "Functional Structures," for instance, claims, "Our research confirmed for the first time an extremely negative relationship between traditionalism and both growth and quality within the church." If, prior to Schwarz, this connection was a secret, it was a badly kept secret. Many scholars have observed this connection. There was no one in the Church Growth field who did not already know that!

e. In a remarkable contradiction, NCD claims that traditionalism may be okay in worship, that liturgy has no need to be functionally structured! "Services may target Christians or non-Christians, their style may be liturgical or free, their language may be 'churchy' or secular – it makes no difference for church growth." The fact is that, for most pre-Christian populations, in most places, services that welcome seekers, and begin where they are, and employ language and music and other cultural forms that they understand, do engage more pre-Christian people and experience much more 'conversion growth" from the world than traditional churches, though the most effective traditional churches continue to experience transfer growth.

2. Regarding the NCD Research Methodology

a. The study gathered, from 30 people in 1,000 churches, the self-perceptions of core members about their churches, and then assumed that core-member self-perceptions are "facts." Three (not so hypothetical) cases can easily undermine this assumption:
   i. A local church's "Builder Generation" members may experience an organ interlude from Bach as "inspiring worship," but young pre-Christian visitors, raised more on Rock than Bach, might not.
   ii. Church members often report "loving relationships" within their fellowship, only to be astonished that (say) the

pre-Christian single woman with a child, an addiction, and a reputation may NOT experience the fellowship the same way.

iii. John Ellas distributed the NCD survey instrument in the congregation he attends. He reports: "Members' perceptions of congregational strengths were highly inaccurate in numerous categories." For instance, members rated their church's "need-oriented evangelism" fourth highest among the characteristics; Ellas reports, however, that the church had no notable evangelism emphasis in the preceding five years, and it experienced less than half the conversion growth rate we typically observe in growing churches.[4]

b. Schwarz' *Natural Church Development* does not provide enough data or detail for other researchers to replicate the study, nor even enough data to understand the basis of the conclusions.

c. Schwarz does not report the (statistical) significance level of his conclusions; without the significance level, empiricists tell us, no statistical study should be relied upon.

d. The study claims to present the universal causes of church health and growth, but it only presents *correlations* – which are alleged, but not sufficiently demonstrated. Empiricists would caution us, however, that some (or all) of the eight qualities *might* produce church health and growth. However, church growth may produce the climate in which members have positive perceptions of (some or all of) these qualities. Again, both the health and the growth may be caused (at least partly) by other variables, as I will suggest below.

e. NCD passes off, as original, many insights which are patently NOT original, and without citing the earlier sources whose insights they repeat. (In some quarters, that is called "plagiarism;" it is not permitted in any respectable graduate program.) As one of many examples, Win Arn demonstrated in the early 1980's, from surveys in hundreds of churches, the correlation between the

people's perceptions of love (toward each other in the church AND toward the outside community) and the growth of the church.[5] I am told that Christian Schwarz was first schooled in these matters by time spent with Win Arn.

f. Ellas and Yeakley reported that, after seven years of NCD's 10-year study, a consultant identified several serious flaws in their instrument and their testing procedure. To NCD's credit, they fixed the instrument and the procedure; to their discredit, they based their conclusions on the data from the whole ten years![6]

g. Most Church Growth researchers would say that NCD's methodology comes up shortest at two points. First, they failed to prioritize the gathering of data from *new converts*; every serious Church Growth researcher knows that new converts are, after all, the population pool most capable of telling how and why they found faith and joined the church; the pastor and established members, often, do NOT know why their church is reaching pre-Christian people. (For example, pastors more often attribute the growth to their preaching than their church's converts do!)

Second, NCD relied too much on numbers crunching from questionnaires; only interviews can confirm the people's understanding of the questions, and only interviews can probe deeply enough to access people's experience, and only interviews can engage people's "tacit" knowledge they may have not yet verbalized, and only interviews (with skilled field observation) can identify many of the real causes of church health and growth. Let's give NCD *some* credit; to cite a ludicrous example, their conclusions approximate useful "science" more than a typical David Letterman "top ten" list, but readers will find much more nuanced strategic wisdom, say, in the literature of Lyle Schaller.

3. Regarding NCD's Conclusions

a. Most Church Growth people do not know what to do with NCD's main claim – that increased church health will bring church growth, because NCD does not distinguish between the most

fundamental ways in which Church Growth people believe that a local church grows – biological growth, transfer growth, and conversion growth. NCD's semantic blur may help account for one of their claims: that "services may target Christians or non-Christians, their style may be liturgical or free, their language may be 'churchy' or secular – it makes no difference for church growth." It may, in fact, make little difference in transfer growth; indeed, many "mobile Christians" prefer to join another liturgically traditional church.

But worship style does make a significant difference, virtually everywhere, in a church's outreach to pre-Christian populations. It is difficult to find churches experiencing significant conversion growth from the world through, say, classical music – although Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan is a notable exception because, with Manhattan's population density, a substantial population does understand and love classical music. Even such exceptions do NOT do the same old music "the same old way." They invest the music with greater emotional complexity and energy, they follow a revised composition, or they improvise; they accompany it with "contemporary" instrumentation; and the "old music" is thereby experienced as powerfully "contemporary." (Listen to the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir's rendition of the Hallelujah Chorus of Handel's "Messiah," for example.)

b. The chapter on "Loving Relationships" in *Natural Church Development* reflects no knowledge of what agape love means in the New Testament. While NCD reports that they used a dozen variables in assessing the love in churches, the only two that they feature – laughter in the church, and spending time together outside the church – do not necessarily indicate the presence of *agapaic* love, especially love for lost people. Christian love is, undoubtedly, an essential feature of healthy growing churches, but NCD does not appear to have demonstrated it, and may not understand it.

c. NCD's people do their project a disservice by the artificial device of attaching one, and only one, adjective to each characteristic. Truth is seldom that simple, and what is going on is seldom that singular. For instance, most leadership studies indicate that it is as important for leaders to be "visionary" as to be "empowering," and surely "obedient" is as important in spirituality as "passionate." Again, devotees of Saddleback Church's SHAPE acronym (Spiritual Gifts, Heart, Abilities, Personality Type, and Experiences) are convinced that discovering one's spiritual giftedness is less empowering for ministry than a more comprehensive understanding of how the Holy Spirit has "shaped" people for ministry.

d. In some cases, the favored adjective overstates what NCD has demonstrated. For instance, NCD reports a greater correlation between "small groups" and church growth than for any of the other seven characteristics. BUT, they say, the groups must be "holistic." Curiously, NCD says small groups are "holistic" IF they study the Bible AND apply it to their lives, (regardless, apparently, of whether they pray, or minister to each other, or have any ministry or cause outside the group, or welcome seekers into the group).

e. So NCD is usually wrong to emphasize any one adjective more than the noun it modifies. It is more strategic to emphasize the nouns, and to nuance each noun with the one-to-several adjectives that do fuller justice to the characteristic than one adjective, alone, can do.

4. Regarding NCD's "Great Omissions"

NCD assumes, without sufficient warrant, that their eight characteristics are THE eight characteristics of healthy growing churches. It is possible, however, to identify other characteristics that are *at least* as normative for church health and growth as the eight that NCD emphasizes. Consider, for instance, eight more characteristics

that are *at least* as essential to health and growth as most of the NCD eight:

1) **Macro-Context**. In the long history of the serious study of Christian Mission, the greatest consensus is around the importance of the general context; to reach a people and grow among them, the Christian movement MUST adapt to the specific historical and cultural context. The Faith spreads differently in nomadic desert settlements than in mountain villages or arctic communities, and still differently in Manhattan. The Faith spreads differently among non-literate peoples than formally educated peoples, among refugee populations than suburbanites, among addictive people than non-addictive people, and differently among peoples with a vivid sense of the supernatural than among "secularized" peoples who are scripted by the Enlightenment's "closed system" model of the cosmos. Mission scholars know that to ignore contexts, and assume we can "do church" the same way everywhere, is folly. Indeed, the definitive studies of effective organizations, of all kinds – from fast food restaurants, to automobile manufacturers, to computer software companies, to universities – substantially attribute their effectiveness to their understanding of, and strategic adaptation to, their general context, and to that context's ongoing changes. In other words, the NCD project seems to be oblivious to the supreme importance of understanding the "soils" in which we are called to plant the gospel seed.

2) **Culture.** NCD seems to be oblivious, likewise, to the most important part of any church's context – the culture of the target population. We are certain, from a long history of mission studies, that ministry must be done in "indigenous" forms to engage a significant number of the pre-Christian people of any society, in any and every field of mission. An indigenous strategy requires paying the price to understand the target culture, I. e., the characteristic language, aesthetics, values, attitudes, beliefs, customs, style preferences, and (especially) the worldview themes of the people's shared consciousness. The assumption that a

church can substantially reach a population without understanding, and adapting to, their culture is a delusion.

3) **Credibility.** The credibility of the church's people with a pre-Christian population is, undoubtedly, as important as any characteristic that NCD features. Helmut Thielicke observed, in the secular West Germany of a generation ago, that the single most important variable in whether or not the people will believe Christianity's message is the perceived credibility of the witnessing community. The academic study of Communication has known, for 23 centuries, that the perceived credibility of an advocate powerfully affects the message's reception. My own field research with secular people, beginning in 1962, persistently indicates that, in great numbers, they want to know a) whether we really believe it, b) and/or whether we live by it, c) and/or whether it makes enough difference to take seriously.

4) **Outreach Ministry.** You would never know for sure, from NCD, whether growing churches are in ministry to pre-Christian people AND are sharing the Gospel. You could infer this from the characteristic they name "Need-Oriented Evangelism," but the term obscures as much as it reveals. To be more precise, more and more of the earth's contagious churches are reaching pre-Christian people through Outreach Ministries – from GED tutoring, to literacy classes, to a range of support groups, and recovery ministries, and a hundred others. These outreach ministries are, indeed, need oriented, and need-oriented witness is an indispensable part of outreach ministry, but not the whole of it.

5) **Social Ethic.** The NCD model seems to assume that a church can be "healthy" without a social ethic. NCD's model of a "healthy church" includes no priority concern for justice, or peace, or reconciliation between peoples, or for the health of the planet. I am astonished that some Christian scholars from Germany, of all places, appear to have gained no enduring insight from their people's experience of the Third Reich, the Holocaust, World

War II, etc. Let's recall what once happened. In 1936, Adolph Hitler was the elected Fuhrer, but the Third Reich's span of control was not yet totalitarian. The government passed laws requiring Germany's churches to submit complete copies of their baptismal and membership records to the government. The churches, with astoundingly few exceptions, complied. The government then used those records to discern who was (and who was not) "Aryan." This data later enabled the government to target, with demonic precision, Jewish and Gypsy populations for extermination. Some of the German churches that slept through the 1930's, who complied with a totalitarian regime and expressed no public prophetic challenge to unprecedented evil, would have scored high on NCD's health questionnaire! How "healthy" can that kind of Christianity be?

6) **Wider Mission.** The NCD model seems to assume that a church can be "healthy" without a wider Mission. But how "healthy" can a church be without a deep involvement in Christ's wider mission, nationally and globally? *Should* we expect the God we know, through the biblical revelation, to bless a local church whose range of concern stops at the city limits?

7) **Strength in the Denominational Tradition.** The NCD model, undoubtedly in the attempt to provide a generic model useful to churches of all denominational traditions, ignores the fact that fidelity and strength in one's tradition is also a sign of health. So, for example, how "healthy" is a Lutheran Church that does not stress Justification, or a Quaker church that is not engaged in Peacemaking? Several denominations, including The Wesleyan Church and the Evangelical Free of America, have researched the churches of their denomination, and they developed healthy church profiles that contrast with NCD's. The Evangelical Free Church's research (www.efca.org) produced "Ten Leading Indicators" of Church Health. Two – "Passionate Spirituality" and "Loving Relationships" – that replicated NCD's terms exactly. Two others – "Fruitful Evangelism" And "High Impact

Worship" – replicated an NCD noun but not NCD's adjective. EFC's other six indicators were not featured in NCD's profile.

8) **Local Contextual Factors.** There are ALWAYS local contextual factors that need to be included in any normative faithful profile of a healthy church. If, say, the church's immediate ministry area has been "swamped" by a flood or hurricane, or crime, or job losses, or a shooting at the nearby university, or 80,000 Haitian immigrants, or several thousand French-speaking secular people with no Christian memory, each local church needs the latitude to shape the model of its effectiveness in terms of the challenges presented by the immediate context. Indeed, local contexts vary so enormously that a recipe or manual that, like a stretch sock, will fit every situation, is impossible to produce, and the quest for it is delusional. The Church achieves its objectives somewhat specifically tailored to local contexts – from Manhattan Island, New York City to Baker Lake, Nunavut Territory, Canada, – or not at all.

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Since releasing an earlier version of this reflection, I have heard from many church leaders who tried NCD and found it wanting. The case of South Potomac Church, now a church of 1,100 to 1,200 weekly attendance in White Plains, Maryland is fairly typical. The senior pastor, Brent Brooks, took all of NCD's seminars and received their "certification." He then launched an NCD campaign in his church. He recruited 30 laypersons to fill out the NCD questionnaire. (The 30 people did *not* represent a cross-section of South Potomac Church's membership, because NCD prescribed administering the questionnaire to the 30 *most involved* members of the church.) When Brent Brooks received the results, he knew they were skewed beyond uselessness. The church scored highest in Gift-Oriented Ministries; Brooks discerned, immediately, that *those 30* people knew their gifts and were involved in ministry, but the vast majority of the members did not and were not. Brooks discerned that the questionnaire data also misrepresented the congregation, as a whole, in several other health traits.

I am concerned that the NCD approach to "church health" repeats five of the Big Mistakes of the past.

1. It (mis)perceives Evangelism as only one of eight or so "priorities" of the congregation. (Church Growth people, however, see evangelism as the apostolic congregation's main business.)

2. It fails to perceive that the church's lack of outreach is often the most important cause of the church's pathology; so it is futile to work on health first, and then outreach.

3. It reinforces the tendency in all churches to turn inward – in endless self-preoccupation and self-analysis; by contrast, apostolic congregations mainly focus outward, on the harvest.

4. Furthermore, NCD perpetuates the assumption that if a local church can only get "renewed" enough (or "healthy" enough), THEN it can, and will, reach out effectively; actually, churches that adopt the "renewal first" model seldom get around to much outreach, because they *never* feel renewed (or healthy) enough to move on to the next phase.

5. Neither the church renewal people nor the church health people have discovered what is obvious to most Church Growth researchers: churches are "renewed" (or "made healthier") more from a steady stream of new Christians entering their ranks than from all the known renewal ministries combined.

There is much worth affirming in the *Natural Church Development* project. NCD's leaders want churches to experience greater health (and growth), and they launched an ambitious undertaking to give church health and growth a clearer rationale and a better footing. Some of their conclusions are surely valid, though because of problems with research instrument, design, and interpretation we cannot say which ones. Many church leaders are undoubtedly attracted to NCD's eight characteristics –

largely, I suggest, because the themes like "inspiring worship" and "loving relationships" merely confirm what many church leaders have intuitively believed all along. NCD's popularity is partly due to a remarkable assumption: *all of this "scientific research" confirms our common sense!* Furthermore, at least 20 percent of all church leaders will prefer almost anything that claims to be "natural."

Some churches are undoubtedly helped by NCD's model – in part, I surmise, because they believe in it enough to plan and act upon it. NCD acts, at least, like the proverbial "placebo" in medical studies – in which, say, the blood pressure improves almost as much in the experimental control subjects who took the placebo as those who took the experimental drug. So we are grateful to NCD for the churches that believe in it enough to get a better act together. We are grateful to NCD for whatever they now hypothesize that ultimately turns out to be true. We are grateful to NCD for the visibility they have given, in some quarters, to issues of Church Health and Church Growth.

We are grateful to NCD for provoking some of us in the Church Growth school of thought into a new period of field research, reflection, and clarification, and for the reminder to make Church Growth lore as simple as possible. We resist the temptation, however, to make it simpler than it is – while sympathizing with busy leaders who crave greater simplicity in a world of complexity. After all, reaching a lost soul, like raising a teenager or maintaining a marriage or investing in stocks, "ought" to be simpler than it is; and reaching a pre-Christian society, like advancing literacy or defeating an epidemic or bringing democracy to the Middle East and peace on earth, "ought" to be simpler than it is. We know, however, that the courageous minority who look complexity in the teeth, who pay an intellectual price to understand it, and then translate it for non-specialists, informs most advances in human affairs. We still do not know how to reduce the whole corpus of Church Growth lore to as much simplicity as many leaders would want. We can, however, now identify the 20 percent of Church Growth knowledge that accounts for about 80 percent of the difference. But it would be unfair to promise the simplicity of NCD's formula. Leaders who are unwilling to love The Lord of the Harvest with their minds (as well as their hearts) will be unable to appropriate much of Church Growth's strategic wisdom.

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I have saved my most serious reservation about the Natural Church Development project for last. The project is rooted in European Christianity, more specifically European State-Church Christianity (and Europe's *slightly* reformed "Free Churches"). NCD assumes, remarkably, that nothing is seriously wrong with the traditional European State-Church way of "doing church." Just a bit of tinkering, like making the structures more "functional" or making the worship service more "inspiring," can restore "health" and bring new "growth." I wish that NCD's major assumption was true, because we know how they "did church" back (say) in seventeenth-century Scotland, so if we could repeat that forever, we could get "church" right every time! The problem, of course, is that the traditional European churches have not gathered appreciable harvests for at least several generations, and their approach is not gathering conversion-growth harvests in many places today.

Furthermore, there are no reasons to share much of European Christianity's entrenched assumption that European Institutional State-Church Christianity is pretty much what Jesus and the original apostles had in mind. What they did have in mind, I suggest, is a much more "apostolic" way of doing church, a theme I have explored in several books.[7]

Notes

1. NCD's website does not report, however, what percentage of the churches were already growing, or what percentage of those increased their growth rate to a statistically significant degree, or for how long, or how much of the growth represents actual converts from the world.
2. Phillip R. Perkins. "Pastoral Teams and Congregational Health in Smaller Churches." (D. Miss. diss.; Asbury Theological Seminary, 2007) 283.
3. See the review of *Natural Church Development* by John Ellas and Flavil Yeakley in the *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth* (Spring, 1999) 83-91.

4. Ellas and Yeakley, 90-91.
5. Win Arn, Carroll Nyquist, and Charles Arn. *Who Cares About Love?* (Church Growth Press, 1986).
6. Ellas and Yeakley, 86-87.
7. See George G. Hunter, III. *How to Reach Secular People* (Abingdon, 1992), *Church for the Unchurched* (Abingdon, 1996), *The Celtic Way of Evangelism* (Abingdon, 2000), and *Radical Outreach: The Recovery of Apostolic Ministry and Evangelism* (Abingdon, 2003).

Partnership in Witnessing to the Hindu Diaspora in North America

by Atul Y. Aghamkar

Introduction

The Hindu Diaspora is one of the most neglected and unreached peoples in the world, even though they live in close proximity to the Christian Church in Europe and North America. Although the modern history of Christian missions to the Hindus goes back to the arrival of the Danish missionaries in the early sixteenth century, the real impact of Christian missions in India during the past four centuries has primarily been seen among the outcaste (*Dalit*) and tribal populations. The caste Hindu people[1] have been either ignored or only a peripheral focus of the missionary endeavors in India. In North America, where the majority of the Hindus are derived from caste Hindu society, they also appear to be marginalized by the Christian Church and mission agencies.

This Hindu presence is not only confined to physical, professional and cultural aspects, but infuses more profoundly spiritual aspects of Western societies. An increasing number of people in the West and especially in North America have come across concepts and practices like *Yoga*, Transcendental Meditation, Re-incarnation, *Maya* and *Karma*, which have been consciously introduced in the West by Hindus in the Diaspora and their counterpart Gurus from India. As the process of globalization continues to grip the world, upwardly mobile Hindus will increasingly emigrate to Europe and North America and penetrate Western culture.

It is clear from the trends that the number of Hindus in North America is bound to increase in the coming decades. This will bring tremendous pressure on the North American Church and mission agencies to strategically think about their role in witnessing to these Hindus who are now an inevitable part of American society. Truly the uttermost parts of the world have come to the doorstep of the Church in North America. The process of migration, settlement, adaptation and eventually assimilation of

the Hindus provides the North American Church a significant opportunity to witness to them.

This paper attempts to critically reflect on the Hindu Diaspora in North America with the specific aim of providing insights and guidelines for possible partnership for Christian witness among them, in the light of Paul's model of partnership. Although the Hindu Diaspora is found in many countries, this paper will not address the issues pertaining to them but focus primarily on Hindus in the North American context. Partnership, for the purpose of this paper, is defined in terms of sharing information, equipment and personnel for mobilizing strategic and prayerful planning for Christian witness among the Hindu Diaspora in North America.

Towards an Understanding of the Diaspora

The term 'Diaspora' was at one time a concept referring almost exclusively to the experience of the Jews, invoking their traumatic exile from a historical homeland and dispersal throughout many lands.[2] It had a negative connotation since most Jews were forced into exile by their enemies; hence being in the Diaspora was not a pleasant experience. Both biblical and non-biblical sources indicate that the word 'Diaspora' has to do with people scattering from their homeland to an alien land, mostly by compulsion. To live in Diaspora was an ignominious experience, because everyone assumed such persons lived for the day they could leave and return to their original homeland.[3]

In recent years, however, the notion of Diaspora has been increasingly employed to denote ethnic, linguistic, national or religious communities settling outside their homeland in a culturally different society. Broadly speaking, 'Diaspora' is the term often used today to describe any population which is considered 'de-territorialized' or 'transnational' - that is, whose cultural origins are said to have arisen in a land other than that in which they currently reside, and whose social, economic and political networks cross the borders of nation-states or, indeed, span the globe.[4] The modern usage of the term tends to be more positive since it rarely assumes forced migration, but rather voluntary movement of people from their homeland to the land of their choice.

As far as the modern Hindu Diaspora is concerned, in most cases, Hindus have sought opportunities to move out of India for their overall betterment. Normally, Hindus do not consider themselves to be in Diaspora; rather they call their diasporic situation *Desh Pardesh* (Hindi), which 'can equally well be translated both as "home from home" and as "at home abroad."[5] For most Hindus in the Diaspora, India or *Bharat* not only is their motherland and 'home' but the holy land of their spiritual forefathers, *Punya Bhumi*. Another term often used to differentiate them from Indians who live in India is 'Non Resident Indians' (NRI or *Anivasi Bhartiya*), frequently used in government documents to refer to those people who have Indian origin but do not reside in India. For the purpose of this paper, the Hindu Diaspora refers to the settlements of Hindus (especially in North America) outside of the Indian subcontinent.

Hindu Diaspora in North America

For centuries Hindus from India have been migrating to different parts of Asia and Africa. History shows that Hindus constantly left the shores of India and impacted the surrounding nations. Hindu presence can be traced in Burma, Bali, Fiji, Mauritius, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Surinam, Guyana and Trinidad. But the contemporary wave of Hindu migrants to Europe and North America is quite significant and worth noting. Modern Hindu migration to North America is not new, but the extent and the speed with which it is taking place in recent decades is amazing.

