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The Category 'Christian' as a New Race:
Theological and Sociological Examinations of the Structure and Practice of the Common Humanity

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INTRODUCTION

> For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility (Eph 2:14-16).[1]

The theological point that when people come to Christ, they become a new people or humanity in him is foundational, based on passages such as Galatians 3:28 and Ephesians 2:14-16. While Scripture upholds this for all Christians as a promise that is fulfilled and a concretized reality, what does it sociologically mean to be one people in Christ? How and in what substance or form is this new humanity conceived in real life where people of different ethnicities, class or religious backgrounds become a new humanity? Is it a new species of human beings or a new race, i.e., an otherworldly sort of being? Is this humanity even a new *physical* (not just spiritual) creature in Christ (2 Cor 5:17)?

This article discusses the relationship between the theological and sociological aspects of this new humanity in Christ to explicate its concretized sense so that we might see and realize how it testifies to a fuller unity and reconciliation with one another in real relationships on earth. It is an inauguration of our embodied promised and reconciled life that God in Christ is our peace who has broken down every wall of hostility and division, and reconciled us all to God.

[1] All Scripture references are from the New International Version unless otherwise indicated.

In what follows, I will (1) discuss historical and sociological understandings of race and ethnicity, (2) sketch a theology of race and inclusion (3) examine race and ethnicity in Christian mission then and today (with special reference to Malaysia) and (4) show how Christians are a new race to draw lessons for how believers can live out that kind of reconciled community of Christ-followers and be witnesses in our world today.

A. Historical and Sociological Understandings of Race and Ethnicity

According to Adrian Hastings, "ethnicity is a group of people with a shared cultural identity and spoken language [that] may survive as a strong subdivision with a loyalty of its own within established nations" (1997, 3). For Max Weber, ethnic groups are

> those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs of both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists (1996, 35).

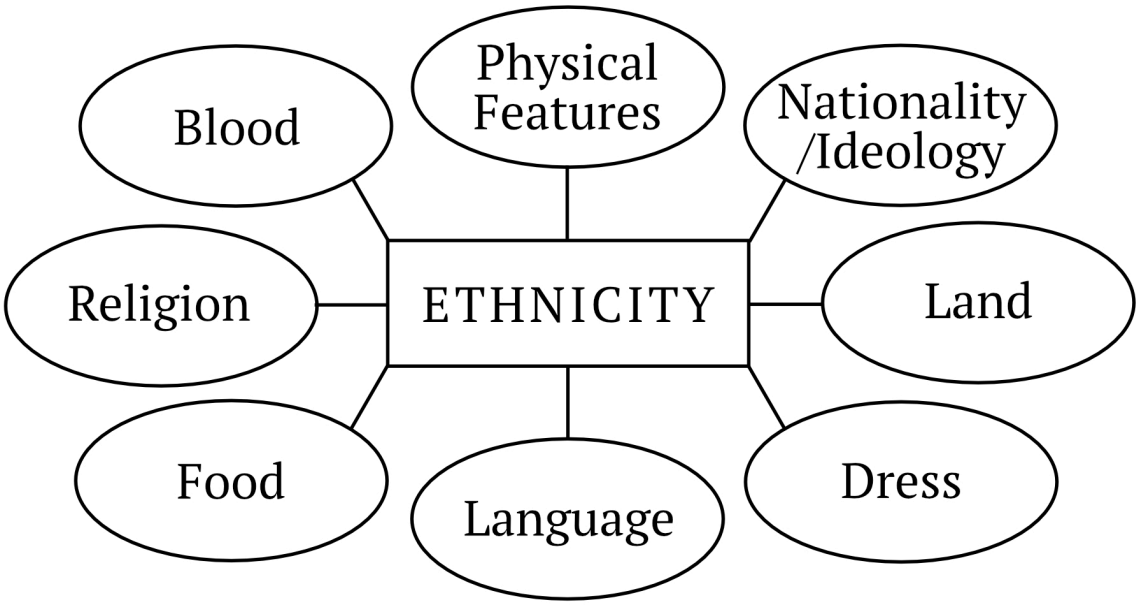
Christian anthropologist Eloise Meneses states that the term "ethnicity" is "usually used to stress the cultural rather than the physical aspects of group identity. Ethnic groups share language, dress, food, customs, values and sometimes religion. These are things that can change easily and do historically" (2007, 34).

Most anthropologists, sociologists and historians in ethnic studies agree that it is better that each community discusses and defines who a person's ethnic identity is (i.e., an emic perspective) rather than outsiders doing so. For example, Gabriele Marranci, an anthropologist of religion, states that religious followers should ask respondents whether they self-identify as followers of a particular religion and ethnicity (2008, 1). Denise Buell adds that one should include "discourse as 'ethnic' rather than some other cultural discourse" (2005, 40).

From these social science and historical understandings, what emerges is an intra-community understanding as to what binds and constitutes their common peoplehood. In an emic view, combinatorial markers of food, language, religion are usually (but not always) emphasized, as opposed to external phenotypical markers such as height, eye, or skin colour (which were colonial, etic markers). The constellation of these markers may be pictured in Diagram 1 below. However, it is also the constant participation or performance of these elements in everyday discourses, practices or rituals that shape or

reinforce such identities as each community contests, revises or confirms who they are and what they must be (Buell 2005, 40).

Diagram 1: ***Elemental markers typically used to signify ethnic identity***



The idea of people being defined and formally categorised by race in the modern age was birthed from the Enlightenment, developed in colonial history, and survived in post-colonial nationalism. The concept of race was created to dominate a conquered nation via the colonial will and ability to impose hegemonic power over people (Meneses 2007, 40). It was to "wield dynastic legitimacy" (Anderson 2006, 150) by asserting its ability to count and classify people, animals and objects in order to administrate and deploy them for colonial enterprises (Anderson 2006, passim).

Each conquered nation under the colonialists operated by their assumptions of what constituted the identities of a "people" or "nation." German Romanticism held to a primordialist view of people and advanced the idea of a *volk* (people) defined on the essentials of a native language (Hastings 1997, 108). The British went further by specifying physical traits as key identifiers of "race" such as skin and hair colour, facial features, body height and size that could all be objectified, quantified and classified (Anderson 2006, 168). From this emerged the modern census wherein racial groups were enumerated within a sovereign (colonial) territory to ascertain available economic surplus and labour for the colonialists (Anderson 2006, 168). Elsewhere, social Darwinianism influenced Americans to adopt craniometry, blood typing and IQ tests as

key markers of (racial) intelligence and biological purity. The Nazis advanced this logic by asserting (White) Aryan superiority against the Jews and other marginal peoples on the basis of race and eugenics (Meneses 2007, 41-42). Ultimately, Anderson observes: "The dreams of racism actually have their origin in ideologies of *class*, rather than in those of the nation" (2006, 149).

In the historical landscape of the conceptualization of race as a category to identify people, its beginnings were sordid and its effects devastating. From using language as a marker, to external biological physiognomies of people, what the higher powers viewed and decided who indigenous peoples were supposed to be, came from them, not the latter. This etic (external) view of peoples was superimposed upon them but the sad consequence of post-colonial nations mostly showed that many underlying sociological assumptions and constructs about race were "retained and even concentrated after independence" (Anderson 2006, 165). Thus, whether colonial or indigenous powers, each society continues to essentialize people's identities into the old hardened, non-permeable categories that fixed race or ethnicity into a particular, permanent combination.

In Malaysia, essential racial markers and categories define the Malays as a person who professes Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, and practices Malay customs.[2] In Singapore, it is merely "any person whether of the Malay race or otherwise, who considers himself to be a member of the Malay community and who is generally accepted as a member of the Malay community by that community."[3]

When nations (and their people) fix specific markers such as language or religion to a specific ethnicity, it often creates divisions for it creates a *difference* that distances groups from one another that formerly may not view them as such (Meneses 2007, 44). Thus, while Islam and Christianity are inclusive of all race and ethnicities, by ascribing a Malay to be a Muslim, most Chinese in Malaysia refuse to embrace Islam because doing so is considered entering into Malay society. Conversely, when Malay Muslims embraced Christianity, they were asked by Chinese Christians if they had now tried eating pork (Cheong 2012, 276-278)!

In this way, postcolonial states perpetuate the colonialist's mindset or habits onto the local population; these forms of colonialism still occur because their minds have been colonised (Rynkiewich 2011, 90-196). If nations were not spared from such beliefs

[2] Article 160 of Malaysia's constitution.
[3] Article 19B.6 of Singapore's constitution (amended in 2016).

about race, neither were Christians. For example, Bible commentators such as Arthur Pink, Keil and Delitzch, and books like the *Preacher's Homiletic Commentary* asserted a "biblical" view that the world population could be classified into three major categories of people (with emphasis on skin type) that descended from Noah: Shem, Japheth and Ham (European, Semitic and Afro-Asian) (Hays 2003, 53-54). Though this view has been largely discredited, this belief lingers among Christians who read these early twentieth century sources.

Thus, one of our tasks is to decolonize our minds in order to find new ways of thinking, seeing and relating to one another so that we can be freed of these mindsets, repent of these sins, make amends and be reconciled to one another. To do this, I next examine how the Bible presents the theological and sociological restructuring of relationships between ethnic others that forge godly and equitable treatment.

B. Race and the Inclusion of Others in the Bible

Race and Inclusion in the Old Testament

In Scripture, Genesis 1:28 declares all peoples are created in the *imago Dei* because "the quality that distinguishes humankind from the animals and from the rest of creation is shared by all the races of the earth" (Hays 2003, 50). Even though God's plan to form a common humanity through Adam and Eve was broken by the fall and the sinful gathering of a monolingual people to build a tower for themselves in Genesis 11:1-9, God was not frustrated. Through the calling of Abraham's family, God would work out his covenant plan to redeem and reconcile all peoples of the world if they came into his covenant community and sought YHWH.

In its early formational identity as a distinct group, the use of the word "people" in conjunction with Israel suggests, according to Kenton Sparks, "a sociocultural entity that called itself Israel and that worshipped … the high god El" (2005, 122). *El* is supremely important because he is the central unifying element that allows ethnic others to become part of Israel's community. We see this in the Pentateuch when "foreign peoples are blended into the stream of the 'people of God'" through faith, intermarriage[,] naming [and] the other avenue is eschatological: a future, glorious

inclusion of the nations into the people of God, an inclusion based on faith" (Hays 2003, 130). When foreigners enter Israel's community, they must be treated like fellow Jews (Ex 22:21, 23:9; Lev 19:18b; Deut 10:19). Kenton Sparks observes:

> Deuteronomy especially "embraced a very supportive stance toward foreign "sojourners" (גרים) .... As a result, non-Israelite sojourners were able to assimilate to the Israelite religious community rather easily. [Additionally] in Deuteronomy the primary criterion for community membership was religious – a commitment to Yahweh – and not ethnic, and this explains why foreign sojourners could so easily be assimilated.... Ethnic exclusivity came to the fore only in a few legal statutes that excluded "foreigners" (that had no interest in community participation), nonassimilating sojourners (גרים within Israel that had no interest in community participation) and "bastards" (ממזר that were born of foreign cultic activities). Deuteronomy invited religious and cultural assimilation as long as one was interested in doing so and as long as one avoided contact with foreign deities and foreign religious practices (2005, 283-284).

Practically, how Israel then had to treat strangers in their midst were noted in specific ritualistic details and practices. Table 1 on the next page illustrates these sociological and theological elements.[4]

Sociologically, the net effect of consistently participating or practicing these acts would serve to unify and bring together ethnic others into Israel and prevent maltreatment or discrimination against them.[5] In this way, Israel's laws regarding the stranger (and slaves) distinguished herself from ancient Near East neighbours as she was commanded to uphold an ethic that was inclusive and humane, life-giving and faith affirming (Tsai 2014).

Even so, during the post-exilic period, there were sociological markers and processes that did *exclude* ethnic others in order to preserve the potential loss of the remnant ethnic community. Israel did this this by adding special ethnic criterion markers such as participation in the exile experience (Ezek 11:14-21) and documenting pre-exilic family holdings to verify one's status as an ethnic Israelite (Sparks 2005, 315). Even so, this "did not prevent them from embracing the non-Israelites who desired to

[4] There are more verses showing how rituals meant for Israel were similarly applied to foreigners, e.g., Lev 24:16; Num 15:15-16,26, 29-30; 19:10; Deut 1:16; 16:11, 14; 24:17, 19-21; 29:11; 31:12.
[5] The only exceptions were choosing a king (Deut 17:15) and lending with interest (Deut 23:20).

Table 1: ***Socio-theological markers that included foreigners into Israel's community***

Markers	Practices or processes of inclusion into Israel's community
Shared ritual	"A foreigner residing among you who wants to celebrate the LORD's Passover must have all the males in his household circumcised; then he may take part like one born in the land" (Ex 12:48).
Shared holy day	"… the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant …nor any foreigner residing in your towns" (Ex 20:10).
Shared food	"Therefore I say to the Israelites, "None of you may eat blood, nor may any foreigner residing among you eat blood" (Lev 17:12).
Shared care/ affection	"The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt" (Lev 19:34). See also Deut 23:7.
Shared law	"You are to have the same law for the foreigner and the native-born. I am the LORD your God" (Lev 24:22).
Shared celebration	"A foreigner residing among you is also to celebrate the LORD's Passover in accordance with its rules and regulations" (Num 9:14). See also Deut 26:11.
Shared safe spaces	"These six towns will be a place of refuge for Israelites and for foreigners residing among them, so that anyone who has killed another accidentally can flee there" (Num 35:15).
Shared work protection	"Do not take advantage of a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether that worker is a fellow Israelite or a foreigner residing in one of your towns" (Deut 24:14).
Shared money	"When you have finished setting aside a tenth of all your produce in the third year … you shall give it to the Levite, the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied" (Deut 26:12).

join their community … The exiles seem to have feared only those foreigners who came into frequent contact with the Israelites but who showed no signs of openness to assimilation" (Sparks 2005, 315). So long as they "separated themselves from the unclean practices of their Gentile neighbors in order to seek the LORD, the God of Israel" (Ezra 6:21), they were welcomed.

Ultimately, as strangers entered into Israel's covenant community, their entire adherence to Israel's laws would sociologically emplace them as belonging to the same faith as Israel's laws and align them towards a covenant-keeping relationship of the worship of YHWH.

Race and inclusion in the New Testament

If the Mosaic laws evidenced the necessary sociological conditions of how foreigners or non-Jews could enter and live together as *one* community with God's chosen people, a similar functioning ethos and marker also existed in the time of the Greeks.

> [N]on-Greeks could become 'Hellenists' by turning to and practicing 'Hellenism,' so too non-Jews could probably become adherents of 'Judaism' by adopting the Jewish lifestyle. In fact, we encounter the first known examples of conversion to Judaism in the days of the Hasmoneans. They even forcefully converted non-Jews in order to secure a Jewish population majority in traditional Israelite territory .... And if Hellenism had succeeded in becoming a worldwide 'ism', why should not Judaism aspire to the same? It takes no great imagination to realize the importance of this new development as a precondition for early Christian self-understanding and mission (Skarsaune 2008, 40).

According to Palmer (2018), this reflected later developments from the post-exilic period where a Gentile could convert to Judaism by a "mutable ethnicity" which revolved around shared kinship (e.g., marrying into the community), connection to the land and the shared practice of circumcision. According to Kim, even a band of followers who followed a rabbi could be considered a type of new community with a culture of their own: "The band remained within the Jewish community [yet] had their own distinctives that set them apart ... They had their own grammar of language, social system, family formation (2016, 18).

However, Jesus' community also introduced a distinct idea that pointed beyond fellow Jews: *Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God* (Jn 1:12-13, emphasis mine). Here, Jesus' new community emphasized only one inclusive marker ("those who believed in his name") and three excluding ones ("not born of natural descent", "not of human decision", "husband's will"). Paul resonates with this when he writes:

> So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith ... There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and

> female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Gal 3:26-29)

For John and Paul, *faith* is the key inclusion marker. For Paul, justification by faith in Galatians 3:26-29 implicates "the equality and unity of all in Christ" over race or social status (Hays 2003, 183). Here, Paul "strikes at three of the major barrier-forming divisions in human society": ethnicity, economic status and sexuality (Hays 2003, 185-186). The barriers are obliterated while the differences are relativized in light of our oneness in Christ (Hays 2003, 186). This also occurs in language – in Col 3:11 when Paul says "there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian."[6] Bosch (1987, 167) notes:

> To the Galatians he writes in similar vein: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ" (Gal 3:27f; cf also Eph 3:6). Baptism thus consciously brings about a change in social relationships and in self-understanding. Faith in Christ makes fellowship possible. Because believers are one in Christ, they belong to one another.[7] The fellowship in Christ does not unite only Jews and Gentiles, but people from different social backgrounds as well .... The contemporary Greek and Roman associations tended to be rather homogeneous sociologically, but Paul insists that divisions be transcended.

So significant was Galatians 3:26-28 as a key theological statement for the birth of a new humanity in the early church that they took it to be their first creed and key Scripture used for baptizing new believers (Thaxter 2020).

However, inclusion by faith (to enter *in*) and the obliteration of divisions (to enter *without walls*), must have reconciliation (to enter *into one another*). Ephesians 2:1-10 indicates how Christ's new work is "the reconciliation of people not only to God but also to one another. Salvation is thus more than believers receiving forgiveness of sins [but] union with one another" (Hays 2003, 190 citing Best). When they are reconciled, "believers in Christ are now seen as part of his body and part of a new society, a new race

[6] By this, Hays (2003, 188-189) understands 'Scythian' and 'barbarian' to mean languages, not ethnicity.
[7] Bosch (1987, 167) adds: "This explains the vehemence of Paul's reaction to Peter when the latter refused to eat with Gentiles converts (Gal 2:11-21). To object to sharing the table of the Lord with fellow-believers is a denial of one's being justified by faith. Where this happens, people are trusting in some form of justification by works. The reconciliation with God is in jeopardy if Christians are not reconciled to each other but continue to separate at meals. The unity of the church—no, the church itself—is called in question when groups of Christians segregate themselves on the basis of such dubious distinctives as race, ethnicity, sex, or social status."

of men and women" (Hays 2003, 190) as found in Ephesians 2:14-16. Thus, "the cross produced an organic unity among the various groups in the Church [and] eliminated the points of hostility between the groups and reconciled them to one another" (Hays 2003, 190). Beale comments (2004, 260):

> If Jews and Gentiles are reconciled to God because they are in the one Christ, then they are also reconciled to and have peace with one another because their identity as 'one new man' in Christ surpasses any nationalistic identities that formerly alienated themselves from one another (Eph 2:15-16). And if they are part of Christ and a new creation in him, they are also part of the 'one Spirit' and have open 'access' to the Father (Eph 2:18).

In Ephesians 2:15 and 19, we thus see the formation of a new race when Christ purposed "to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility." It is "for this reason that the early church father Tertullian called Christians 'a third race'" (Wu 2015,170).[8] When we become this new humanity in Christ, God becomes our "Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named" (Eph 3:14-15). For Peter, this new kind of humanity was seen as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession…" (1 Pet 2:9, ESV). Clement, another church father, noted that when Jews and Gentiles were one, "what emerged is a distinctive group that is neither Jew nor Gentile but believers who soon after regarded themselves a third race or new race" (wa Gatumu 2010, 212).[9] Buell observes: "Many early Christians define Christianness as a membership in a people characterized especially by religious practices, in contrast to historical reconstructions that portray Christianness as a category that transcends or dissolves ethnoracial difference" (2005, 35). For this reason, religious practices were the "primary means" for differentiating the "three kinds (*genē*) of humans in this world: worshippers of so-called gods, Jews, and Christians" (Buell 2005, 37 citing Aristides). Sunquist comments (2014, 282):

Christians, to use the expression from early detractors of Jesus people, were labeled a "third race." Christians did not disagree with this name calling, but they understood it differently [for] Christians do not follow local customs regarding family and sexual ethics, but all Christians, in no matter what country or nation, follow the same customs following Jesus Christ.[10]

[8] Wu notes that "in speaking of a 'third' race, Tertullian differentiates Jews and pagans." (2015, 239 f.231)
[9] Wa Gatumu, *The Pauline Concept*, 212. He cites Clement, *Stromateis* 6.5.41.6; *Epistle to Diognetus* 1.
[10] Sunquist, *Explorations*, 282.