The early wave of modern Hindu migration is linked with trade and business, but much of this was not permanent, hence does not technically fit into the category of Diaspora. The second wave of migration was related to so-called 'indentured workers' who were taken as cheap labor for plantation and construction work under the British, French and Dutch colonies. "During the period from 1834 to 1917, about 1.5 million Indians signed five year contracts and were shipped to Mauritius, East and South Africa, South America, and Caribbean and Fiji Islands."[6] A significant number of Hindus taken into these countries eventually preferred to settle down there, thus becoming the early Hindu Diaspora. Then there was a large influx of immigrants especially to Britain due to labor shortage, most of whom were male workers from the north-western part of India. These

were either illiterate or marginally literate artisans, but very hard working people whose services were utilized extensively to build roads and rail. Then in the mid-1960s family-based immigration began to take place. Consequently, most of those earlier migrants who had intended to earn some money and return to India began to put down roots in their adopted land by investing in properties. This probably was the beginning of the real Hindu Diaspora in Europe. In the later part of the 1970s many East Africans of Indian descent started moving to Europe and North America due to political unrest in Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. These were well-established and experienced business and professional people who were forced out of East African countries.

Migration to North America was earlier restricted for the Hindus, though occasional migrations were recorded in the early part of the nineteenth century. There were individuals who came sporadically in search of better employment but their number was not significant due to the immigration restrictions brought upon them by American law. However, the repeal of the Asian Exclusion Act in 1965 resulted in opening the North American shores to Asians and Indians. During this time a number of Hindu professionals from a largely urban middle class background started arriving in North America.[7] These included teachers, professors, scientists, medical doctors and a large number of nurses and other professionals. Those who came after 1965 were among the best educated and most professionally advanced and successful of any population.[8] These were the elite of Indian society who could afford to have higher and specialized education and had the means to acquire mobility beyond their own country. Interestingly, those who came from Punjab and Gujarat states either started business or were involved with agricultural occupations; whereas those who came from the rest of India came primarily as professionals. In the final and contemporary stage, many students who came to North America for higher education eventually found jobs and settled down.

It is important to note that most Diaspora Hindus in North America tend to settle down in major metropolitan areas, whereas a very small fraction of them are found in the rural area. A huge number of engineers, scientists, and information technologists, software and hardware engineers and medical doctors began to put their roots in key cities of North America. Thomas Wolf estimates that at least 38 percent of medical doctors, 36 percent of NASA scientists and 34 percent of Microsoft employees are

Indians; most of them are Hindus.[9] Though these figures appear to be inflated they are indicative of the trend of Hindu penetration into North American society and its job market.

Estimates differ quite drastically as to how many Hindus[10] are found outside India, but it is clear that the figure is significant and will continue to increase in decades to come. Ascertaining the exact number of Hindus in the United States is also particularly difficult because of the 1957 Congregational Prohibition Act that prevents the United States government from collecting information on religious affiliation to safeguard religious privacy. However, the US Census Report of 2000 points out that the overall growth rate for Indian Americans (which includes Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and Buddhists of Indian origin) from 1990 to 2000 was 105.87 percent, the largest growth in the Asian American community; the average annual growth rate was 7.6 percent. That means the Indian community doubled in one decade, bringing Americans of Indian origin to 0.6 percent of the United States population, with 1,678,765.[11] Since 82 percent of India is Hindu, naturally a vast majority of Diaspora Indians in North America would be Hindu. Taking the US Census report into consideration, it would be safe to say that there are more than a million and half Hindus residing in the United States. This figure makes Hinduism the largest Asian religion in North America.[12] Recently Harold Coward found 420,000 South Asians in Canada alone, the majority of whom are Sikhs and Hindus.[13] Putting these approximate figures together, we can assume that about two million Hindus can be found in the United States of America and Canada.

Hindu Diaspora Distinctives

Hindus in the Diaspora are similar to Hindus in India in many ways, and yet there are numerous distinctives that should be noted. These differences are perhaps only slight variations of traditional Hindu society, and yet they set the Hindus in the Diaspora apart from the Hindus in India.

Multi-lingual and Fragmented: When considering Hindus in North America, one must remember that these are not one homogenous people, though most of them have their origin and roots in India. India has

thousands of castes, tribes and ethnic groups[14] with different languages and religions and only a segment of these are represented in North America.

The most prominent group of Indians in North America of course are the Gujaratis and Punjabi Sikhs who have come either directly from the north-west part of India or via East Africa. In Britain they make up about 70 percent of the Hindu population[15] whereas in North America they comprise about one fourth. Prominent among the Gujaratis are the Lewa and Kadwa Patidars, Lohanas, Kanbis, Prajapatis and Mochis.[16] Except for the Mochis, the others are primarily trading and business castes, therefore most of them are involved in business and trade in North America.

Ten Largest Metropolitan Areas by Indian American Population

Metropolitan Area	Metropolitan Area Pop.	Indian American Pop.	IA Pop. % of Metro Area	% of National IA Pop.
New York	21,199,865	453,896	2.14	23.89
San Francisco	7,039,362	158,396	2.25	8.34
Chicago	9,157,540	125,208	1.37	6.59
Los Angeles	16,373,645	121,745	0.74	6.41
Washington	7,608,070	98,179	1.29	5.17
Houston	4,669,571	57,158	1.22	3.01
Philadelphia	6,188,463	57,124	0.92	3.01
Dallas/Ft. Worth	5,221,801	53,975	1.03	2.84
Detroit	5,456,428	49,879	0.91	2.63
Boston	5,819,100	48,188	0.83	2.54

Table 1

Although most Sikhs perceive themselves to be a distinct community, they share many similarities with Hindus, including the caste distinctions. Roger Ballard points out that among the Diaspora Sikhs the Jats (peasant farmers) now form a clear majority, but they are accompanied by smaller local communities of Ramgarhias (craftsmen), Ramdasis (leather workers),

Jhirs (water carriers), and Valmikis (sweepers).[17] Most of the early migrants from Punjab, both Sikhs and Punjabi Hindus, came as laborers or farm workers. Then there are Sindhi Hindus, a strong business community who are found all over the world and especially in Europe and North America. They are also Hindus but with slight variations in their religious beliefs and practices. Again a number of sub-castes among the Sindhis are present.

Apart from these dominant migrant groups among the Hindus, there are Bengalis and numerous North Indian groups, mostly from the Hindi speaking states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar. These people are mostly educated professionals and skilled workers. Then there are many South Indian Hindu groups which include the Malayalis, Tamils and Telugus, who are found in various professional, educational and administrative sectors, and are primarily from one of the higher castes if not Brahmin.

One thing is clear: Gujarati, Punjabi, Sri Lankan, Surinamese and Indo-Caribbean Hindus have created their own homes away from home, bringing with them a diversity of ethnic styles and cultural patterns.[18] While recognizing this diversity of ethnic styles, it must be kept in mind that there is no uniformity in so-called 'Hinduism' of the Diaspora, nor unity among the Hindus.

Educated and Open to Change: Evidently, the Hindus in the Diaspora are well educated and financially secure. Most of those who are involved in medical, technological, educational and scientific fields are highly educated, and those involved in entrepreneurship are highly experienced in business undertaking. Those who immigrated before 1965 have made substantial progress and come up financially even though many of them were not highly educated; with sheer hard work and community support they were able to establish themselves in North America. A good number of these were already from the business and farming communities of North-West India, which provided them with an edge to move upward. But those who came during the post 1965 era are among the best educated and most professionally advanced and successful of any population, partly because of US immigration regulations favoring professional and educational status.[19] Table 2 indicates the educational attainment of the Indian Americans.

Educational Attainment			
	U.S. Pop.	Asian American	Indian American
No Schooling	1.44%	4.20%	2.23%
High School	80.40%	80.59%	85.39%
Bachelor's Degree	24.40%	42.71%	60.96%
Master's Degree	5.19%	10.25%	20.55%
Professional Degree	1.97%	3.79%	7.27%
Doctoral Degree	0.96%	2.69%	4.59%
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Sample File 4			
Table 2			

The majority of these Hindus, whether professionals or business people, are from the higher castes. And yet many of them, representing the cream of Indian society, are not necessarily convinced practicing Hindus. Most of them are highly globalized and consequently open to change in their overall perspective of life. To a certain extent, higher education and financial security free them from the traditional Hindu mindset.

Diaspora Hindus in North America, and especially the youth, are gradually becoming secularized, individualistic and materialistic. This is perhaps inevitable, since it is in line with the American way of life. Open and at times eager to assimilate, many young Hindus show increasing tendency towards new perspectives, new ideas and practices. This need to change probably stems from the pressure brought upon them both at the work place and in their own neighborhood, having realized that they are now living in a predominantly non-Hindu culture. Though the degree of change differs from community to community, this openness to change is indicative of their transition into American life. This transition at times makes them open to change even in their spiritual realm.

Culturally Clashing: The overall life, culture, religion and society in North America are different for Diaspora Hindus than what they would have been

accustomed to in India. This is especially seen in the area of religious and social values and worldviews. Tension arises when Hindu cultural values are brought under pressure by American cultural values. At times they develop mechanisms to resist changes and retain their Hindu culture and values. However, that is not possible every time, especially when it comes to the younger generation who are exposed to American life from childhood.

To cope with such tensions, concentrated efforts are being undertaken by first generation Hindus to re-orient the new generation to the Hindu faith by inviting Hindu religious gurus and spiritual teachers. Many Hindu gurus are found conducting discourses primarily for the Hindu community in North America; at the same time others are consciously involved in proselytizing American youth into their brand of Hinduism.

Another way of safeguarding and strengthening their religious and cultural presence in North America is by establishing Hindu temples. These temples have become centers of Hindu faith and culture. Currently, there are more than 412 Hindu centers in the United States, plus an accredited university in Fairfield, Iowa, the Maharishi University of Management. This total includes more than 50 major temples built since 1976 in cities throughout the United States.[20] This trend of temple construction will continue as the increasing number of Hindus put their religious and cultural roots in North America. Diana Eck points out: "For Hindu immigrants to America, the process of building a temple is simultaneously the process of building a community."[21] While retaining their personal deities in their homes, most Hindus in the Diaspora tend to find ethnic, religious and community identity in the temple. Community life and spiritual bonding are strengthened through the construction of temples and various religious as well as socio-cultural values are imparted to the younger generation.

Apart from establishing temples and caste-based associations, a number of spiritual discourses, summer camps and festival gatherings are arranged. These activities are designed to institutionalize, preserve and transmit Hindu values that were implicitly institutionalized in India.[23] Many of these activities also present a comparative perspective of the Indian (Hindu) values against American (Christian) values that enables the younger generation to think through their religio-cultural heritage seriously.

However, having been exposed to more free, critical and objective thinking in North America, many Hindu youth are critically assessing their

Hindu values before retaining them. They are more exposed to the non-Hindu, American perspective of life, which they want to adapt to and assimilate with as much as possible. This is leading to a deep clash of values, since traditional Hindu values, which most American born Hindus find difficult to adhere to, are expected to be accepted without question.

The gap between the first and the second or third generation is certainly increasing. First generation Hindus normally manage to maintain their own value systems, at times slightly adapting to American culture. Since their roots are in Hindu culture, they usually make every effort to retain, as much as possible, their core values and religion intact. However, the second and third generations of Diaspora Hindus experience numerous value-related stresses and at times give in to American culture. Being born or raised in America, they are more inclined to be assimilated into the dominant culture, while affirming their basic Hindu norms such as arranged marriages, modesty, and respect for others.[23] This process of assimilation creates a huge socio-cultural as well as spiritual vacuum, leading many to search for more pragmatic and contextually relevant ways to cope with such tensions. Consequently, many are either confused or frustrated because they cannot make clear sense out of the traditional Hindu values and practices in their contemporary American context.

Family/Community Oriented: For most Diaspora Hindus, American society stands in direct contrast with Hindu society. This is partly because Hindus are generally more accustomed to a sense of community, interdependence and divinity in every aspect of human life and nature. "Consequently, for most Hindus there is a great awareness of, and respect for, human interdependence and interconnectedness, which is understood to be the foundation of well-being."[24] Strong ethnic and regional identities are consciously built around family, clan and caste. They tend to stay close to each other and instead of individually attempting to meet their own needs, they work together to care and provide for their family and community. When it comes to the concept of the family, most Hindus consider themselves as part of an extended rather than a nuclear family. "In keeping with the community ethos of Hinduism, the individual is understood to be embedded in a family that is embedded in an extended family, which in turn is embedded in an even wider kin and network."[25] This network is evident especially during times of festivals, celebrations and death.

Having seen the overall perspective and some distinctives of the Diaspora Hindus in North America, now we turn to issues of providing Christian witness among them. Christian witness to the Diaspora Hindus is a complex and demanding task and can never be effectively undertaken without the conscious partnership and support of the whole Church of Jesus Christ. When it comes to Christian witness to the Diaspora Hindus, we have a great model of partnership in the life and ministry of Paul. For this reason, we now turn to Paul.

Paul's Model of Partnership

Although a number of principles can be drawn from the Bible for partnership in missions, it is appropriate to confine ourselves to the Apostle Paul's ministry because most of his ministry was undertaken in the context of the Jewish Diaspora (though not entirely confined to it), and that too with significant partnership at various levels. Of paramount importance, however, was his sense of partnership with God.

Paul's writings show a keen sense of this ultimate partnership. He was fully aware that his work involved fulfilling God's plan of salvation for humankind. Therefore, he always considered himself as God's co-worker. This collaboration at the vertical level does not denote an equal partnership. At best it indicates the bipolarity of ministry.[26] However, he implied that as a co-worker with God, he had the authority of God himself. Because of this sense of co-working with God, Paul developed a strong commitment to team ministry.

Partnership with the Church

Paul's life and ministry demonstrate clear and significant partnership with the Church. He was initially associated with the churches in Jerusalem and Antioch and then eventually with the churches that he was instrumental in planting. He maintained strong links with the church in Jerusalem, without whose blessings his mission to the Gentiles might have been in jeopardy. For at least two decades, the Jerusalem church was regarded as the 'mother church' and Paul was wise enough to recognize the importance of keeping in touch with this influential church. Even when he moved out

of Jerusalem and went as a missionary from Antioch to Asia Minor, Paul kept his commitment to the mother Church in Jerusalem intact.

After moving to Antioch and being sent from there as a missionary, again Paul's basic approach to missions was strongly Church centered. He planted churches and established meaningful networks and partnership between them (Acts 11:30; 21:19). Roland Allen's comments in this context are worth noting: "Paul did not set out on his missionary journey as a solitary prophet, the teacher of a solitary individualistic religion. He was sent forth as the messenger of a Church, to bring men into fellowship with that body."[27] According to Allen, Paul's mission was strongly anchored in the Church and he kept in mind the central place of the Church even as he went on his missionary journeys. Paul maintained a strong sense of commitment and accountability to the sending church while working as a missionary to the Gentiles (Acts 14:27). Such commitment to the churches enabled him to develop meaningful partnerships with them for his ongoing mission and ministry to Jews and Gentiles in Asia Minor and beyond. Consequently, Paul's partnership with the sending Church, as well as with the churches that he was instrumental in planting, proved to be fruitful in his overall ministry.

Partnership with Fellow-Ministers

While being keen on partnership with the church, Paul made every effort to team up with fellow ministers. These included various kinds of people who were available for partnership in the ministry with Paul. Indeed, the whole foundation for partnership stemmed out of Paul's conviction that the ministry of the gospel is a God-given ministry to all and hence all of God's people should be involved in it. Being a very able and educated person, the natural temptation for him would have been to be on his own, but Paul consciously developed a deep sense of partnership with other ministers even when most of his co-workers were not on par with him.

Paul's ministry required a lot of networking and partnering with fellow ministers. His approach was similar to that of Jesus Christ who taught how to do ministry while doing it. "Paul was a trainer and coach as much as he was a church planter."[28] He knew that the task was so huge that he could never accomplish it on his own. He depended on many co-workers who were supportive of his efforts in rendering their wholehearted cooperation so that the God-given task would be accomplished. At times it was not easy

for him to work in a team but despite that he kept his commitment to partnership. We do not have a clear account in the New Testament as to how Paul sought his team members, including prominent members like Luke, but what we know is that he consciously partnered with them for the furtherance of the Gospel and the Church of Jesus Christ.

Initially, he was called to partner with Barnabas, who was his senior and an established leader of the Churches in Jerusalem and Antioch, but later he began choosing his fellow partners. His preference for them was not dictated solely by his desire for friendship or companionship, but it was part of his strategy as an expert builder (1 Cor. 3:10). Hence we see varieties of fellow workers who with different gifts and commitments played their parts in fulfilling the task. Many times he chose people as he ministered in various contexts and allowed them to work with him for a while before they were entrusted with the responsibility of carrying on their own. Different team members were added all the time in his ministry and occasionally some were dropped, but Paul's commitment to team ministry and partnership did not diminish.

Recognizing that each member of the team had different gifts and abilities, Paul mobilized them for the effective communication of the gospel. Acts 14:21-23 describes the sequence of activities of Paul's teams. These teams were mobile and very much on their own. They were economically self-sufficient, although not unwilling to receive funds from local congregations.[29] Explaining this team ministry, Manjaly states:

> The travels of Paul and his associates (1 Thess 2:17-20; 1 Cor 16:5-12; 2 Cor 1:15-2:4; Phil 2:19-30; Phim 22) were part of his missionary strategy and constitute an important mode of collaborative ministry, and not an ad hoc arrangement for crisis management. Regular personal contact with the communities to encourage, to support and to strengthen them, to prevent them from falling away from faith, and to help resolve problems when they arose were of high priority in his pastoral plan.[30]

Through this collaborative ministry, Paul demonstrated his commitment to partnership with those who were committed to his missionary vision. The composition of his team itself shows how clearly he was committed to multi-ethnic and multi-cultural and multi-lingual ministries.

Paul did not feel threatened by those who were senior Christians but found them useful for the kind of ministry he was developing. So he moved forward comfortably with some prominent senior co-workers like Barnabas and possibly Luke. But at the same time he had a series of other co-workers who functioned as his partners in the ministry. We come across Prisca and Aquila (Acts 18:2-3), who were already Christians before Paul met them at Corinth. They instructed Apollos (Acts 18:26) and commended him to the Corinthians (Acts 18:27). Though they had begun their work independently of Paul, they became his close associates.[31] This shows Paul's wisdom in using the experience and gifts of seasoned believers.

At the same time, Paul did not hesitate to bring new converts to his team as well. Many of these were ordinary people who demonstrated commitment to the Lord and were willing to partner in the ministry with Paul, including Philemon, Phoebe, Lydia, Epaphroditus and others, both Jew and Gentile Christians as well as married and single people.

What is further interesting is that Paul's networking included prominent women who proved to be a great source of encouragement and support to his ministry; not only Lydia and Prisca, but Junia, Euodia and Syntyche, as well as Chloe were women actively involved in the ministry under the direction of Paul and his associates.

The gifts, experiences and capabilities of people were used effectively by Paul. Some of his coworkers were involved in direct proclamation of the gospel with him, others were his travel associates providing needed support, others helped him in his correspondence and networking with churches, and yet others represented him in different churches that he was instrumental in planting. Consequently, Paul accomplished a great deal because he was able to recruit, train, use and mobilize a variety of people for the ministry.

Partnership with Families

Paul worked exclusively in the urban context where individualism tended to be elevated against the family or community, but he quickly recognized that the individual was inevitably a family member, never regarded as an isolated person. He rightly perceived that every individual has a strong relationship with and commitment to the family. Therefore, to reach an individual with the gospel, many times Paul went through the family network, since isolating an individual from the family was almost

impossible, even in urban society. Paul strategically used this reality to reach out to families and use their natural potential for networking with extended families for the smoother penetration of the Christian witness. Taking this thread further, we notice that Paul established churches that were clearly centered on the family networks.

> The success of the early Christian mission and the life of the new churches were closely connected with the private house. The Greek term oikos described the "house as living space and familial domestic household," and as such it became the base of missionary work, foundational center of a local church, location of the assembly for worship, lodging for the missionaries and envoys, and at the same time, of course, the primary and decisive place of Christian life and formation.[32]

Paul demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of the family structure and functions so that he could use it in reaching the Jewish and Hellenistic society of his time.

Recognizing the role of elders in decision making, he was able to influence whole households by dealing with the decision makers in the family. "The gospel moved across cities and spread from family to family. When these families were united and formed into churches, they began to exert tremendous influence on their relatives and friends. These households became centers of Christian faith and evangelism."[33] Paul kept in mind the dynamics of family decision making and used them effectively to win the whole family as a unit rather than as individuals (though not always), equipping and mobilizing them to be involved in reaching other families for Christ. Once a family or household became Christian, other relatives and friends encountered them and to a large extent were influenced by them.

Becoming a follower of Christ inevitably brought shame, making it difficult for people to commit themselves to Christ. Paul seems to have been aware of the issues of honor and shame that were inbuilt in Hellenistic society. "Since honor is linked to the family and depends heavily on the way it defends its honor status, the result is an exclusive loyalty toward the family."[34] Knowing this reality, Paul made conscious efforts in instructing these new believers and their families, strengthening them in their newly found faith and encouraging them to be the bearers of this faith among their own extended families. His own life and ministry was held up as an

example to follow. The demonstration of life-change sometimes earned significant honor. This is particularly seen in Macedonia, where Lydia and her household became instrumental in spreading the gospel beyond their own family (Acts 16:12-15). Again in Acts 18 we find that Priscilla and Aquila also became effective instruments in instructing others and equipping them for the ministry. This sent a positive signal to the community: despite facing severe persecution and harassment for becoming Christians, an element of honor also accompanied it. Paul used these aspects of shame and honor so that many persons and families felt honored in accepting and following Christ in the midst of persecution and steep opposition.

Since homes were probably the most neutral places for people of different ethnicities to gather for the purpose of instruction and worship, Paul saw the importance of families in building bridges with contemporary society. "The households of newly converted believers were important centers of Paul's missionary work, and they were centers of the life of the newly established communities of believers, who met in 'house churches'."[35] Paul appointed elders and deacons within these house churches with the intention of enabling them to be strong witnesses to and beyond their own households. Most of his letters were written to the house churches, functioning almost as an instruction manual for the Christian families that met in the houses to live their faith out in daily life and be a witness for Christ among their own people. The attention of these early Christian home churches was directed to their internal as well as external functioning. In fact, we find among these Christians a powerful combination of inwardness and outwardness.[36] The house church in Paul's mind did not remain only a worshiping group of families, but an important means of spreading the gospel. It is hardly surprising that the 'church in the house' became a crucial factor in the spread of the Christian faith.[37] Partnership with families in communicating the gospel was a significant aspect of Paul's strategy.

This was so subtly and almost naturally done that rarely do we recognize the way Paul used the family structure to impact the community of his time. This approach was effective in winning large segments of different societies for Christ. Thus Paul could boast of preaching the gospel to the whole of Asia, although he only went to some strategic cities and preached the gospel there. But Paul's secret was that he preached to family units – and these families, probably through their networks, spread the

gospel to their own kin and clans.[38] Such partnership with the families certainly became one of the most effective ways of reaching contemporary society during Paul's time.

Partnership in Witnessing to the Diaspora Hindus

The Diaspora Hindus in North America are largely neglected not because they are resistant or are perceived to be an insignificant minority, but because the North American Church has not seriously perceived their significance and explored possibilities of meaningful partnerships in witnessing to them. Although there are considerable resources, expertise and qualified personnel available to initiate Christian witness among the Diaspora Hindus, little effort is being made in using them. Ministry to Hindus in the Diaspora requires not only different but more innovative and contextually relevant approaches, with the backing of research and prayer. Keeping in mind the partnership model of Paul and in the light of the present reality of Hindus in the Diaspora, the following guidelines are presented for effective Christian witness among them.

Partnership with the Church

The American Church may not necessarily have the expertise, know-how, and personnel to witness to Hindus in the Diaspora, but through the existing network of churches, plans for witnessing could be initiated.

Recognize Centrality of the Church: First of all, it must be recognized that the Church is central to God's plan and therefore needs to be taken seriously while establishing a base for witness among Hindus in the Diaspora. Most of these Hindus are accessible to the Church in North America. Taking the example from the church in Antioch, teams of missionaries could be set apart and sent to minister among Hindus in the cities of the North American Diaspora. This would require prayerful sensitivity and planning on the part of the Church. As the church in Antioch, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, set apart two of their experienced and able leaders for cross-cultural ministry, so leaders could be set apart for such a task by the American Church. As the Jewish church in Jerusalem sent their leader, Barnabas, to

minister to the multi-ethnic Gentile church in Antioch, so should efforts be made to send leaders of integrity, expertise, experience and willingness to minister among the Hindus in North American cities.

Initiate Global Partnership: In the era of globalization, conscious efforts are needed for such partnership between the East and the West. It is time that the Indian churches also look into the possibility of sending short term, long term and even life-time missionaries to North America to primarily work among Diaspora Hindus. Many North American sending groups have had ministries in India for years, and they also have a pool of experienced leaders, theologians, evangelists and pastors who have had exposure to and expertise in working with Hindus in India. Various exchange programs could be initiated to bring experts from India to work with the American church leadership. Similar initiatives could be undertaken in sending North American leaders for exposure trips to India where they could observe various kinds of ministries among Hindus.

Further, partnership between global mission agencies and denominations should also be encouraged. Collecting, interpreting and sharing information about Hindus in the Diaspora can best be done through such partnerships. Churches and mission agencies that are involved in ministering to Hindus in the Diaspora should be encouraged to come together for mutual understanding, support, strategy development, and actual working out of effective Christian witness among them. The increasing number and the influence of Hindus in the Diaspora needs to be researched and studied systematically, for which partnership with mission bodies that have the experience and expertise is essential.

Develop a Broader Network of Churches in North America: Reaching the Diaspora Hindus is a complex and demanding task and it can never be done by one single church. Hence a larger partnership with the churches of North America is required. Learning from Paul's model of partnership with various churches, efforts should be made to develop a broader network of Church partnership. Such partnership should be explored both at the local church levels as well as at regional or denominational levels. Knowing that strong pockets of Hindus are concentrated in certain cities of North America, efforts should be made to initiate partnerships with those churches that have strong Hindu presence in their vicinities. Churches should be

encouraged at various levels to develop meaningful partnerships with each other and share their resources in witnessing to Diaspora Hindus.

Resources in terms of information and expertise ought not to be the monopoly of one group; rather such information should be shared widely among those who are interested in ministering to Diaspora Hindus. Joint ventures should be undertaken to assess progress, growth, and direction of ministry, and measures ought to be taken to bring more effectiveness. Human resources, especially those who are experienced, should be extensively utilized. Conscious and deliberate efforts are needed to establish a strong support base of prayer, training and finance. There are large churches with sound financial bases, while other churches have good human resources. These could be effectively connected for meaningful partnership in reaching Diaspora Hindus. To effect this, proper planning, procedure and accountability structures should be established.

Utilize Indian Christian Networks: Even though the number of Christians of Indian origin is limited, a number of regional groups and fellowships meet regularly all over North America. These fellowships, though tending to be region and language based, have great potential in establishing rapport with the Hindu community in North America. [39] Many Indian Christians are either living in close proximity to their Hindu counterparts or working with them. This naturally provides a good point of contact with the Hindu community. Different ways should be explored to equip and mobilize the Indian Christian Diaspora to establish initial contacts with the Hindu community and then, in collaboration with the American Church, develop meaningful Christian witness among them.

In addition, partnerships should be developed among the networks of Indian Christians who work in different parts of North America. These networks appear to be loose at the moment, since a good number of them are working in regional language groups (i.e. Tamil, Malayalam, Gujarati, Telugu, Hindi), and they are confined almost exclusively to the Christian communities. However, many of these groups have willingness and potential to reach out to the Hindu community in North America.

Encourage House Church Network: Plans for follow-up and nurture of new believers with the concrete aim of forming worshiping communities of new believers should be undertaken. Since most Hindus are very family/community oriented people, efforts should be made to keep their

family structures intact, as much as possible, even after their conversion. So, different ways of establishing house fellowships should be explored and through these fellowships of Hindu believers, deeper penetration into the Hindu Diaspora community can be explored. Existing churches must be encouraged to take new believers under their shelter for further nurture, and in turn encourage them to develop partnerships with older and more experienced churches to reach other Hindus.

Partnership with Fellow-Ministers

The task of Christian witness among the Diaspora Hindus will never be effectively undertaken unless various types of Christian leaders form specialized teams and develop strong networks for ministry. Paul's ministry model was clearly multi-ethnic. There is a need for developing a "team ministry" to reach Hindus in the Diaspora. Teams of missionaries, pastors, evangelists, researchers and other interested Christians should be encouraged to work together. Since ministry to the Hindus in the Diaspora requires various kinds of resources, expertise and personnel, attempts should be made to develop teams of Christian leaders with varieties of expertise and backgrounds. Attempts should further be made to develop team ministry with different ethnic groups of Christian leaders, both from Indian and North American backgrounds. These teams could consist of multi-ethnic, multi-lingual as well as multi-regional leaders. Seasoned missionaries with substantial experience in ministry among Hindus should be encouraged to team up with American leaders interested in working with Diaspora Hindus in North America. In addition, attempts should be made to include women and youth in the team since this is essential in reaching whole communities. Women have better access to and rapport with the Hindu community than men for socio-cultural reasons. Christian women can play a crucial role in initiating and establishing contacts with Hindu women. So also, Christian youth could be good instruments in building bridges with Hindu youth. Building multi-ethnic, multi-gender and trans-generational teams to reach Hindus in the Diaspora is bound to yield good results.

Partnership with Families

Any ministry among Hindus in the Diaspora will have to take the centrality of the family into consideration. To make any breakthrough in the Hindu community, one has to use the existing family network.

Recognize the Importance of the Family: The importance of family, caste and community should be kept in mind as strategic approaches are developed to witness to Hindus in the Diaspora. Many Hindus of upper caste origin equally value their family as their religion and any threat to these is vehemently opposed. Because of the close-knit nature of the extended family, any member who acts out of line or questions its activities or views is considered a traitor. Moreover, becoming a Christian means renouncing not only the religion of the forefathers but also the age-old caste structure which is strongly woven into the fabric of the Hindu family. Therefore, very few caste Hindus, even after moving to North America, would like to renounce their caste and religion and become outcastes. For most Hindus, caste, religion and family issues are so interwoven that it is difficult to separate them.

Taking Paul's example of partnership, we can gain several insights. Although Paul did not neglect individuals in his evangelistic approach, he strongly focused on the family as a total unit. Learning from his family-centered approach, special care may be taken in developing family-based approaches to Christian witness among the Hindus. This would entail not only mobilizing families for Christian witness, but also forming house churches in line with the Hindu extended family structure. This approach, at least theoretically, has a great scope for penetrating the large number of Hindu communities and triggering a family-based house church movement.

Equip and Mobilize Christian Families: Perhaps the most effective way of reaching Hindu families for Christ is through Christian families. For the effective spread and penetration of the gospel, Christian families need to be nurtured, equipped, and trained systematically to undertake Christian witness with Hindu families. Though this is a natural and effective way of witnessing it is rarely taken seriously, since traditional approaches of evangelism tend to be more individualistic and male dominated. Families

with women and children could become effective instruments in witnessing to Hindus in the Diaspora.

However, the task of identifying, equipping, training and mobilizing Christian families for such witness is not easy. The Christian faith should be nurtured in the family in such a way that the Christian family becomes instrumental in sharing this faith effectively with their Hindu counterparts. Can the American Church take this issue seriously and develop a strategy that would provide on-going training programs to Christian families in order to make them effective witnesses among the Hindus? This is an almost unexplored area of ministry and should be given urgent consideration in view of ministry among Hindus in the Diaspora.

Understand the Decision-Making Process: With a family-based approach in Christian witness to Hindus, the issue of decision-making has to be dealt with carefully. Focusing on the decision-makers is crucial, as it has great potential for the natural spread of the gospel among other Hindu families. Having come to North America, many Hindus and especially the younger generations of Hindus have become more comfortable with individualistic decision-making. But it must not be forgotten that most crucial family decisions, and especially religious decisions, are still taken by the elderly male or at least processed through him. This is very much in line with the Hindu cultural norm of respecting elders and abiding by the decisions made by them. Important decisions and especially religious decisions in Hindu families are not normally taken by individuals or young people. Understanding and respecting the decision-making process is crucial in witnessing to Hindus for further penetration of the Christian message.

Be Sensitive to the Reality of Honor and Shame: The issue of shame and honor, which is indirectly linked with the family structure and decision-making process, also has to be given due consideration when witnessing to Hindus. Most Hindus come from a 'shame and honor' culture, where social acceptance and harmony in interpersonal relations are carefully balanced with the need to protect and enhance one's self-esteem. The issue of 'shame' in Hindu culture acts as a potent social control; when an individual commits a mistake or a grave sin, their reputation and honor is perceived to be at stake. In most cases, individual conversion to Christ is considered by the Hindus as something that brings shame upon the family. When an individual takes a decision to renounce his age-old Hindu religion

and accept the Christian faith, heavy pressure is brought upon him/her from every segment of the family, extended family and caste association, because becoming Christian is inevitably perceived as bringing shame upon the family. Ways and means should be explored to present the Christian message in such a manner that accepting it would make people feel proud and 'honored' as a result of their decision to become followers of Christ. If the issue of shame is handled carefully and the gospel is presented so that most Hindus will feel it honorable to become a follower of Jesus Christ, then there is a great possibility of triggering a Christian movement among them.

Conclusion

Until recently, Hindus in the Diaspora were considered marginal to the study of the "main" religion, and have been viewed as peripheral in Christian studies. Although of interest among social scientists, Christian theologians and missions thinkers have rarely given any serious consideration to systematic study of the Hindu Diaspora in North America. Traditionally, India and her people have been a mystery for most Western Christian theologians; not many serious attempts have been made by them to develop theologically informed and missiologically appropriate approaches in reaching upper caste Hindus in and outside of India. Some attempts obviously were undertaken by the early missionaries to reach the upper castes, but within a short period of time these were abandoned due to lack of substantial results. Those approaches are now outdated and irrelevant for reaching Hindus in the Diaspora.

Indian and Western Christian theologians' failure to deal with the issue of witnessing to Hindus in the Diaspora is partly because they are generally from a higher caste background and financially better off, in contrast to most Christian mission workers and theologians who are accustomed to working among the poor 'outcaste' people. At the same time, in the name of religious tolerance in the post-modern pluralistic world, Western as well as Indian Christian theologians seem to neglect the need of mission to the Hindus, whereas Hindus appear to be taking advantage of the freedom and openness of Western countries by bringing increasing numbers of Hindu Gurus to present their religious perspectives and possibly win converts in the West.

Despite the presence of a million and half Hindus in the United States, and the popularity of Hindu practices such as yoga and meditation etc., most Americans Churches tend to keep their distance from them, thus making Hindus in the Diaspora one of the most neglected and un-evangelized people groups. Since the presence of Diaspora Hindus in North America is an emerging reality, it demands a fresh and appropriate Christian response.

Christian witness among them is possible, provided that serious efforts are undertaken in developing comprehensive partnerships at the Church, individual minister, and family levels. The reality, the need and the challenge of witnessing to the Hindus in the Diaspora in North America demands a comprehensive partnership without which most of them will still remain untouched by the Christian message.

Notes

1. Caste Hindus are those who fall into any one of the four major caste categories: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Shudra. In each linguistic region, there are about 200 caste groups which are further subdivided into about 3,000 smaller units, each of which is endogamous.
2. Steven Vertovec, *The Hindu Diaspora Comparative Patterns* (London: Rutledge, 2000), 141.
3. Gerrie ter Harr, ed., *Religious Communities in the Diaspora* (Nairobi: Action Publishers, 2001), 4-5.
4. Vertovec, *The Hindu…* 142.
5. Martin Baumann, "The Hindu Diaspora in Europe," in Gerrie ter Haar, ed., *Religious Communities in the Diaspora* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2001), 87.
6. Baumann, "Hindu Diaspora…" 88.
7. Harold Coward, "Hinduism in Canada" in Harold Coward, John R. Hinnells, and Raymond Brady Williams, eds., *The South Asian Religious Diaspora in Britain, Canada, and the United States* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 151.
8. David R. Hodge "Working with Hindu Clients in a Spiritually Sensitive Manner" in *Social Work: A Journal of the National*

Association of Social Workers, Vol., 49, Number 1, (January 2004), 31.

9. Thomas Wolf, "The Wrinkled Wired Elephant: Firsts, Facts and Facets of India" A Paper presented at The Bakke Graduate University D. Min. Cohort. New Delhi, February 23, 2005.
10. It must be kept in mind that the term 'Hindu' generally represents all types of Hindus, including Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs, though these are distinct religious communities in India. However, the term 'Asian Indian' includes Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Parsees and other religious communities whose origin can be traced to India.
11. Indian American Center for Political Awareness, Washington DC, www.iacfpa.org, cited on March 24, 06. The Asian American community overall grew at the rate of 48.26 percent from 1990-2000. Asian Americans constitute 3.6 percent of the United States population with 10,242,998. Indian Americans comprise 16.4 percent of the Asian American community, making them the third largest constituency in the Asian American community, behind the Chinese American and the Filipino American communities.
12. Coward, "Hinduism in …" 148.
13. Coward, "Hinduism in …" 148.
14. Anthropological Survey of India documented 4,635 distinct people, caste, tribal and ethnic groups in India.
15. Baumann, "Hindu Diaspora…" 95.
16. Baumann, "Hindu Diaspora…" 95.
17. Roger Ballard, "The Growth and Changing Character of the Sikh Presence in Britain" in Coward et al. eds. *The South Asian…*,133.
18. Baumann, "Hindu Diaspora…" 88.
19. R. B. Williams, "Asian Indian and Pakistani Religions in the United States" in A. W. Heston, ed., *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 558 pp.178-195.
20. T. A. Tweed, "Asian Religions in the United States: Reflections on an emerging sub-field" in W. H. Conser, Jr. & S. B. Twiss eds., *Religious Diversity and American Religious History* (Athens: GA: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 189-217.
21. Diana L. Eck, "Negotiating Hindu Identities in the US" in Coward et al, eds. *The South Asian...* 221.
22. Hodge, "Working with Hindu Clients …" 33.

23. J. G. Miller, "Cultural Diversity in the Morality of Caring: Individually oriented versus duty-based interpersonal moral codes" *Cross-cultural Research*, 28(1), 3-19.
24. David R. Hodge, "Working with Hindu Clients …" 27-38.
25. I. Reddy and F. J. Hanna, "The Lifestyle of the Hindu Women: Conceptualizing Female Clients from Indian Origin". *Journal of Individual Psychology*, (54) 384-398.
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31. Manjaly, *Collaborative Ministry…*339.
32. Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission: Paul and the Early Church* Vol. 2 (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2004), 1302.
33. Atul Y. Aghamkar, "Family Coherence and Evangelization of Urban India" in Charles Van Engen and Jude Tiersma Eds., *God So Loves the City* (Monrovia: MARC, 1995), 26.
34. Malvor Moxnes, "Honor and Shame" in Richard Rohrbaugh, ed., *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 28.
35. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission …*1303.
36. Robert and Julia Banks, *The Church Comes Home: A New Base for Community and Mission* (Clermont: Albatross Books, 1986), 48.
37. Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970), 207.
38. Aghamkar, "Family Coherence…," 26.
39. Refer to the Appendix for details of select Asian Indian and NRI Christian group listings of North America.

From Going to Gathering: Studying an Interdisciplinary Ecclesial Evangelism

by Laceye Warner

Introduction

The landscape related to the study and practice of evangelism can be difficult and rocky terrain. To briefly and simply describe at least one aspect of this topography: a polemic developed in the late nineteenth-century resulting in a growing distance between personal piety and works of mercy and justice. A chasm grew between those passionate about individuals' relationships with Jesus Christ (love of God) and those with compassion for meeting the material needs of others (love of neighbor). The distance between these two vantage points emphasized individual spiritual well-being or social policy created to alleviate systemic ills. In addition to truncating the gospel, for many, the focus of one to the exclusion of the other left the evangelistic role of Christian communities largely to fall from sight.

Another earlier development also contributes to difficulties related to evangelism. When biblical texts were initially translated into English (with the Tyndale and Wycliffe versions of the Bible) the Greek root for evangelism was translated simply as "preaching." This was an attempt to employ language that could be widely understood.[1] This, coupled with the popularity of Matthew 28 as the Great Commission, contributed to an emphasis upon the dynamic of "going," most often of individual preachers or small groups of missionaries. While the "going" and preaching of individuals are important aspects of evangelism, such interpretations, while well intended, encourage truncated understandings and practices of evangelism often too confined by parochial or local connotations lacking a broad, or worldly, context. Concepts and practices of evangelism influenced in this way also tend to overlook the essential role of Christian communities in the textured practices of initiating, forming, sending, and gathering persons in faith.

This truncation has led to the exclusion of voices outside the dominant culture from shaping understandings and practices of evangelism simply because these voices were not allowed to go and preach. One example, among many, of such exclusion is women, particularly European and African American Protestant women in the 18th and 19th centuries.[2] This is to say, such estrangement and truncation related to the understanding and practice of evangelism must not be viewed apart from its background of an often shameful history, not merely of exclusion, but inquisitions, crusades, and colonization to fraudulent television preachers and church marketing schemes within a growing context shadowed by anti-intellectualism.

My purpose in this short essay is to offer an overview of themes towards a proposal for the academic study of evangelism. First, acknowledging briefly the difficulty of studying evangelism and locating it within the landscape of Christian theological reflection. Second, proposing in broad strokes facets of an interdisciplinary study of evangelism characterized by the dynamic "from going to gathering" drawing upon resources such as biblical texts and historical perspective to inform an ecclesial evangelism set in worldly context.

The Study of Evangelism

As an academic area of study, particularly in university contexts of theological education, evangelism is not glamorous. While there is increased attention given to the concept and practice, the contemporary climate of mainline denominational decline and general malaise in North America clamors for techniques to reverse these trends, preferably swiftly and simply. However, the careful definition of evangelism and the construction of a coherent theology for this ecclesial practice are needed. While an increasing number of practitioners flood the market with practical guide books encouraging the latest technique (a possibly more lucrative occupation than that of the theologian), rarely do these afford a theologically and historically robust understanding of evangelism. Such resources are not unhelpful, and indeed sometimes better than simply ignoring the biblical commission. However, in light of the significance of the evangelistic task, careful theological reflection by some ideally ought to shape faithful and diligent practice by many.[3]

Quick-fix remedies may ease the symptomatic sting of decline, but these will not address the deeper systems working within Christian communities and institutions. Much of the difficulty faced by contemporary American mainline congregations related to evangelism/mission needs also to be addressed through rediscovery and careful study of biblical and theological foundations with attentiveness to historical perspectives to inform practices of local Christian communities across the contemporary international landscape.

Yet, terms such as evangelism and mission elude easy definition. Difficulties surround attempts to articulate the interface of these two – sometimes assumed distinct – ministries in the life of the church, much less the university/seminary. Conceptual boundaries shift as interest groups and ideologues labor to claim sufficient space for agendas that begin more often from reactive starting points than constructive biblical and theological engagement. Whether originating in the twentieth century Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy in the United States or related to the legacy of colonial imperialism in numerous world contexts, polarities are often manifest in conversations about the meaning and practice of evangelism.

In the midst of this volatility, churches and educational institutions need each other to broaden, deepen and refine concepts and practices of evangelism within the larger *missio Dei*.

As I have alluded, the use of the term evangelism and its relation to mission often lacks consistency. For example, evangelism and mission are at times used synonymously, while at other times a distinction is made between them. When there is a distinction, evangelism may be understood as activity in one's domestic context to those already baptized, but estranged from the Church, or the unbaptized. Mission may then be understood as preaching accompanied by outreach activities such as educational and medical assistance in urban or more often foreign contexts.[4] This lack of clarity often results from an absence of critical theological reflection replaced by simplistic truncations or worse reactionary differentiation.

Mission has its root in the Latin phrase *missio Dei* or the mission of God. According to the commission text in the gospel of John, the mission of God is to send Jesus Christ to the world, and with the Holy Spirit to send the Church to the world.[5] A relatively recent (mid twentieth-century), but important shift has occurred within the Church's self understanding among

ecumenical conversations from the Church sending missions to the world, to God sending the Church in mission to the world.[6]

David Bosch, a South African missiologist, defined evangelism in his monumental text *Transforming Mission* as "the proclamation of salvation in Christ to those who do not believe in him, calling them to repentance and conversion, announcing forgiveness of sin, and inviting them to become living members of Christ's earthly community and to begin a life of service to others in the power of the Holy Spirit."[7] For Bosch, and others, evangelism is the heart of God's mission.[8] Indeed, evangelism characterizes our baptismal commission received upon initiation into Christian community, to proclaim the gospel in our words and lives.

In the world of the university/seminary, scholars have attempted to find a niche for evangelism within the theological education curriculum. Some set it apart as an aspect of missiology or a topic within ecclesiology. Others view it as a sub-discipline of practical theology or as a discrete field in its own right. Among the areas of biblical, historical, and theological studies, evangelism is frequently located as a sub-discipline, often on the margins, of practical theology. Not in every case, but often, the location of evangelism demonstrates a truncated or shallow understanding limited merely to one or more techniques for increasing church membership.

However, when one considers that those who study and practice evangelism, thoughtfully conceived, engage in reflection upon God's invitation, voiced in biblical texts and embodied in Christian tradition, to all people to be reconciled through Jesus Christ; and to respond in faithfulness through the power of the Holy Spirit by participating in the reign of God, such a location seems desperately misplaced. The study of evangelism is serious interdisciplinary theological work.

Unfortunately, for the most part, theologians have neglected the study of evangelism or relegated it to the margins of serious theological discourse. It is still relatively difficult to identify a major theologian for whom the study of mission/evangelism figures prominently in his or her theological frame.[9] Most often the study of evangelism is gladly left to the realm of the practitioner as technique thereby perpetuating narrow concepts and heated divisions.

A study of evangelism does not need the endorsement of dominant cultures or to rely entirely upon an intellectual rationale for the gospel as a proof for God through human experience. However, a study of evangelism does depend upon ecclesial life and practice that grows from canonical texts

and Christian tradition pervaded by the Holy Spirit in Christian communities of faith. Such a study of evangelism must take into consideration the relevance of the gospel in a post-Christian setting (e.g. Great Britain or even the United States) that critically reflects and embodies the life of faith beyond techniques of contemporary worship, accessible signage, or friendly greeters. A study of evangelism may rest more upon an aesthetic than an epistemology or metaphysic – upon the beauty of the triune God reflected within and by communities of faith of the baptized (not that such a context is the only occurrence of the Trinity, Holy Spirit, beauty or evangelism, but for Christians is primary).[10] A study of evangelism ideally considers practices in communities of accountability that include sisters and brothers from multiple locations, certainly Christians in southern international contexts.[11]

An Interdisciplinary Ecclesial Evangelism

Once located upon the theological landscape of serious inquiry, evangelism is most appropriately studied not as a single discipline, but at the intersections of multiple disciplines as demonstrated by Bosch's comprehensive concept of evangelism. The study of evangelism, to maintain integrity, must maintain an interdisciplinarity. Additionally, students must develop acute sensitivities with regard to historical contexts. A failure to take biblical and historical sources seriously can lead to truncated or deficient understandings of the mission of the church and its evangelistic practice. Critical theological reflection upon the relationship between evangelism and such sources demands much of the scholar and the community of faith.