What were these religious customs? If circumcision marked the Jews as a people, the new Christian practice belief was the circumcision of the heart (Rom 2:29). If Christians indeed are the third race, in which Jews and Gentiles, slave or free, Scythian or Barbarian can enter in to become one, it had its own functional sociological religious markers that allowed foreigners to enter this new community in Christ as that kind of a "race" (see Table 2):

Table 2: Socio-theological markers that brought Jews and non-Jews into a new race

Markers	Process or rituals of creation into a new race
Shared ancestry	"For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Cor 15:20-23)
Shared history	"Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior" (Col 1:21).
Shared birth	Shared birth "...no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit ...So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (Jn 3:5-8).
Shared adoption	"...the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (Rom 8:14-17).
Shared ritual	"For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free" (1 Cor 12:13)
Shared family	God is our "Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named" (Eph 3:14-15).
Shared faith	"...one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph 4:5).
Shared speech/ language	"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths..." (Eph 4:29) See also Eph 4:15, Tit 3:1-2, Jas 1:12.
Shared food	"The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:23-25).
Shared future	"...looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Heb 11:10-11).

In these ways, the New Testament laid the socio-theological foundations that indicate how Christians became a new race in the history of the world and a new creature in Christ. At the same time, even as new believers could enter into this new ethnic space to become a new people, "early Christians frequently portray religiosity and ethnicity/race as mutually constituting and, like their contemporaries, treat ethnicity/race as both fixed and fluid" (Buell 2005, 36). In this way, early Christianity accomplished four things: "to assert the fixity of ethnoracial differences between groups, to accomplish ethnoracial fluidity (as a means by which one can change membership), to make links between two or more distinctive ethnoracial groups, and to make differentiations within a group" (Buell 2005, 36). In other words, just as a new race (of Christians by the practice of such new religious customs) was created, it retained enough fluidity to permit newcomers to enter into this new humanity that neither erased their preexisting ethnic identities. In this way, Christianity was both welcoming and outreaching toward ethnic others. "If God is to be more than a tribal deity, then God must be one for all humans... But this particularity... is not rooted in an ethnic or a cultic difference, but in a shared humanity through which God seeks to reach all people" (Johnson 2001, 197). We next examine how the mission enterprise to reach all peoples related to race.

C. Race in Christian Mission Then and Today

The influence of the colonial enterprise and its discourses, structures and practices in racializing society have deeply affected missions. Some mission enterprises perpetuated it while others masked longstanding animosities. For example, in Rwanda (lauded as the most missionized nation in Africa), old tribal animosities between the Hutus and Tutsis resurfaced, resulting in the ethnic genocide of millions (Rutayisire 2012, 243-248). In South Africa, indigenous people were given British names when studying in mission schools (Mandela 1995, 12-14). In the Philippines locals had to dress and behave as Whites as part of the missionary's civilization project. Even in America, Christian ministry and evangelism was stained with racism as churches created and maintained racist ideas, policies, and practices from colonial America up to the twentieth century civil rights movement (Tisby 2019).

In Malaysia, when mission schools enrolled students and entered them into school registrars, they were categorized following the colonial constructs of race that originated from census forms (Chew 2000, 97-99; Hirschmann 1987); students were classified as Malay, Chinese or Indian, mostly omitting the categories for the indigenous people of the land.

If the Malays, Chinese or Indians intermarried, their offspring did not fit into neat Western racial categories because hybrid identities resulting from intermarriages were erased or absorbed into these categories. Consequently, the Peranakan (Malay-Chinese mix), Chitty (Malay-Indian) and Chindian (Chinese-Indian) were excluded from the census forms and marginalized in schools that were later established for only the three races. In the 1970s, the indigenous people, even the Orang Asli, Kadazan and Iban peoples were clumped into one catch-all term, *bumiputra*, meaning 'sons of the soil' or indigenous.

By the 1970s, a recovery by missiologists of such hidden or marginal peoples other than the main racial groups began when the people group concept and the 10/40 window emerged. The recognition there existed diverse ethnolinguistic peoples in every country other than the main 'races' thus raised their profile as distinct people who needed to be reached for the gospel, to be economically empowered and linguistically recognized. The last spurred organisations such as Wycliffe Bible Translators to map such groups that existed and to survey the state of gospel penetration, the translations of Bibles in their language and the existence of churches among them. In this way, missions begun remediating the history of their marginalization.

Even so, the recognition of such groups coincided with the homogenous unit principle – the theological-missiological strategy for evangelism and church growth (McGavran and Wagner 1990, 69-71). The history of its formulation generated heated debates in missiological circles due to the affirmation that monoethnic churches grew the fastest because it naturally drew similar people into their congregations. It was critiqued as such because it was believed to give new Christian sanction to implicit racist ideas of segregated congregations.

While those debates have abated, a new concept, diaspora missiology has now emerged to engage ethnic migrants who reside abroad (Wan 2011, 123-126). Though the charge of racism against diaspora missiology is largely absent, missiologists and practitioners who labour here must avoid the pitfalls of the HUP lest they unwittingly support building only ethnically homogenous migrant churches where whole groups of migrants and their identities are again essentialized as being only of one race and thereby support implicit segregated congregations that are imbued with racism.

Today, even as missionaries enjoy the amenities the globalized world has provided for them to travel affordably, communicate instantly and network effortlessly, globalization also problematizes or dissolves colonial constructs of race such as the people group concept (Park and Lee 2018). As ethnolinguistic groups (once tied to strict

nation-state borders) travel or reside overseas for long or frequent periods to work, study or marry outside their homelands, their overseas born children feel less connected to their parents' homeland, language, food and customs (all of which constitute key elements of ethnic identity). For example, a Malaysian-born Indian who marries a White Australian may have a child who never speaks Tamil but is more fluent in English. Thus, even if we desire to preserve an (idealized) view of pure ethnolinguistic groups among the locals or the diaspora, these understandings are increasingly untenable.

Consequently, we must be cautious to not reify fixed notions of race and ethnicity into our own ideas of evangelistic strategies, church planting and growth. Related to this, contextualization efforts to promote Asian, African or Latin American theology must also be critically analyzed and not assume that cultures are fixed and thereby end up contextualizing stereotypical versions of what these kinds theologies are or must be. If we do this and ignore overlaps or cultural or ethnic hybridizations within or without such groups, we may unwittingly end up with (racist?) essentialized versions of local theologies.

D. How Christians Can Live as the New Race

If Christians are to avoid the sins of the past, we must learn to *be* and *live* as the new race in Christ. Earlier, I remarked that (1) theologically and objectively, we are already one, as a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17) and that (2) sociologically and subjectively, there are specific and common practices or rituals that enable us to become one. If such socio-theological markers functioned to structure the formation of a new community in the Old and New Testaments, we can learn from these examples to construct find similar functional rituals and practices that forge the experience of a new race. If these habits are lived in the daily acts of our experience, the reality of a new life together as a new race or peoplehood may be more visibly seen and realized among us (see Table 3 on the next page).

If such a vision and motivation to live as Christians exists in our lives, we must also realize that in order for it to flourish, the larger community in which we are embedded (i.e., Christians in our near social context, churches and other institutional/ organizational supports) is an important factor that creates an environment for its life. Just as the Jews had a covenant community, and the Christians a supporting *ekklesia* of believers, believers today must create a web of relational and socio-religious structural supports for its enablement. If such an atmosphere and life of the new race could

Table 3: Socio-theological markers and practices of peoplehood that are paralleled in Christianity today

Markers	Practices of the 'new race'
Shared ancestry	Treat each other as fellow humans made in the *imago Dei*
Mutual history	Share testimonies and stories of the old life and the new in Christ
Common birth/ birth ritual	Invite Christians of another ethnicity to celebrate birth ceremonies
One family	Refer to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ
Mutual faith	Pray and worship together
Same language/ speech	Study and read Scripture together Speak the language of Christian love, peace and encouragement
Common land/ shared future	Hold loosely national citizenship; look to a shared heavenly future
Same food	Eat together often with others Serve communion one to another (i.e. to ethnic others)
One festival	Invite others to commemorate or celebrate Easter and Christmas together

emerge, grow and become a witness of the new kingdom life in the midst of a hostile empire among the early Christians, there remains hope for Christians today. In whatever circumstances, whether of anti-Christian secular nationalism, ethnoreligious opposition or systemic racist structures, we can draw encouragement and strength that the battle to realize our common community and life in Christ was no different then as it is today.

E. Conclusion

I have discussed how a shared identity is not only theologically established in Scripture, but indicates sociological aspects of how it is structured to forge this shared life and identity. If Christians may act in such ways daily, a renewed vision and evidence of that transformed and reconciled life together in Christ can happen. How we live that out will show which is deeper – our Christian or ethnic identity – and indicate the true foundation and compass of our life.

Christian mission and history also show that missionaries and ministers who affirmed the faith have also failed to live up to its tenets. Indeed, it is our fallenness and inability to treat one another as we would treat ourselves that indicates a right understanding of the theological foundation of our oneness becomes ever more important as a call for repentance, rebirth and renewal among us. Paul writes: "He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it in the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:6). If we cannot complete this work in our strength, we must trust that this is something only God can ultimately do: "And in him, you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (Eph 2:22, emphasis mine).

Without the Holy Spirit, such sociological markers and structures to become the new race are merely fleshly acts for the sake of superficial unity. As Christians, we must thus rely on the new power and life given to us by God's Spirit who birthed this new community in Christ at Pentecost; it is this everyday life in the Spirit that sets us apart from others as that new race. However, as a new race, we are also tasked with a new mission (italics my emphasis):

> … you are a chosen race … *that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light* (1 Pet 2:9, ESV).
>
> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and *gave us the ministry of reconciliation … And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation* (2 Cor 5:18-19).

Bosch comments (1987,168):

> In the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ a new age has dawned, in which Jew and Gentile are joined together without distinction in the one people of God.... And Christ's work of reconciliation does not just bring two parties into the same room that they may settle their differences; it leads to a new kind of body in which human relations are being transformed. *In a very real sense mission, in Paul's understanding, is saying to people from all backgrounds, "Welcome to the new community, in which all are members of one family and bound together by love"* (italics mine).

As a new race called to shine his marvelous light and to reconcile others, our mission begins by reaching out to others in humility, repentance (where our wrongs, past or present, have harmed them) and by doing acts of justice, mercy (Mic 6:8) and reconciliation. By this, we become a unified and transformed community, a people that

answers the prayer of Jesus: "… that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn 17:21, emphasis mine).

This transformation does not mean that race no longer matters. It still does, for each of us cannot escape the fact that God has created out of all humankind the diversity of the human race. However,

> [h]uman identity cannot be grounded ultimately in race. The human being is essentially constituted by its relationship to God as the creature, reconciles sinner and glorified child or God. Who we are is determined in and through this relationship and on the basis of this identity we are called to relate to others as those who also belong to God in this three-fold way (Hays 2003, 63 citing Deedo).

And it is for this reason that God chose us to be in Christ in order that we are a chosen race to bear witness of the inauguration of this new kingdom life on earth.

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General Revelation, Communication Theory and the Same God Question

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Introduction

A number of years ago Larycia Hawkins, a tenured professor at Wheaton College, ignited a firestorm by suggesting that Muslims and Christians worship the same God (Smietana 2015). When Wheaton eventually let her go from her position there was considerable criticism and backlash. One of those who came to Larycia's defense was Miroslav Volf (2015) who penned a widely-read article in which he reiterated the conclusions from his book *Allah: A Christian Response* (Volf 2012), that Christians and Muslims do indeed worship the same God. The missiological world seemed divided by these events, as evidenced by the wide variety of views and responses in the Special Edition of the Evangelical Missiological Society (Priest 2016).

While missiologists often debate the "Same God Question" (SGQ) through theological or philosophical lenses, many believers around the world are faced with this question on a very practical level. The explosive growth of the majority world church (Jenkins 2011, 1) has coincided with a similar growth in Islam (Johnstone 2012, 74). This has meant that many more pastors, believers and missionaries around the world are wondering how best to speak of God as they witness to their Muslim neighbors on the one hand, and as they seek to teach fellow believers on the other. This reality calls for greater understanding of the issues surrounding the SGQ, clarification of terminology (see, for example, Netland 2017), and a way forward that is sensitive to today's multicultural and pluralistic context.

For many years, missionaries have been trained in the importance of communicating in a receptor-oriented manner (Kraft 1983, 23). This article suggests that a similar receptor-oriented approach should be applied to the conversations around the SGQ in order to decrease misunderstandings and strengthen evangelistic outreach. This article will not seek to provide a definitive answer to the SGQ. Rather, the aim is to bring clarity to the debate surrounding the SGQ by exploring the dynamic of how one speaks of God,

particularly through the lens of general and special revelation, tie that into communication theory, and then apply it to the discussion around the SGQ. Such an approach will allow one to speak of the Muslim God in relation to the Christian God in a culturally sensitive, yet biblically accurate way.

Revelation and the SGQ

Those that give an affirmative response to the SGQ—agreeing that Muslims and Christians worship the same God—usually do so on the basis that there is only one Creator God and, therefore, when monotheistic Muslims and Christians speak of Him they must of necessity refer back to that one Creator (see Beckwith 2019, 68; Volf 2012, 96; Ariarajah 2004, 30). However, this line of reasoning does not always sit well with others, including many Muslim Background Believers (MBBs), who recognize in the biblical concept of God something deeper than just a generic understanding of a Creator God. Lamin Sanneh (2004, 35), former Muslim and highly-acclaimed scholar, stated that the question of similarity "is adequate insofar as there is only one God, but inadequate with respect to God's character, on which hang matters of commitment and identity, the denial of which would sever our ties to God." Similarly, Nabeel Qureshi asserted,

> For years I thought [they were the same], but I no longer do. Now I believe that the phrase 'Muslims and Christians worship the same God' is only true in a fairly uncontroversial sense: There is one Creator whom Muslims and Christians both attempt to worship. Apart from this banal observation, Muslims and Christians do not worship the same God. I do not condemn those that think they do, but the deeper I delve into the Christian faith, the more I realize that this assertion is not only untrue but also subverts Christian orthodoxy in favor of Islamic assertions. (Qureshi 2015)

When one studies the arguments of those both for and against an affirmative answer to the SGQ, a pattern develops which is founded on the distinctions between general revelation and special revelation. Those that affirm the same God position usually point to characteristics apparent through general revelation—the commonality of a Creator God that both Muslims and Christians seek to worship. On the other hand, those that reject an affirmative position usually do so out of a desire to uphold the truths of special revelation—the Trinity, Jesus' deity, and the character of God as revealed in the Bible (see Farrokh 2016a, 11). With these different lenses and points of emphasis, both sides

often end up talking past one another. As Sanneh (2004, 35) wrote, "Muslims and Christians agree on the great subject that God exists and that God is one. They disagree, however, about the predicates they use of God. Much of the Christian language about God affirms Jesus as God in self-revelation, and much of the Muslim language about God seeks exception to that Christian claim." It is this issue of God's self-revelation in Christ and His salvific plan—which became known through special revelation, rather than general revelation—which causes much of the confusion in the SGQ debate.

General and Special Revelation

The term revelation comes from the Hebrew *gala* and the Greek *apokalupto*, both of which mean "the unveiling of something that was hidden so that it might then be seen and known" (McDermott 2010, 46). Over time—especially after the enlightenment—theologians began to differentiate between general revelation and special revelation in order to distinguish between the ways that God reveals Himself (McDermott and Netland 2014, 86).

General revelation can be defined as simply as "God's witness to himself to all people" (Ramm, 1961, 17). Many theologians see general revelation as given in three ways—through creation, conscience, and through God's influence within the ordering of history (Grudem 1994, 122). Evangelicals have traditionally concluded, based on Paul's teaching in Romans chapter one and two, that while general revelation might be sufficient for awareness of God, and makes one responsible for sin, it is insufficient for salvation (Tennent 2002, 17; .

Unlike general revelation, special revelation, as the name suggests, goes beyond what can generally be perceived through either nature or conscience, to that which is specifically revealed by God. Ramm (1961, 17) defines it as "God's word in a concrete form to a specific person or group." Grudem (1994, 123) elaborates further, referring to it as "God's words addressed to specific people, such as the words of the Bible, the words of the Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles, and the words of God spoken in personal address." Special revelation may also include God's will revealed through means other than direct verbal declaration—such as dreams, theophanies, and angelic messengers (see Ramm 1961, 46-48). Demarest (1982, 14) concludes that special revelation entails "the modalities of God's mighty acts in history, the teachings and deeds of Jesus Christ, and the writing of the Bible" through which "the divine salvific plan is unveiled."

The Redemptive Center of Special Revelation

As noted above, general revelation has traditionally been viewed as insufficient for salvation. McDermott (2010, 51) has shown that both John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards considered that general revelation "points only to God the Creator, not God the Redeemer, and that knowledge of only the former is insufficient for salvation." In other words, because general revelation does not unveil God's redemptive plan of atonement, it cannot save. Special revelation, on the other hand, points to God's work of atonement through His Son:

> Special revelation is redemptive revelation. It publishes the good tidings that the holy and merciful God promises salvation as a divine gift to man who cannot save himself (OT) and that he has now fulfilled that promise in the gift of his Son in whom all men are called to believe (NT)...This is the fixed center of special redemptive revelation (Henry 1984, 946).

The Revelatory Scale (R-scale)

While helpful, these two levels of revelation (general and special) are somewhat simplistic in that they do not capture the full range of what may be revealed through God's self-disclosure. This article suggests a spectrum or continuum, referred to as the "revelatory scale" (R-scale) to highlight the broader scope of the unveiling of God's will. At the very beginning of this scale is general revelation, given to all humankind. This provides knowledge of God as Creator, but not His redemptive plan. Further along the scale would be the special revelation of God as seen in the Old Testament. While this type of revelation informs much more of God's ways than general revelation, Old Testament revelation alone cannot save today. Rather, it provides a preparatory foundation, paving the way for the full revelation of redemption through God's "Man of Promise," Jesus Christ (see Kaiser 2009, 171). At the far end of the spectrum would be New Testament special revelation which reveals God's salvific plan of redemption in Christ.

With the R-scale in mind, one could map out where people are in their understanding of God and communicate accordingly. Note that there could be many various points on the scale in between these numbers, which might lead to a change in communication methodology. Perhaps an individual may have understood very little about God from creation, placing them at 0.5 on the scale. Another may have only heard aspects of the Old Testament, but not in its entirety—perhaps they would be at 1.4 or

1.5 on the scale. Someone who grasps the main message of both the Old and New Testaments would be at the far end of the scale, at R3.

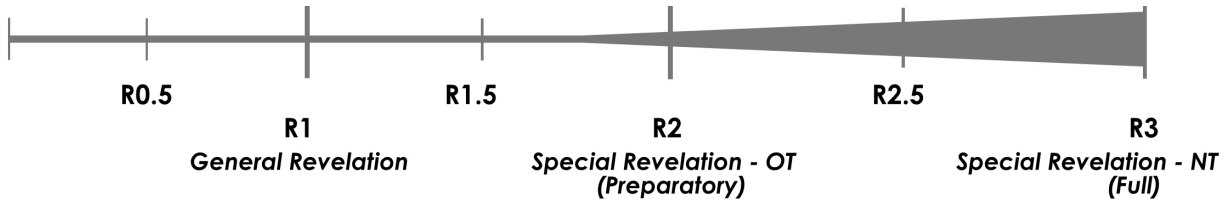

Figure 1.1. The Revelatory Scale. The phases of revelation, reaching their pinnacle in a clear revealing of God's plan to reconcile the world to Himself in Christ.

Universal and Non-Universal Special Revelation

In considering the revelatory spectrum, one can further distinguish the difference between universal special revelation (that intended to be proclaimed to all people), and non-universal special revelation (God directing certain people by way of special revelation). This refers to the scope of the revelatory intent of the primary message—whether it remains normative for all people, or was revealed to a person or persons for one specific occasion only (Coleman 2011, 85). So the passage "There is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12)[1] would be normative for all people, while God's special revelation to Joseph to flee to Egypt (Matt. 1:13) is not, though it makes up part of God's inspired word in Scripture.

Direct and Indirect Revelation

Another distinction can be made between direct and indirect revelation. Direct revelation refers to God's initial act of revelation—whether directly spoken by God himself, or given through an intermediary (such as the angel Gabriel), or by the word of the prophets. Indirect revelation would refer to God's revelation passed on by the initial receptor, which could then be repeated by others countless times. For example, Moses received God's direct revelation of the ten commandments, but the repetition of that direct special revelation would be considered indirect special revelation. So today one might read the Ten Commandments, which still constitutes God's special revelation, though thousands of years removed from the direct revelatory event. Furthermore, an individual could be introduced to aspects of special revelation through other forms of media. The mere inclusion of R2 or R3 information would not therefore make such

[1] All Scripture citations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New International Version.

media in itself revelatory or on equal footing with the special revelation of Scripture. For example, a movie such as *Ben Hur* (Wyler 1959), which recounts—in an indirect and partial way—some aspects of special revelation (such as fleeting portrayals of Jesus and the cross) would not therefore be considered special revelation in and of itself. The importance of this will be seen below.

Repurposed Indirect Revelation

Furthermore, partial and indirect R2 and R3 revelation could be intentionally repurposed or twisted—such as happened in the movie *The Last Temptation of Christ* (Scorsese 1988). In that case, although the movie contained aspects of special revelation (by mentioning Jesus, the cross, the disciples, and so on), the purpose of the movie was contrary to the initial purpose of God's special revelation. This false narrative, or repurposing of the story, erases any value in the (partial and indirect) revelatory content used. That being said, if the only exposure one had to Christianity was by having seen *The Last Temptation of Christ,* it could possibly be used as a bridge—though a very flimsy one—from which to introduce the real Christ, and guide the person to a fuller biblical truth and understanding of Jesus and God's redemptive plan.

Islam and the Revelatory Spectrum

With this understanding of revelation as a foundation, it will be helpful to consider where Islam fits within the revelatory spectrum. Doing so will aid in focusing the terminology and understanding surrounding the SGQ. Evaluating the Qur'an in relation to the revelatory spectrum can be complicated because the Qur'an includes parts of both the Old and New Testaments, yet much of what it contains has been changed or repurposed.

While some have tried to confer a type of revelatory status to Muhammad and the Qur'an (Talman 2014), such a position is difficult to maintain in light of the fact that Qur'anic material clearly opposes the redemptive plan of God in Christ—directly contradicting the R2 and R3 narrative of Scripture. Former Muslim, Fred Farrokh (2014), notes that "the Qur'anic Jesus is an Islamic figure that serves Muhammad and the Islamic theological agenda…Jesus' two main purposes in Islam are to herald the coming of Muhammad and to rebuke Christians for worshipping him." He later writes,

> Muhammad saw as a central part of his mission the demolition of the biblical belief regarding the Incarnation of God in the Lord Jesus Christ.

> Muhammad transformed Jesus into a fictional character who advances the Islamic theological narrative by announcing the coming of Muhammad (61:6) and assuring all who will listen to him that he never allowed anyone to worship him. (Farrokh 2016b, 470)

In other words, in the Qur'an the partial and indirect R2 or R3 revelatory content of the Bible has been distorted, changed, or removed so that there remains no connection to the redemptive, salvific plan of God in Christ. Even the fragmented portions of the Gospels which the Qur'an includes have the atonement, salvation and the divinity of Jesus expunged. Because of this repurposing of biblical material, the Qur'an cannot be held to be R2 (preparatory revelation), as the Old Testament was. It is far different than the revelation of the Old Testament, in that the Old Testament does not repudiate the idea of the atoning Messiah, while Islam clearly does. Because of this, the Qur'an cannot be seen as "a continuation or fulfilment of the biblical revelation, not because of any disdain for Muhammad and his book, but because of a firm belief in the finality of Christ as God's self-revelation and the achievement of our salvation at the cross" (Accad 2019, 175).

Due to these factors, this article argues that Islam cannot be placed at the R2 or R3 level of the R-scale. While there are scattered pieces of biblical revelation in the Qur'an (such as the naming of Old Testament prophets, or the mention of Mary and Jesus), what happens to be included is used either to promote Muhammad, or to negate the original revelatory intent: that of the salvific work of Jesus the Son of God. As noted earlier, just because a text (or any other form of media) may contain traces of biblical fact does not give that text revelatory status. Such quotations might be useful as a bridge for reaching the one reading it, but the inclusion of disjointed or repurposed aspects of special revelation, does not mean that the end product equals R2 or R3 revelation.

General Revelation and Volf's Similarity Thesis

Understanding the revelatory spectrum can help in evaluating claims of similarity as advocated by affirmative views to the SGQ. For example, Volf (2012, 110) proposed that the Christian God and the Muslim God are "sufficiently similar" to be called the same. His six points to establish this were:

1. There is only one God, the one and only divine being.
2. God created everything that is not God.
3. God is radically different from everything that is not God.

4. God is good.
5. God commands that we love God with our whole being.
6. God commands that we love our neighbors as ourselves.

These six points, however, are all basic enough that they can be categorized as belonging to general revelation, or at the R1 level of the revelatory spectrum. Demarest (1982, 243) provides a list of twenty characteristics that general revelation makes known about God. From his broader listing, the following are areas that parallel Volf's six points mentioned above:

1. God exists and is uncreated.
2. God is Creator.
3. God is transcendent.
4. God is good.
5. God should be worshipped.
6. People should perform the good.[2]

From this it can be seen that the similarity which Volf perceives between the Muslim God and the Christian God are all on the level of general revelation. This strengthens the position that Islam at best functions only akin to an R1 level of revelation. Because the revelatory content included is second-hand, indirect, and repurposed, it cannot function at the level of R2 or R3 revelation.

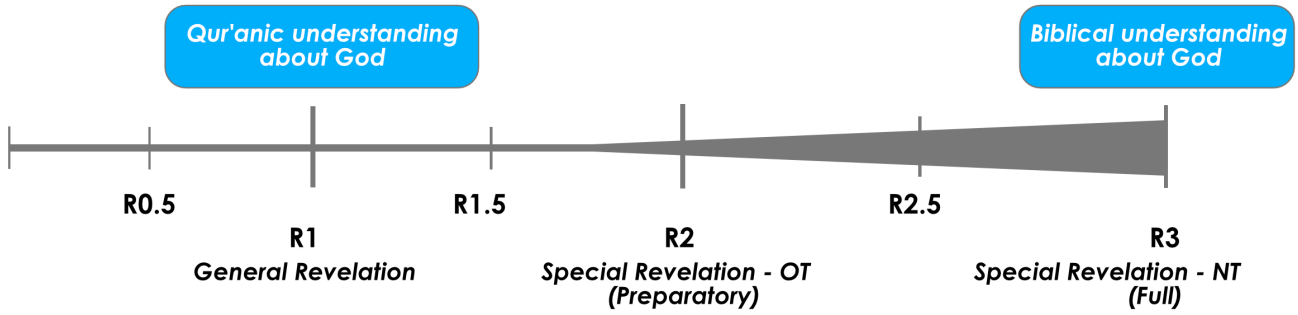

Figure 1.2. The Revelatory Scale. Marking out the different understandings of God in the Qur'an and the Bible, in relation to special revelation.

[2] Demarest lists them in a different order, these are rearranged to parallel Volf. Some might argue that these points do not overlap exactly. While that may be true, the points can be inferred. For example, from Demarest's statement in point six that "people should perform good," it can be inferred that people should then love their neighbors, since this is good. One should also remember that this parallels the type of reasoning-by-inference that Volf performs to arrive at these points in the first place. His conclusion that God commands people love their neighbors as themselves is itself an inference—not from the Qur'an (no such command exists in the Qur'an), but from the Hadith.

To summarize, then, this section has considered general and special revelation and introduced the revelatory spectrum to highlight a fuller range of revelatory understanding. Further, it argues that Islam can only be considered R1 (akin to a general revelation understanding of God) as it repurposes and redefines biblical material, eliminates the redemptive center, and negates the salvific role of Jesus Christ. Merely mentioning names or terms (the Messiah, Jesus, Mary) does not equate to a full R2 or R3 understanding of God. Having looked at general and special revelation, this article now turns to communication theory to consider its impact on the SGQ.

Communication Theory and the SGQ

As mentioned earlier, communication theory highlights the importance of a receptor's viewpoint. Specifically, it advocates that messages should be given in such a way that the receptor can understand the communication in the clearest way possible. If care is not taken the message will be misunderstood since "receptors, in response to the stimulus of messages, construct meanings that may or may not correspond to what the communicator intended" (Kraft 1979, 34).

David Hesselgrave (1991, 46) states that one "must establish a 'commonness' with someone to have communication. That 'commonness' is to be found in mutually shared codes." This article suggests that due to the difference in revelatory understanding, the "codes" for the word God are different between those who have an R1 level understanding of God, and those with an R3 level. In other words, the SGQ revolves around codes that, though similar in terminology or form, do not necessarily have the same meaning for all people. "We must account for an awareness of the meaning that receptors ascribe to the communication based on their context, community, and worldview" (Shaw, Engen, and Sanneh 2003, 71). See this illustrated in Figure 1.3 where the meaning of the term God is ascribed by the context and community of the receptor—whether that be the Qur'anic or biblical context, the community of the Ummah or the church. Furthermore, "receptors bring an understanding of their world that creates certain theological assumptions on their part" (Shaw, Engen, and Sanneh 2003, 157). So any use of the word "God" would come along with the theological assumptions of the community.

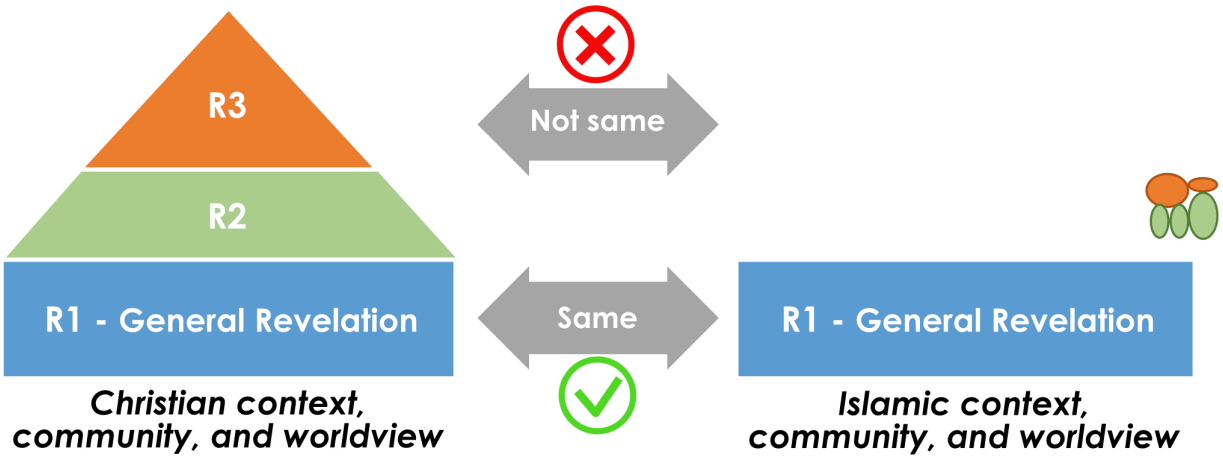

Figure 1.3. Comparing the Christian and Islamic understanding of God according to the R-Scale, especially with regard to the particular faith's context and worldview.

Note that in the Islamic context, the biblical R2 and R3 content has been reinterpreted and repurposed. This figure shows that Christianity and Islam could both say "same God" when it comes to a general revelation understanding of God, but not in terms of special revelation.

In light of the above, one can see that tensions could arise between R1 and R3 communities as they seek to speak of God. Whether or not the God of Muslims and the God of Christians is somehow the same "Referent," (Volf 2012, 83) becomes immaterial—for what people hear depends not on a vague ontological referent, but on the meaning their context has ascribed to a certain symbol—in this case to the term God. Those in an evangelical R3 context could misunderstand the communication of others—whether Muslims, missionaries, theologians, or philosophers—who are looking at God from an R1, or a general revelation viewpoint. The latter may look through an R1 lens for a number of reasons: perhaps, in the case of the average Muslim, that is their faith context; perhaps, in the case of missionaries, such a viewpoint is due to trying to reach people in an R1 context. Therefore, when someone from an R1 viewpoint says "same God" to someone else with an R1 viewpoint, there would be little problem or confusion. However, when someone from an R1 perspective says "same God" to someone with an R3 understanding of God, misunderstandings occur.

Reverse Contextualization

With these different ways of viewing the problem, it is no wonder that confusion surrounds the SGQ, and highlights the need for communication with the receptor in mind. In recent years, missionaries have grown in their attempts to present the Gospel in contextually sensitive ways. What also needs to happen is reverse-contextualization—when missionaries or theologians present their missiological conclusions to a Christian audience in a contextually sensitive way. Confusion especially arises when an R1 witnessing approach is used to communicate to those in R3 environments. Ignoring Christian receptors' R3 understanding of God and speaking as if God only has R1 characteristics can easily cause misunderstandings and may unintentionally alienate a Christian audience.

To summarize, when someone says "same God," what the receptor understands by the term God results from their contextual idea of God, which itself has been informed by the level of revelation they know and accept. To a Muslim, this would be the Qur'anic perception of God, which aligns with general revelation (R1) and—from an Evangelical perspective—is non-redemptive. In contrast to this, for many Christians the term God would be understood in a way that aligns with special revelation—what this article refers to as an R3 understanding of God. Missiologists and theologians, therefore, should be as contextually sensitive in regards to communicating with Christians as they are in communicating with people of other faiths, lest they alienate their audience. Furthermore, if one looks closely at Scripture, it becomes apparent that this is the type of communication that Paul used in his ministry. He was very sensitive to the revelatory level of his audience, whether they were Jew, Gentile, or a follower of Jesus.

Revelatory Awareness in Scripture

The apostle Paul seemed to understand these differences and the book of Acts clearly shows how he spoke according to the level of the revelatory understanding of his audience. Time and again Paul spoke about God on their level of understanding—not because there was ontological similarity between Yahweh and the Greek gods, but precisely because there was revelatory dissimilarity with his audience. Paul therefore used a receptor-oriented way of communicating, for he realized his audience knew no other level of understanding God. Paul, however, would not stop at that level, but would always draw his audience to the next level of the revelatory spectrum.

Examples of Paul and Revelatory Awareness in Acts

In Acts 13 Paul uses R2 level communication to connect with his hearers—starting from the testimony of the Old Testament and messianic prophecies. He then intentionally led his listeners to the next level of revelatory awareness, what this article calls an R3 level: "We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus…through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you" (13:32,38). So Paul began with their level of awareness, then went on to use that understanding as a bridge to introduce them to the greater revelation about Jesus.

Similarly, in Acts 17, Paul started with an R1 level of understanding about God in communicating with the Athenians. This article asserts that Paul was speaking to the Athenians generally, on an R1 level, not because the God he was proclaiming was ontologically similar to the Greek gods (see Dieppe 2019), but because his audience only knew general revelation and were at an R1 level in their understanding of the concept of God. After establishing some common ground, he quickly moved the conversation from an R1 level of a Creator God to a higher revelatory level and spoke of Jesus as the one appointed to judge the world, who died and rose again. Once more, for Paul this was not a matter of ontology, it was a matter of communication. His point was not to equate Yahweh with the Greek gods, it was to communicate to their level of revelatory awareness, with a goal of introducing them to the redemptive plan of God in Christ.

Other Biblical Examples of Revelatory Awareness

When one has this realization, such communication methods can be seen throughout the New Testament. In a similar manner Jesus approached the woman at the well and spoke to her on an R2 level because that is what she knew (John 4:1-26). This did not mean her conception of God was completely correct or accurate. Rather, this language helped to start the conversation, using shared mutual codes, based on her level of revelatory awareness. Jesus did not leave the conversation at an R2 level, however. He took the opportunity to shift her understanding further along the revelatory scale by explaining that He was indeed the Messiah and, as the Samaritans later realized, the "Savior of the world" (John 4:42). This same pattern can be seen elsewhere as well, including Philip's conversation with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:35), and Peter's interaction with Cornelius (Acts 10:34-43). In all of these cases, the biblical pattern shows that good communication starts at one's level of revelatory awareness, but then moves them along the R-scale to understand the fullness of God's redemptive plan in Christ.

This goes beyond the general contextualizing of a message in words or forms that a hearer understands. This article suggests the need to recognize the level of revelatory understanding of the audience and to speak in a clear receptor-oriented way in regards to God, yet with the intentional aim of expanding their revelatory awareness to fully understand the redemptive plan of God in Christ. Such an approach does not advocate a type of theological relativism or hypocrisy (saying one thing to one audience and something different to another). What it advocates is better communication, keeping in mind the level of revelatory awareness of one's audience.

Communication of the SGQ in Light of the Revelatory Scale

With the revelatory scale in mind, this article suggests that it would be acceptable for a follower of Jesus, in speaking to a Muslim friend, to assert that they both worship the same God. So, for example, Larycia Hawkins could have used language of "sameness" with her Muslim neighbor, since her neighbor would have an R1 conception of God. The biblical pattern, however, would be to eventually lead that person to an R3 understanding of God. This does not necessarily mean that the ultimate referent is the same in every way, nor does it seek to answer the SGQ in the affirmative. In fact, almost any talk of referents can end up appearing "the same" if one slides far enough down the revelatory scale to the R1 side and holds to a perspective of God based on general revelation.

In speaking to Christians who already have an R3 understanding of God's redemptive plan in Christ, however, "same God" could be very confusing and misleading—which the incident with Larycia Hawkins showed. In speaking to Christians, it is important to keep in mind their context and worldview—that of an R3 level of their concept of God. So while the God that Christians and Muslims worship might be considered the same when looked at from an R1 level, when looked at from an R3 perspective, there are many differences.

MBBs and the Revelatory Scale

As noted earlier, some MBBs (see Qureshi 2015, and Farrokh 2016a, 11) have been hesitant to say that the God of Islam and the God of Christianity are the same, once they grew in their awareness of His revelation in the Bible. Lamin Sanneh (2004, 35) declared simple statements of similarity as "inadequate," for they overlook God's character as revealed in Scripture. When, over time, these MBBs arrived at an R3 level of understanding, they could no longer say the concept of God they previously had was

equal to their new Christian understanding. Contrary to what Volf (2015) stated when he claimed that a denial of the SGQ was a result of "anti-Muslim bigotry," if MBBs grow in their perception of God and see discontinuity with their past beliefs the more R3 revelation they comprehend, that is within their rights. They may not have articulated such an understanding using the terminology of this article, but they were expressing a similar sentiment.

To summarize, for the sake of clarity in communication, one can speak to the level that the receptor is at. Additionally, the further along the revelatory scale one goes, the greater the need for clarity and the more inaccurate the statement "same God" becomes. If one speaks to an audience well aware of an R3 knowledge of God—that God in His reality consists of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and that this God has centered His redemptive plan in Christ—then to say that an R1 representation of God equals an R3 knowledge would be false. This would be why there has been such pushback from evangelicals to the SGQ. However, if one works in missiological or philosophical contexts, wherein they communicate to R1 receptors, then language of similarity could be permissible. It should be noted however that the biblical *modus operandi,* mentioned earlier, would include intentionally leading the receptor further along the R-scale to a greater awareness and understanding of God's redemptive plan in Christ.

Answering Objections

One objection to the R-scale may be in regards to the Jewish perception of God. Some could claim that since the Old Testament reveals an R2 level understanding of God, that according to the R-scale some Christians could claim Jews do not worship the same God. This would be false for a number of reasons. First, the Old Testament sets forward God's redemptive plan, to be fulfilled in the coming "Man of Promise," mentioned earlier. So the New Testament fulfills and completes the Old Testament understanding, unlike the Qur'anic view which replaces and repurposes the Old Testament understanding. Second, the Qur'an "repudiates the concept of God found in the New Testament" (Craig 2016)—something the Old Testament obviously does not do, since it was written long before the New. Likewise Gavin D'Costa (2013, 156) argues that the continuity between the Testaments and their shared covenant history shows that the God of Jews and Christians is already of the same kind ("*sui generis*"). For a more thorough treatment of the significant differences between the Islamic and Jewish perceptions of God and how they relate to the SGQ see Willoughby (2022).