This kind of serious reflection is not absent from the landscape. However, interdisciplinary conversations among biblical exegetes, historians, theologians, ethicists, social scientists and practitioners (including pastors), for example, entail the development of relationships that are not necessarily natural. But the application of new hermeneutical lenses and methodologies to the study of evangelism engenders excitement with the creation of new perspectives and paradigms. Ideally, the continued construction of such a scholarly infrastructure builds upon itself dialectically, while simultaneously providing accountability across cultural communities.

Foundational to a critical study of evangelism is the premise, "the most evangelistic thing the church can do is to be the church – to be formed imaginatively by the Holy Spirit through core practices such as worship, forgiveness, hospitality, and economic sharing into a distinctive people in the world, a new social option, the body of Christ."[12] To re-calibrate the study of evangelism as central to the theological landscape, yet characterized by interdisciplinarity, creates an ecclesial evangelism informed by philosophical, theoretical, cultural, biblical, historical, and practical knowledge. The following describes themes related to a selection of such resources for the study and practice of evangelism.

Biblical Study

Exegetical and theological study of biblical texts with attention to its place and function in ecclesial life offers significant, rich and complex resources for engagement in a study of evangelism.

For example, the concept of evangelism found in the gospels is related to the Greek Septuagint term *euangelizesthai*, meaning "to proclaim good tidings."[13] This term *euangelizesthai* was used in general reference when good tidings from God occurred. It has a close connection to the announcement of God's salvific activity in Second and Third Isaiah. The related Greek term also found in the Septuagint, *evangelos*, has as its root *angelos*, or "messenger," and *angelo*, or "to announce." Significant to understanding these concepts of messenger and announcement is the notion that the message announced is not merely a verbal proclamation of abstract information. Rather, the proclamation of salvation manifests that salvation.[14] The message is a present tangible reality through its immediate embodiment, which invites responsive participation in a tapestry of practices. St. Frances encouraged Christians to preach the gospel and when necessary to use words.

However, even the most careful studies of biblical texts for evangelism focus heavily upon the New Testament. Remarkably, this focus is often to the exclusion of the Old Testament and for all their good intentions continues to highlight verbal proclamation despite substantial evidence of more nuanced and complex practices. For example, Bosch's definition of evangelism articulates the proclamation of the New Testament gospel and this in the context of his larger work almost to the exclusion of the Old

Testament in light of its place in the canon. His work, which if not, is clearly among, the most comprehensive, though making brief mention of Old Testament themes and texts, can be limited by methodology.[15]

A number of opportunities exist within biblical studies for the theology and practice of evangelism. For example: canonical biblical studies generally, as well as further attention to other concepts beyond *euangelion* related to initiation into the reign of God – such as *martyria*, *kerygma*, *koinonia*, and *diakonia*. Further exploration in these areas would contribute to a broadening and deepening of the church's understanding and practice of evangelism among communities of faith.

From Going and Preaching

Implicit in the current trajectory within the academic study of evangelism is a reorientation from the traditional notion that evangelism, particularly in the New Testament, functions mainly as a centrifugal dynamic of "going out." While this is an important aspect, a merely centrifugal understanding of evangelism does not offer an accurate representation of the biblical witness.

When many think of God's mission and the Church's participation in evangelism, the general dynamic – most often inspired by Matthew 28 – is one of *going*. Yet the dynamic of *gathering* is also modeled in Matthew in the use of the term *ekklesia*, as well as in the Old Testament: "Israel is the missionary people of God, 'the light of the nations,' whose primary mission is not to *go* but to *be* the people of God."[16] For Arias, this characteristically Old Testament dynamic of centripetal mission changed following the resurrection and Pentecost to the traditional, centrifugal pattern. However, even in the New Testament, the notion of centripetal mission remains – "by attraction, by incarnation, by being."[17] Mortimer Arias uncovers the oversimplification of such dynamics identified in biblical foundations of evangelism when he argues for the emphasis on hospitality as a paradigm for evangelism, particularly as a distinctive mark of Christians and their communities in the New Testament.[18] "Christian mission from its beginning has been centrifugal mission – going from the center to a periphery in the world. Mission cannot remain at any center, it has to move to new boundaries and frontiers: 'to all peoples everywhere;' 'to the whole world;' 'to the whole creation;' 'to the end of the earth;' and 'to the end of time.'"[19]

It seems that many North American Protestant denominations emphasize evangelism as techniques to increase church membership, at best as *going* to verbally proclaim a formulaic and/or packaged gospel message. While communities of faith in or from other (for example globally southern) ecclesial/cultural contexts seem often to acknowledge a more nuanced reading of biblical texts informing a more complex set of practices including both the centripetal and centrifugal.[20] While these are statements generalizing characterizations of large areas and numerous communities of faith – more established churches and denominations have much to learn from "newer" ones.

Evangelism, which must ultimately be set in a global or worldly context, like the practice of pilgrimage, is as much about receiving the message of salvation (even among the baptized) through attention to the work of the Holy Spirit in the world as sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. Practices of going and telling are complemented by listening together to the Holy Spirit witnessing in, through, and beyond individuals and communities seeking to live faithfully across the world.

To Gathering

The dual dynamic of centripetal and centrifugal evangelistic practices appears in more recent studies. Evangelism informed by the biblical witness includes not just centrifugal proclamation to the individual but centripetal participation in the life of the gathered Christian community. Drawing on insights from postcritical philosophy, Brad Kallenberg argues in his *Live to Tell* for the essential role of communities in initiating and forming Christian disciples: "The first lesson for evangelism to be gleaned from postcritical philosophy, then, is the importance of embodying the story of Jesus in our communal life. Such a community provides the context that demystifies the gospel by making it concrete."[21] "Simply put," says Kallenberg, "when viewed through a postcritical lens, conversion can be understood as entailing the change of one's social identity, the acquisition of a new conceptual language, and the shifting of one's paradigm."[22] For Kallenberg: "Faithfulness in evangelism must simultaneously attend to both the group and the individual."[23]

This process of formation – ideally transformation – is enriched when it occurs across boundaries of difference such as culture, class or ability.

The critical theological study of evangelism, understood as the heart of God's mission, has much to gain from an interdisciplinarity in church and educational settings towards an ecclesial evangelism that recognizes the essential dual dynamic of going and gathering.

Intentional Practices

William Abraham holds together traditional understandings of 'conversion' or 'soul-winning' with the importance of nurturing discipleship – in the context of gathering – which both occur in response to the holistic proclamation of the message of salvation – traditionally construed as going and preaching. Abraham, based on the centrality of the reign of God in the gospel texts, proposes its significance for understanding the concept of evangelism.[24] For Abraham, evangelism is best conceived "as that set of intentional activities which is governed by the goal of initiating people into the kingdom of God for the first time."[25] Bishop Scott Jones builds upon Abraham's foundation. He defines evangelism as "that set of loving, intentional activities governed by the goal of initiating persons into Christian discipleship in response to the reign of God."[26] While both Abraham and Jones emphasize intentional practices related to Christian initiation into the reign of God – representing aspects of gathering – their scholarship offers balance to a persistent overemphasis in some circles upon going and preaching.

With Abraham and Jones' focus upon intentional practices of Christian initiation, for some an expectation of the ability to measure results can be seemingly preserved.[27] Bosch explains, evangelism is "not a call to put something into effect, as if God's reign would be inaugurated by our response or thwarted by the absence of such a response…In light of this, evangelism cannot be defined in terms of its results or effectiveness, as though evangelism has only occurred where there are 'converts.' Even so, evangelism does aim at a response."[28] Difficulties arise in relation to the biblical and theological integrity of evangelism when we evaluate results only in human measures. While I am not arguing against efforts to reflect upon our practices for the purposes of accountability, I am acknowledging, this can be dangerous ground. We need a spirit-led theological approach that recognizes the complexity of possibilities for the reign of God in our midst to pursue accountability in faithful Christian practices of evangelism.

Historical and Varied Contemporary Perspectives

William Abraham clarifies a problem persistent within the current study of evangelism: "at issue is the appropriation of what evangelism has actually meant in the early church and in history, not judged by the etymology of the word evangelism and its rather occasional use in Scripture, but by what evangelists have actually done in both proclaiming the gospel and establishing new converts in the kingdom of God."[29] With more comprehensive critical reflection shaped by biblical and theological study, while taking into account historical sources and contexts, we will discover evangelists, individuals and communities, not yet self or otherwise identified. Such reflection and discovery may painfully confront complexities of our past. However, humbly struggling through this difficult terrain with the help of the Holy Spirit may bring deeper and more profound blessings. Without diluting concepts or practices, awareness of historical contexts and narratives can help us claim broader and deeper opportunities for evangelistic witness and include the seeming overlooked disciples, seeking and living their Christian faith in communities of accountability as an invitation to all to love God and neighbor in the world.

Opportunities

The following are possible opportunities for further exploration in an interdisciplinary study of ecclesial evangelism:

- Biblical theology – particularly the study of the Old Testament
- Complexities of sin – objectification of the other (race, class, gender, ability, etc.)
- Blurring the boundary between evangelism and discipleship
- Exploring the influences of the market upon ecclesial identity and practice in the United States and global economy

With new opportunities for doctoral study in evangelism alongside continued work in the area of evangelism and practical theology, this seems an exciting time to gain perspective on the biblical commission for evangelism in the midst of a shifting landscape. I am grateful to those who

have trekked such precarious terrain and admire their agility and endurance. It is a privilege to join this journey engaging the study and practice of evangelism at the intersections of disciplines and in communities of faith towards faithful responses to God's invitation to share the gospel of Jesus Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Notes

1. *This essay is a revision of remarks given at the Consultation on World Evangelism, Candler School of Theology, Emory University, January 8-9, 2007. I am grateful for the invitation to have participated in that conversation.

   See David Barrett, *Evangelize! An Historical Survey of the Concept* (Birmingham: New Hope, 1987), 22. Barrett offers an example of a study too narrowly focused on verbal proclamation. Based on his research Barrett argues that the six closest English synonyms to the term "evangelize" are: preach, bring, tell, proclaim, announce, and declare, thus perpetuating the emphasis upon verbal proclamation.
2. In response to the encouragement of colleagues I have attempted to recognize and integrate selected women's voices within the current academic study of evangelism in a recent book entitled *Saving Women: Retrieving Evangelistic Theology and Practice* (Baylor University Press, 2007).
3. Bryan Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007), 23-38. See Stone on evangelism as practice. Stone surveys select scholars reflecting upon practice such as Wittgenstein, Bourdieu, MacIntyre, Yoder, Hauerwas, and Hutter. I am indebted to Stone for this scholarship which gives a philosophical and theological frame within which the following reflections largely reside.
4. David J. Bosch, "Evangelism: Theological Currents and Cross-currents Today," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research,* 11:3 (July 1987), 98-103.
5. John 20. 19-23.
6. David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 377-78.

7. Ibid., 10.
8. According to David Bosch (with Dana Robert and Walter Klaiber) mission includes evangelism as one of its essential dimensions. See also Dana Robert, "Evangelism as the Heart of Mission," Mission Evangelism Series # 1 (New York: General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church, 1998). This resonates with and helps frame the United Methodist Church's mission statement and the current focus upon "making disciples for the transformation of the world."
9. William J. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 7-9. In more recent scholarship Rowan Williams and James McClendon give attention to such themes.
10. George Lindbeck, *The Church in a Postliberal Age*, James J. Buckley, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 158. Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom*, 12.
11. Dana L. Robert, "Shifting Southward: Global Christianity Since 1945," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 24:2 (April 2000), 50-58.
12. Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom*, 15. Stone describes this statement as the thesis of his text.
13. Walter Klaiber, *Call and Response: Biblical Foundations of a Theology of Evangelism*, trans. Howard Perry-Trauthig and James A. Dwyer (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 24.
14. Ibid., 22.
15. Stephen B. Chapman and Laceye C. Warner, "Rethinking Evangelism and the Old Testament: Jonah and the Imitation of God," (unpublished paper, 2007).
16. Mortimer Arias, "Centripetal Mission or Evangelization by Hospitality" *Missiology*, 10 (Jan. 1982), 74-75, italics mine.
17. Ibid., 75.
18. Ibid., 69-71.
19. Ibid., 74.
20. See for example, J. N. Kanyua Mugambi, "A Fresh Look at Evangelism in Africa," *International Review of Mission*, 87 (July 1998), 342-360; and Orlando E. Costas, "Evangelism and the Gospel of Salvation," *International Review of Mission*, 64 (January 1974), 24-37.

21. Brad J. Kallenberg, *Live to Tell: Evangelism in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002), 54.
22. Ibid., 32.
23. Ibid., 21.
24. See Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* and Mortimer Arias, *Announcing the Reign of God: Evangelization and the Subversive Memory of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).
25. Abraham, *Logic of Evangelism*, 95.
26. Scott J. Jones, *The Evangelistic Love of God and Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 18.
27. For an alternative approach to Abraham, see Elaine A. Robinson, *God-bearing: Evangelism Reconceived* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2006).
28. David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 412-13.
29. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, 69. For a lively introduction to a historical view of evangelism see Robert Tuttle, *The Story of Evangelism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006).

Teaching Evangelism in a Community of Learning

By Paul Dekar

Introduction: Assumptions

This article reflects on 32 years teaching evangelism in several seminaries. I have adapted Thomas Merton's experience as student, teacher, and writer, as well as other approaches to evangelism courses. I seek to create communities of learning, by which I understand safe space in which participants grow into their truest selfhood. Before summarizing nine evangelism courses at Memphis Theological Seminary, I name assumptions of my calling as theological educator.

First, to claim one's True Self is to be united to the image and likeness of God. God in Jesus enabled humans to participate in the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). This idea of deification recalls we are God's children created in the divine image and likeness (1 Jn 3:1). To nurture this insight, I seek to create safe space, communities of learning, in which students grow into their True Self. By the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the work of God's Holy Spirit, we are being conformed to Christ's likeness from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor 3:18).

Second, evangelism is an expression of gratitude, a response to God of gratefulness rather than something we do. A major tenet of sixteenth-century Reformation teaching (*sola gratia*) affirms that God redeems us by grace. Many students come to seminary from experiences in the church's life of working hard for God but not having time to be with God; speaking for God but not listening to God; and pushing agendas on God's behalf while there is little interest in being in communion with the God in whose name we are to evangelize. The culture of church life as many have known it fosters knowledge about God but does not satisfy the deepest longing in the heart to know God in intimacy as the Hebrew word *yada* connotes.

Third, any attempt to establish a dichotomy between life of the Spirit and life in the world is false. To nurture a healthy love of self, God, and

neighbor, I encourage students to reflect on the underpinnings of their practices of ministry, evangelism, and mission in their local contexts, with awareness of the globalization. In our present threatened and threatening world, it is only too easy to withdraw. To do so would not reflect the mind of Christ (Ph 2:5). Recently, these questions have shaped my theological thinking and influenced my selection of texts:

- What am I/what are we to do about the growing gap between the rich and poor?
- What am I/what are we to do about the environmental crisis?
- What world will our children and grandchildren inherit?
- What am I/ what are we to do about diversity and freedom?
- How will I/we bring a deep spirituality to bear on these questions?
- Can one's practice of spiritual disciplines balance contemplation and action?

Finally, the banking approach to education follows attitudes and practices which often mirror oppressive society. My pedagogy is self-directed, problem-solving, action-oriented, and relevant to the learners' life experience. Brazilian educator Paulo Freire calls this praxis or "problem-posing education." It encourages reflection on action and vice versa. It leads to change. "Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow."[1]

Pedagogy

At the start of elective courses, I seek to ensure that registrants covenant to participate in a community of learning. I have not dispensed with syllabi; they function as mutual covenants, not as legal documents. I openly share the story of my conversion and of experiences that have shaped my pedagogy in general and specific to the particular course, and my understanding that one does not have to travel afar to enter the pain of the world. This process was not always thus.

As a graduate student in the 1960s and early 1970s, the curricula of institutions I attended offered excellent scholarship but little occasion for spiritual growth or the work of justice. In 1976, when I began to teach at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario, I found a dearth of concern for spirituality and justice in the curriculum. Moreover, in my own life, I did not find my experience of teaching work as enlivening.

A practicing Christian and an activist formed during the sixties at the University of California, Berkeley, I had been a conscientious objector to war, a journey that took me to Africa for three years. Now an instructor preparing leaders to serve as preachers, teachers, and missionaries I was trying to bring the pain of the world into the classroom. As I designed courses, I ran into a presupposition of modernity. A secular realm of facts and a sacred sphere of values must be kept separate. I was not to move from teaching about God to knowing firsthand the One to whom the Bible bears witness with the result that I experienced alienation, separateness, and disconnection from heart, students, and colleagues.[2]

Among courses I designed was one on "The Holy Spirit in the Church." Talk of the Holy Spirit was, literally, blowing in the wind. I assembled a reading list and presented a syllabus to the appropriate committees. Texts included a theological history of the theme.[3] In the first class, students indicated what interested them in the course. Some wanted to recover a sense of God's presence in their lives. Some indicated that there were too many demands on their time. They had no time to practice the presence of God. Some acknowledged that, though spirituality was an awkward word for them, they wanted to explore this area. Many neglected themselves spiritually. Emotionally, they were rendering themselves dull and wooden. Socially, they were courting respectability. They acknowledged needing an intimate knowledge of the riches of the Christian tradition in order to develop immunity in some degree "from the great cataract of nonsense that pours from the press and microphone of our age."[4]

I launched into a series of lectures authenticated with a freshly minted Ph.D. A problem surfaced quickly. Students really had little interest either in the history of the Holy Spirit, or in the texts. The course no doubt had some positive impact, but in course evaluations at the end of term, students urged that I teach the course on a very different basis a second time around.

The next academic year, I did so. To create a learning environment in which we could experience God, I removed tables. We sat in circles around a small altar in the center, with candles and icons. We spent time praying

and on three-day retreat. Participants covenanted to come to class each week; to have read excerpts from autobiographies of spiritual or theological mentors; to have kept a journal; and to be prepared to read from them to one another.

I offered the course regularly. Overwhelmingly, feedback was positive. When I have re-connected with students from my McMaster years, they have claimed it was the elective that most shaped their ministry.

I have disclosed to you readers a personal crisis brought on by a deficient (for me) pedagogy that up to that time I had accepted uncritically. My dilemma deepened in a course on "The Mission of the Church." How could I heighten awareness of oppression and encourage work for justice? Through speakers, films, and field trips I introduced students to the pain of the world. They balked. Initially it seemed that I had not communicated well, either the force of my anger at the way things were, or my ideas for change.

On further reflection, I concluded that I had inherited from mentors a pedagogical approach familiar to most students, that of reading books and writing papers; of attending lectures, memorizing facts, and preparing for exams. Such a method was poorly suited to putting a human face on large issues of homelessness, hunger, or poverty; or to motivating registrants to tackle such larger-than-life issues. The second time, I rooted my pedagogy in the real stuff of the lives of students and their communities. The course became a staple at McMaster Divinity College and now at Memphis Theological Seminary. Students gave thirty hours to a project of their own design. With me and a supervisor from the community, students shared in an accountability structure that included journaling and self-evaluation. Student took four steps:

Preparing. Human need often is invisible. One reason is that members of congregations are strangers to the community around the church facilities. They are neither aware, nor directly concerned. A first rule for developing social ministry is that engagement with the destructive dimensions of personal and social sin varies inversely with one's awareness of need in one's immediate vicinity.[5] To prepare for engagement, I encourage students to walk through their neighborhood, or if they serve a rural community, to drive a twenty-mile radius around it. In their journals, they record what they see. They prepare a basic demographic survey using census data and other sources. In other words, students begin where they are planted.

Listening/sharing. Building relationships in communities requires connecting with neighbors and identifying the determinative realities of their lives. Possibilities abound. One can attend community events, visit homes, or share meals. One may invite a social worker to lunch, ride a police beat, or meet with someone of a different cultural group.

Assessing. Students assess and evaluate the data gathered. They formulate possible plans for action, with specific goals and objectives, a time-line, and a process for evaluation. I caution them to be sensitive to how any activity will impact on people most affected, and especially to be mindful of potentially asymmetrical power relationships in race, class, and gender. This is especially true if we are seeking real and lasting empowerment of an oppressed group.

Acting. Participants inevitably respond to contextual learning by wanting to make a difference in the lives of those in need. Students have thereby grown where God has established them in ministry. To cite from myriad examples, in Ottawa, Ontario, a student encouraged a congregation to create a place of hospitality for children left alone on city schoolyards by an innovative pre-school breakfast program. In a poor area of Hamilton, Ontario, Welcome Inn became a school of compassion enabling a generation of students to journey through poverty terrain and to create ministries for homeless, addicted, prisoners, and others.[6]

Failure to follow such an approach can produce catastrophe! A Hamilton, Ontario congregation spent millions to refurbish office- and worship-space but ignored three categories of people living near the church: the homeless, the poor, and the elderly. The congregation neither elicited what people thought they needed, nor addressed the needs. The congregation might have provided facilities such as washrooms, kitchens, and beds for street people. They might have undertaken a ministry for those vulnerable to drug trafficking. They might have provided wheelchair access for the elderly. They did none of these. Despite efforts of a student minister, the congregation did not grow where it was planted.

In the course, we struggled to relate this practical approach in social ministry to what Wesleyans call social holiness. In trusting circles, we began to explore a new spirituality of liberation deeply rooted in the lived experience of God's presence in history.[7]

We gained confidence that finding our truest self does not lead us away from the world, but to purposeful ways to love and serve God in the world. We struggled to relate to the global context. I encouraged students to

explore the wisdom that those who have lived in many places are not likely to be deceived by the local errors or one's native village. Quoting an East African proverb, "One who has never traveled thinks mother is the only cook," I instituted cross-cultural learning experiences. In late 1986 I facilitated an immersion course that became a staple of my teaching. At McMaster, I led groups to India, Bolivia, aboriginal communities in Ontario and Nunavut, and in Toronto with refugees. At Memphis Theological Seminary, I have continued to offer such courses, leading students in Cameroon, Trinidad, urban Memphis, and aboriginal communities in Oklahoma and Nunavut.