Another objection may be that children who cannot fully grasp the Trinity could be said to be worshipping a God who is not the same as a full R3 understanding of God (Volf 2012, 90). However, having an elementary understanding of God does not mean the God being spoken of is not the same. A speaker should communicate according to the revelatory understanding of the receptor, while leading them to a full R3 understanding of God. So while recognizing a child's current understanding, it would be appropriate to teach them until they grow in knowledge and move further along the scale.

Third, it could be pointed out that there are those like Volf or other theologians and missiologists who obviously have an R3 understanding as Christians, yet affirm the SGQ. Likely, they do so out of a desire to build bridges with their (R1) colleagues, friends, or community. This does not negate the reality of the R-scale. However, it calls for such people to recognize the worldview of those who see things primarily from an R3 perspective, and to adjust their communication accordingly.

A final objection could be that the R-scale seems condescending to Muslims. However, it must be stated that the R-scale speaks not of status of education but the acceptance of revelation. There are many brilliant people who reject both the R2 and R3 understanding of God, and so would be at an R1 level in their understanding, from a Christian perspective. Furthermore, Muslims themselves would have a similar perspective, only in reverse, since they claim that Christians worship the same God—provided they deny the biblical revelation regarding the Trinity. Even the supposedly conciliatory document "A Common Word" (The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute 2007) calls Christians to reject the deity of Christ in order that both Muslims and Christians can say they worship one God. It concludes by quoting Surah 3:64, which calls on Christians not to insist that Jesus is partner with, or equal to, God. In fact, any religious body that holds to their own accepted revelatory content could see other religious bodies on a scale ranging from similar to less similar—and therefore would need to contextualize their understanding of God (or Reality) in a way that would make sense to the receptors.

Practical Application

As churches are planted in Muslims areas, and as majority world believers often live in proximity to Muslims contexts, there remains the potential for confusion in regards to the SGQ, as well as a genuine fear of syncretism. This article proposes that understanding the R-scale provides a reasonable, theological rationale that allays such fears and avoids confusion. It allows those witnessing to Muslims to use terminology of sameness, based on a general revelation understanding of God. They do not need to

refer to Allah as a different god or a false god. Yet it avoids syncretism and confusion because it recognizes that the Muslim concept of God (R1) does not equal the full biblical understanding of God (R3). Furthermore, it encourages Christian workers to intentionally help their audience grow in their understanding of the true nature of the biblical God, by bringing them along the scale to a more complete R3 understanding. This is not theological relativism, but a recognition of the differences in revelatory understanding of the receptor, and the need to contextualize the message for that primary audience. At the same time, pastors are free to clarify with their (R3) congregation the great difference between the Muslim concept of God and the biblical concept of God.

Conclusion

The goal of this article was not to answer the SGQ, but to investigate how one could speak of the Muslim God in a biblically accurate yet culturally sensitive way, especially in regard to the SGQ. A number of important points were investigated:

First, the article noted the two categories of God's self-revelation which have been described by theologians as either general revelation or special revelation. The Revelatory Scale (R-scale) was introduced to bring greater clarity to the specific content of these forms of revelation. It was also shown that revelatory content could be repurposed for something different than the original intent.

Second, keeping in mind key elements of communication theory, this article suggests that when speaking to someone it is appropriate to begin at their level of revelation—whether that be R1, R2, or R3. Scripture shows that both Jesus and Paul followed such a pattern. However, it also shows that they did not leave the revelatory content at R1 or R2, but sought to bring in something of the next level of revelation, specifically the redemption found in Jesus the Messiah.

Third, in the SGQ debate, lack of clarity in regards to the revelatory level of the recipient leads to misunderstandings. To say an R1 level of understanding of God equals an R3 level can bring great confusion. This article emphasizes that the farther along the R-scale one goes, the greater the need for clarity and accuracy in terminology.

Finally, this article concludes that (a) it can be appropriate to use "same God" terminology to an audience at the level of R1 (for example, Muslims), since that is what they know. However, (b) to an evangelical audience that understands R3 revelation,

saying "same God" can be greatly misunderstood and invites confusion. For the sake of clarity and unity, missionaries and theologians (among others) should take as great a care in communicating to an R3 audience as they do in communicating to an R1 audience.

Again, this article does not attempt to posit an answer either for or against the SGQ. Rather, it argues for the need to understand the different levels of revelation, and to communicate according to the revelatory understanding of the receptor. It is the hope of this author that understanding the various levels of revelatory awareness will bring greater clarity and enable believers to speak of God in a more biblically accurate and contextually sensitive way.

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Subverting Cosmic Connection in the *Gule Wamkulu* of Malawi

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Introduction

Malawi is commonly known as the "Warm Heart of Africa" and home of possibly the friendliest people on earth. Christianity has profoundly shaped Malawi since the time of David Livingstone. Operation World records the current percentage of Christianity at an astounding 80% (Operation World, n.d.). Multiple churches dot the landscape of most villages and fill the urban scene. Even the current president is an Assembly of God pastor. At a surface level, Malawi is a serene and predominately Christian nation.

However, within this ardent profession of Christianity and tranquility, there is an uneasy wrestling between the ancient ritual of Malawi's largest tribe, the Chewa, and Christianity. This jostling is perhaps most acute for Chewa chiefs, who must blatantly choose between membership in the church or their traditional beliefs. The village calls successful men, who often grew up in Christian operated schools and churches, to serve as chief. The village expects the chief to maintain allegiance to his ancestral culture (Kaspin 1993, 51). The primary expectation centers around participation in what is called the *Gule Wamkulu*, or "big dance." The *Gule Wamkulu* is the center of Chewa cultural identity and widely considered a *shibboleth* between full devotion to Christianity or culture (Van Bruegel 2001, 126).

The conflict pushes to the fore the perennial Malawian missiological question, "How should Christians interact with *Gule Wamkulu*?" Linden reports that Catholic missionaries opposed it from the beginning "because of the sexual content of the songs, the appearance of naked dancers in the presence of women, and because they had reason to believe that there were instances of adultery taking place after the performances" (Linden and Linden 1974, 119). Tension grew more pronounced when missionaries, especially Catholic, expected virtually all the village children to attend Christian schools. The *nyau*, special initiated Chewa who participate in the *Gule Wamkulu*, responded by vehemently urging the initiation of all Chewa young people and

refusing to send children to schools. They left the schools in mass, and some of the schools closed altogether (Schoffeleers 1976, 261). Consequently, the central and southern regions of Malawi, largely Chewa populated areas, have the highest rates of illiteracy even currently (Malawi Population and Housing Census Report 2018, 23).

Further conflict ensued when the *nyau*, often on the deathbed, agreed to Catholic baptism. This gave Catholics rites to perform the funeral, which is *the* focal point of the *Gule Wamkulu* (Schoffeleers and Linden, 1972, 267). Catholics and the Chewa fought over burial rites as both believed their funeral practices had significant implications for the future of the deceased spirit (Linden 1975, 37). The *nyau* pushed on the missionaries saying "We Chewa, cannot allow our customs to disappear. They are the legacy of our ancestors. We hold to them as sacred things" (Schofeleers and Linden 1972, 267). Linden says of the situation, "Throughout Chewa country the *Nyau* became a major object of missionary attack, and simultaneously the *Nyau* developed as the main focus of cultural opposition" (Linden 1975, 33). He goes on to say, "To dance *Nyau* was to support traditional society and to show respect for the elders. It was to be Chewa" (Linden 1975, 33). Kaspin relates how missionary pressure led to the proliferation of *nyau* as the chiefs lowered the age of initiation to counteract missionary pressure to put children in school (Kaspin 1993, 37).

Christianity and the *Gule Wamkulu* are at odds with one another. Grant Maulidi, a Baptist pastor near the capital city of Lilongwe, says that in some cases the *nyau* will kidnap young men and take them to be initiated. Parents must either redeem them with an exorbitant payment or allow them to continue in the society. Many parents cannot afford the price and must leave their children in *nyau*, who at least sometimes do not allow their members to participate in Christian churches (Grant Maulidi, interview with author, 3 August 2022). Gabriel Machili, another Lilongwe area Baptist pastor, reiterates Maulidi's story (Gabriel Machili, interview with author, 4 August 2022). Boys who enter the *nyau* often leave the church (Machili 2019, 5). Kaspin says there is a dualistic choice between *nyau* and Christianity. The latter is always identified with the outside, something foreign (Kaspin 1993, 50). The question of Christian interaction with the *Gule Wamkulu* is an old and central missiological question of contextualization.

Contextualization depends first on sound understanding of a practice (Hiebert 1985, loc 2277–2295). However, it is impossible to uncritically treat a cultural practice as a neutral object. The *Gule Wamkulu* is not an "it" that can be objectively and scientifically explicated. Every description is at once an interpretation. Thus, the honest description also blatantly declares its interpretive lens. This article is an etic attempt to interpret

aspects of the *Gule Wamkulu* through a Christian interpretive lens, which will allow contextualization to take place on surer footing. This effort is by no means provides a final answer, as contextualization should be inclusive of Christian emic perspectives and be more comprehensive than this presentation allows. Rather, this is a modest attempt by an outsider to theologically interpret one aspect of the *Gule Wamkulu*, its cosmic relational component, and provide tentative proposals for Christian engagement.

The thesis of this article is that the *Gule Wamkulu* among the Chewa people of Malawi attempts to maintain cosmic relationships in a truncated and misdirected form, and Christians must subversively fulfill its relational longings with the Christian gospel. In order to effectively substantiate this, the first step is to define the operative theology of religions in terms of idolatry and "magnetic points." This makes explicit the interpretive grid for evaluation of the *Gule Wamkulu*. The next task is to describe the *Gule Wamkulu* in terms of its content and primary function, specifically delving into its cosmic significance. The final section will propose ways in which Christian missionary engagement may subversively fulfill the social and cosmic impulse of the *Gule Wamkulu*.

Theology of Religions

Quite boldly, Daniel Strange defines other religions as "*sovereignly directed, variegated and dynamic, collective human idolatrous responses to divine revelation behind which stand deceiving demonic forces*" (Strange 2014, 41). In *Their Rock is Not Like Our Rock*, Strange argues convincingly that all non-Christian religions are idolatrous expressions of false faith. However, because of the *imago Dei* and what he calls "remnantal" revelation (Strange 2014, 120), they are not altogether false in every sense. Thus, all religions contain elements of perverted truth. It is these elements of perversion that comprise what Bavinck calls "points of contact" or better yet "points of attack" for evangelical engagement (Bavinck 1960, 140). Because Strange's definition of other religions stems soundly from Scripture, it is the starting point for the interpretation of the *Gule Wamkulu* that follows.

Due to the *imago Dei* and "remnantal" revelation, one can speak of what Bavinck describes as five "magnetic points." These are aspects of every worldview "that time and again irresistibly compel human religious thought" (Bolt, Bratt, and Visser 2013, 226). The first is "an experience of totality" (Bolt, Bratt, and Visser 2013, 151) or an "intuition concerning the totality," what this article refers to as a cosmic connection (Bolt, Bratt,

and Visser 2013, 162). This concerns relationship with the surrounding world (Strange 2014, 251). The second is "the notion of the norm," the fact that one "has to consider the norm by which his thoughts will be judged" (Bolt, Bratt, and Visser 2013, 163). It is how every culture/religion provides a governing structure for society. The third is a connection with the divine. Bavinck says, "Human history shows that awareness of a connection with a higher power has been present everywhere and among all peoples" (Bolt, Bratt, and Visser 2013, 182). The fourth is concerned with salvation. Again, Bavinck says, "One of the very real constituents of universal religious consciousness is the need for deliverance" (Bolt, Bratt, and Visser 2013, 183). Lastly, the final magnetic point relates to fate. Bavinck says that "human life is only thinkable as a continuous dialogue between action and fate" (Bolt, Bratt, and Visser 2013, 192). Every religion attempts to work out that tension.

Every one of these magnetic points identifies an area of connection and engagement for Christian witness. Every religion somehow "gropes" (Acts 17:27) for God in these aspects precisely because of the *imago Dei* and "remnantal" revelation. Yet, Satan actively deceives within every non-Christian religion and tries to answer their compulsions with a false faith. Therein is where Christianity must "subversively fulfill" each religious answer. Strange pulls from Hendrik Kraemer's singular mention of the term and utilizes it as an interpretive grid for Christian engagement of the religious other. Christ does not simply fulfill other religions because many of their concepts and desires are misguided. Thus, Strange claims that "even the most contextualized communication of the gospel must issue in an appeal and a call for repentance: a turning from idols to the living and true God" (Strange 2014, 268). Christ subverts other religions by fulfilling their deepest desires in unexpected and unintended ways. The remainder of this article is an interpretation of the *Gule Wamkulu* with the presupposition that it is a false faith, an idolatrous expression, that nevertheless has a connection with truth which must be subversively fulfilled in Christ.

Interpretation of *Gule Wamkulu* in Malawi

General Description

The *Gule Wamkulu* is the "great dance" of the *nyau* society of specially initiated Chewa persons. Schoffeleers offers an apt description of the *nyau* which is worth quoting at length to provide a basis for further discussion:

> *Nyau* is the name for a masked dance and for the societies which stage this dance. Traditionally, *nyau* dances are staged at funeral ceremonies, or

> rather the closing ceremonies which take place from a few months to a year or so after the funeral, and at initiation ceremonies. Nowadays, they are also performed at national celebrations and cultural demonstrations. A full-scale *nyau* performance lasts several days and is synchronized with the final stages of beer-brewing. There are quite definite rules about when a certain mask should or should not perform; what kind of movements are appropriate for each type of mask, and what songs have to accompany its dance. There are dancers wearing human masks, all of which are male except one known by the name of Maria or Dona. Others wear masks representing animal faces, or a combination of human and animal features. The *nyau* also make large structures of wickerwork and maize leaves or other materials, representing an elephant, a large antelope, an ostrich or a zebu cow. More recently again there have been imitations of motor cars, lake steamers and other modern inventions. All these representations show enormous ingenuity and a great sense of humour. Most of the *nyau* dances take place in the slack period between harvest and hoeing for the next season, which is also the appointed time for initiations and a number of other rituals (Schofeleers 1976, 59).

This brief but succent portrayal provides enough of a starting point to launch interpretive work. Due to the limited space of this article, the examination is limited to how the *Gule Wamkulu* establishes cosmic relationships in Chewa society. However, the other magnetic points provide significant clues to the cohesive Chewa worldview and opportunities for Christian engagement.

Gule Wamkulu and the Cosmos

It would be impossible to rightly understand the power of the *Gule Wamkulu* without seeing how the dance ties the Chewa community to each other and the outside world. Kaspin acutely says the *nyau* societies "constitute a major part of social experience, drawing an extended community together on numerous occasions to create the largest arena of sociality that rural Chewa know" (Kaspin 1993, 39). In order to demonstrate this, what follows is a selected interpretation of the masks, elements of the dance, and an explanation of its social significance.

The Masks

The masks are the most visible and obvious aspect of the otherwise secretive *nyau*. However, fully describing them is difficult because there are a plethora of masks and a

seemingly corresponding multitude of interpretations. They appear under three broad categories of animal masks, human masks, and modern technological masks. Researchers also divide the masks into nocturnal and diurnal categories, the animals related to the former and personalized masks the latter (Schlofeleers and Linden 1972, 258; Kaspin 1993, 41). De Aguilar says that some of the masks originated merely as imitation of animals. It was later that a group of Chewa, the political Phiri group, utilized the masks as representative of deceased spirits. Then a later group of masks immerged as representations of human characters, like slave traders from Portugal, Catholic women, and English colonizing officers (de Aguilar 1994, 8–10).

In 1950, W. H. J. Rangeley set out to describe the various masks. Space prevents a full articulation of his findings. However, a full reading of his article along with Van Breugal's updated description is most helpful in this regard (Rangeley 1950, 19–33). What follows is a description of some of the more common and significant masks according to the categories of animal, human, and technology. Technological masks are only mentioned in brief and within the human masks because of their rarity and small number.

Animal Masks

It is perhaps telling of the origins and central focus of the *Gule Wamkulu* that all masks are called *zilombo* (wild beasts). The *njovu*, "elephant," is the most revered of the masks. Despite the multiple explanations of each mask found in the literature and the ambivalence of interviewees, this is perhaps the one point of agreement. It must have its own *dambwe* (staging place) and always dances on the last day (Rangeley 1950, 19). The *njovu* is king of the masks. Van Bruegal says it only comes at the death of a chief (Bruegel 2001, 157). Although, Linden says it also appears at the girls' initiation (Linden 1975, 32). During funerals, the large costume is carried into the local chief's house until the mourners move the body to the graveyard. While the funeral procession moves at a typical solemn pace, the *njovu* mask runs to the gravesite (Agness Kachala, interview with author, 4 August 2022). One *Gule Wamkulu* participant said that attendance at the dance of the *njovu* requires a special initiation. To be initiated, he claims, means that one had to kill a family member and sleep with his sister. If a non-initiate should attend the dance, they would die. Even if the *njovu* inadvertently steps on someone in the path, the person would die. If *njovu* brushes against a woman, she would become barren. The interviewee attributes this to the magic of the dancers, not the mask itself (Agness Kachala, interview with author, 4 August 2022).

There are multiple other animal masks, including a rabbit, antelope, baboon, bush pig, python, black mamba, lion, and jackal. The masked dancers imitate the animals both in appearance and behavior. Schoffeleers says that the *nyau* is typical of other similar societies, where "contact with the gods is not sought through mediating agents such [sic] sacrifice and prayer but by the reenactments of some primeval event in which the gods were involved" (Schoffeleers 1976, 63). He approvingly quotes Edouard Foa and says the dance is "a ballet portraying the temporary reconciliation between men and animals and their subsequent separation" and "touches on a central theme in Chewa and indeed Bantu theology, viz. that of the relationship between man and animal, or in a somewhat wider perspective, the relationship between man and his natural environment" (Schoffeleers 1976, 63). Thus, the animal dances demonstrate at least temporary reconciliation with the animal world.

Figure 1: *Ng'ombe* (cow) mask

However, Breugal observes that the animal mask are all fearsome animals that can kill people. They "represent powerful spirits" and some of them "the *mizimu* [spirits] of honoured elders" (Breugal 2001, 157). He sees a much more direct connection between the animals and spirits. However, interviewees may tell outsiders they have no special significance other than to entertain people (Amati, interview with author, 5 August 2022). This is possibly due to Christianization and modernization. However, it is hard to believe that within the Chewa worldview there are not at least some who see a deeper spiritual significance. This is an area that needs further exploration. Yet, it is safe to conclude that the animal masks represent connection with at least the animal world and likely, in many cases, the spirit world.

Human Masks

There are a large number and variety of human masks. Even the *njovu*, who otherwise dances alone, often performs with up to six human masks who portray hunters pursuing the *njovu*. A special human mask called *makanja* dances on stilts up to eight feet long (Rangeley 1950, 25). The dance is dangerous to perform but exemplifies Chewa dancing skill and creativity.

Figure 2: *Makanja* mask

Figure 3: Human mask

Figure 4: Other human masks

De Aguilar also makes a convincing argument that the *makanja* mask is a representation of Kenyan people, the tall and lanky warrior types (de Aguilar 1994, 46). Breugal sees the mask as "the spirit of a deceased *mfiti* [witch] who after his death continues to perpetuate evil deeds" (Bruegal 2001, 162). Once again, it is difficult to know if the correct interpretation is spiritual or anthropocentric, or a combination.

Other dancers explicitly imitate the spirits of the dead. Kadyankadzi portrays a fierce and troublesome human. The name means "he who eats *nkadzi* trees," which are typically found at the graveyard. This dancer is especially known to chase people in the village throughout the day (Rangeley 1950, 27–28). Breugal sees this mask also as a portrayal of evil spirits "who had no heart for their fellowmen and who themselves have no peace" (Breugal 2001, 164). Clearly, at least some of the masks directly connect to the spirit realm.