As I developed these new (for me) approaches to teaching, I attended workshops and read about adult learning principles. I found three sources especially fruitful. First, I benefitted from McMaster University where I taught from 1976 to 1995. During the 1970s the faculties of medicine, engineering, and business management developed an approach to pedagogy, self-directed and problem-based learning, for which McMaster is noted. That humanistic studies should permeate the entire university, in 1981 McMaster introduced Arts and Science, a program described by Debbie Sin Yan Too, "Transformation. A web of support and guidance in the forefront of Science and Art: the never-ending kaleidoscope of symmetrical loops. Promoting freedom to be and to do. Learning the difference you can make. Granted permission to explore and see life through freshly opened eyes."[8]

Second, educator Parker Palmer laid the groundwork for my "spirituality of education." He posed unanswerable questions like, "How can the heart be true when my senses and reason reduce reality so self-confidently to their own narrow terms?" "How might my quest for a holistic way of knowing be translated into practical ways to teach and to learn?" "How can I teach truth?" Teaching from the tradition of the desert saints, he summarized, "to teach is to create a space in which obedience to truth is practiced."[9] Being part of a community of learning, characterized by Parker Palmer as a circle of trust, a communal place of safety that welcomes the soul, helps participants to hear God's voice. The goal is to reclaim "a hidden wholeness," for Thomas Merton, arguably the most successful religious author in North America or perhaps the world in the last century, an integrity that comes from re-creation of one's humanity in Christ.[10]

As an undergraduate student at the University of California, I read writings by Merton, specifically his essay "The Root of War Is Fear" in the October 1961 *Catholic Worker*; "The Shelter Ethic" in the November 1961

Catholic Worker;[11] his poetic reflection on the thinking of government officials who decided to explode the first atomic bomb on Japanese civilians, *Original Child Bomb*;[12] and his compilation of writings by Gandhi.[13] Merton fueled my passion for victims of war and contributed to my movement towards pacifism and non-violence as ways to establish God's peace in a world of violence.

In the 1970s, I rediscovered Merton. Recalling his experience at Columbia University, Merton wrote of his theology of education in an essay entitled "Learning to Live." The function of a university is first of all to help students to discover themselves, to recognize themselves, to move beyond one's superficial selves, to claim selfhood in freedom.

> The purpose of education is to show a person how to define himself authentically and spontaneously in relation to his world – not to impose a prefabricated definition of the world, still less an arbitrary definition of the individual himself. The world is made up of people who are fully alive in it: that is, people who can be themselves in it and can enter into a living and fruitful relationship with each other in it. The world is, therefore, more real in proportion as people are able to be more fully and more humanly alive; that is to say, better able to make a lucid and conscious use of their freedom.[14]

Merton likened the university to a monastery. Merton recognized that university and monastery could be in conflict, but he saw each at once a microcosm and a paradise. For Merton, each had its own sphere, the university intellectual knowledge and the monastery mystical knowledge. Both arrived at the same place, a consciousness that transcends all division and all separation.[15]

In the same volume, Merton elaborated on the role of monastic culture in nurturing desire for God, love of learning, and Christian humanism. By contrast with the depersonalization, individualism, and narcissism of his day, Merton highlighted the emergence of the idea of the self in the 12th and 13th centuries; St. Thomas for his openness to Aristotle, Arabs, and the claims of reason and nature; Chartres where scholars were deeply intrigued by the natural world; and the School of St. Victor for its motto, "learn everything, you will find nothing superfluous."[16]

In *The Seven Storey Mountain*, Merton introduced readers to a young person preoccupied with discovery of self, call, sexuality, politics, the arts, and other aspects of life. The book had a quality rare in the genre of autobiography. Merton enabled the reader to see himself or herself through the story of someone else. When Merton's literary agent and editor, Naomi Burton, read an early draft, she recognized Merton had something to say that might help others.[17] What was it? Merton's transparency was (and is) striking. He allowed others to share his journey to God, authentic selfhood, and living more humanly, a phrase he coined in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*. Merton wrote of living in obedience to God, who is Supreme Life,

> To believe: to obey Him Who is Life, and consequently to live. To live by submission to the Supreme Authority of Life – self-commitment and submission to God's truth precisely in its power to give life, to command to live. . . . We cannot live in the truth if we automatically suspect all desires and all pleasures. It is humility to accept our humanity, pride to reject it… We are human, and the only thing stopping us from living humanly is our own deeply ingrained habit of delusion, a habit which some of us stubbornly continue to associate with original sin.[18]

Thomas Merton was an extraordinary teacher. He taught at Columbia in 1939; at St. Bonaventure in 1940-41; and as Master of Students and Novice Master at Gethsemani from 1951 to 1965. Merton sought to enable students to be more fully and humanly alive. He taught in a way that students and teacher explored what is meaningful, real, and true for oneself and in life.

For Merton, a teacher helps students define self authentically and spontaneously in relation to their world and does not impose a prefabricated definition of the world, still less an arbitrary definition of self. Truth-telling is crucial. "If I insist on giving you my truth, and never stop to receive your truth in return, then there can be no truth between us."[19]

To have studied with Merton must have been like being present with an artist whose thinking and creativity brought clarity and insight through the very process of teaching. In the course of his presentations, Merton could be diverted by questions or flashes of insight. Merton explored ideas for the sheer delight in doing so. Merton found the real joy of reading is not

in the reading itself but in the thinking that it stimulates and which may go beyond what is written.

Merton grounded education in the personal experience of students rather than in rules or abstractions. In 1939, he reported to his friend Robert Lax that he enjoyed his class on English composition. “It is interesting and instructive to teach a class: it is not true that any of them are crazy at all, but nor is it true that many of them can write English. Also it is true that they are beginning to write better than before once they can write about their families and their summer vacations....” A few months later, he reported, “I lost my section of English composition, and they were going to give me a class teaching selling to old ladies instead, and I declined, saying no thanks for the offer of that stupid spelling class.”[20]

As novice master, Merton introduced what he characterized as a new education. Rather than a catechetical approach, his was experiential and participatory. He covered a staggering breadth of subjects, both the rich heritage of monasticism, and literature, music, philosophy, science, and the world’s religions. He believed that the monastery should by no means be merely an enclave of eccentric and apparently archaic human beings who have rebelled against the world of science. He sought to form monks of the twentieth century who are capable of embracing in their contemplative awareness not only theology, but also the modern world of science and revolution.” Students have recalled that Merton could threaten and or cajole, but his goal was always to make one aware of one’s own human experience so that it might be a channel for self-knowledge and a way of opening to the life of the Spirit.

Two features of Merton’s pedagogy have informed mine: his commitment to explore varied materials with intellectual rigor and honesty; and his pursuit of truth through dialogue. I came to see my approach to pedagogy as formation for justice, spirituality, and mission. I seek to create communities of learning, safe space, with clear limits; intentionality; respect for the learner’s knowledge; community; collaboration; open, voluntary invitations; positive in valuing persons and their growth, concrete, with skills for leadership; and diversity in materials read and approaches introduced. Following Merton and other mentors, I ask myself crucial questions. Am I educating in ways that make it impossible for students to reply to diverse claims on their lives? Are students simply getting a course credit that will allow them to complete a degree and then compete for scarce

rewards? Or am helping them to live more at peace with God, and with a passion to share God's love in a complex and demanding world?[21]

Teaching Context

Memphis Theological Seminary, an ecumenical Protestant seminary serving from the Mid-South region, is committed to providing theological education for church leaders throughout the world. The seminary is an institution of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. As a Christian seminary, we seek to cultivate a love for scholarship, piety, and justice. Intentionally, we foster ecumenical cooperation, support the full ministry of women and men of all races and cultures, and provide resources for the church's life and witness.[22]

The location of Memphis Theological Seminary shapes its approach to theological education. Located in the geographical center of Memphis, and the heart of the Delta region of the Mid-South region of the United States, the seminary is easily accessible to persons from Mississippi, Tennessee, Arkansas, Alabama, Kentucky, and the Missouri boot heel. Though this region is abundant in natural resources, racial tensions still subvert efforts to build community or create opportunity for cooperation. The education level of citizens is generally low. Within this context, the seminary offers opportunities for different races to meet and learn from one another. The present (February 2007) enrollment consists of small numbers of Asian American, Native American, and international students, 34% African Americans, and 64% European Americans.

An urban sprawl of nearly a million persons at the confluence of Arkansas, Mississippi, and Tennessee on the Mississippi River, Memphis is one of the poorest cities in the United States. One-third of Memphians live below the poverty line. Homeless poor go through the green garbage bins before city sanitation workers do their collection runs. Single mothers work double shifts. Health care is not available for countless thousands. While such poverty can be overwhelming, when it claims to be home of the blues, Memphis claims a heritage steeped in Delta blood, sweat, and tears. The music rocks, writhes, and tells of hard times that hurt so good.

Teaching Evangelism

Every year I offer evangelism courses in which students develop projects suited to their own contexts. I also offer courses that include immersion experiences in other cultures, including the monastic culture where students attest their spiritual growth. In these courses, my role is that of coach, collaborator, and facilitator. The balance of this article surveys evangelism courses offered at Memphis Theological Seminary since 1995 in a three-year cycle with a focus on models of evangelism; personal evangelism; and evangelism through small congregations.

In the start of each course, students set their own learning goals. At the end, in accord with a set of guidelines and questions that form part of the evaluation process, they participate in the grading process by evaluating their success in realizing their goals.

I open each class session by eliciting prayer concerns which are incorporated into a time of prayer. Devotions often include singing hymns or choruses linked to the readings of the day on the course theme, or chosen by students related to their projects. There are opportunities to practice evangelism, one-and-one or in small groups. Examples include giving testimony, role playing, or telling the Greatest Story, that "old, old story of Jesus and His love."[23]

We dare not ignore our stories. In *Ceremony* Native American, Leslie Marmon Silko writes of white groups seeking to decimate Pueblo culture.

I will tell you something about stories, [he said]

> They aren't just entertainment.
> Don't be fooled.
> They are all we have, you see,
> all we have to fight off
> illness and death.
> You don't have anything
> if you don't have stories.
> Their evil is mighty
> but it can't stand up to our stories.
> So they try to destroy the stories
> let the stories be confused or forgotten.
> They would like that

They would be happy
Because we would be defenseless then.[24]

Notably, we share stories of our conversion, the basic category that helps us understand ourselves and the journey of our lives. According to the basic tenets of most of the world's major religions, we are all on a journey that takes us out of darkness into light, out of a situation of being lost to one of being saved and, indeed, of entering into a new life. This journey can be identified in the stories of all the great saints of the various world religions. From Paul and Augustine in early Christian history through Teresa of Avila and Martin Luther in the sixteenth century to Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton in the twentieth century, we explored how theological reflection arises from conversion. We let spiritual practices shape theological reflection; conversely, our theological reflection informed practice in accord with *Lex orandi, lex credendi* (law of prayer, law of belief).

Having written a doctoral dissertation on conversion, I have been influenced by Catholic theologian Bernard Lonergan. He describes three movements of religious conversion, moral conversion, and intellectual conversion. In the following passage, he is writing about the need for a renewal of [Catholic] theology in the light of the new cultural situation in which modern or postmodern Christians find themselves. He points out that if theology is to be renewed, it needs new foundations. As the foundations of science are in the scientist himself, the methodical structure of his own mind, so the foundations of a renewed theology will be found in reflection on the process of profound personal change, that is, the process of conversion.

> Fundamental to religious living is conversion. It is a topic little studied in traditional theology since there remains very little of it when one reaches the universal, the abstract, the static. For conversion occurs in the lives of individuals. It is not merely a change or development; rather, it is a radical transformation on which follows, on all levels of living, an interlocked series of changes and developments. What hitherto was unnoticed becomes vivid and present. What had been of no concern becomes a matter of high import. So great a change in one's apprehensions and one's values accompanies no less a change in oneself, in one's relations to other persons, and in one's relations to God.

> Not all conversion is as total as the one I have so summarily described. Conversion has many dimensions. A changed relation to God brings or follows changes that are personal, social, moral and intellectual. But there is no fixed rule of antecedence and consequence, no necessity of simultaneity, no prescribed magnitudes of change. Conversion may be compacted into the moment of a blinded Saul falling from his horse on the way to Damascus. It may be extended over the slow maturing process of a lifetime. It may satisfy an intermediate measure.
>
> In a current expression conversion is ontic. The convert apprehends differently, values differently, relates differently because he has become different. The new apprehension is not so much a new statement or a new set of statements, but rather new meanings that attach to almost any statement. It is not new values so much as a transvaluation of values. In Pauline language, "When anyone is united to Christ, there is a new world; the old order has gone, and a new order has begun" (2 Cor 5: 17).
>
> Though conversion is intensely personal, utterly intimate, still it is not so private as to be solitary. It can happen to many and they can form a community to sustain one another in their self-transformation, and to help one another in working out the implications, and in fulfilling the promise of their new life. Finally, what can become communal can become historical. It can pass from generation to generation. It can spread from one cultural milieu to another. It can adapt to changing circumstance, confront new situations, survive into a different age, flourish in another period or epoch.
>
> When conversion is viewed as an ongoing process, at once personal, communal, and historical, it coincides with living religion. . . . Now theology, and especially the empirical theology of today, is reflection on religion. It follows that theology will be reflection on conversion. But conversion is fundamental to religion. It follows that reflection on conversion can supply theology with its foundation and, indeed, with a foundation that is concrete, dynamic, personal, communal, and historical.[25]

Each student develops a project following four steps identified above and adapted from recent literature:[26]

Preparing. Students identify the congregation or other institutional setting in which they are working. They describe that context and address such questions as these:

1. What is the demographic profile of the congregation? What issues are there of transition, both inside the congregation, and in the area in which the congregation is located? Students give attention to its strengths and weaknesses.
2. What are the resources? People? Buildings? Money?
3. Is a "turnaround" possible?

Listening. Students seek to understand and interpret the wider context. They explore possibilities for outreach through methods such as a windshield survey, taking a social worker to lunch, talking with non-members, and so on. Students do fieldwork through participant observation: attending cultural events, meetings, and other events, and talking with people to explore the needs and possibilities for outreach. The primary source of information must be the people outside the congregation.

Assessing. Students summarize findings, including information elicited by interviewing someone not a member of the congregation.[27] They diagnose the material, decide on possible strategies, generate ideas that fit the situation, and identify issues or questions to be addressed through further research, follow-up interviews, and analysis. Action requires honest evaluation of what may or may not work. Students are to identify skills and knowledge they need to acquire as they start an evangelistic program. They are to pay attention to what they experience through this process.

Acting. Students design a project, initiate action, and evaluate progress.

As class sessions are organized as seminars, students present their reports and receive feedback in class. We share concrete examples of how what we are doing works or does not work, and why. Exploring the importance of paying careful attention to culture, I identify situations when I have not listened adequately to culture and, as a result, failed in my attempt to evangelize. For example, when I moved from Canada to the south, I had to learn a new context. The first time I preached a revival, I suggested closing the service each evening with a beautiful hymn, "Here I am, Lord." The host pastor gently suggested that "Just as I am" would be more suitable. I held my ground, but no one in the congregation knew the

contemporary song. What happened? I did not make this mistake the next time.

Another example came from a project, helping to develop a place of retreat for the Memphis School of Servant Leadership. A group of us held fifty acres near Walnut, Mississippi in trust. An urban person, I visited residents in this rural area in a totally inappropriate manner. While I am used to carrying business cards, I ignored a simple rule of working with ordinary people: build relationships. When I called on neighbors and presented them with a card, the gesture did not contribute to building relationships. I should have taken them a pie or invited them to a barbeque! The kind of listening that takes culture seriously is not simply auditory. It requires the deepest attentiveness to people in their context.

In a final integrative paper, students summarize and report progress, indicate areas for future action, and identify personal learnings. This paper is not the end of the journey, only a record of steps taken thus far. A minimal goal for a four-month term is to initiate concrete outreach. Student projects have included new-church starts; renewal programs; creation of a retreat center; creation of a summer camp for disadvantaged youth; and efforts to "grow" a congregation in numbers and spirituality.[28] Several have created websites for their congregations. Some have adapted national programs to their context, for example, the Alpha Initiative and Stephen Ministry.[29]

Projects are highly contextualized. To cite three examples, the Reverend Sarah Salazar developed a variety of specific ministries such as English as a second language and training in job skills that led an Anglo congregation to house a nascent Hispanic congregation. When the Reverend Janjia Liu surveyed the Chinese population in Memphis, he discovered that all the Chinese ministries served the Cantonese-speaking community. He initiated a new congregation for Mandarin- speaking Chinese. The Reverend Mike Wilkinson served a twenty-five member Cumberland Presbyterian Church near Humboldt, Tennessee. His survey of the area identified a need. There were many unchurched young couples living in the area. To welcome potential new members to the congregation, the congregation instituted a fall harvest festival and built the first indoor washrooms for the church facilities. Attentive to the demography of those being reached, both the men's and the women's washrooms had an area for changing diapers!

Each class, we do a service project together. In Memphis, the poor poke around city dumps or the garbage placed on street curbs each week. They are looking for food or material with which to build shelter. During a time of unprecedented prosperity we dare not neglect those in need. Discussion of how to respond has led to classes participating in feeding programs, building homes through Habitat for Humanity, distributing tracts, or visiting a seniors' complex.

Generally, these initiatives support a student whose project addresses some social concern. Many students have sought to empower congregations to give attention to the reality that they are part of God's dream. Our congregations are filled with people filled with God's love, vessels through which God's compassion flows. Through them, the world is learning about God's compassion.

Working with people in their congregations, and in the community, students have created a tremendous variety of programs specific to the needs of those served by their congregations, for example, a parish nursing program; a food bank; a community garden; awareness programs for families of members struggling with addiction (alcohol, drugs, sex, consumerism, and gambling); with Alzheimer's Disease; and with mental illness; a gun-safety program; and a course for young people on healthy sexuality. The course dealt very directly with abstinence, use of condoms, AIDS, and myriad other health issues. Other projects have dealt with human rights; crime; ecology (clean water, cost of gas, and alternative energy sources such as hydrogen, nuclear, solar, wind); education and literacy; family issues including child abuse, elder abuse, marriage, and communication breakdown; effects of globalization (economic issues, immigration); hatred of "the other;" housing and homelessness; hunger and nutrition; idolatry (we make God who we want God to be); internet; poverty; racism; simplification of life; nurturing love and a culture of life; truth telling; stewardship issues in broadest sense; loss of community; and how to reflect God's goodness in our daily living; violence and war; peace building; reconciliation; stopping nuclear proliferation; workers issues: living wage, good work, and the nurture of a healthy work ethic. One project created a data bank for all these projects called Jericho Road. An article in *Christianity Today* picked up on the story and cited these ministries throughout the Mid-South as good things Christians are doing![30]

Some projects link the local and global. Several students have done overseas mission service. One student has led over a dozen groups to Leon,

Nicaragua; her project was to prepare a manual for team leaders.[31] Another who had participated in a mission trip to Central America initiated a "fair trade" coffee program at a Toronto congregation; I can now buy Bridgehead Coffee in the Mid-South; it is a model for the world campaign.[32]

As one buries coals to keep them through the night till morning,[33] these projects are a burning ember in postmodern society. They offer a vision of life's final meaning and a path to come into relationship with that meaning. Life in Christ is centered not on a body of doctrine, but on One who calls people to Himself, in Whom people find meaning, and Whose hands and feet become one with those of His disciples. Teaching evangelism, I am moved by students who live as faithful Christians and invite others to follow Christ on a journey of love, compassion, nonviolence and prophetic witness.

Notes

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3. Charles Williams, *The Descent of the Dove. The Holy Spirit in the Church* (London: Longmans Green, 1939).
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10. Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness. The Journey Toward an Undivided Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004) 22. Palmer quotes "Hagia Sophia," in Thomas P. McDonnell, ed., *A Thomas Merton Reader* (Garden City: Image, 1974) 506. See New Seeds of Contemplation (New York: New Directions, 1961); The New Man (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1961).
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16. Ibid, 137.
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18. Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966) 10-11, 233-34.
19. Thomas Merton, "A Letter to Pablo Antonio Cuadra Concerning Giants," *Collected Poems*. New York: New Directions: 1977) 383.
20. Thomas. Del Prete, "'Teaching is Candy': Merton as Teacher at Columbia and Bonaventure," *Merton Annual* 9 (1996) 158.
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25. Bernard Lonergan, "Theology in its New Context," *A Second Collection* (1974; University of Toronto Press, 1996) 65-67.
26. Adapted from Carl S. Dudley and Nancy T. Ammerman, *Congregations in Transition* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002); Ron Crandall, *Turnaround Strategies for the Small Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995).

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31. http://www.nicamissions.com/. Started in 1998 by a few men and women in Brownsville, Tennessee upon return from a short-term mission trip to Honduras, *El Ayudante* is a non-profit, ecumenical, Christian ministry. It serves children in Central America and Mexico.
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Communicating with Impact: Strategies for Effective Witness

by Paul Dybdahl

Not too many years ago, I awoke one morning to the frightened wails of my youngest daughter. I leapt out of bed, adrenalin coursing through my body, and rushed into her room where I found her crying on her bed. "Daddy, oh Daddy!" she sobbed, "My nose stopped working!" It only took me a moment to realize what had happened. Her nose, which she had assumed would always be a clear channel for the flow of oxygen, was now congested. It wasn't working anymore.

Her shock was understandable. Over time, all of us begin to assume that what usually works will always work. It comes as a surprise to discover that what has seemed so simple and sure is perhaps more complicated and tenuous than we had assumed.

In reality, communication is just such a common yet complex process[1] that frequently "stops working," as my daughter might say. Sometimes, we are unaware of this breakdown–and if we are aware, we don't know what went wrong or how to fix it. Melvin LeFleur suggests that, although "the communication process is utterly fundamental to all our psychological and social processes, . . . we know less about it than we do about the life cycle of the bat or the chemical composition of the sediment on the ocean floor."[2]

Unfortunately, LeFleur's statement describes many Christians, including educators. We may wish to communicate spiritual truth in the classroom and community, but we are perhaps blissfully unaware of even the very basic tenets of communication theory. While we may have managed quite well (and even met with considerable success), increased knowledge in this area will lead to increased effectiveness as communicators.

With this goal in mind, I will present some basic principles of communication that, if employed, would be of benefit to all Christian communicators. First, however, it is important to briefly acknowledge the current state of Christian communication in the United States.

A Fundamental Problem

In spite of the many models which attempt to describe how communication works, there is basic agreement that communication is successful "when a message has been transmitted and the intended point is grasped by another."[3] The key point, here, is that communication is not merely the broadcasting of a message. The transmission of words (or other symbols) does not mean that communication has taken place–or that it will take place. To assume otherwise is presumptuous, at best.

This can be graphically illustrated by the current situation in the United States, where hundreds of Christian radio and television stations broadcast their Christian message to the nation on a daily basis.[4] Sales of Christian music and literature in the United States exceed one billion dollars annually.[5] David Barrett, statistician on the global status of Christian mission, describes the United States as "the world's most-evangelized country,"[6] where citizens are literally saturated with opportunities to hear the gospel.[7]

If America is indeed saturated with religious communication, it would be tempting to conclude that the gospel has in fact been clearly communicated to North Americans. However, research reveals that this may not be the case. For example, as a part of his regular research into the attitudes and beliefs of Americans, pollster George Barna asked Americans to explain or define the term "gospel." Faced with the challenge of describing this most basic Christian term, only about one third of Americans provided an explanation that was close to being correct. Half these "correct" answers defined "gospel" as the first four books of the New Testament.[8] This means that, in a country where over 80 percent of the population consider themselves Christian, fewer than one in five understand the gospel to be "the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection undertaken to save people from their sins."[9]

Clearly, Americans have been *exposed* to the gospel message without truly *hearing or understanding* the message, even though it has been shared in their own language. This means that in spite of the numerous Christian messages transmitted by well-meaning Christian communicators in America, many Americans remain relatively ignorant about spiritual matters.[10] Why is this the case?

Receptor-Oriented Communication

One of the most obvious (and, ironically, the most neglected) realities of good communication is simply this: a message should be constructed and delivered so that it is receptor oriented.