De Aguilar traces developments in mask making alongside historical developments. For example, there are depictions of Arab slave traders in some *Gule Wamkulu* groups (de Aguilar 1994, 38). There is also the *Chilembwe* mask, which derives from the historical figure and national hero John Chilembwe. He was a Malawian who led an uprising against British plantation owners. In response, the British sent soldiers who attacked and killed Chilembwe and his followers. The mask, ironically, is a horse, likely portraying the British pursuers (de Aguilar 1994, 44). Though it seems in many contexts the mask has lost its connection with Chilembwe and taken on new interpretations (de Aguilar 1994, 45). Breugal groups the mask among the animal dancers and says he is an angry spirit (Breugal 2001, 159). Another mask is Mr. Davis, a historical figure who reportedly recruited young Malawian men to work in South Africa. One also finds other historical figures like King George V, Charlie Chaplin, Elvis, and even modern inventions like cars, helicopters, and buses (de Aguilar 1994, 47–9). Simon Peter, Joseph, and Mary make an appearance in *Gule*, obviously a development related to the arrival of Christianity (Rangeley 1950, 28–30). *Gule* participants likely variously interpret the masks, but they surely indicate a fluid connection with the developing world around them.

Interpretation of Masks

Probst proffers that the meaning of the masks is best understood using the Chewa term *fano*. *Fano* is not an exact replica but "in the sense of being a product of imagination" or "an inner image" or "affective likeness and resemblance not one of visual identity" (Probst 2002, 195). This object behind the *fano* may be a spirit or even other objects such as foreign colonizers, movie actors, or vehicles. Thus, the "meaning of the *nyau* masks

is always polyvalent" (Probst 2002, 196). Because of their flexibility, "*nyau* actively adjusts and adapts elements outside the village sphere and transforms them into the something belonging to *nyau*" (Probst 2002, 196).

Kaspin sees the masks and accompanying dance as "appropriation" of the spirits of the dead. The village eats meat and dances with animals from outside the village, while the village gives their dead to the spirits (Kaspin 1993, 42). Ranger also sees a spiritual value, as "definitely connected with spirit worship and reincarnation of the dead" (Rangeley 1949, 36). It seems best to say the masks themselves offer a connection between the living and the dead, between animals and man, and between Chewa and the surrounding changing world.

The Dance

The *nyau* dance at funerals of significant persons or of deceased members, at a memorial service called a *chiliza*, or at the special request of the chief. Alternatively, they can take place as long as someone agrees to pay for it. Breugal says that the *Gule Wamkulu*, happens most often at the *chiliza*. Several villages may band together at one time for a memorial service (Breugal 2001, 141). Based on the author's experience, they may also do a *chiliza* service for many deceased at the same time. These take place most often between harvest season and the planting season, from August to November (Bruegal 2001, 141).

The *chiliza* begins with women leading a procession with shakers, which are "eyes" for the *nyau* (Gabriel Machili, interview with author, 4 August 2022). Various masked *nyau* roam the village harassing people, even those participating in the memorial. The actual performance of the dance, which takes place the night of the *chiliza* service, is a dizzying array of polyphonic rhythms, intricate dancing, and audience participation. Machili reports that every dance is accompanied by six drums, each with an animal skin playing surface and a specific size. The drummers warm them by a fire before a performance (Machili 2019, 16). Women singers stand next to the drummers, providing a sort of background choir for the dance.

Figure 5: Women choir and drums

Figure 6: *Chiliza* memorial procession. Note the nyau dancer in the fluorescent vest.

Figure 7: *Chiliza* procession

Figure 8: *Chiliza* procession led by chiefs' wives and nyau dancer

Figure 9: Chiefs' wives placing flower arrangement on graves

At the dance this author attended, the dancers solicited money as they danced. Each mask took his turn in the *bwalo* (dancing field) and each with a particular style suitable to the mask they wore. Much like at a Chewa wedding, the participants expect the more well-to-do attendees to give the performers money. Usually, the givers use small denominations so that the giving takes more time. However, it is significant to note that the performance the author attended was specially arranged for non-initiated persons and solely for entertainment. This was just prior to a *chiliza*.

> Schoffeleers and Linden report:
> In the course of the performance women are subjected to insults, obscenities, and vituperative male behaviour. In the Chewa *nyau* the initiate is required to run through the village of the matrilineage into which he has married to steal chickens from his mother-in-law. This pronounced sexual antagonism plays an important role in the resolution of social conflict within the traditional matrilineal society of the Chewa people (Schoffeleers and Linden 1972, 258).

Dancers freely approach audience members totally free of the respectful humble interactions common to society otherwise. It is a communal event, where, apart from special permission from the chief, only the initiated participate.

Sociological Significance

The *nyau* carries significant sociological weight. One of the chief reasons the *nyau* is so significant is because the Chewa is a matrilineal tribe. A married man is termed a *mkamwini*, or "one who belongs somewhere else" (Kachapira 2006, 327). So, though the village chief is the owner of the *nyau*, it was nevertheless composed of marginalized men who found solidarity with other marginalized men (Kachapira 2006, 328). Schoffeelers and Linden say that the "*Nyau* cult has been of great religious and social significance to the Chewa-speaking peoples of Malawi.... Its function in the small Chewa village societies was to reconcile conflicting loyalties and provide alternate pathways to status within the framework of traditional values" (Schoffeeler and Linden 1972, 271). It is also a "social safety valve, venting tensions that may build within a closed community reliant on consensual decision making" (Curran 1999, 68). It is crucial in maintaining the sociological structure.

The *nyau* sit in a slightly paradoxical relationship with the village chief. In one sense he is the owner of the *nyau* in his village. According to Kaspin, the village chieftaincy and the ownership of the *nyau* is virtually synonymous (Kaspin 1993, 36). But in another sense, he is unable to prosecute crime by *nyau*. Schoffeelers and Linden quote one chief as saying, "You cannot arrest and punish an animal which has hurt you because what he did was pure accident. There is no case because there is no accused" (Schoffeelers and Linden 1972, 258). Thus, they conclude, "Thus the *Nyau* member finds in the society a world in which all the normal rules of behavior are reversed, a relative autonomy, financial benefits and an alternative structure in which to rise in social status" (Schoffeelers and Linden 1972, 258).

Each ceremony of the *nyau* reinforces social construction. They occasion the separation of men and women into their ceremonial roles. During funerals, men prepare the grave and the dances while women prepare food and grieve the dead. At the same time, the village takes advantage of the time to initiate new girls and boys. Each group receives and participates in their "secret knowledge," their particular *mwambo* (Kaspin 1993, 40).

The central connective level for the *nyau* is at the local village and within the matrilineage, rather than tribe-wide (Linden 1975, 32). It is a counterforce to centralized governance, indigenous or foreign (Linden 1975, 38). It has served in the role whether against Chewa families who wanted to centralize power, Ngoni conquerors, British colonizers, or Christian missionaries (Linden and Linden 1974, 117).

Yet, it is also significant that *Gule Wamkulu* dances seem to almost always involve neighboring villages (de Aguilar 1996, 11). It focuses on the local village, yet connects Chewa across a particular area.

Summary of Cosmic Function

To summarize the meaning of *Gule Wamkulu* in its cosmic role, it serves as a representation of at least temporary reconciliation between humanity and the animal world, connectivity and appeasement of the spirit world, and a means of maintaining strained social relationships. Schoffeleers and Linden say, "In cosmic terms they may be interpreted as a re-enactment of the primal co-existence of the three categories of men, animals, and spirits in friendship, and their subsequent division by fire" (Schoffeelers and Linden 1972, 257). The masks, the dance, and its social arrangement give the Chewa a way to relate to their place in the world. Or, as Kaspin puts it, "[T]he dance always contains at least two levels of meaning. It points to the "symbiotic" relationship between "the human world and an external world" and "inscribes" that relationship on Chewa society and human relationships (Kaspin 1993, 44). Curran also claims that the dance represents a reconciliation of the spirits and the living within village (Curran 1999, 68). Yet, this is no theologically neutral function or performance. Thus, the remainder of this section is a theological interpretation of the cosmic role of the *Gule Wamkulu*.

Theological Interpretation of Cosmic Role

First, even if the animal masks *only* function to portray restoration between animal and man, the reconciliation is a façade. Malawians live in avid fear of snakes, dogs, chameleons, among other animals. A dance cannot truly restore peace between man and animal. The world needs a greater reconciliation, one where "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb" (Isa 11:6). The *Gule Wamkulu* pushes restoration into the present and only by symbol, with no hope of real and future reconciliation.

Secondly, if it is true, as seems to likely often be the case, that the masked dancers represent a connection with the spirits of the dead and a means of appeasement, the dance pulls the future hope of reconciliation into the present and twists it from hope to fear. The Bible does not speak of the spirits of the deceased interfering with the lives of the living. Non-physical beings do truly exist, both angelic and demonic. However, the souls of the deceased are either with Christ or separated from him in judgement and do not come to either harass or help the living. Scripture does not call people to please the spirits but to please God. Demons could likely pose as spirits of the deceased to attract

attention to themselves and steal true worship. The effort to please the spirits through the *Gule Wamkulu* is an idolatrous focus on demons posing as spirits of the deceased.

Third, the *Gule Wamkulu* provides a way for the disgruntled and underprivileged and outcasts to participate in community and offer their complaint. While this is a commendable attempt to maintain community, it attempts to do so in ways that will never finally achieve unity. Scripture plainly teaches that God is bringing the world together in Christ (Eph 2:14). Apart from Christ there can never be true unity. Rather than persons finding peace because of honest confession of sin and loving rebuke, the Chewa attempt restoration through special occasions of open protocol breaking and sanctioned inappropriateness. It achieves only a veneer unity through underhanded means.

Subversive Fulfillment as Missional Application

Having interpreted the *Gule Wamkulu* through the magnetic point of cosmic connection, it is time to propose ways in which Christian witness might engage it as it truly is. The first set of proposals deal with evangelical engagement and the second with contextualized discipleship. The first point for Christian connection to the Chewa is love for story, song, dance, and drama as communicative media. At first glance, it seems as if one could almost reproduce a *Gule Wamkulu* dance that illustrates the gospel story. However, local Christians have repeatedly stressed that doing so would be confusing to Chewa people. A local church planter says that the *Gule Wamkulu* and Christianity are two separate things that cannot be brought together. This is because beneath the mask, there are always levels of "medicine" and magic. The Chewa are not able to separate the two (John Masale, interview with author, 19 August 2022). However, drama, song, and dance make wonderfully culturally appropriate modes of communication. Machili, a pastor in a *Gule Wamkulu* area, proposes the use of the same drums, same tunes, and some of the same ceremonies. He says these are powerful attractions for the Chewa (Gabriel Machili, interview with author, 4 August 2022). Wise missionary engagement will utilize this aspect.

Secondly, the first point of attack toward worldview content is to stress that cosmic connection is found only in Christ. The Chewa rightly long for cosmic reconciliation but wrongly seek it through symbolic reenactment and wrongly aim it toward spirits of dead ancestors. Christ is redeeming the world and reconciling every part of it, similar to the longings of the Chewa. The animal world, spirit world, and human world is the object of

Christ's redemption. Yet, evangelists must preach that the division comes from man's sin. Only Christ has removed the barrier and the curse. The Chewa must turn from trusting their tradition, the dance, the mask, or a secret society for reconciliation. Christ's coming has initiated the great reconciliation, and only faith in him brings one into the community of the reconciled.

Thirdly, in light of the longing for communal connection demonstrated in the *Gule Wamkulu*, evangelists do well to emphasize the African historic roots of Christianity. Kwame Bediako articulated his concern that Christianity may strip the African of their identity. However, there is a way in which to become Christian is to become truly African (Hartman 2022, 10). To embrace Christianity is not to embrace a Western religion, but one that has deep historic and global roots. Evangelists do well to stress the African connections to the Christian story. Even though African Christians lose part of their local community in coming to Christ, they gain a great historic global community. Christians must emphasize and the Chewa must embrace the broader and more historic community.

Fourthly, Christians should evangelize the chiefs rather than merely condemn them. The chiefs feel the weight of responsibility to please their community, a cherished value especially outside of the West. Many of them want to also hold allegiance to Christ while serving their traditional communities. Evangelists should use dialogue to help the chiefs see where *Gule Wamkulu* practices contradict Scripture and require repentance, yet also affirm the positive values of the *Gule*, such as value of community and participation in God's wider creation. They are open to conversation and could be key to engagement of the wider Chewa community. This is not to say that the chiefs should hold onto the *Gule Wamkulu* as it is, but to say Christians should engage them in relationship like Jesus with the tax collectors, rather than in Pharisaical censure.

Lastly, evangelic witness and Christian maturation requires expansion of the Chewa timeline into the future. The preoccupation with the present virtually erodes the concept of future tense salvation so central to gospel proclamation. Moltmann rightly noted the significance of the future saying, "A proper theology would therefore have to be constructed in the light of its future goal. Eschatology should not be its end, but its beginning" (Moltmann 1967, 16). Eschatology is not an appendix to theology but "is the medium of faith as such, the key in which everything is set, the glow that suffuses everything here in the dawn of an expected new day" (Moltmann 1967, 16). Without this locus, Christian witness is all too susceptible to the deception of the prosperity gospel and over-realized eschatology. Christian evangelism and discipleship must incorporate

inaugurated eschatology, filling out the future tense concept, which is a possible, but often ignored, aspect of Chewa thought (Schilt 2021).

This is significant for evangelism as salvation from future judgement is a core component of gospel understanding. Apart from the concept of future judgement, salvation is always merely concerned with this world and misses the large-scale salvation from eternal damnation. Kaspin encapsulates the struggle when he says *nyau* concepts of "reincarnation on earth," of the "return of the spirit of the dead to the land of the living" always misconstrue the passion and resurrection of Christ (Kaspin 1993, 53). Salvation is pressed into the present and earthly. Addressing this issue calls for evangelism that recognizes and addresses the present challenges of Malawian life, while still concerning itself with the urgent need of rescue from the day of wrath.

The concept of time is also significant for discipleship. Believers only concerned with the present will have a truncated motivation for evangelism and tend toward works-based Christianity. Everything is based on quid-pro-quo. The motivation of present sacrifice for future reward is cut off. This bleeds into issues of financial stewardship, family discipleship, missiological strategy, leadership development, among many other topics. There is a great need to teach Chewa Christians inaugurated eschatology and the many implications for the Christian life. Delving into all that entails is beyond the scope of the article, but it is surely a significant touch point for contextualization.

As a reorientation of time makes the first component of discipling the Chewa conception of the cosmos, the second involves reshaping the way social tensions are worked out. The *nyau* structure provides a passive-aggressive way of only releasing social tensions. Rather than addressing offenses directly, participants retreat to their own private group where they may protest mistreatment in concealment. Even dissention within gender specific groups is handled via manipulation and witchcraft. The Christian gospel calls for more open discussion of issues, mutual forgiveness, and restoration (Matt 18:15–35). Believers maintain unity according to biblical instruction, in confession and forgiveness.

Conclusion

The *Gule Wamkulu* among the Chewa people of Malawi maintain cosmic relationships in a truncated and misdirected form that must be subversively fulfilled by the Christian gospel. In terms of cosmic connection, the *Gule Wamkulu* rightly recognizes the need for

community and reconciliation of all realms but attempts to do so through inadequate means and for misguided purposes. As such, it is a false faith from which adherents must repent. Repentance does not entail leaving dance, song, drama, perhaps costumes, or even communal values, but it does mean fixing hope of reconciliation ultimately on Christ and his future complete restorative work. Only when the Chewa see this can they know true community as everything brought together in Christ (Col 1:19–20).

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The Kind of Person God Uses to Catalyze a Movement: Traits and Competencies of Effective Movement Catalysts

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1. Introduction

We define a movement as a rapid indigenous multiplication of disciples making disciples and churches planting churches in multiple streams within a people group to the fourth generation. What traits and competencies characterize pioneers who have been instrumental in catalyzing a movement? What traits and competencies distinguish these effective movement catalysts from those who have not catalyzed a movement? These two questions form the basis of an extensive Catalyst Competence Research project by Bethany Research Institute in 2020-21.

The study had a sample size of 307 pioneer missionaries, of which 147 had catalyzed a movement and the remaining 160 had not. Participants represented the largest mega-cultures of the world, with a focus on the regions or groupings where most movements have occurred, specifically Francophone Africa, East Africa, India, Indonesia, Latin America, and Ethnic Chinese.

Participants completed an online survey with 95 questions. Forty-five of them also gave in-depth interviews.

2. Developing a List of Traits and Competencies

Based on a review of the relevant literature on empirical leadership studies and apostolic and movement leadership (including Prinz, 2016; 2022), a list was developed of 24 trait and competency constructs. These 24 constructs were grouped into three domains, as shown in Table 1 on the next page.

1. The "Big Five" domain, consisting of traits and competencies related to personality and character
2. The "Spiritual" domain, consisting of traits and competencies of a spiritual nature, to do with one's relationship to God
3. The "Socio-Influential" domain: traits and competencies having to do with relating with others, describing social behavior and ways to influence others

Table 1: Trait and Competency Constructs, Grouped into Three Domains

Section 1: Individual traits and competencies ("Big Five" domain)	Section 2: Spiritual traits and competencies ("Spiritual" domain)	Section 3: Social Influence traits and competencies ("Socio-Influential" domain)
1. Openness to experience	1. Hunger for God	1. Extroversion
2. Creativity	2. Listening to God	2. Assertiveness
3. Drive to achieve	3. Evangelistic Zeal	3. Inspiring Personality
4. Conscientiousness	4. Expectant Faith	4. Influencing Beliefs
5. Internal locus of control	5. Fervent Intercession	5. Inspiring Shared Vision
6. Persistence	6. Tangible Love	(Number 6 was cut after pretest)
7. Agreeableness	7. Confidence in Locals	7. Disciple-making
8. Flexibility	8. Confidence in the Bible	8. Empowering
9. Emotional stability		

In a pretest, a survey with 125 questions (25 trait and competency constructs measured through five questions each) was administered to a pretest group of 181 students, missions agency staff and missionaries, and Global South missionaries around the world.

In the following tables we will present respondents' average self-ratings for the 24 trait and competency constructs (TCs) measured through 44 different questions. The traits and competencies are labeled TC1-1-1 through TC3-8-1. The numbering TC1 to TC3 is based on three domains described above.

3. Traits and Competencies at Construct Level

All the trait and competency constructs had been identified in the literature review as those universally correlated with leadership effectiveness by empirical research. So it does not come as a surprise that out of the 24 traits and competencies, effective catalysts rated themselves higher than non-catalysts for 21 of them. (In each case, the means difference between catalysts and non-catalysts was statistically significant.) For 13 of these, the difference between catalysts and control group was at least 1/3 of a Likert point (>0.33), and for seven of them it was almost half a Likert point (>0.46). The practical significance of a difference substantially below a half or one-third of a Likert point is unclear.

Table 2 on the next page shows the trait and competency constructs that mark effective movement catalysts, sorted by self-rating by catalysts in descending order. Traits and competencies identified in the leadership literature review as characteristic of effective leaders are also rated highly by the effective movement catalysts.

The only exceptions are the constructs at the bottom of the table, each with a rating lower than 4.0: *flexibility*, *extroversion*, and *emotional stability*. (The role of intercession will be discussed further below as there was a different reason for its low rating.)

Table 2: Trait and Competency Constructs Sorted by Self-Rating

Trait and Competency Constructs	Catalyst	Control	Difference	Standard Deviation	MWU test
TC2-7 **Confidence in Locals**	4.88	4.53	0.36	0.77	**< 0.0001**
TC2-8 **Confidence in the Bible**	4.77	4.39	0.37	0.81	**< 0.0001**
TC3-2 **Assertiveness**	4.77	4.29	0.48	0.84	**< 0.0001**
TC3-4 **Influencing Beliefs**	4.7	4.19	0.51	0.74	**< 0.0001**
TC1-4 **Conscientiousness**	4.69	4.41	0.29	0.85	**0.0009**
TC2-6 **Genuine love**	4.69	4.43	0.27	0.87	**0.0115**
TC2-3 **Evangelistic Zeal**	4.68	4.39	0.28	0.64	**0.0003**
TC2-4 **Expectant Faith**	4.67	4.36	0.31	0.94	**< 0.0001**
TC3-5 **Inspiring Shared Vision**	4.66	4.23	0.43	0.77	**< 0.0001**
TC3-7 **Disciple-making**	4.65	4.07	0.58	0.96	**< 0.0001**
TC3-8 **Empowering**	4.63	4.11	0.53	0.97	**< 0.0001**
TC1-7 **Agreeableness**	4.6	4.16	0.44	0.92	**< 0.0001**
TC3-3 **Inspiring Personality**	4.6	4.06	0.54	0.92	**< 0.0001**
TC2-1 **Hunger for God**	4.51	4.15	0.35	0.74	**< 0.0001**
TC2-2 **Listening to God**	4.51	4.16	0.35	0.74	**0.0001**
TC1-1 **Openness to Experience**	4.44	4.19	0.25	0.93	**0.0302**
TC1-5 **Internal locus of control**	4.43	4.11	0.32	0.99	**0.0023**
TC1-3 **Drive to achieve**	4.41	4.14	0.27	0.75	**0.0074**
Average of all traits and competencies	4.41	4.06	0.34	0.5	**< 0.0001**
TC1-2 **Creativity**	4.32	3.86	0.46	0.83	**< 0.0001**
TC1-6 **Persistence**	4.3	3.98	0.31	0.98	**0.0213**
TC2-5 **Fervent Intercession**	3.83	3.07	0.76	1.02	**< 0.0001**
TC1-8 Flexibility	3.47	3.63	-0.16	0.93	0.1213
TC3-1 Extroversion	3.27	3.37	-0.1	1.04	0.6919
TC1-9 Emotional stability	3.01	3.15	-0.14	1.2	0.1736

To try to understand the reasons why three traits and competencies were not verified, we offer some possible explanations. *Flexibility* brings strengths in certain situations, and potential weaknesses in others. Empirical studies have shown that leaders are universally marked by flexibility (Stogdill, 1984; 1974; House and Aditya, 1997); apparently this is less true of effective movement catalysts. Without further research, we are at this point unable to offer a clear explanation as to why this trait is not a significant marker of movement catalysts.

Extroversion is measured in this study on a behavioral level, not as a psychological inclination. At times, and as the situation demands, catalysts can be assertive, while at other times they may choose more introverted behaviors, giving space to others with the intent of empowering them. In balancing the two, catalysts may deliberately hold themselves back.

With regard to emotional stability, there is no apparent explanation as to why catalysts do not see themselves as very emotionally mature and stable, and able to regulate their emotions in ways helpful for interactions with others.

Looking at the list as a whole, practitioners will benefit as they see what are the traits and competencies of those pioneers that God uses to catalyze a movement. It will give them a basis for an honest self-assessment of how much they have developed each of these traits and competencies, and help them to identify their biggest gaps, and thus provide direction for their ongoing development.

4. Findings at the Question Level

In the process of crafting survey questions, each construct was operationalized, and questions were formulated that describe the affective or cognitive dispositions or the behavior of catalysts. Table 3 shows the 22 responses among all 44 survey questions, measuring trait and competency constructs where (a) catalysts rated themselves the highest (⩾4.50), (b) catalysts and control group show a statistically significant difference, and (c) that difference amounted to at least 1/3 of a Likert scale point (⩾0.33). Responses are sorted by catalyst self-rating in descending order.

Table 3: Self-ratings for the 44 Questions Testing for Traits and Competencies Sorted by Highest Catalyst Ratings

Questions measuring traits and competencies	Catalysts	Control group	Difference	MWU test (p value)
TC2-1-3 **Hunger for God** Deep down, I feel a hunger to know God more and to be closer to His heart. Qn37	4.93	4.61	0.33	**0.006**
TC2-7-2 **Confidence in Locals** I am confident that God grows and uses new disciples - He can use them as much or more than He can use me. Qn55	4.88	4.53	0.36	**0.005**
TC2-2-2 **Listening to God** I regularly spend time seeking God's guidance. Qn39	4.84	4.46	0.38	**0.004**
TC2-3-3 **Evangelistic Zeal** I regularly think about more effective ways we can share the Gospel. Qn43	4.78	4.4	0.38	**<0.0001**
TC3-5-3 **Inspiring Shared Vision** To those around me, I express confidence that our goals will be achieved. Qn61	4.78	4.28	0.5	**0**
TC1-3-4 **Drive to Achieve** Setting and achieving goals motivates me. Qn38	4.78	4.26	0.52	**0**
TC2-8-1 **Confidence in the Bible** Others would describe me as someone who has a deep confidence in the power of the Bible for discipling and ministry. Qn67	4.77	4.39	0.37	**0.007**
TC3-2-2 **Assertiveness** I am motivated to influence and bring change, wherever I go. Qn63	4.77	4.29	0.48	**0**
TC2-2-1 **Listening to God** Others would describe me as a person who is strongly dependent on God for my life and ministry. Qn60	4.71	4.28	0.44	**0.003**
TC3-4-4 **Influencing Beliefs** I regularly communicate my most important values and beliefs to others. Qn53	4.71	4.19	0.52	**<0.0001**
TC1-3-3 **Drive to Achieve** Once I set a goal, I am motivated to work until I have attained it. Qn32	4.7	4.36	0.34	**0.005**

Table 3 continued on next page

Table 3 Continued

Questions measuring traits and competencies	Catalysts	Control group	Difference	MWU test (p value)
TC3-4-1 **Influencing Beliefs** I regularly talk about my most important values and beliefs. Qn62	4.7	4.19	0.51	**0.001**
TC2-3-1 **Evangelistic Zeal** Others would describe me as a person who is passionate about seeing as many people as possible saved. Qn63	4.68	4.35	0.33	**0**
TC1-6-2 **Persistence** When things get hard, I am tenacious and push through until the job is done. Qn34	4.68	4.27	0.41	**0.049**
TC3-7-1 **Disciple-making** My disciples give me the feedback that me discipling them has led to character formation and greater obedience to God. Qn48	4.65	4.07	0.58	**<0.0001**
TC3-8-1 **Empowering Others** would describe me as someone who empowers others and develops their potential. Qn44	4.63	4.11	0.53	**0.004**
TC1-7-2 **Agreeableness** I am characterized by pleasant conversation and companionship. Qn40	4.6	4.16	0.44	**0.002**
TC3-3-1 **Inspiring Personality** People have said that they are proud of being associated with me. Qn70	4.6	4.06	0.54	**0.004**
TC2-1-1 **Hunger for God** Others would say that I love God passionately. Qn52	4.54	4.14	0.4	**0.001**
TC3-5-2 **Inspiring Shared Vision** I articulate a compelling vision of the future. Qn65	4.54	4.19	0.35	**<0.0001**
TC2-1-5 **Hunger for God** I follow God, but I do not feel that I desire Him deeply. (inverted) Qn64	4.51	4.13	0.38	**0.005**
TC2-5-5 **Fervent Intercession** [coded] On average, I spend this many hours per week praying by myself or with others on behalf of our adopted people: Qn47	3.75	2.78	0.98	**0.002**

From this list in Table 3, we can glean best practices that distinguish effective catalysts from pioneers who have not catalyzed a movement. This takes the insights gleaned from Table 2 one level deeper. Not only do we see what the traits and competencies of effective movement catalysts are, but Table 3 identifies the specific affective and cognitive dispositions, practices and behaviors in the lives of those catalysts. They can be seen as a list of what in organizational behavior theory is termed Best Practices and what missions research has labeled Fruitful Practices (Woodberry 2011). These will benefit practitioners, as they will be able to identify practices and behaviors that have made a significant difference in enabling a movement to be catalyzed.

5. Differences between Same-Culture, Near-Culture, and Expatriate Catalysts

Table 4 below shows the trait and competency constructs distinguished by the origin of the main catalyst: he or she may be an expatriate, a member of a different people group near the group being reached (in the same country), or a member of the same people group. Although this distribution is not being used for the subsequent regression analysis, it is interesting to compare how each of these sub-groups ranked themselves. Differences were typically small. The table only shows the eight trait and competency constructs which exhibit a statistically significant difference between the three groups.

Table 4: Trait and Competency Constructs by Origin of Main Catalyst

Trait and Competency Constructs	Expat	Same country proximate people group	Same people group	All	Kruskal-Wallis test (p value)
TC1-7 Agreeableness	4.24	4.15	4.45	4.36	**0.002**
TC1-8 Flexibility	3.91	3.83	3.35	3.54	**< 0.0001**
TC1-9 Emotional stability	3.43	3.37	2.88	3.07	**0.001**
TC2-5 Fervent Intercession	3.09	3.26	3.54	3.41	**0.008**
TC3-1 Extroversion	3.7	3.55	3.15	3.32	**0.002**
TC3-3 Inspiring Personality	4.06	4.38	4.37	4.32	**0.017**
TC3-4 Influencing Beliefs	4.28	4.25	4.53	4.43	**0.001**
TC3-7 Disciple-making	4.06	4.37	4.41	4.34	**0.006**
Average of all traits and competencies	4.18	4.28	4.22	4.22	**0.195**

Note that expatriate catalysts rank significantly lower than their counterparts on *agreeableness*, *disciple-making,* and *intercession*. They rank higher on *emotional stability*, *flexibility*, and *extroversion*. The catalysts from the same country, interestingly, rank in the middle between expatriate and same people group catalysts for most traits and competencies. Where they rank considerably higher than both other groups is *drive to achieve*. Catalysts from the same people group rank lower than the other two groups in *flexibility* and *emotional stability*. They rate themselves higher than the other groups on *intercession* and *disciple-making*. Overall, given that only eight of the 24 traits and competencies showed a statistically significant difference between the three groups, and the average across all traits and competencies was not statistically significant, we conclude that catalysts from different cultural backgrounds have far more similarities than differences in the traits and competencies they exhibit.

6. Using Regression Analyses to Evaluate the Mutual Influence of Traits and Competencies and Inhibiting and Contributing Factors

In this section, we evaluate the influence of all explanatory variables included in the study on movement outcomes. While the study assumed that the traits and competencies of the movement pioneers would have a primary influence on movement outcomes, it also sought to measure other influencing factors that might be unrelated to the pioneers' traits.

These other factors were grouped as 11 "contributing factors," denoting factors that would be expected to positively influence the catalyzing of a movement, and 10 "impeding factors," describing factors that would typically hinder it. These 21 contributing and inhibiting factors can also be categorized as "internal" or "external." Internal factors can be influenced by the pioneers themselves and/or their teams, while external factors are outside their immediate control and cannot be influenced directly (other than through prayer).

These variables were entered into a multivariate statistical analysis called regression analysis. A regression measures the simultaneous influence of several explanatory variables on a response variable (or outcome), to see which of these factors influence the outcome in a significant way.

The first regression (Table 5 on the next page) focuses on traits and competencies at the question level, which reflect specific behaviors or activities related to these traits and competencies. Accounting for sample size limitations, it includes a total of 33 factors: a) all questions related to four trait and competency constructs that were

significant in a previous analysis; b) the 22 trait and competency questions with the largest difference between the average response of all catalysts versus the average response of all control group members; c) the average of all contributing and inhibiting factors. The results indicate which items differentiate effective catalysts from those who did not catalyze a movement.

Table 5: Traits and Competency Items (in Question Form) of Effective Catalysts that Differ Most Significantly from the Control Group

Explanatory variable	Value	Standard error	Wald Chi-Square	Pr > Chi²	Wald Lower bound (95%)	Wald Upper bound (95%)
TC3-4-4 **Influencing Beliefs** MLQ I regularly communicate my most important values and beliefs to others. Qn53	-0.91	0.238	14.654	0	-1.376	-0.444
TC1-6-5 **Persistence** I tend to stop trying when things get very hard. Qn50 [inverted] – re-worded positive: I don't give up, even when things get hard.	-0.512	0.203	6.375	0.012	-0.91	-0.115
TC1-3-4 **Drive to achieve** Setting and achieving goals motivates me. Qn38	-0.508	0.208	5.974	0.015	-0.915	-0.101
TC2-8-1 **Confidence in the Bible** Others would describe me as someone who has a deep confidence in the power of the Bible for discipling and ministry. Qn67	-0.483	0.228	4.485	0.034	-0.93	-0.036
Average of all Contributing Factors	*-0.481*	*0.162*	*8.856*	*0.003*	*-0.798*	*-0.164*
TC2-5-5 **Fervent Intercession** [coded] On average, I spend this many hours per week praying by myself or with others on behalf of our adopted people: Qn47	-0.452	0.143	10.029	0.002	-0.731	-0.172
TC2-3-3 **Evangelistic Zeal** I regularly think about more effective ways we can share the Gospel. Qn43	-0.407	0.207	3.871	0.049	-0.813	-0.002
TC2-2-4 **Listening to God** I am too busy with other things to wait on God and listen to Him. Qn51 [inverted] – re-worded positive: I regularly wait on God and listen to him.	0.346	0.178	3.767	0.052	-0.003	0.695
TC1-3-1 **Drive to achieve** Others would describe me as an achievement-oriented person. Qn35	0.457	0.195	5.494	0.019	0.075	0.839
Average of all Inhibiting Factors	*0.499*	*0.139*	*12.88*	*0*	*0.226*	*0.771*
TC1-8-4 **Flexibility** I find it hard to adapt to change. Qn41 [inverted] – re-worded positive: I adapt to change quickly.	0.627	0.197	10.144	0.001	0.241	1.013
TC1-3-3 **Drive to achieve** Once I set a goal, I am motivated to work until I have attained it. Qn32	0.758	0.26	8.512	0.004	0.249	1.268

A total of six trait and competency questions correlated positively with movement catalyzing, with each of them belonging to a different trait and competency construct. Four trait and competency questions correlated negatively with movement catalyzing, with two of them belonging to the construct "Drive to achieve."

The individual trait and competency question with the strongest positive correlation with movement catalyzing was "TC3-4-4 *I regularly communicate my most important values and beliefs to others*." This question is part of the trait and competency construct "*Influencing Beliefs*," which is defined as the transformational competence to influence others toward certain ideals, a process that shapes beliefs and transfers values.

It is possible that this competence functions like a keystone competence among all competencies of an effective catalyst, and that its proficient practice is at the very heart of movement ministry. This finding, although not entirely surprising, provides significant insights. For one, the foremost school of leadership, Transformational Leadership, has empirically identified "*Influencing Beliefs*" as one of only four competences of transformational leaders. Also, from a movement philosophy standpoint, the effective transference of spiritual beliefs and values is at the core of movements, leading to multiplication of disciples and churches. For catalysts to often communicate their most important values and beliefs appears to have been identified as the single most impactful practice toward a movement.

Summary and Conclusions

The research identified twenty-two traits and competencies that characterize effective movement catalysts and distinguish them from pioneers who have not catalyzed movements. Fifteen of these mark an even greater contrast between the two groups, with higher ratings for each trait and competency.

The catalysts who were interviewed in addition to completing the online survey referred to their intentionality and focus as an essential factor contributing to movement breakthrough. The non-catalysts didn't mention either intentionality or focus at all – a significant contrast between the two groups.

The study also identified a number of specific cognitive and affective dispositions and behaviors that characterize effective catalysts and distinguish them from non-catalysts. These can be labeled Best Practices.

A total of six traits and competencies correlated positively with movement catalyzing in the regression analysis (Table 5). Below, these are combined with the findings of the descriptive statistics and the analysis of contributing and impeding (or internal/external) factors.

The following explanatory variables (traits and competencies, and contributing or impeding factors) were highly rated by catalysts (at least 4.5 of 5) and were shown in the regression analysis to have a significant influence on movement outcomes:

- **Influencing Beliefs** TC3-4-4 I regularly communicate my most important values and beliefs to others (positive correlation).
- **Drive to Achieve** TC1-3-4 Setting and achieving goals motivates me (positive correlation).
- **Confidence in the Bible** TC2-8-1 Others would describe me as someone who has a deep confidence in the power of the Bible for discipling and ministry (positive correlation).
- **Fervent Intercession** TC2-5-5 On average, I spend this many hours per week praying by myself or with others on behalf of our adopted people (positive correlation).
- **Evangelistic Zeal** TC2-3-3 I regularly think about more effective ways we can share the Gospel (positive correlation).
- **Drive to Achieve** TC1-3-3 Once I set a goal, I am motivated to work until I have attained it (negative correlation).
- Raised up leaders effectively (contributing / internal)
- Right ministry strategy or method (contributing / internal)

The following explanatory variables (traits and competencies and contributing or impeding factors) were rated relatively highly by catalysts (higher than 4 on a 1-5 Likert scale) and were shown in the regression analysis to have significant influence on movement outcomes:

- **Persistence** TC1-6-5 I tend to stop trying when things get very hard. Qn50 [inverted] – re-worded positive: I don't give up, even when things get hard (positive correlation)
- **Listening to God** TC2-2-4 I am too busy with other things to wait on God and listen to Him. Qn51 [inverted] – re-worded positive: I regularly wait on God and listen to him. (negative correlation)
- **Drive to Achieve** TC1-3-1 Others would describe me as an achievement-oriented person (negative correlation)
- Discovery approach and discovery groups (contributing / internal)

Taken together, these two lists provide strong confirmation that a significant number of universally identified leader traits and competencies are also significant in the context of movement ministry.

The second important finding is that seven of the eight explanatory variables influencing movement outcomes and most highly rated by effective catalysts correlate positively with movement outcomes. The first among them was regular communication of one's most important values and beliefs, a competence so strategic that it may serve as a keystone in movement breakthrough. It is possible that this competence functions like a keystone competence among all competencies of an effective catalyst, and that its proficient practice is the single most impactful practice toward a movement.

This means that pioneers should focus more on developing positive traits and competencies within themselves and their teams, rather than being concerned about external impeding factors beyond their influence. A positive focus on developing strategic traits and competencies is much more likely to lead to successful movement outcomes. The list of traits and competencies presented here as characterizing effective catalysts gives mission trainers a blueprint for their training curricula and points mentors to the areas on which to base their mentoring. By focusing on these traits and competencies in trainees and mentees they can more effectively develop fruitful movement catalysts for the kingdom.

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Seeking Christian Enculturation Through Filial Piety Among Vietnamese Evangelicals

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Introduction

This research entails understanding enculturation, defined as "The aspects of the learning experience which mark off man from other creatures, and by means of which, initially, and in later life, he achieves competence in his culture" (Herskovits 1949, 39). The inculcation of non-material, internal traits are natural processes of enculturation by transmission that develop in a person from birth and onwards. Seeking out such possible cultural internal traits already existing within the patterns of culture may allow for the entry of the historical Christian message, if these traits continue to be accepted and practiced by Evangelicals within that culture. The doorway for enculturation begins with the study of the whole culture of Vietnamese Evangelicals (hereafter, VNEs), rather than simply studying their larger church tradition as it appears to foreigners with different cultural and ecclesiastical norms. Digging out what the average Christian really believes and actually does through qualitative research (ethnography) in conjunction with their believing or unbelieving family and lineage allows the researcher the means to see whether Christian enculturation, or the grounds for enculturation, exist. If some form of enculturation exists, it eliminates the need to find and/or develop foreign-devised inculturation methods which often fail, or are only slightly or partially successful.

This research points to a needed modification in Schreiter's ethnographic model as defined in his book, *Constructing Local Theologies* (1985). It departs from his model in a significant way. The attempts to create inculturation within a mission community in Schreiter's model supposedly lead to the construction of local theologies. He defines inculturation as, "A combination of the theological principle of incarnation with the social science concept of acculturation" (Schreiter 1985, 5). This research diverges from Schreiter's goal of developing inculturation perceived as necessary for seeing the incarnation of the gospel message in cross-cultural missional communities, such as Vietnamese Evangelicalism. Schreiter's stance of seeking an incarnation of the

Christian message within a particular setting (or describing what local theologies may have already developed) from the standpoint of inculturation is described among Christian communities who are now re-evaluating their Christian expressions, those which were originally imported through Western missionary efforts (Schreiter 1985, 1-6). I posit that this is too late: Christian conversions and resulting mission communities in many, if not all cases, have then been influenced or inculcated with Western forms of thought, Christian practice, doctrine, and belief. Determining whether Christian inculturation has formed in a given mission community in reality means looking at the forces of acculturation and its influence on the orthodoxy and orthopraxy of the said community.