The importance of receptor-oriented communication can be better established by looking at the basic building blocks of communication: words. First, it must be recognized that words have no inherent meaning but instead are merely symbols.[11] People attach meanings to these symbols, but the words themselves do not carry meaning.[12] For this reason, "the same word or phrase may have an entirely different meaning for the speaker and the listener."[13] In fact, because no two minds are identical, no two people interpret the same word in exactly the same way (a truth that can be confirmed by anyone who has tried to administer a multiple choice test, win a theological argument, or mediate in a domestic squabble).

In spite of this, there is a tendency, even among educators (and perhaps *especially* among educators), to put "an inordinate amount of emphasis on speaker characteristics and effective message construction."[14] In other words, there is the tendency to focus on the right words to use rather than on the meanings the receptors will attach to those words.[15] This focus on selecting the "accurate" word also tends to overlook the importance of a word's deeper, connotative meaning, and this is often the central meaning of a word or message.[16]

Thus, communicators must be cognizant of the receptor's interpretational reflexes which provide culturally conditioned, automatic, deep level "understandings" of various terms and concepts.[17] For example, in Ps. 23, the Lord is compared to a good shepherd. The denotative meaning of "shepherd" as one who cares for small livestock may remain somewhat uniform from culture to culture, but the connotative meaning can be quite distinct. Thus, when certain Nigerians were first told that the Lord was like a shepherd, their interpretational reflex defined the Lord as a lunatic because in their traditional society, only very young boys and insane adults care for sheep.[18] Speaking from the perspective of a receptor, Bluck summarizes nicely: "Meaning is something that only we ourselves can give to the message we receive. No matter how eloquently or authoritatively the message is presented, its meaning depends on how we decode it and value it."[19]

Since this is the case, it becomes clear that the meaning of a message is as much a product of the receptor as it is of the sender.[20] In fact, it is "the receiver rather than the sender who has the final say in defining the message."[21] The focus of the communicator, then, should not be on the "precise formulation of the message" but on how the receptor is likely to interpret that message.[22] Kraft describes this as "*the single most threatening insight of contemporary communication theory for Christian communicators,*"[23] probably because it reveals that the meaning of a message cannot be controlled by the sender. Once the message is given, there is no guarantee that the meaning assigned by the recipient will correspond with the meaning intended by the communicator. Fortunately, *substantial* correspondence is within reach and communication is thus possible. That *exact* correspondence is not possible makes communication a challenge–especially when one is attempting to communicate a vitally important message such as the gospel.

All this establishes the crucial principle all Christian communicators should keep in mind: effective communicators must be receptor oriented. Since words are only symbols that trigger meaning, and since the ultimate meaning of a message is assigned by the receptor's mind, effective communication must keep the receptor at the center.[24] Receptor orientation is, according to Sogaard, "one of the demands of an acceptable Christian communication theory."[25] Engel is even more graphic when he repeatedly refers to the audience as "sovereign."[26]

Making such a statement may immediately raise concern in the minds of many Christians. It is necessary, therefore, to be clear about what this principle does not suggest. Receptor-oriented Christian communication does not mean communication that simply panders to the various whims of the receivers. It is not a "watering down" of truth so as to bring easy compromise. To be receptor *oriented* is not to be receptor *controlled*. This theory instead calls for Christian communicators to be explicitly aware that if communication is to have any impact on a receptor, it must employ terms and concepts that the receptor can understand. A narrow focus on "the message" and "delivery systems" should be replaced with an emphasis on how receptors may interpret the message.[27]

Kraft summarizes nicely: "Those who deal with communication from a Christian point of view tend to focus much more strongly on either the source of the message or the message itself than they do on the receptors. It is my contention, however, that not only does contemporary

communication theory indicate a change is necessary, but the very example of Jesus demands that we be receptor-oriented."[28]

Recognizing the importance of the receptor in the communication process should help Christians craft messages which will be understood by their audience. Christians who are presenting the gospel, however, desire something more than mere comprehension by receptors. Their ultimate hope is that the message will persuade the receptors and stimulate them to change their beliefs and behavior. For this to occur, the message must be presented with impact.

Communicating with Impact

Those who wish to communicate with impact should be cognizant of two different facets of communication and how each can either enhance or lessen the power of a message. These two facets involve the *source* of the message and the *content* of the message itself.

The Source of the Message

After focusing on the importance of the receptor in the communication transaction, it may now seem odd to emphasize the centrality of the communicator. It is not possible, however, to separate the messenger from the communication process.

According to Eugene Nida, "The content of the message is communicated by its symbols; the value of the message is communicated by the person who produces the message."[29] In even more pointed fashion, he states that communication in close-knit communities is characterized by the fact that "just as much emphasis is given to the carrier of the information as to the content."[30]

Since this is the case, Christian communicators should not simply focus on the gospel message, but must look at themselves in light of the gospel message. Familiar folk proverbs such as "I'd rather see a sermon than hear one" and "Practice what you preach" point out the need to live a life congruent with the message one wishes to share.

Robert Don Hughes writes that "Christians must live our lives before the world in a way that validates our faith. Words mean less than people

mean."[31] Ellen G. White likewise suggested that "the strongest argument in favor of Christianity is a loving and loveable Christian."[32]

A relationship of mutual trust between the source and recipient is key. Marvin Mayers has written extensively on the importance of this "trust bond." This bond serves as the foundation for true relationship, and relationship is the basis for impacting communication. If the receptor does not trust the sender of message, the receptor will not trust the message either. If there is no bond of trust, there is almost no chance for positive impact.[33]

The building of trust requires specific attention. Mayers posits that trust is built as Christians accept the one they are trying to reach, "even though we might disapprove of what he does."[34] It may sound as if Mayers is urging Christians to "lower the standards." Mayers, though, makes an important distinction in this regard. "Even though we do not need to accept-*believe* what a person believes," he writes, "we can still accept-*respect* what a person is and does and believes."[35] This openness to others results in a reciprocating openness, and "openness will provide fertile soil for change."[36]

Closely related to the question of trust is the matter of credibility. Effective communication is possible only when the communicator has credibility with his or her audience.[37] There are two major types of credibility: *authoritativeness*, gained by knowledge and expertise;[38] and *perceived integrity,* credibility that comes from having admirable "character."[39] Both types are important, since receptors may place greater weight on either expertise or integrity, depending on the situation.

It is clear, however, that communicators need to have both expertise and character for maximum communicational impact.[40] Leo Schreven recounts the story of a Christian woman who for many years attempted to get her husband to attend church with her. Finally her husband exploded, "We play the same lotto, gamble the same money, watch the same T.V. shows, attend the same movies, eat the same food, go to the same parties, dance every Thursday night together, drink the same scotch, smoke the same brand of cigarettes, you go to church on Sunday, I stay home and watch the football game. What's the difference?"[41]

Clearly, Christians may have credibility of expertise (doctoral degrees in theology or biblical studies, for example), but if they lack character credibility, their message is robbed of much of its potential impact, for "the

person who communicates the Christian message is, not only the vehicle of the message, but the major component of the message as well."[42]

Since this is the case, it follows that the more direct and personal the connection between the sender and receiver, the greater chance that the message will have an impact. "Face to face communication," Tom Nash says, ". . . is usually the most powerful form of communication."[43] Robert Don Hughes calls this the "personal word."[44] Kraft suggests that "the most impactful [*sic*] communication results from person-to-person interaction."[45]

Nida demonstrated that in vibrant Christian communities where life change is occurring within and without the church, the gospel message is transmitted as "a man-to-man kind of communication."[46] As people share their spiritual values personally with others, these others are powerfully moved to respond. Nida continues, "Radio and television are excellent techniques for selling soap and cereal, . . . but they do not carry the impact of personal conviction about values."[47]

This is true not only of the individual Christian, but of the Christian community as a whole. The community must proclaim good news with its words and by its deeds. Lesslie Newbigin expresses it this way: "How is it possible that the gospel should be credible, that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross? I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it."[48]

One final principle should be mentioned in relation to the source of the message: the principle of common ground. Research shows that if a communicator wishes to persuasively impact receptors, common ground must be established.[49] Simply stated, "People are more likely to listen to someone who is similar to them."[50] Communication theorists use the terms *heterophily* and *homophily* in discussing this issue. *Heterophily* refers to "the degree to which two or more individuals who communicate are unalike," while *homophily* describes "the degree to which two or more individuals who communicate are alike."[51]

A number of communication research studies showed that "homophilous communication is more effective than heterophilous communication."[52] This is particularly true when the messenger wishes to affect the behavior and value system of the receptor.[53] As a receptor in some way identifies with the sender and believes that the sender understands his or her way of thinking, the potency of the message is enhanced.[54] Unless

some common ground is established between receptor and source, the communication pathway is no pathway at all.

The Content of the Communication

After recognizing the importance of his or her role as the source of a message, the communicator who wishes to impact an audience must also pay attention to the content of the communication. Clearly, what is said is vitally important. Once more, communication theory suggests a number of principles which should assist the communicator who wishes to deliver a message with impact.

The Principle of Specific Relevance

Communication carries greater weight when it is perceived by receptors as specifically relevant to their everyday life. Receptors almost continually ask themselves whether or not they "need" the message. The communicator should ask the same question from the receptor's frame of reference–and then adjust the message accordingly.[55] This same emphasis is echoed by author after author. Engel summarizes nicely when he points out that "it is a demonstrated communication principle that people respond when a message on any subject is shown to be relevant in terms of their basic motivations and felt needs."[56]

So, what are the "felt needs" and deep longings of our audience? Are we prepared to address those needs in a meaningful, responsible way?

Not long after receiving my M.Div., I found myself leading out in a series of evangelistic meetings at my church. As a part of the program, I gave the audience a chance to write questions and place them in a box. I would then attempt (and indeed, it was often quite a feeble attempt) to provide a "Bible answer" to the questions from the front. As the supposed expert, I was concerned that the audience would try to overwhelm me with tricky theological issues. I wondered if my training had adequately prepared me for the challenge that awaited.

I soon discovered that my theological training had not prepared me for the questions I received. I also realized that I was out of the touch with the issues that many struggled with. What sort of questions did they ask?

Instead of grilling me on the issues I had studied and written about during my theological education, they asked questions about things like dinosaurs, demons, and would pets who had died be with them in heaven?

Unfortunately, I suspect that I am still out of touch with the average "person on the street." I also suspect that I am not alone in my ignorance.

The Discovery Principle

Researchers in the field of education recognize that for deep-level learning to take place, teachers must not be mere dispensers of facts. According to veteran teacher and full-time educational consultant Donna Walker Tileston, a teacher should operate as a "coach, leader, or guide in the classroom," providing opportunities for active student participation in the learning process. She writes, "The teacher cannot continue to be the lecturer with the students as passive listeners."[57] "Active learning" demands that teachers be willing to listen to students and involve them in the learning process.[58]

The fact that true learning is a collaborative process has important implications for Christian communicators. Adults, particularly in an individualistic society such as North America, resent being told exactly what to believe and do. However, if a message presents insights which reveal to receptors certain incongruities between their self-perceptions, beliefs, and actions, and if the receptor is coached to actively address these issues, deep-level learning and even behavior change are likely to occur. In effect, the communicator provides information that allows the receptors to confront themselves, and this self-confrontation motivates a person to change.[59]

In a sense, then, the wise communicator will not tell all, but will show all, and then leave space for the receptor to ponder, discover, and respond to new insights.[60] The process of discovery allows the receptors to use their own creativity and thinking rather than relying solely on the marching orders of a messenger. This approach benefits all involved in the communication process, for "it is in this process of discovery that the deepest, most abiding kind of learning takes place."[61]

The Principle of Surprise

An effective communicator will present a message which builds upon the existing beliefs of the receptor. Proceeding from the known to the unknown is, according to Smith, "a principle that is considered basic to sound pedagogy."[62] At the same time, a communicator must keep in mind that a highly predictable message holds less interest and carries less impact than a message which, though understood, still manages to surprise the receptor with its uniqueness (this explains why a rerun on television generally loses viewers). Ironically, when a communicator fails to conform to the receptor's stereotype, the receptor begins to take more careful note of the message.[63]

This principle can be carried to an extreme, however. If a message conforms totally to a receptor's expectations, impact is lost; but, if a message is entirely foreign to the receptor's expectations and beliefs, it may be rejected. This rejection can occur even before the message is truly understood.[64]

The Principle of Emotive Language and Story

The communicator who wishes to shape attitudes and values must understand and effectively employ emotive language. Such emotive language can even be considered "indispensable" if one wishes "to move an audience to accept a point of view or undertake an action."[65] Some well-meaning communicators may try to avoid emotive language for fear that an emotional appeal may be considered manipulation. Others (perhaps the highly educated in particular) may have been taught that appeals to the head were somehow of a higher order than appeals to the heart.

In his classic work, *Freedom in the Modern World*, philosopher John Macmurry addresses this "bias in favor of the intellect"[66] and argues that "a merely intellectual force is powerless against an emotional resistance. . . . Unless the emotions and the intellect are in harmony, rational action will be paralyzed."[67] According to Macmurry, "What we feel and how we feel is far more important than what we think and how we think. Feeling is the stuff of which our consciousness is made, the atmosphere in which all our thinking and all our conduct is bathed. All the motives which govern and drive our lives are emotional."[68]

Even if Macmurry has overstated the importance of feelings, it is still true that a message which has the power to change people will likely be "emotional" in some sense. It must not consist of the merely theoretical or propositional. Instead, the effective communicator must couple the propositional and theoretical with more concrete, emotive forms of expression such as narrative, metaphor, and analogy.[69]

These forms of expression do more than create emotion in listeners. Throughout history, narrative, metaphor, and analogy have served as vehicles for expressing and exploring truth.[70] Although narrative theology[71] may seem to be a recent movement, it is really a rediscovery of what has always been the case. Bible writers did not pen systematic theologies; they told stories.[72] Approximately a century ago, William James confessed, "I do believe that feeling is the deeper source of religion, and that philosophic and theological formulas are secondary products, like translations of a text into another tongue."[73] William Bausch writes, "It is story and all related art forms that touch us at our deepest levels and convince us of truth."[74]

The Principle of Indigenous Narrative

Not just any story, metaphor, or analogy will do, however. Before a communicator tells a story, he or she must realize that every culture already has its own stories.[75] As communicators learn these narratives, they may discover that their "new story" can be presented from the perspective of the receptor's existing stories. In fact, illustrations, analogies, and metaphors which arise from the receptor's own life context are especially powerful.[76]

One of the benefits of searching for and utilizing such indigenous illustrations is that the people of the culture "cherish that particular idea or concept or ceremony. . . . When you start talking about something new in reference to this cherished, familiar thing, you have an automatic interest."[77]

Close inspection reveals that the use of such illustrations is actually a synthesis of the communication principles presented thus far. The terminology is familiar to the receptors and is presented within their frame of reference. The message is receptor oriented and, by building on concepts already present within the culture, the Christian communicator demonstrates an understanding of the receptor, thus maintaining (and even building) credibility and trust. An analogy inherently makes space for the receptor(s) to discover meaning. It is also specifically relevant to life as the receptor

lives it, and carries emotive force. In short, it includes many of the elements of effective communication; for this reason indigenous narrative holds great power. Many of us would be wise, in fact, to lay aside much of the jargon of our area of expertise and instead tell good stories.

Conclusion

At the start of this study I suggested that a cursory understanding of basic communication principles would increase the effectiveness of those wishing to share Christ in the classroom and with the wider community. I attempted to highlight the importance of receptor-oriented communication as well as the centrality of the person of the communicator. I then focused on the need for the content of a message to be specifically relevant, familiar yet unpredictable, provide opportunities for the audience to discover truths instead of pronouncing truths, and finally, employ emotive, indigenous narrative and metaphor. With that final bit of advice, I am nearly compelled to conclude with a story.

Every other year I spend a quarter commuting several hours to a sister campus where I teach a religion class to nursing students. Since many of them do not have much religious training, I try to keep the course fairly basic. One of the initial concepts I hope to communicate is that the God of the Bible actively seeks us. This comes as a bit of a surprise to some who have been led to believe that God is distant, usually angry, and waiting for us to crawl back to him–or else.

One of the ways I have attempted to illustrate God's seeking is to share portions of a rather simple news story which describes the reunion of an adoptive son with his biological parents. Both son and parents had been looking for each other for many years. The news story ends with a quote from the grown son, John Mathieson, now a father himself, who describes what happened when contact was first made. "'I just lost it and cried for two hours straight,' said Mathieson. . . . 'My greatest fear in life was that I would want to find my natural parents, but they wouldn't want me to find them. To find out that they were looking for me brought out more emotion than I could ever describe.'"[78]

The first time I read the story to my class, I was surprised as I sensed a sort of awesome quietness gradually come over the group. When I was done, the hushed silence in the classroom was broken by the sound of

snuffling noses. I was prepared to further elaborate and try to "drive the point home," but thankfully, the tears I saw in many eyes kept me from saying too much. The story had already made it "home". Somehow, with very little explanation, they knew the story was about God and about them. That was enough.

I am sure that there are other, deeper, better stories that could be told. My hope is that such stories *will* be told. As these new stories are shared, may they somehow illumine the old, old story so that it can be more clearly heard.

Notes

1. A helpful survey of definitions and communication models appears in International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, *Many Voices, One World: Communication and Society, Today and Tomorrow* (New York: Unipub, 1980), 283-287. Some of the better known models include Shannon-Weaver's information-centered model, Berlo's SMCR model (which is also information centered), and the Westlely-Maclean model which emphasizes feedback. A succinct summary of these models is presented by Michael Burgoon, Frank G. Hunsaker, and Edwin J. Dawson, *Human Communication*, 3d ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), 26-31. Other authors who either summarize or propose communication models include David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, 40-41; B. William Gundykunst and Young Yun Kim, *Communicating with Strangers,* 2d ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1992), 33; and Larry A. Samovar and Richard E. Porter, *Intercultural Communication: A Reader*, 5th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1988), 22.
2. Melvin LeFleur, *Theories of Mass Communication*, 2d ed. (New York: David McKay, 1970), 76; quoted in David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 39.
3. Viggo Sogaard, *Media in Church and Mission* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey, 1993), 30. This definition correctly suggests that communication will be approached predominantly from the perspective of the "process school" rather than the "school of semiotics." Essentially, the process school is most concerned with the

accurate transmission of messages in an interpersonal communication transaction, and it is this approach which serves as the foundation for most studies on Christian communication. The semiotic school tends toward a focus on mass communication. John Fiske, *Introduction to Communication Studies* (New York: Methuen, 1982), 2, provides a succinct summary of these two approaches to communication studies, which is quoted and expanded upon by John Bluck, *Christian Communication Reconsidered* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1989), 3-4.

4. For a listing of these many stations and their locations, see Edythe Draper, ed., *The Almanac of the Christian World* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1990), 656-668.
5. George Barna, *Evangelism That Works* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1995), 35.
6. David B. Barrett, "Quantifying the Global Distribution of Evangelism and Evangelization," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 9 (April 1992), 74.
7. Ibid., 71-76.
8. Barna, *Evangelism That Works*, 36.
9. Ibid., 36
10. Theodore Baehr posits that if the producers of religious programming believe they are effectively reaching non-religious Americans, "they are fooling themselves." *Getting the Word Out* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 84.
11. David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1989), 188.
12. Charles Kraft, *Communication Theory for Christian Witness* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983), 33-35.
13. John T. Seamands, *Tell It Well: Communicating the Gospel across Cultures* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1981), 123.
14. Burgoon, Hunsaker, and Dawson, 71.
15. "A single-minded attempt at exact language neglects the fact that language is necessarily ambiguous, since it arises from our unique experience." Kenneth Hamilton, *Words and the Word* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 90. The overarching emphasis is simply that the communicator must be aware that a dictionary definition of a word is not the final arbiter of meaning. George L. Dillon, for example, demonstrates that the same word, used by the same person, contains

what he calls an "extralogical" meaning which is affected by its position in a given sentence. "The Meaning of a Word," in *Language: Introductory Readings,* ed. Virginia P. Clark, Paul A. Eschholz, and Alfred F. Rosa, 5th ed. (New York: St. Martins, 1994), 435.

16. Michael Shaw Findlay, *Language and Communication: A Cross-Cultural Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1998), 37.
17. Charles Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979), 132.
18. Ibid., 133.
19. Bluck, 3.
20. According to Burgoon, Hunsaker, and Dawson, "Common sense and theory . . . would dictate that the receiver is just as important as the source in the communication process" (71).
21. Bluck, 10.
22. Kraft, *Communication Theory*, 32.
23. Ibid., 92. Emphasis original.
24. Bluck, 16.
25. Sogaard, *Media*, 79.
26. James F. Engel, *Contemporary Christian Communications: Its Theory and Practice* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1979), 31, 46, 57.
27. Hesselgrave and Rommen, 192.
28. Kraft, *Communication Theory*, 92.
29. Eugene Nida, *Religion across Cultures* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 68.
30. Ibid.
31. Robert Don Hughes, "Cross Cultural Communication," in *Missiology*, ed. John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith, and Justice Anderson (Nashville TN: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 291.
32. Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing, 1905; reprint, 1942), 470.
33. Marvin K. Mayers, *Christianity Confronts Culture*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987), 4-73.
34. Ibid., 43.
35. Ibid., 49.
36. Ibid., 55. Seamands does not use the term "trust bond," but his point is similar as he discusses what he calls the "heart-to-heart" approach, which is "primarily concerned with people, not with the religious systems they represent"(79).

37. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, 150.
38. Ibid., 281.
39. Ibid., 291.
40. Ibid.
41. Leo Schreven, *Now That's Clear!* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research, 1994; reprint, College Place, WA: Color Press, 1997), 150.
42. Kraft, *Communication Theory*, 62.
43. Tom Nash, *Christian Communicator's Handbook* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1995), 114. One of the main reasons is that face-to-face communication provides the messenger with more immediate, accurate feedback. As the audience size increases, accurate and immediate feedback decreases. This trend, if continued until "communication" becomes unidirectional, means the message "inevitably will become irrelevant. Even though it is true, it does not reach its receptor." Nida, *Message and Mission*, 163.
44. R. Hughes, 288.
45. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, 149.
46. Nida, *Religion across Cultures*, 69.
47. Ibid.
48. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 227.
49. Seamands, 81. Seamands shares a number of ways this common ground can be established.
50. R. Huges, 279.
51. Everett M. Rogers and Thomas M. Steinfatt, *Intercultural Communication* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, 1999), 45.
52. Ibid., 46.
53. Eugene Nida, *Message and Mission: The Communication of the Christian Faith*, rev. ed. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1990), 215-216.
54. R. Hughes, 280; Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, 163.
55. Donald K. Smith, *Creating Understanding: A Handbook for Christian Communication across Cultural Landscapes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992),19. See also Kraft, *Communication Theory*, 84.
56. James F. Engel, *How Can I Get Them to Listen?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1977), 35. This emphasis is repeated in other Engel books. See, for example, idem, *Contemporary Christian Communications*, 31,

318; and James F. Engel and H. Wilbert Norton, *What's Gone Wrong with the Harvest*? (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), 68-75.

57. Donna Walker Tileston, *Ten Best Teaching Practices* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2000), 49.
58. For more information on active learning, see National Research Council, *How People Learn*, ed. John D. Bransford, Ann L. Brown, and Rodney R. Cocking (Washington, DC: National Academy, 2000), 12-21.
59. Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach, Milton Rokeach, and Joel W. Grube, *The Great American Values Test: Influencing Behavior and Belief through Television* (New York: Free, 1984), 36-37.
60. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, 150.
61. Ibid., 163.
62. D. Smith, 85, 74.
63. Repeated television programming is one obvious example of this. A "rerun" loses viewers because the story is now predictable and, thus, has lost its potential impact.
64. D. Smith, 265.
65. Annette T. Rottenberg, *Elements of Argument: A Text and Reader* (New York: St. Martin's, 1988), 142.
66. John Macmurry, *Freedom in the Modern World*, 2d ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 45.
67. Ibid., 47.
68. Ibid., 146.
69. Ibid., 150-154.
70. Madeleine L'Engle, *The Rock That Is Higher: Story as Truth* (Wheaton, IL: H. Shaw, 1993), 90, 103.
71. A helpful overview of some key concepts in narrative theology is provided by Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, eds., *Why Narrative*? (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989).
72. According to L'Engle, "The Gospels are story, the Good Story, the story we are called to share with humility and joy" (197).
73. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1902), 431.
74. William J. Bausch, *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1984), 11.
75. Thomas E. Boomershine, *Story Journey: An Invitation to the Gospel as Storytelling* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), 20.

76. R. Hughes, 280.
77. Don Richardson, "Finding the Eye Opener," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement,* ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1981), 427.
78. Associated Press, "Fassels' Link to the Past," 15 May 2003, http:/sportsillustrated.cnn.com/football/news/2003/05/15/fassel_reunion_ap/ (24 December 2003).

Islam and the Church, Any Hope for the Future?

By Robert G. Tuttle, Jr.

Introduction and Outline

I've been to the Middle East twice in the past year. Islam looms larger and larger both there and around the world. What do we as Christians think about Islam? What about the Qur'an? Can we as Christians understand the Muslim mindset? Where is the common ground? Can Muslims be reached for the Church of Jesus Christ? I read the Qur'an through at least once or twice a year and I honestly believe that in our attempts to reach the peoples of the world, if Muslims do what they do best and Christians do what they do best, Christians will win every time. Hamas (militant Islamists) won in the Palestinian Authority Election because they were the only ones caring for the people, feeding the hungry and educating the poor. We are told that the more moderate PLO (Fatah) was too busy stuffing its pockets with American money. What does that say to the Church of Jesus Christ?

I. A Brief History of Islam
II. Muslim Ethos and Theology in Capsule
III. Areas of compatibility
IV. Areas of incompatibility
V. Rules of Engagement
VI. Is There Hope for the Future?

I. A Brief History of Islam:

Islam (as religions go) is a fairly late phenomenon. Hinduism dates to c. 3000 BC (the oldest of the so-called high religions).[1] Judaism dates to c. 2000. Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism date

to c. 590 to 520 BC (roughly the 70 years of the Babylonian Exile). Islam then follows Christianity by some 600 years.

Muhammad (c. 570-632)

Muhammad was born in Mecca (Saudi Arabia). Deeply and sincerely religious, Muhammad knew a great deal about Judaism, something of Christianity, and was influenced by them both. By 610 – through reported revelations from visions with the angel Gabriel – he believed himself to be the "mouthpiece of God." The words received were then to be conveyed to the people. These messages, or revelations, were later collected in what Muslims call the Holy *Qur'an*. So, Islam – meaning submission – was founded. The followers, Muslims – meaning those who submit – believe that God – Allah – is one. Related to the Hebrew *El*, the greatest sin is to ascribe partners – *shirk* – to God.[2] Although some first believed that Islam was a Christian sect – or heresy – it soon became apparent that when shirk was applied to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, Christians became the fundamental enemy. Islam's understanding of Allah places great emphasis on God's transcendence – thus the section in the *Qur'an*, "The Transcendent God of Islam." The gulf between God and creation is too great to be bridged. Jesus, for example, was a prophet, but Muhammad emphatically denied that God could have a son. Since Christians believe that Jesus is God's son incarnate – closing that gap – Muslims believe that Muhammad's words were a fresh revelation, in effect, superseding such beliefs.

According to the *Qur'an*, Allah sent 124,000 prophets including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus.[3] Muslims believe that Muhammad was the last of these prophets and served as their seal.

The Five Pillars of Islam

Islam's understanding of truth consists of two fundamental affirmations: "I bear witness that there is no God but God; I bear witness that Muhammad is the Apostle – Prophet – of God." The confession of these two affirmations (*Shahada*) is the first of the *Five Pillars of Islam*. The remaining four are: prayer five times a day (*Salat*) – preceded by ritual

washing and facing Mecca; alms to the poor (*Zakat*) – especially during festivals and the Sabbath (sunset on Thursday to sunset on Friday); fasting (*Sawm*) in the month of Ramadan; a pilgrimage to Mecca (*Hajj*) – at least once in one's lifetime. In addition, an optional sixth can be added, the holy war or *jihad* – meaning, "striving."

Sources of Authority

Apart from the *Qur'an*, the second most important source of authority is the *Sunna* – meaning, "trodden path." The *Sunna* consists of the words and actions of Muhammad as recorded in the traditions of Hadith. A third source of authority, the *Shari'a* – meaning "the path" – is drawn from the *Qur'an* and the *Sunna*. The *Shari'a* is the body of law for the Muslim community. This community is of critical importance. Muslims will generally help each other in a crisis. They take pride in a lack of discrimination in this community, and thus, are growing among peoples who have experienced discrimination – especially from Christians. This is, no doubt, the reason for the rapid growth of Islam among African-Americans in North America. Again, it is interesting to note that Muslim growth in the United States has been the highest in 30 years – 43,000 – since the attacks on September 11, 2001 (most of that growth was in the first nine months).

Major Divisions

There are two major divisions within Islam, *Shi'ite* and *Sunnis*. Let me explain the difference. During the Umayyad Caliphate Dynasty the capital for the Umayyad Dynasty was moved from Baghdad to Damascus – where it remained for the next 90 years (661-750). During that time the *Sunnis* split – an argument over the succession to Muhammad – into *Sunnis* and *Shi'ites*. *Sunnis* still comprised the large majority and today are predominant in Africa, India, Pakistan and Indonesia. They are led by community consensus – *ijma*' – and accept the first four caliphs as the legitimate successors to Muhammad. The *Shi'ites* – or *Shi'a* – tend to look more to a specific spiritual leader or imam who is viewed as God's representative on earth. They consider Ali, Muhammad's son-in-law, to be

the first Imam. Unlike the *Sunnis*, the *Shi'ites* have an institutionalized clergy who exercise great authority – note the power of the Ayatollah Khomeini and the present leaders in Iran. Today the *Shi'ites* are predominant in Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, and Azerbaijan. Then, when the Abbasid Dynasty replaced the Umayyad Dynasty and the capital was moved back to Baghdad, the *Shi'ites* split again, this time into Zaidis and Ismailis. Since the differences there are more political than religious, let me mention just one other group – the *Sufis*.

Sufism – *Sufi* means "mystic," – is a mystical movement that began during the same period ©. 750).[4] In contrast to the more fundamental branches of Islam where Allah is far removed, these Muslim ascetics sought direct personal contact with God. Interestingly, with the present day rise of Islamic fundamentalism, these mystics are becoming more and more difficult to identify.

Muslim Advances

We now turn to a brief history of the Muslim advances. History teaches that the disintegration of the Roman Empire had seemingly been halted by the successes of Justinian. Not for long. Muhammad, though a mystic, was intensely practical and active.[5] The elite of Mecca, however, took no more kindly to Muhammad than the elite of Jerusalem had taken to Jesus. Muslims reckon the beginning of the "Moslem Era" from July 16, 622, the date of Muhammad's flight – *hijira* – to Medina. In Medina he made some attempts to identify with the Jews, but in spite of common bonds – Abraham appears in 25 of the *suras* in the *Qur'an* as "Ibrahim" – the Jews refused his authority and Muhammad then turned the direction of Islamic prayer from Jerusalem to the still pagan temple of Mecca. With a harem of nine wives – becoming the elderly son-in-law of Abu Bakr and Omar, the first two caliphs to succeed him as God's supreme commander on earth – Muhammad was both father-in-law and cousin to the fourth, Ali. He bound his followers to himself and to each other by the closest possible ties. In December 623, Muhammad, with a band of 300, attacked a force of a thousand Meccans at a place called Badr. The *Qur'an* refers to it as the "Day of Deliverance." This gave him control of the Red Sea from Jeddah to Yanbo. Within half a decade, the band of 300 had grown into an army of 30,000. Mecca fell to him in 629 and became the religious center of Islam

– though the political power remained in Medina. It was now time to declare to the Arabs that God had completed a new religion that was destined to rule the world. At his death in 632, his followers controlled Arabia and his successor, Abu Bakr, was embarking on campaigns against Persians and Romans.

The question now follows, how were these Muslims – before the ink had dried on the first copies of the *Qur'an* – able to sweep across Arabia, Palestine, Syria, and northern Africa in the East? How is it that Islam managed to divert the mainstream of Christendom to the dark recesses of barbaric Europe in the West? There are several reasons.

The most important, it was entirely unexpected. Few imagined that what was thought of as religious wrangling in the East could give birth to such military power. Admittedly, the eastern Roman Empire was concerned with the Persians, but had fought them to a standstill – Jerusalem had been retaken. Little did they realize that they were now vulnerable to Arabs, who earlier were so dissipated by tribal feuds that they were capable of little more than an occasional razzia – the swift Bedouin raid. Who could predict that Muhammad and his new creed could unite these Arabs into a disciplined force that turned monks at night into soldiers by day, determined to take the world for Allah?

II. Muslim Ethos and Theology in Capsule

While there are areas where we share much in common with Islam, and there is much to be admired, there are also areas of incompatibility.

The Qur'an Interprets the Old Testament

Basically the *Qur'an*, like our New Testament, or the Jewish Mishnah and Talmud (or the Book of Mormon for that matter), is an interpretation of the Old Testament. If you do not understand the Old Testament you will never understand any of these texts.

A Growing Threat?

Many Christians find pause in the fact that hundreds of millions of perfectly wonderful peoples are faithful followers of other religions. Most of the time our questions are more philosophical. Who am I to say? These peoples are far removed. Most Hindus live in India. Most Buddhists live in Southeast Asia. Except for the lonely missionary in some far away land, rarely do we come head to head.

Now, however, things are different. Islam has brought some of the issues to the doorstep of Christendom. How does Christianity compare with Islam? What about the authority of the Bible? How do we agree, or disagree, on the big questions of life and death?

If you want to make the August 1998 near-simultaneous attacks on the U.S. Embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam or the September 2001 destruction in the U.S., or the July 2005 bombings in London worse than they already are, just keep on believing that Babylon is still in Iraq. It is not. It moved west. Throughout the Old Testament the nation Israel was supposed to destroy the Asherah poles, those pagan totems that dotted the landscape in times of idolatry. One day it occurred to me that if you cut those poles down, burn them, bury the ashes and then leave them in the ground long enough, *they turn to oil*. We simply have different pagan gods. It concerns me that the U.S. has an oily tail wagging an oily dog. Other countries are not far behind. Since most of the oil is in the hands of the Muslim world, we had better learn how to get along.

The Muslim Need for Revenge:

It has been mentioned that many Muslims add an optional sixth pillar to their basic tenets of belief, the holy war or *jihad*. Remember that much of Islam must endure the desert and if you do not understand the desert you will never understand the *Qur'an* and its images of heaven as wonderfully green and replete with water (Surah 18:31 et.al.). Furthermore, life in the desert is always a struggle. One must strive to survive. Again, *jihad* is the Arabic word for striving. As Christians we need to take all of this into consideration.

If I had to name only a few of the driving forces that threaten people in this generation, one would have to be our need to forgive. I've seen

condemnation affect our attitudes toward God and our neighbors, not only when we fail to receive forgiveness, but when we fail to offer forgiveness. Many of us carry deep seeded resentments. They control us at every level of our lives. William Faulkner once said, "The past is never dead, it's not even past." I know a woman who was terribly abused by her now dead father. "How can I forgive someone already in the grave? He still controls my life."

How can any of us overcome such things? We live in a world where an "eye for an eye" seems to rule. Many of my Muslim friends have a need for revenge that never goes away until retribution is complete (Surah 2:194).[6] The Bible says, "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord" (Rom. 12:19). Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit enables you to release such resentment so that you can get on with your life.

Just in the past week a Muslim friend reacted to my question about his need for revenge. I had just read an article sent to me from former students in the Indonesian province of Suwalesi.[7] I had taught there some years ago. Although that province is evenly divided between Muslims and Christians, three Christian girls had just been beheaded. The Muslim suspect told the judge, "We are not cold-blooded killers.... We just wanted revenge." He then apologized to the girls' parents as if they were not to take it personally. "Family and friends are honor-bound to take revenge." I wondered aloud, "What if revenge goes on and on, until eventually no one can remember the original offense. Revenge is taken against those taking revenge and then revenge against them in turn. The cycle never seems to end."

My Muslim friend simply said, "It's about war and that's what *jihad* is all about. I could show you dozens of statements about war in your own Bible." I said, "The Old Testament speaks about war but the *Qur'an* is an interpretation of the Old Testament just as our New Testament is an interpretation of the Old Testament. You can never make a case for war (let alone revenge) from the mouth of Jesus. Jesus interprets the Old Testament in an entirely different way from Muhammad. Muhammad calls for war, 'those who disbelieve, strike off their heads' (Surah VIII, 12-16); Jesus calls for peace, 'love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you' (Matt. 5:44). Can you help me understand that? It seems to me that we may both be wrong, but we cannot both be right. We disagree." He shrugged and walked away.

Leon Uris' *The Haj* describes a chilling conversation between the leader of a Muslim village overlooking a Jewish kibbutz across the road between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem (wars have been fought over this road). The Muslim leader's name is Ibrahim (what else) and the Jewish leader's name is Gideon (what else). At one point in the story Ibrahim confesses that Gideon is his worst enemy, but his only friend. Then this exchange ensues, beginning with Ibrahim,

> "During the summer heat my people become frazzled. They worry about the autumn harvest. They are drained. They are pent up. They must explode. Nothing directs their frustration like Islam. Hatred is holy in this part of the world. It is also eternal. If they become inflamed, I am but a muktar. I cannot stand against a tide. You see, Gideon, that is why you are fooling yourselves. You do not know how to deal with us. For years, decades, we may seem to be at peace with you, but always in the back of our minds we keep up the hope of vengeance. No dispute is ever really settled in our world. The Jews give us a special reason to continue warring."
>
> "Do we deal with the Arabs by thinking like Arabs ourselves?" Gideon mused....
>
> "Aha!" Ibrahim said. "That proves you are weak and that will be your downfall. You are crazy to extend us a mercy that you will never receive in return."
>
> "The Jews have asked for mercy a million times in a hundred lands. How can we now deny mercy to others who ask it from us?"
>
> "Because this is not a land of mercy. Magnanimity has no part in our world. You Jews have come in and destroyed a system of order we created out of the desert. Perhaps the bazaar looks disorganized to you, but it works for us. Perhaps Islam looks fanatical to you, but it provides us with the means to survive the harshness of this life and prepares us for a better life hereafter."[8]

Some Added Perspective on Islam

Last year I was on a panel in Chicago with Christians and Muslims. Since the intent was to encourage interfaith dialogue I came looking for ways of affirming what is good in Islam--**their faithfulness in prayer, their commitment to the poor, their level of fidelity in marriage, their sobriety**. These virtues would challenge any Christian. So, when my Muslim friend said that the *Qur'an* does not teach violence I did not object, though I could have quoted Surah 5:33,

> The punishment of those who wage war against Allah and His apostle [Mohammad] and strive to make mischief in the land [a most interesting phrase in light of the war in Iraq] is only this, that they should be murdered or crucified or their hands and their feet should be cut off on opposite sides or they should be imprisoned, this shall be as a disgrace for them in this world, and in the hereafter they shall have a grievous chastisement.

In fact, I could have cited dozens of similar passages but I simply listened, UNTIL he asked this question: "Have you read the *Qur'an* lately?" Since I read the *Qur'an* through carefully every year I was about to respond when he added this, "Christians do not have a reliable or authoritative Scripture [like the *Qur'an*]. The Christian Bible has been changed so many times since the King James Version was written in 1611 that no two versions are alike" (he apparently believed that the KJV was our original text and I must admit if that were true it would make some of my fundamentalist friends downright giddy). I said, "Sir, I must tell you that you have been misinformed. We do indeed have a reliable Scripture and since our Canon was established in the fourth century (which I might add predates the *Qur'an* by some hundreds of years) it has never been changed from the original texts."[9] I then asked, "Where did you hear such a thing?" His reply left me nearly speechless, "From Christian seminary professors and from the books they recommend." These books apparently insisted that the Bible was simply a book of collected sayings, some fine poetry in some instances, but was certainly not believed to be the Word of God in any unique sense. My response was that your taking the word of those particular professors and books would be like me taking the word of Salman Rushdie (*Satanic Verses*).

You must know that I'm no fundamentalist (in fact I tend to make fundamentalists nervous) but may I say that when so-called Christian theologians give Islam reasons to reject the Christian faith and hold more firmly to what I believe to be a misguided (and dangerous) interpretation of the Old Testament (the *Qur'an*), I'm more than a little bit bewildered and disappointed.

III. Areas of Compatibility

We've stated that there are things to admire about Islam: their faithfulness in prayer, their commitment to the poor, their level of fidelity in marriage, their sobriety. We could also have mentioned their complete and utter reverence for Allah (their understanding of the O.T. Yahweh) and the *Qur'an* (in its original Arabic text). We Christians would do well to hold similar reverence for God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and for the Bible as the Word of God. It has been said that you will be heard with authority to the precise degree that you are willing to put your life on the line. Is it true that many Muslims seemingly understand sacrifice better than Christians?

Reinhold Neibur once wrote, "In society the whole is less than the sum of it parts." That's because society tends to look after its own interests first. On the other hand, in the Church, the whole is (or should be) greater than the sum of her parts. That's because Jesus is the head of the Church and if you had to reduce the words of Jesus to one sentence it would have to be this (what I call *the first principle of Christianity*), "Whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it" (Mk. 8:36), because the only way to be great is to be a servant and the only way to be first is to be last. For Jesus that principle was a constant theme.

I've forgotten who first said, "There is no limit to what you can accomplish if you don't care who gets the credit," but that is the mind of Christ. The old adage, "When the team wins, we all eat well," really is true.

I received a letter recently from a friend who wrote that "God is preparing me for something really BIG." I could not help but wonder, what is BIG? How does one give up one's life for Jesus, really BIG? How does one be last, really BIG? How does one be a servant, really BIG? I wonder if my friend wants to be like St. Francis of Assisi or Mother Teresa. Now that's BIG! Read Ephesians 4:2-6,

> Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit--just as you were called to one hope when you were called--one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Sometimes my Muslim friends understand humility and sacrifice better than some of my Christian friends.

IV. Areas of Incompatibility

According to the *Qur'an*, the 99 names for Allah include divine attributes compatible with Christianity--all-knowing, all-seeing, all-hearing, all-merciful, all-powerful.[10] Unfortunately that same view leads to an understanding of Allah (except for the occasional Sufi) that is absolutely transcendent, totally other, unknown and unknowable by any of Allah's creation (even in Paradise). Furthermore, Allah is loved but apparently does not love us in any personal way. Allah is aloof and does not reveal his nature, only the divine will. Whereas the Bible insists that humanity was created in God's own image (Gen. 1:27) the Qur'an insists that "there is nothing like unto [Allah]" (Surah 42:11).

In spite of this, the *Qur'an*'s view of creation is far more optimistic than the Bible's. Critical to any understanding of Islam is their understanding of sin. In effect, since humans are basically good, there is no innate sin nature (no original sin) and no need for atonement (Surah 20:115-122; 30:30).

The concept of Trinity is incomprehensible for Muslims (Surah 4:171). As mentioned before *shirk* would seemingly attribute partners to God and this is the opposite of *Tawhiid* (the Oneness of Allah). There is a concept of Holy Spirit in Islam but that is always identified with the Archangel *Jibril* (Gabriel) and never with Allah. So you both can talk about the Holy Spirit and mean two totally different things. It is important to avoid words that can be misinterpreted. For example, know what Muslims mean by terms like sin (which is closer to mistake than to a moral transgression of a known law).

Even more important are the different concepts of salvation. Surah 4:122 reads, "But those who believe [in Allah and his Prophet] and do deeds of righteousness, We shall soon admit them to Gardens, with rivers flowing beneath, to dwell therein forever." Ephesians 2:8-9 (NLT) reads, "God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it." Romans 8:1-2 (NIV) reads, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death." The law of sin and death is simply the law without the Spirit, without the power or the inclination to measure up. On the other hand, the law of the Spirit of life is the same law (Jesus did not come to destroy the law but to fulfill the law) but empowered by the Spirit (grace) through faith and trust in Jesus Christ. The difference here is critical. So, how do we communicate?

V. Rules of Engagement

In any culture, when competing for the hearts of people, if Christians do what they do best (treating people with love and respect, while serving, praying and forgiving), and the world does what it does best (accumulating money, power and status), Christians should win every time. I meet people all the time who make three/four times what I make and after 30 minutes they want to be me. You would love my life. Yet, I'm troubled as an American.

Francis Fitzgerald wrote, "Americans ignore history.... They believe in the future as if it were a religion; they believe that there is nothing they cannot accomplish, that solutions wait somewhere for all problems, like brides."[11] Manifest destiny is always putting on new dresses and we Americans are getting deeper and deeper into trouble. Without humility and global perspective it will always be We and They.

All good people agree,
And all good people say,
All nice people, like us, are We
And everyone else is They.
But if you cross over the sea,

Instead of over the way,
You may end by (think of it!)
Looking on We as only a sort of They![12]

I might add, or, "Looking on They as only a sort of We."

So, having established the contrast between Islam and the Christian/Jewish tradition; let me give you some basic principles as rules of engagement.

First, earning credibility and trust, or the right to be heard, requires patience and understanding. Try never to react without asking the question, why? It is always important to understand the other person's point of view. It seems to me that if following the tragedies of 9/11 we Americans had paused just long enough to ask, why, rather than vowing revenge and preparing for war, we might have served the cause of peace and security far better. How can people possibly hate Americans that much? Is it simply a matter of envy or have we offended the rest of the world at some deeper level? Has our insatiable need for things driven the two-thirds world even deeper into poverty? Please don't write this off as liberal tripe. I'm a red blooded American. Democracy seems to work in America. I'm even a capitalist, but it seems to me that democracy and capitalism ought to produce better products and services, not avarice and greed.

Second, attentive listening means being present and engaged. Francis of Assisi was known to say, "Preach at all times and when necessary use words."[13] Sometimes we have to be silent to be heard. Many years ago I was sitting next to a woman on a long transcontinental flight. She was reading a current best selling book, *Looking Out for Number One*. Since I had just assigned that book in a class I was teaching, I was curious as to her impression. "Oh, it is one the best books I've ever read. The only way to get ahead is to look out for yourself, *first*. No one else really cares." She then told me that she was a buyer for a large department store in New York City. For some reason I asked, "Are there people who work for you?" With some pride she announced that 30 people were directly responsible to her. My next question was nearly the last thing I said for the rest of the flight, "Of the people who are responsible to you, tell me about the ones who subscribe to the philosophy of that book." Over the next several hours she told me about how difficult it was to turn her back on any of them. They were making her life miserable, and she was making their lives miserable. By the time we were ready to land she had concluded that she no longer liked the

philosophy of that book (she actually left it on the plane) and no longer wanted to be that kind of a person. I'm telling you the truth, all I did was ask the question and listen.