This research indicates that underlying patterns of culture show potential enculturation bridges which may be discovered from Vietnamese communities, and these cultural patterns allow for "finding Christ in a culture", "for the purpose of evangelization and church development" and is, in fact, what Schreiter seeks through his definition of inculturation, which is to "hear... Christ...already present in a culture" (Schreiter 1985, 29). Schreiter argues for seeking this in three theological concepts: creation, redemption and community (1985, 40), as a means of introducing the unknown historical message of Jesus Christ. This research focuses on enculturation (seen in patterns of culture) within the creational concepts embedded within society and culture, including family and lineage. Vietnamese ancestral veneration rites[1], which are an integral part of Vietnamese culture, have long been an obstacle to conversion, as these practices are forbidden within Vietnamese Evangelicalism. The death anniversary of elders (a ceremony called the *Lễ Đám Giỗ*) of the family patriarch or matriarch, are performed yearly and are an integral expression of the trait of filial piety. This inculcated filial disposition is a collective *habitus* of virtually all Vietnamese persons.

Collective ethical dispositions form a collective *habitus*, defined as "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them" (Bourdieu 1977, 78). These expressions (traits) are explicitly or implicitly incorporated into the specific Christian orthopraxy, lifestyle, speech and behaviors, for these are cultural traits acceptable to them. Contiguous

[1] The term "veneration" and not "worship" is deliberately chosen, as this research did not indicate "worship" of ancestors. For a full discussion, see Lim's article, "Contextualizing Ancestor Veneration: A Historical Review". *International Review of Frontier Missiology* 32:3/Fall:109–115

enculturated traits, carried over and accepted by local Christian communities, are potential bridges for the building of local theologies. Examining the rationale for seeking enculturation versus acculturation, and secondly, the examination of the filial *habitus* and its significance is a foundation for the development of local theology.

The Forces of Acculturation: Enough to bring about Christian Enculturation?

Missiological scholar, Lim (2015), while not speaking from within the scope of anthropology, acknowledges the forces of "natural accommodation" or, acculturation, which he hopes will gradually overcome pre-Christian enculturated traits as an explanation for the slow progress of the Christian gospel message both within and without the church:

> Their [Chinese Christians] socio-religious worldview continues to be operative in helping them to understand and appropriate the new religious tradition…with regard to morality, they interpret and appropriate Christian moral teachings in a Chinese way, upholding filial piety and family harmony in the same manner as their former religion.. .This "natural accommodation" may be viewed as the actualization of Protestantism in a Chinese worldview. This actualization is not static; it will surely develop new innovations within the slowly changing boundaries of socio-religious traditions, especially in a day of postmodernism that encourages tolerance and accommodation towards new worldviews and other religious movements (2015, 113).

What Lim hopes will occur, through the slow "actualization" of Christianity has not occurred through previous missiological methods, contextualization, exegesis, and/or intentional attempts at inculturation, but through natural, cultural processes that are actually outward expressions of inward, collective *habitus*. The enculturated *habitus* continue to operate, often in conflict (both individually and collectively) with newer Christian belief systems. This "natural accommodation" is actually a slow, taught Western acculturation occurring within Christian communities which may take three to four generations to assimilate, or which may never be assimilated. This also indicates that there has not been voluntary appropriation by the new Christian community, but rather resistance. Innovations that produce enculturation are voluntarily welcomed and assimilated into a society, and spread into the culture. Lim concurs that this may be the

only way to overcome the barriers of ancestral veneration rites since other, overt attempts and methods have, to date, largely failed.

From Exegetical Approaches to an Ethnographical-Theological Approach: Seeking an Incarnational Model

Most scholarly research in the area of ancestral veneration has been undertaken in the theological arena, particularly within its subdivision of missiology, under the nomenclature "inculturation" or "contextualization" (Bevans 2002, 26). Academic work done in missiological disciplines by Western Evangelicals seldom adequately utilize anthropological or sociological sources.[2] Ethnographic approaches that begin from within the Christian community itself are nearly non-existent. Western theological systems have no categories for Asian spiritual and cultural expressions and exegetical interpretations (and those non-Western nationals trained in it), and thus have no means by which to resolve real life conflict ancestral veneration issues in Asian communities. Previous enculturated dispositions within the society to which Christian mission comes are often ignored, or considered unredeemable, as was often the case with an Evangelical mission in Vietnam, in spite of earnest and sincere missionary endeavors. However, new approaches to research on ancestral rites, beginning within social science disciplines, versus simply Western theological ones, are beginning to be recognized as a necessity, which Lim seems to acknowledge. There is emerging discourse among Evangelical scholars in regard to qualitative or quantitative research (Smith 1987; Phan 1996; Nguyen 2013; Koepping 2011).

Schreiter's methods for developing local theologies must be adapted in another regard, that is, in developing true reflexivity as an essential component of qualitative research (Schreiter 1985, 28–29). Wigg-Stevenson defines an ethnographic-theological approach which allows reflexive responses from the researcher in building ethnographic models within theological discourses, and begins from primary theology obtained through field data (Scharen & Vigen 2011; Wigg-Stevenson 2013). Some missiological scholars have made significant studies in the area of ritual, but little or no qualitative research in the area of ancestral rituals (cf. Perry 1990; Farhadian 2005; Tan 2008; Vasantharao 2008; de Neui 2016). Ethnographic research allows primary voices a more adequate and accurate witness into VNE communities and provides an instrument for their communities, through insider approaches, to develop or advance local theologies (Schreiter 1985,19).

[2] Hiebert's concept of "critical contextualization" shows some exceptions to this lack (Hiebert 1987,109–112).

Schreiter's contextual model for an ethnographic approach begins with cultural listening: "in ideal circumstances, the process of constructing local theologies begins with the study of a culture, rather than with possible translations of the larger church tradition in the local circumstance" (Schreiter 1985, 28-29, 39-74). While applauding this approach, Schreiter is bound to Roman Catholic traditions that dictate how institutional church traditions must be inculcated into new mission communities, thus ensuring that acculturation must take place in the first stage of mission. An enculturation model for research is not bound by such constraints, but encompasses an ethnographic inquiry into the larger, pre-Christian culture. This research includes the examination of Evangelical traditions in orthodoxy and orthopraxy pertinent to the cultural impact on VNE communities and the larger community. This includes primary source data, and examination of instances in which inculturation emerges in Vietnamese Evangelical orthopraxy. An enculturation model differs greatly from approaches or methodologies that artificially attempt to analyze or create inculturation within Vietnamese Christian communities, and needs anthropological disciplines at its source.

Enculturation

Herskovits' work withstands postmodern criticism and demonstrates how humans integrate into their own societies. His position that humans interact to form culture, and his rejection of cultural determinism, is significant for understanding the similarities between enculturation, and the closely allied concept of the *habitus*, which formed the epistemological lens for seeking enculturation within this research (Bourdieu 1977). His explanations link closely with explanations of how humans are enculturated through *habitus*: "Culture is stable, yet culture is also dynamic, and manifests continuous and constant change…Culture fills and largely determines the course of our lives, yet rarely intrudes into conscious thought" (Herskovits 1948, 18).

Herskovits' definition of culture and enculturation and humans' receptivity to enculturation through unconscious conditioning are readily seen in explanations of how *habitus*, which works through mathematical operations of the brain, to produce a conditioning which makes our current world (environment, culture and society) seem normative without understanding why this is so (Lizardo 2004). These processes allow enculturation through transmission to seem natural and normal.

All humans are able, as well, to creatively respond to and change their social environment, which Herskovits calls "transmutative enculturation":

> Yet though culture is the instrument by which human beings adjust themselves to their total setting, it must never be conceived as reducing the individual to a passive or inert status in the process. Actually, the process of adjustment is circular and never-ending, it is a process of interaction between the individual and his group in terms of his enculturation to its pre-existing patterns. This adjustment is furthered by the creativeness which, as a fundamental expression of the restlessness of the individual in the face of the ways of his group, permits him to exercise various modes of self-expression, and thus, to extend the scope of his culture without breaking down its basic orientations (Herskovits 1949, 641).

Herskovits' definition allows members of Vietnamese societies to "extend the scope of his culture" and through the creative processes of innovation to alter and expand collective *habitus* and to alter spiritual belief and practice from those of their lineage, forebears and general surrounding society. Note that Lim also, quite astutely, mentions innovation: "This actualization is not static; it will surely develop new innovations within the slowly changing boundaries of socio-religious traditions, especially in a day of postmodernism that encourages tolerance and accommodation..." (2015,13). Cultural practices which have been enculturated cannot be erased: innovation is required for these to become a legitimate part of Christian practice.

Christian Enculturation

Seeking out possible Christian enculturation, (transmutative enculturation) that may have permeated Vietnamese culture through Evangelical or Catholic communities or kinship units in VNE communities requires investigating those enculturated traits that Christian communities indicate have the potential to do so. The end result would be Christian practices within VNE orthopraxy which may have found their way, (become enculturated) into segments of Vietnamese culture. However, data from primary sources in this research did not indicate this (Wise 2020).

Examining cultural patterns (enculturation through transmission) through ethnography already extant within general society does give evidence to "hearing Christ already within the culture" which could provide a cultural bridge to the historical

message of Christianity upon its advent into Vietnamese culture. Specific forms of Vietnamese filiality, examined throughout the research are general cultural patterns that allow for the development of local theology. Filial piety, in spite of the forces of colonialism, modernity and the influence of Communist ideologies in a post-Marxist culture, has shown amazing resilience. It has been, since antiquity, a vibrant cultural expression and the central ethical disposition within all of Vietnamese society. Filial piety, it is believed, is drawn from or established by a Confucianist ethos, and is undisputedly regarded as its supreme value:

> Through a close and critical analysis of the classical texts of the Analects (Lun Yu) and the Mencius (Ming Zi), however, it can be demonstrated that because Confucius and Mencius always take filial piety, or more generally speaking, consanguineous affection, as not only the foundation but also the supreme principle of human life (Liu 2003, 1).

Filiality, a central tenet of Confucian belief and ethos, has a strong sacramental component. Fingarette's work (1972) addresses this unclear duality. Adler summarizes Fingarette's conclusions, which concur with his own: "Confucianism is a non-theistic, diffused religious tradition that regards the secular realm of human relations as sacred" (Adler 2014,12). A significant amount of Christian scholarship concurs. Ching (1993) sheds light on both Confucianism and popular religions in China, (which are, in many cases, synonymous with religious and spiritual practice throughout Vietnam). She believes that Confucianism has always contained a "sense of the sacred" within its humanism, as well as in ancestral worship rites, (1993, 63–4) as does Chih's scholarship (1981).

Vietnamese Evangelicals' Justification for Expressing Filiality to Living Ancestors

VNE ecclesiology adheres to the practices centering on filiality toward parents, with little remembrance of ancestral lineage (as a reaction to perceived idolatrous ties and explications connected to the rites within Vietnamese culture), after the dramatic decision is made to break off the expression of and participation in ancestral veneration rites. Justifications for these expressions are based upon an inculturation created by the translators of the Vietnamese Bible.

The original Protestant version of the Vietnamese Bible was printed in its entirety in 1926. While detailed records are very sparse on the process involving its translation,

a Vietnamese team worked collaboratively with a team of missionaries, overseen mainly by Grace Cadman, who was trained in Greek and Hebrew. There is little doubt that it was the missionaries who made the final decisions on translation matters (Cadman 1925).

The translation team developed a unique term, *hiếu kỉnh*, taken from the compound verb *hiếu thảo* (which is also a compound noun, as is the English noun, "filial piety") as a translation for the English word, "honor". "Honor" is used six times throughout the Old and New Testament, particularly in the fifth commandment. "Honor" is also used in Ex. 20:12, Deut. 5:16, Matt. 15:4, Matt. 15:5, Mark 10:19, and Luke 18:20. Each time the word "honor" is used, it is translated as *hiếu kỉnh*, creating a dynamic equivalent (Kraft 1979, 264) thus, filiality (filial piety), carried a special connotation to the Vietnamese reader. The missionaries making translation decisions felt comfortable to follow a similar dynamic equivalence translation used in the Chinese Bible, or, chose this term because their Vietnamese helpers encouraged this usage. Pastor Nguyên Hồng Chỉ shares the belief that

> The concept of "hiếu" in this kind of culture not only means "honoring your parents" but also means "taking good care of your parents, following their path(s)... Therefore, they felt the need to combine "hiếu" and "kính" together in order to "marry" the Bible to the culture (Wise 2020,134).

It is notable that the newest version of the Vietnamese Bible, (*Bản Dịch Mới*) done by a team of Vietnamese pastors and leaders trained in Greek and Hebrew, published in 2001, continues the usage of *hiếu kỉnh* (http://nvbible.org/translation).

The common term for filial piety, *hiếu thảo*, is used once, in 1 Timothy 5:4, referring to children and grandchildren of widows, and the proper devotion toward them by these members in terms of repaying *(hiếu thảo*) their parents and grandparents. It is significant that the term, "repaying" is used, which correlates linguistically with the two concepts of filiality and reciprocity, thanksgiving and repayment of one's obligation (*biết ơn*), which are significant traits within filiality, as the "debt so immense that it cannot be repaid" (Jamieson 1993, 17).

This new transliteration of the term, *hiếu kỉnh* for filial piety was used word-for-word in the translation of the fifth commandment, evidence that the translators saw a sacramental quality in the word choice and indicating that filiality is commanded by God Himself. The fifth commandment, of course, does not speak of the duty toward lineage no longer living. So, while VNEs take filial behavior (*hiếu kỉnh*) very seriously, they have avoided discussing, in orthodoxy and orthopraxy, the issues surrounding

remembering, venerating/honoring, and respecting the dead. The dynamic equivalence of these two terms has aided in forming the re-structured concept of filiality among VNEs, and shows limited potential for a possible enculturation bridge and the development of local theology. However, outside the boundaries of this orthopraxy, it can be seen through field data that VNEs show evidence of filial behavior toward deceased lineage.

VNE Ecclesial Expressions of *Hiêu Kính Cha Mẹ* (Filial Piety toward One's Parents)

Primary data revealed church activities actively expressing filial behavior. The senior pastor of an independent Methodist church has an annual church service dedicated to showing filiality toward one's parents. During this service, he preached on how it is impossible for us, as Christians, to love one another until we learn to love our parents, for this is the source of love. He was seemingly unaware that he was drawing directly from Mencian thought: "The man of humaneness loves all, but he considers the effort to cultivate affection for his parents and the worthy to be the most urgent" (Confucius & Mencius 1861, 7A:46). He never mentioned parents or grandparents who had passed away, staying within the appropriate doctrinal confines of Vietnamese Evangelicalism. He discussed the history of the Jewish people within Scripture and their honoring of ancestors, which is why, he said, the Jewish race continues to be blessed by God. His sermon was an acculturation of Western theology and Jewish culture as a means of preserving Vietnamese filial values.

This annual ceremony, called *Lễ Song Thân*, was done in conjunction with the Western holiday calendar of Mother's Day as a celebration of parents. The ceremony stressed one's duty toward parents as the highest expression of human love (versus the Western concept of romantic love). The filial expressions made by the church members were done in song, poem, and choral singing and brought forth an avalanche of emotion. Nearly everyone was in tears at some point during the service. The pastor said afterwards, "I was so moved I could hardly even preach". (Wise 2020, 139-140). This service is intended as a functional substitute for the ancestral rite of the *Lễ Đám Giỗ* that includes veneration of deceased patriarchal lineage along with a memorial meal of food offered upon the deceased's altar; these expressions are forbidden to VNEs. The *Lễ Song Thân*, however, does not include discussion of deceased lineage; these are virtually ignored. The oldest male member of this church told me sadly, in an interview, "I do not know where my parents are" for of course, they never had the chance to hear the gospel,

and he has no way to resolve this quandary (Wise, Personal Journal 6, 2016). There are no ritual practices which speak to these issues due to prohibitions taught in Vietnamese Evangelical churches.

Continued Expression of Filial Piety toward the Deceased by VNEs

Despite the prohibitions surrounding any expression toward the deceased, many VNEs included expressions of filiality to deceased parents and grandparents. A middle-aged male church planter, Mr. Đen, who planted a small indigenous house church in Kratie, Cambodia, decided to have a Christian memorial ceremony (*Lễ Kỳ Niệm*) for his parents, who passed away long ago and never heard the gospel message in their lifetime. While little used by VNEs, this ceremony is a functional substitute for the *Lễ Đám Giỗ* ritual done for deceased parents and grandparents. Mr. Đen told me, "We prayed to God, and asked Him to forgive them. We don't know if God will answer, but we can ask." He then told me, with tears in his eyes, "My parents never heard the gospel message, so what can I do? I must do something" (Wise 2020, 149). His motivation is increased due not only to his family's loss during wartime, and the fact that he is not sure of their place in the afterlife, but the intrinsic need for an expression of filiality. He and his family, not under the auspices of an institutional church setting, felt freer to pursue expressions of Christian filiality ancestral veneration. The *Lễ Kỳ Niệm* ceremony, designed by Mr. Đen from the Evangelical Church of Vietnam doctrinal manual, was, in effect, a form of intercession for the family's deceased parents toward God which expressed respect, love and remembrance to his deceased parents and was clearly an expression brought about by the inculcated trait of filiality. This attempt, through improvisation and innovation of an enculturated ancestral practice, was certainly an attempt to bridge Vietnamese cultural expressions with the historical Christian message.

Mrs. Mai, a devout Christian, was widowed soon after she and her husband became Christians more than fifteen years ago. Every year she has the *Lễ Kỳ Niệm* at her home on the day of her husband's death. This ceremony does not include ancestral veneration rites, but is a shared meal, with a prayer over the food and reading a Scripture as a remembrance of her husband. Her husband's non-Christian relatives faithfully attend. Mrs. Mai's husband had a Christian funeral service and has a burial spot in a Catholic cemetery, but her Christian children visit their father's grave on the Grave Sweeping Day in April, although participation in these rituals is technically forbidden to VNEs. They continue to express filial behavior toward their father on this day, although this holiday is considered to be unholy, filled with superstition, and possibly demonic practices which include communication with the dead (Wise 2020, 107,130).

In cases in which young Christians either had not heard of or simply ignored the forbidding of the practice of ancestral veneration, they simply continued the *Lễ Đám Giỗ* practices of general society. Mrs. Diễm, as a baptized believer for ten years, continued to have her grown children practice the *Lễ Đám Giỗ* veneration rite in memory of their father (in opposition to the prohibition taught at the Evangelical Church of Vietnam) for, she told me, "my children will not remember and respect their father if they don't do this" (Wise 2020, 116). Her greatest concern was that her children would continue to express remembrance, obligation and respect to her husband. The oldest woman in a Vietnamese house church in Kratie, Cambodia, told me, "we need ancestral rites, these are important, we should remember our family who have died" (Wise, 2020, 116). She continues to prepare the *Lễ Đám Giỗ* every year for her husband's non-Christian family, but comes to house-church faithfully every Sunday, taking the Lord's Supper without any feeling of guilt. The powerful trait of filiality continues to guide her behavior, in spite of Christian teaching to the contrary.

Non-Filiality as Sinful Behavior

Filial duties toward living parents are endorsed by VNEs as seriously as filial duties by those in general society. Mrs. Phương told the story of a young man who broke off relations with his father when he became a Christian. He later repented, and their relationship was restored. His behavior was unfilial, she told me, and this required change on his part. His sinful behavior, she believed, resulted in separation from his father, and while she did not believe that he should perform ancestral veneration rites, she placed the blame for the break solely upon the son for his non-filial behavior, rather than upon the non-believing father. Her interpretation of this dispute gives evidence of Mrs. Phương's own filial disposition (Wise, 2020, 136).