Third, sometimes prayer can lead to a timely, and sometimes surprising, word. I was sitting on an elevated train in Chicago with my back to the window facing rows of seats not three feet away. There was no one else in this particular car except for an elderly couple, seated directly in front of me. At the next stop two young women entered the train and took the seat just behind the couple. One of the women was smoking a cigarette. The elderly gentleman simply turned around and said that he was allergic to smoke and since there was a no smoking sign on the window next to her would she mind extinguishing the cigarette. The woman reacted instantly. She blew smoke in the man's face and then, while cursing, slapped him on the back of his head dislodging a rather obvious toupee. When the woman saw the toupee she began laughing, snatched it off his head and began stomping it. At that point the train stopped at the next station. The elderly couple hurried off, pausing only long enough for the man's wife to grab the toupee on their way out.

So, there I was, not three feet from these two women. In a matter of seconds I had watched this abuse unfold in front of me and if I said nothing I would explode. I remember praying, "God give me a word, I cannot sit and remain silent." At that moment the abusive woman looked at me and I heard something come out of my mouth that absolutely astounded me. It felt almost out of body. "You have incredibly beautiful hair" (which she did; it was braided and beaded and seemed to cascade down her back like waterfalls). Instantly her entire countenance changed from a grimacing snarl to a radiant smile, at which point her companion poked her in the ribs saying, "See, see, see how good that makes you feel. Why were you so mean to that old man. Why didn't you say something nice to him so that he could feel good too? You got an attitude girl. You're my best friend but you embarrass me." At that the woman hung her head, obviously ashamed. Since we then arrived at my stop, I nodded at the woman's friend, mouthed the words, "Thank you," and exited being utterly amazed. The woman's friend had said all the things that I had wanted to say, and more. There has to be a moral there somewhere.

Fourth, no one should ever think that you think they are stupid because they disagree with you. I was a boy Ph.D. When I returned to the U.S. after completing that degree abroad I honestly believed that I was the Church's

favorite son. This was during the middle ‘60's and when I was assigned a church in the rural South I soon realized that the most segregated hour of the week was between 11:00 and 12:00 o’clock on Sunday morning. I decided to act. A local radio station was looking for public opinion and offered me a slot. I begged the people of that particular county to integrate their churches. When I walked out of the station they were waiting for me. They did not have on their hoods and gowns but I knew who they were (half of them were members of my church). Before I could open my mouth they dragged me by the tie under an old oak tree and proceeded to beat the “mischief” out of me (to this day I still have lumps on the back of my head and scar tissue on the inside of my lip). I recall that my first reaction was utter confusion. How could they do this to me? I was their pastor. Then, sometime later I realized what I had done. *I had gone into a community with the answers before I knew what the questions were*. I probably had about half of that beating coming. Though my opinions on justice issues have never wavered, I’m now hopefully a whole lot wiser. Even when I’m wrong my wife has a way of disarming me with the occasional compliment. I then spend the rest of my life trying to live up to it.

Fifth, my sphere of influence relates to people I like. The more people I like, the greater my sphere of influence. When I find that I like people, I begin to pay closer attention to the opportunities for ministry. Wonderful things are about to happen. Similarly, when I find that I do not like people, I’m in trouble. In the church mentioned above someone was programmed every Sunday to stand and grumble the moment I “got off text” that they were not going to listen to that bull **** any longer. I cannot tell you how disconcerting that was for a young minister of the gospel.

Once while standing in the pulpit, just before I was to preach, I realized that I really disliked about half the people in the congregation. Suddenly, I simply excused myself saying that I had something I needed to do. I would probably return. At that point I went back into my office, shut myself in the closet, sat on the floor with my head on my knees and prayed, “God I can’t do this anymore. I’m not going back out there if you don’t give me a love for the people.” I cannot adequately explain what happened next. Within moments I sensed God saying, “I give you the same love I will one day give you for your own children.” Boom, my life was changed. I felt I did love the people and when I returned to the pulpit, miraculously no one had left. They tell me that was the best sermon I ever preached. My ministry has been different ever since.

VI. Is There Hope for the Future?

It should be fairly obvious that no one wins the war against Islam (especially on the ground). Christians have been battling with crusade vigor for well over a thousand years. Neither will Islam win the war against Christianity. Historically, when Christians are persecuted for being Christian the nail is simply driven deeper. So how do we get along?

First, we determine to do what we do best according to Christian principle, we love and forgive, maybe *one Muslim at a time*.

Second, we feed the hungry, clothe the naked and visit the sick and imprisoned. May I remind you again that the radical Hamas (Sunni) won the elections in the Palestinian Authority because they were the ones most effective at feeding the hungry and educating the children?

Third, we learn to get along with other Christians. The greatest threat to Islam is not American bombs. It is war among themselves.[14] The same could be said for Christianity. Let me illustrate.

I was recently in several of the Balkan countries: Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia/Herzegovina, Slovenia, and Serbia. Those who understand the Slavic peoples know that the conflicts there (especially during the "recent" war of 1991 to 1995) go back literally a thousand years. This was the epicenter of the fight between Christian (eastern) Constantinople and Christian (western) Rome that split the Slavic people into two groups--the Serbs (eastern) and Croats (western). Both speak a similar language and both are basically the same ethnically (albeit with some Turkish intermixing with the Serbs and some German intermixing with the Croats). Slobodan Milosevic's uncle was killed in World War II by the Utashe (the Croat Nazi collaborators under the leadership of the Bosnian Croat, Ante Pavedlic) hence, his hatred for the Croats was established because of the holocaust in his own family (nearly 600,000 Serbs were killed in WW 2, largely by Nazi collaborators). So there are demonic strongholds of ethnic hatred in the Balkans! Furthermore, historically Bosnian Muslims were once Christians who followed a heretic named Bogomil and the so-called Bogomil heresy. Both Catholics and Orthodox slaughtered them like sheep; so, it is no surprise that they converted in mass to Islam when the Turks conquered the area in the early part of the 16th century. So, the recent war was not so much between Christians and Muslims (though Christian Serbs and

Muslims eventually fought in Bosnia), it was between Christian Serbs and Christian Croats.

Like politicians slamming each other on the eve of an election, we tend to cancel each other out and undermine the people's confidence in the political (or religious) systems altogether. Both Christians and Muslims alike had best learn from the words of Thomas Paine, "If we don't learn to love each other, they will hang us one by one." We tend to be like two lawyers suing each other for malpractice, both win their case and both are disbarred.

Fourth, we learn to pray with authority. Jesus might well say, "This kind can come out only by prayer and fasting" (Mark 9:29). It is also good to remember that although both Christians and Muslims fight the demonic, we must never demonize each other. Although I, as a Christian, believe that it is faith in Jesus Christ alone that accesses the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome the sin in my life, that does not make the rest of the world my enemy.

Lord, teach me to pray and empower me to be more like Jesus. Like Paul with regards to his Jewish kinsmen in Romans 9-11, my only hope for winning my Muslim friends is to make them jealous. Does my life demonstrate more compassion, more joy and more power than any other? Could faith in Jesus Christ empower the Muslim to measure up, even to the Islamic law? I once led a Muslim in London to faith in Jesus Christ by simply helping him realize that the only way he could measure up to the Islamic law was to access the power of the Holy Spirit through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. In other words, the only way he could become a true Muslim (he had struggled to be a faithful Muslim for years) was to become a Christian. There is something in me that believes that the only way to live up to any law, be it Christian, Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist is to access the power of the Holy Spirit. I sometimes say that true spirituality is not grunt and groan, it is repent and believe. I've found that *jihad* rules every aspect of Muslim existence. Our Muslim friends *strive* to be faithful to Allah and *strive* to obey the Muslim laws and *strive* to survive in a world that is never easy. So, how do we engage? First, we pray for ways of getting along. We really don't have to kill each other. Then, we make them jealous.

In the meantime, for those who are looking for hope among Muslims, be encouraged by words from Wafa Sultan, an American-Syrian Muslim psychologist: "Jews do not go to Germany and blow up churches and massacre Christians, they build synagogues, businesses and factories. We

Muslims must learn from the Jew."[15] I might add that we Christians must learn from anyone who opts for peace and has the courage to take the words of Jesus seriously,

> You have heard that it was said, "Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth." But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

Need I say that we who speak the name of Jesus Christ do not always do this well? Many peoples of the world hold Christians in utter contempt. *Too many on whatever side believe that if they are right that makes the rest of the world their enemy.* Once again I believe that Jesus says it best,

> You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven (Mt. 5:44).[16]

Recently I was on a flight from Amman to New York. In the airport in Amman I had an opportunity to get acquainted with a Muslim Imam from India. We chatted for nearly an hour. Once the plane was in the air my Imam friend tapped me on the shoulder and asked if we could talk some more. I said, "Of course." We walked forward to where the flight attendants were taking a needed break. While I listened, for nearly half an hour my Muslim companion tried to convince me that there was no Trinity and that Jesus could not possibly be the incarnate Son of God. He was so adamant the flight attendants were getting a bit nervous so I decided to conclude the conversation by saying, "Sir, the day you can love me more than I can love you, or you can forgive me more than I can forgive you, I will become a Muslim." The attendants actually applauded.

So, is there hope for the future? There is if we believe that God is never without a witness. May I encourage you to do something in this very moment? Stop! Pray for the peace of Jerusalem, and Gaza, and Cairo, and Damascus, and Amman, and Beirut, and Tehran, and Baghdad, and Kabul,

and Caracas, and Delhi and Jakarta, and on and on until Jesus returns and establishes his peace on earth, once and for all. *Allah cum salaam!*

Notes

1. A "high" religion is a religion that has trans-cultural significance.
2. Like the Hebrew Yahweh, Allah cannot be pluralized.
3. Muslims sometimes refer to Adam, Abraham (the middle prophet) and Muhammad as the three major prophets.
4. *Sufi* is from the word, *suf*, for "wool," what the early Muslim ascetics wore.
5. A contemporary describes Muhammad as having "a large head, large eyes, heavy eyelashes, reddish tint in the eyes, thick-bearded, broad-shouldered, with thick hands and feet." He was probably illiterate. *Encyclopedia Britannica* XV, p. 649.
6. The *Qur'an* speaks of the Law of *Qisas* or retaliation. Surah 2:194 reads, "All sacred things are (under the law) retaliation; whoever acts aggressively against you, inflict injury on him according to the injury he has inflicted on you..." (Translated by M.H. Shakir, Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, Inc.). All subsequent quotations from the *Qur'an* are from this same translation.
7. Indonesia (presently the world's fourth most populated country) has the world's largest Muslim population.
8. Leon Uris, *The Haj*, pp. 60f.
9. It should be noted that the *Qur'an* also went through the process of establishing a Canon of texts, which Muslims now believe to be authoritative. There is also a doctrine of "Abrogation" that is concerned with the modification of previous teaching contradicted by a new portion of teaching from Allah.
10. Five key words summarize the Muslim view of Allah. *Takbiir* (making or declaring great), *Tawhiid* (making or declaring one), *Tanziil* (sending down a word from on High), *Taqdiir* (causing to take place), *Tanziih* (making pure or eliminating all anthropomorphisms).
11. Francis Fitzgerald, *Fire in the Lake*.
12. Rudyard Kipling, "We and They."
13. In the early 13th century Francis of Assisi joined the Fifth Crusade, not as a warrior but as a peacemaker. "Francis was not impressed by the

Crusaders, whose sacrilegious brutality horrified him. They were entirely too fond of taunting and abusing their prisoners of war, who were often returned to their families minus nose, lips, ears or eyes." See *Mysteries of the Middle Ages: The Rise of Feminism, Science and Art From the Cults of Catholic Europe*, by Thomas Cahill.

14. It should be noted that the Sunni Hamas in the Palestinian Authority was in rare sympathy with the Shi'ite Hezbollah during the 2006 bombings in Lebanon.
15. Dr. Sultan's life has been threatened by several Muslim communities.
16. Cf. Luke 6:27, 35.

Book Reviews

The Gospel According to Starbucks®
By Leonard Sweet
Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2007. 210 pp.

Anyone who is even slightly aware of the emerging church movement is familiar with Leonard Sweet. Currently serving as the E. Stanley Jones professor of evangelism at Drew Theological School, Sweet is a prolific author (he has written more than twenty books) and has influenced the way many think about the gospel and contemporary culture.

In *The Gospel According to Starbucks®*, Sweet presents the practices of Starbucks Coffee Company as a model for what the church should become. As those practices are described, Sweet believes "we can learn what Starbucks has come close to perfecting–that life is meant to be lived with passion, and that passion is found and practiced through experiences, connection, symbols and images, and the full participation of every part of your being" (p. 4). These truths, according to Sweet, "also point out the blind spots, weaknesses and failures of the church to serve people at the level of life's bottom line: passion and meaning" (p. 4).

Sweet arranges these "Starbucks truths" into the acronym EPIC, which stands for **E**xperiential, **P**articipatory, **I**mage-Rich, and **C**onnective. According to Sweet, "Anything in business or in the church that is working in this emerging culture is becoming more EPIC" (p. 21).

After two introductory chapters (which provide an overview of the book), *The Gospel According to Starbucks®* systematically explores the EPIC acronym by first looking at the EPIC practices of Starbucks and then attempting to apply those principles to one's personal life and to the life of the church.

Following this exploration, an epilogue, "Jehovah Java," shares additional "amazing coffee facts, history, and legends" (p. 157). The book also includes a discussion guide written by Edward Hammett (a consultant for the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina). This guide follows the chapters of the book and is intended to spark personal reflection, conversations with friends, as well as being useful for life coaching. Finally, Sweet includes an Appendix in which he suggests that Western rationalism

has (unfortunately, from his perspective) taken over the church. It would be helpful for the reader to begin with this appendix since it so succinctly describes the fundamental problem of the church as Sweet sees it.

Few would argue with Sweet's basic premise. Indeed, the church should be an EPIC place and the life of faith should be an EPIC life. His description of the human need for connections and relationships–and his call for the church to foster such connections–was especially powerful.

Another valuable contribution is Sweet's discussion of contemporary "USAmerican" society as a celebrity culture. Instead of fighting this tendency in culture, Sweet argues that people of faith should be known for "celebrating a different kind of celebrity: less handsome or beautiful and more compassionate and loving" (p. 122). In this same context, Sweet urges Christians to become icons rather than celebrity idols. The difference, he explains, is that an idol is something one prays to, while an icon is something one prays through, a window or an avenue through which others can see God (p. 123, 124). These are valuable concepts to contemplate, and Sweet has presented them well.

Sweet's writing style is unmistakable. He is informal, funny at times, and more than willing to say what others might shy away from. Few authors, for example, would be comfortable calling Billy Graham the evangelical "superpope" and naming James Dobson and Pat Robertson as "other 'papal' celebrities" of the Protestant world (p. 121).

The Gospel According to Starbucks® is also filled with fascinating quotations, facts and figures, some of which are not directly related to the topic, but are interesting nevertheless. The many illustrations are themselves worth the price of the book.

Sweet's strengths can also become weaknesses, however. His informality, from my perspective, sometimes borders on poor taste. For example, he could stress God's willingness to turn the despised into the beautiful without a discussion of civet cat dung and the Shih Tzu dog, whose name he uses repeatedly as a sort of pun or homophone. In one of the more unfortunate sections of the book, Sweet describes honey as "nothing but bee Shih Tzu" and "wine is pee-juice: grape Shih Tzu" (p. 24, 25). Elsewhere, Sweet refers to Rev. 3:16 as a "God-puke verse" and reports that one of his "favorite gifts to pastors is a personalized vomit bag" which he inscribes with the message, "Hot or hurl" and signs "God" (p, 60). All this may leave the average reader a bit shaken.

In his efforts at contemporary application, Sweet also seems willing to play with Scripture rather loosely. For example, is the first command of Scripture really to "eat freely "(p. 6), and is it accurate to say that Jesus "was born a blue blood in the royal city of Bethlehem" (p. 95)? While these are minor points in and of themselves, some will see them as indications that Sweet should have spent more time exploring the Bible and less time exploring Starbucks.

The Gospel According to Starbucks® will be especially attractive for those (like me) who already agree with Sweet's basic premise that the church should become more relational, experiential, and participatory–in short, that it should become more EPIC. The gospel calls us to this sort of abundant, passionate life. Unfortunately, those who most need to hear Sweet's appeal may be offended rather than persuaded by his book.

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Paul Dybdahl is an Associate Professor of Mission at Walla Walla University in College Place, Washington.

Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness

By Bryan P. Stone

Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007, 335 pages

Bryan Stone urges an understanding of evangelism that grows out of the social, public, embodied witness of the people of God. He suggests that the influence of Constantinian assumptions and Enlightenment philosophy has caused evangelism to be unduly conceived of in terms of winning individual persons to a personal relationship with Christ. In this evangelism, both the individual's relationship with Christ and the practice of evangelism are divorced from the church, with a primary focus on individual piety rather than the public witness of the ecclesia.

In contrast, Stone maintains that the practice of evangelism should be based upon an understanding of the church's "politic" (a new alternative public) and the church's "economics" (a transformed oikos).

This understanding will best live itself out through five core practices (among others): economic/material sharing, inclusiveness, a process for forgiveness and restoration, decision-making based on consensus in public meetings, and implementation of the Spirit's giftedness within the church.

Furthermore, participation in this social/public life together as God's people is what constitutes the essence of salvation. "These new patterns of kinship and social relation are not merely an *implication* of one's prior acceptance of salvation. Rather, they are precisely that which is offered *as* salvation" (78). Thus, Stone argues against the type of evangelism that seeks first to convince persons to accept a personal relationship with Christ and then *subsequently* encourages them to participate in the social/public embodiment of Christ's peaceable reign. He maintains that participation in the social/public embodiment of Christ's peaceable reign through God's people (the church) is part and parcel *of* conversion, not subsequent thereto.

This book will stir much conversation. It offers insights concerning the relationship between evangelism and the church; it illustrates the pitfalls of an evangelism that is separated from the church and focuses primarily on inner spiritual formation; it highlights the impact of Constantinian Christendom and the Enlightenment on Christian practice today; and much more.

One frustration I have with this book is the lack of application-oriented ideas for Christians and churches in America today. For example, one of the five core practices he recommends is that of economic and material sharing. Does he want existing churches in America to implement that on a church-wide scale, or within small groups, or in some other way? Another core practice is decision-making by consensus in public meetings. Does he want 1,000-member churches to do this? Isn't that impossible? If so, then is he also saying that for a church to truly engage in evangelism as an embodied witness to God's peaceable reign it must have fewer than 100 participants (or 50, or some other number)? There are simply too many unanswered questions of application.

Another sticking point is Stone's stance against calling individuals to a personal relationship with Christ. Instead of viewing a personal call to individual conversion as an inappropriate understanding of evangelism, it could be seen as an appropriate *contextualization* of the gospel *in the American context*. I embrace Stone's prophetic word to the American church that the people of God must learn how to live out an embodied social/public witness to God's peaceable reign that is a true alternative "public" which will be obviously different from the world's "publics." But perhaps we can conceive of an evangelism that values the connection of evangelism to the people of God *and* values the scriptural portrayal that individuals are called to personally respond to God's grace offered in Christ. Jesus called the disciples to live in community with him and one another, but they each had to personally respond to that call. The context from which the good news springs is indeed the people of God living together in grateful and obedient love, but the focus of the good news is the son of God. Jesus said, "Come, follow *me*," not "come, be a part of the people of God."

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Dan W. Dunn serves as Associate Professor of Evangelization and Global Outreach of the Wesleyan Seminary of Venezuela in Barquisimeto, Venezuela.

The Road to Delhi: Bishop Pickett Remembered, 1890-1981
By Arthur G. McPhee
Bangalore, India: SAIACS Press, 2005, 394 pp. [Available from Amazon.com in the USA]

This extraordinary missionary biography is both informative and inspirational, and it deserves careful reading by every serious student of global Christianity. J(arell) Waskom Pickett served for 46 years in India under the (U.S.) Methodist Board of Foreign Missions and was a close friend of the much better-known E. Stanley Jones (1884-1973). He was a towering personality in his own right, in that he did much to shape the development of the Methodist church in India, contributed to the

missiological understanding of mass movements, and influenced the formulation of modern church growth theory. Professor McPhee of Asbury Theological Seminary has done an enormous service by bringing to our attention this man's many contributions.

Pickett was born in Texas in 1890 into a devout Holiness family, and four years later his father, an evangelist, autodidact Bible scholar, hymn writer, publisher, businessman, and occasional politician, relocated the family to Wilmore, Kentucky, a center of Holiness life and culture. A precocious youth, Waskom had learned to read at 4, was proficient in New Testament Greek at 8, and had finished high school at 13. In 1903 he enrolled in the local Asbury College where he experienced the usual revivals that swept the college and was consciously converted at age 17 in 1907. He graduated that same year, earned a master's degree in 1908, taught a year at an Arkansas college, and became a professor of languages at Taylor University in Indiana in 1909. He had signed a Student Volunteer Movement pledge card ("It is my purpose, if God permit, to become a foreign missionary"), and encouraged by his college classmate Stanley Jones who was now in India, he applied to the Methodist board and was accepted. In fall 1910 the 20-year-old Pickett was on his way to India.

He began his ministry at a church in Lucknow and rapidly advanced in the mission. In 1916 he married Ruth Robinson, a missionary bishop's daughter, and they had four children, all of whom are still living and were valuable sources of information for McPhee. From 1916 to 1924 he worked in Arrah, Bihar, where he gained his first experience in working with mass movements among the outcaste "untouchables" or "Chamars." In this process of working in the villages and experimenting with new ideas Pickett underwent a transformation of heart, or to use McPhee's term, an "Indianization." Thereafter he would spend much more time with people at the bottom of society than with those at other levels.

In 1924 Pickett returned to Lucknow where for five years he edited the *Indian Witness*, the main Methodist publication in the country. Then, at John R. Mott's urging, he assumed the leadership of the National Christian Council's Survey of Christian Mass Movements in India, one of the most extensive social science studies of this type made in the pre-

computer era. In 1936 he was named the bishop in Bombay and finally in 1945 the senior bishop in India with his seat in Delhi, where he served until retirement in 1956. The latter portion of the book contains extremely fascinating material about his political connections – B. R. Ambedkar, political leader of the Untouchables and a drafter of the Indian constitution, M. K. Gandhi, the father of modern India with whom he had a sharp dispute over the treatment of the outcastes, and Jawaharlal Nehru, who frequently sought his advice. In the early 1950s he was virtually an "ambassador at large" for India in negotiating with the U.S. government and the Congress for relief assistance. His last major effort was forming the United Mission to Nepal in 1954 that succeeded in opening that hitherto closed country to the gospel witness.

McPhee's account of Pickett's relationship with Donald McGavran and his role in the church growth movement is another intriguing part of the book. To my knowledge, this is the first substantive discussion of the origins of church growth theory. He explains the connections but also brings out that Pickett had his own missiological ideas on how to reach Indians for Christ, but space limitations preclude further development of this point. The wide-ranging treatment of Pickett's travels and manifold endeavors is reminiscent of C. Howard Hopkins' magisterial biography of John R. Mott (Eerdmans, 1919). In short, the book is a treasure trove of information about missionary life in the late British and early independence period in India and one man's commitment to proclaiming a holistic gospel there.

Richard V. Pierard is the Stephen Phillips Professor of History at Gordon College and Professor of History Emeritus, Indiana State University.