Expressions of Filiality among VNEs in *Lê Đám Giỗ* Rituals

All pastors and leaders who contributed to this research, except one, acknowledged that they attend, at least on occasion, the *Lễ Đám Giỗ* of non-Christian relatives, especially if the ceremony is for immediate family. In many cases it is almost impossible not to, if one does not want to be lacking in filial piety (*bất hiếu*). Nguyên notes, "Filial piety, as expressed in ancestor worship, is...an integral part of being a moral person in Vietnamese culture" (Nguyen 2013, 181). Lack of presence at the *Lễ Đám Giỗ* is seen as such a violation of filial piety that VNEs rarely break with the status quo, implicitly giving credence to filiality as a Christian virtue.

VNE presence at the death-day memorial of the *Lễ Đám Giỗ*, even while not eating food offered on the ancestral altar, was in many cases an acceptable level of participation of the extended non-Christian family. The only real reason for non-attendance was for those who, because of distance, could acceptably excuse themselves. Leaders unanimously expressed reluctance to participate, but most attended. This same reluctance was not in evidence among average VNE members. In fact, some of them told me that these occasions are a warm family reunion. Some would avoid eating from certain trays, if possible (very difficult) and others would request a separate tray that came directly from the kitchen (this required some pre-ceremony negotiation). At times, a leader might not attend, but would send his wife as a representative to work in the kitchen.

One female leader and wife of an associate pastor of the largest denomination in Vietnam, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam, told me without hesitation that, "Christians should go to the *Lễ Đám Giỗ*. They should not eat the food, but they should compromise a little, otherwise how will their relatives want to hear the gospel?" (Wise 2020, 113). This is almost an about-face from past decades when many Christians were forbidden to go, or it was so frowned upon that many did not want to risk being seen as participating in rites considered idolatrous. Mr. Bửu, born and raised an Evangelical, at 66 years old, changed his opinion on attendance of *Lễ Đám Giỗ* rites, though he had been forbidden to go as a child. "We should not eat the food, but we should go," he stated (Wise 2020, 108). Over time, many VNEs have come to recognize the power of collective filial dispositions which express moral goodness in honoring one's parents and the moral value of filiality. These sympathetic attitudes were also expressed by VNEs born into Evangelicalism.

Interpreting Vietnamese Evangelical Filial Theology

Nearly all VNEs contributing to this research, including members of the more conservative Evangelical churches in Vietnam, acknowledged that they continued to embrace some non-Christian practices from which they carefully parse and edit out unsavory practices considered to be idolatrous. VNE orthopraxy has attempted to re-shape the traditional view of filial piety by cleansing out anything including caring for, remembering, and (at least symbolically) communicating with the deceased through indoctrination in Sunday school and through sermons. However, primary field data showed that they still participate to a high degree in all traditional filial-based rituals, which can include Buddhist funerals, grave visitations, the yearly *Lễ Đám Giỗ* (minus

lighting incense and eating offered food) visiting grandparents' and parents' graves at Lunar New Year, and on the Grave Sweeping Day. A small percentage of this is due to pressure from non-believing family members (versus societal pressure), but much of it was simply because of the inculcated disposition or enculturated trait of filiality that permeates all aspects of cultural life in Vietnam. VNEs desire to perform these ritual or non-ritualized activities because the filial disposition demands it, as evidenced by statements such as, "it seems the good thing to do", "we must be wise", "it would be offensive not to", "it would hurt someone's feelings", and that they did not see any sinful behavior attached to it, if they could edit out unacceptable actions. A collective filial *habitus* dictates the need for continued participation within the parameters allowed within Vietnamese Evangelical doctrine, and an expansion of those parameters. Vietnamese Evangelicals, in spite of adverse forces of acculturation, navigate around this and continue to express filiality as a part of their Christian morality.

Summation: An Analysis of Vietnamese Evangelical Filiality

Within the scope of this research, as well as drawing from background knowledge of VNE communities inside Vietnam, none of the data showed evidence of transmutative (Christian) enculturation within the Vietnamese culture at large. The re-expression of filiality as *hiếu kính cha mẹ*, (being filial towards one's living parents), ended up being a narrowing of cultural expression, rather than an expansion of such, for it did not allow any remembrance or veneration of the deceased. It was more common for VNEs to continue to express traditional traits of filiality within the Vietnamese culture at large, rather than designing expressions for new, redeemed, or, sacralized forms of filiality toward the deceased because of the fear of accidentally performing actions that could be termed idolatrous. Very little innovation was seen, however VNEs found ways of expressing filiality toward deceased parents and grandparents through acceptable practices which went beyond the acculturated forms regulated by the dictated practices of "*hiếu kính cha mẹ*".

VNEs have quietly found ways to express their filial disposition toward the deceased, and in many cases, in its ultimate expression, as a memorial to Jesus Himself in the Lord's Supper, the *Lễ Tiệc Thánh*. The presentation of the Lord's Supper in VNE churches appears to be solely a Western presentation. Research, however, indicated that some VNEs saw the Lord's Supper as a filial duty and as an expression of filiality toward God Himself (Wise, 2020). Since VNEs remain filial pietists, it should be no

surprise if they make an intrinsic connection between partaking of a memorial meal requested by Jesus before His death, in which He said "Do this in remembrance of Me." Some Vietnamese Evangelicals readily made the transition of filial duty toward ancestors and re-pointed that duty toward God Himself. One Vietnamese Evangelical contributor stated, "I think that He is the source that is given to us" (Wise, 2020,193). This is the term also commonly used in Vietnamese society when remembering ancestral lineage who gave one life.

As discussed, traditional filiality contains a sacramental quality recognized by general Vietnamese society. Not only an important moral duty, the trait contains ontological connotations, and the offense created if a member withdraws from this rite is evidence that it is certainly different from other general practices within society. The missionary translators of the original Vietnamese Bible recognized this difference, and not only affirmed the ontological connotation, but actually distinguished it and elevated it to a higher level than that of general society through their word choice of *hiếu kính*, as a duty toward God Himself. This establishes at least limited grounds for the building of local theology, for it reaffirmed the sacred quality attached to filiality. The term has also been accepted in the publication of the *Kinh Thánh Mới*, a new translation of the Bible done solely by Vietnamese scholars.

Within the inculturation of the dynamic equivalence term, *hiếu kính cha mẹ*, there lies a starting point, or, a "seed theology", for development of a local theology as Vietnamese Evangelical communities begin to reflect upon their interpretations of filiality along with a wholehearted embracing of this pre-Christian enculturated trait, which functions "incognito", in Vietnamese Evangelical practice. This is what Schreiter termed, "finding Christ within the culture" (Schreiter 1985, 29) and could lend itself to a starting point for Vietnamese scholars and leaders to build a corresponding orthopraxy, as long as some form of remembrance and/or veneration of the deceased lineage is incorporated. Primary data indicates that Vietnamese Evangelicals are already expressing the cultural sacral trait of filiality in various, and mutually acceptable ways toward the deceased. Linking the authority of Scripture behind the dynamic equivalence term, *hiếu kính cha mẹ* alongside the voices of primary data gives credence to not only the need, but to the validity of veneration for deceased lineage. This may, through the process of improvisation and innovation, become acceptable for Vietnamese Evangelicalism. Vietnamese Evangelicalism continues to practice forms of veneration for their deceased lineage, which are personally tolerable to them, and simultaneously adhere to orthodox Evangelical doctrines, which contain a high view of Scriptural authority in all spiritual practice. No genuine innovation (transmutative

enculturation) is yet seen, for no integration of cultural practices has occurred among VNEs; fact, their parsed-out practices indicate a narrowing of societal cultural practices. This datum indicates not only the need, but the possibility of new Evangelical orthopraxy built upon local theologies with integrated filial practices if there is inclusion of the veneration of deceased lineage in some form. The enculturated trait of filiality as practiced by Vietnamese Evangelicals would be unacknowledged if one is simply seeking to create a contextualized method (such as functional substitutes) through inculturation of Christian practices, for inculturation is an incomplete tool. Seeing that VNEs continue as filial pietists (as *habitus* dictates) requires a more comprehensive enculturation model. Enculturated traits contain the potential for transmutative Christian enculturation through innovation. If these traits are discovered, reflected upon and accessed by a given Christian community, they may allow for the development of local, (incarnational) theologies, and for the entry of the historical Christian message into unreached cultures and societies.

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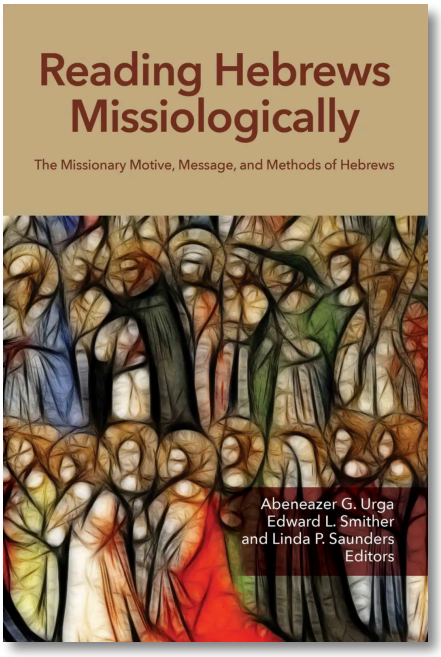
REVIEW: *Reading Hebrews Missiologically: The Missionary Motive, Message, and Methods of Hebrews* by editors Urga, Smither, and Saunders

REVIEWED BY
WILL BROOKS, PHD

Urga, Abeneazer G., Edward L. Smither, and Linda P. Saunders, eds. *Reading Hebrews Missiologically: The Missionary Motive, Message, and Methods of Hebrews.* Pasadena, CA: William Carey Publishing, 2023. 216 pages. 978-1-6450-8455-6 $17.99 paperback



Biblical studies serves as one of the key foundations of missiology since the church's understanding of her mission flows naturally out of the biblical data. The relationship between these two disciplines, though, is often tenuous and even when done well, tends to only focus on Acts or the Pauline letters. *Reading Hebrews Missiologically* attempts to address both of these issues as the authors "tease out the theology of mission in the book of Hebrews" (ix).

As the subtitle suggests, this book has three main sections. The first deals with the missionary motive of Hebrews. These four chapters deal with broad themes that relate primarily to the biblical storyline and the missio Dei, and the chapters show how the grand narrative of Scripture provides the background for the issues addressed in the letter. The second section focuses more on the specific missionary aspects of the content in Hebrews, namely the themes of hospitality, the pilgrim people, and hope in a storm-tossed world. These three themes arise from specific texts in the letter and show the missiological concerns of the Hebrews community.

In the final section of the letter, the authors consider specific missionary methods displayed in the epistle of Hebrews. In these chapters, Urga shows how the author expected the readers to be involved in evangelism, while Grindheim argues that the epistle shows the superiority of witness that is borne out of suffering and humility. Then Janvier addresses how Hebrews influenced the ways the African American community engaged in social and ethical issues while simultaneously being missional.

Finally, Lunsford considers disciple-making efforts and how Hebrews informs discipleship in mission contexts.

The primary strength of this work is that it brings together the unfortunately often separated disciples of biblical studies and missiology. For example, in her chapter Linda Saunders unpacks the relationship between the grand narrative of Scripture and the missio Dei and shows that, for example 1:3 "validates the perfected mission of God" (24). Her detailed exegesis of 1:3 sheds light on the church's mission and how it relates to God's salvation historical plan fulfilled in Christ.

At the same time, though, an additional strength is that examining a missiologically neglected section of the Bible enables the authors to deal with missiologically neglected topics. For example, Ed Smither examines hospitality and shows that this theme is not just in Hebrews 13:2 but is woven throughout the letter. Likewise, Allen Yeh focuses on Hebrews 13, which gives him the opportunity to examine centripetal missions, which is an aspect of strategy that contemporary missiology rarely addresses.

Though limitations exist for any book, one weakness of this book is that a number of additional key issues from Hebrews remain unaddressed. To name just a few, issues like the believer's future and the promised eschatological rest (4:1-13), perseverance of the saints and the warning passages (6:1-12; 12:1-2), and the importance of the local church meeting and suffering together (3:13; 12:3-5; 13:3) all have significant implications for contemporary missiology.

This weakness withstanding, *Reading Hebrews Missiologically* is an incredible resource that makes a unique contribution to the church's biblical understanding of her mission. It will be helpful as a primary textbook in Theology of Mission courses and as supplemental reading in Introduction to Missiology courses for years to come.

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REVIEW: *Faithful Disobedience: Writings on Church and State from a Chinese House Church Movement* by Wang Yi, et al.

REVIEWED BY
STEPHEN
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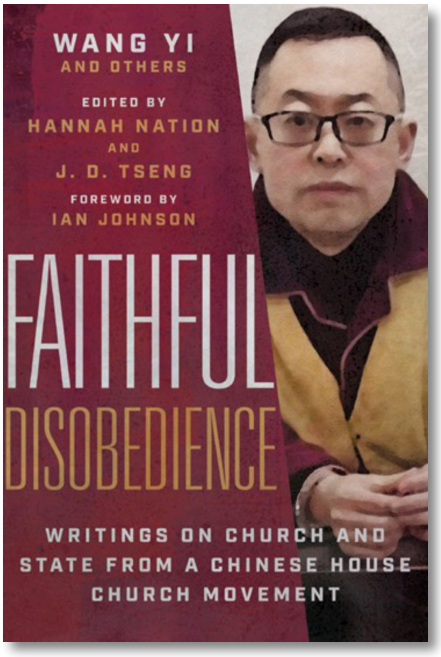
Yi, Wang, et al., *Faithful Disobedience: Writings on Church and State from a Chinese House Church Movement*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022. Pp 288, ISBN: 978-1-5140-0413-5 $28.00 paperback.



Wang Yi is a Presbyterian leader in the Chinese House Church Movement who is currently incarcerated for refusing to bow to the wishes of the Chinese Community Party (CCP). Wang Yi's physical condition is unknown. In the absence of news about his imprisonment, his voice continues to reverberate globally through his prior work.

Editors Hannah Nation (Managing Director of the Center for House Church Theology) and J. D. Tseng (pseudonym) have provided a rich compendium of primary sources to the Global Church, as it seeks to engage with the emerging Chinese urban house church movement. They share in this volume the translated works of Wang Yi and other house church leaders.

It is important to first clarify what is meant by the term "house church." In previous decades, house churches flourished in rural settings, existing as small, semi-secret churches that met in homes. Watchman Nee was an early leader within this stream of Chinese Christianity. In contemporary times, the house church has developed into new modalities. Several years ago, it was not uncommon for five-hundred members of a house church to gather in a rented facility for public worship. Modern-day Chinese house churches call themselves "house churches" not because they meet in homes, but because they want to identify themselves with a particular stream of Chinese Christianity - one marked by piety, doctrine, and dissent.

There are at least three primary strengths of this volume. First, the editors have provided a curated collection of the writings of key leaders within the urban stream of the Chinese House Church Movement. Since the dissident movement exists within an autocratic country, this book allows their voices to finally be heard by the global Christian community. Those who study the Chinese Church (whether historians, missiologists, or missionary strategists) now have a top-tier collection of primary sources to which they can turn. This alone makes the volume invaluable.

Second, *Faithful Disobedience* provides students with an example of contextual theology. Students in intercultural studies classes have heard about the concept of contextualization. In this book, they are provided with an example. Wang Yi and his colleagues engage in extensive "self-theologizing" as they describe their history, their beliefs, and their mission. Much of this contextual theology centers upon discussions of the relationship between Church and State. Indeed, in a country controlled by the Chinese Community Party, it is impossible to escape this debate.

Third, this volume is a helpful witness to Christians in the West as they continue to explore the proper posture for the Church's missional engagement in a post-Christian society. The United States, for example, is moving in a trajectory that seems more secular and less Christian. As the spiritual landscape shifts around us, many American Christians are grappling with questions of cultural engagement and mission. During the COVID-19 pandemic, questions of civil disobedience even came to the fore. The United States is a far cry from Communist-controlled China. And the situation here may never become as challenging as it is there, but American Christians would still do well to learn from Wang Yi and his colleagues, who have laid down a marker outlining the shape of a suffering, public witness.

Wang Yi likens the Church to a ballet dancer who performs in a landfill. That is a metaphor for Christian witness in Western secular contexts that are increasingly traumatized by polarization and violence. The writers in this volume point us to the cross as the paradigm for mission (currently imprisoned, Wang Yi is no armchair theorist). They call us to speak boldly and peaceably for Christ because they believe that "history is Christ writ large."

A potential weakness of the book is in its selection of sources. The American reader — cut off from the Chinese House Church Movement — could be left to wonder if this book is truly representative of the unregistered churches of China. A broader selection of authors would have strengthened this otherwise excellent volume.

Overall, *Faithful Disobedience* is a significant contribution to the fields of missiology, contextual theology, and public theology. In addition, those who are missionary strategists engaging Chinese people (whether in the mainland or in the diasporas) will benefit from reading this book. As a professor of pastoral theology, and as an interim pastor of an American Chinese church, I found this volume to be crucial and enlightening.

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REVIEW: *New Funding Models for Global Mission: Learning from the Majority World* by Tim Welch

REVIEWED BY
SEAN
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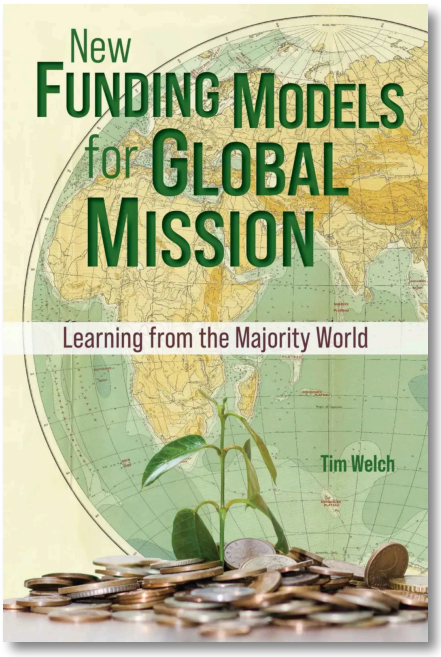
Welch, Tim, *New Funding Models for Global Mission: Learning from the Majority World*. Littleton, CO: William Carey Publishing, 2023. Pp 134, ISBN: 978-1-6450-8471-6 $10.99 paperback.



In his short and immensely practical text, Tim Welch offers a litany of creative missions funding models for use in the Majority World and in the West. Welch bases his recommendations from his thirty-one years of service as a missionary in Côte d'Ivoire and from his doctoral dissertation from the *Université de l'Alliance Chrétienne d'Abidja*n. In *New Funding Models for Global Mission* Welch challenges Western mission agencies and sending churches to adapt their funding approaches to include new models. In turn, he stimulates Majority World churches and agencies to explore funding models that differ from the traditional model used by the missionaries who brought the gospel to them.

Although charitable in his evaluation of the traditional funding model, where missionaries raise all the financial support necessary to send and sustain them on the field, he lists five disadvantages. The traditional model, which he calls Missions Funding 1.0, has limited use for missionaries in restricted countries because the money trail betrays their evangelistic purpose, and it restricts the kind of missionaries being sent because the model requires a support base with stable and expendable incomes. This presents a barrier to missions engagement from minority groups in North America. MF 1.0 invokes cultural objections where support raising is viewed with disrespect. The model tends to foster individualism rather than interdependence, and MF 1.0 is decreasingly effective even in the Western world.

To answer these concerns, Welch advocates for Western and Majority World churches and agencies to adopt a hybrid approach, using alternative strategies for

mission funding, which he groups under the term Missions Funding 2.0. MF 2.0 includes familiar models such as tentmaking and Business as Mission, as well as approaches profoundly inspired by the Majority World, such as "the twelve-church model," in which twelve supporting churches provide support for one month per year. Crowdfunding using mobile technology, revolving savings, "a handful of rice" (*buhfai tham*), and a dozen other models provide a toolbox of creative options to consider.

Welch notes that some of the MF 2.0 methods allow even the poorest believer to make a regular contribution toward God's global mission and they allow small, poor churches to participate. MF 2.0 better matches the socio-economic practices and contexts in the Majority World, being more relational and grassroots in nature. In turn, the fruit of these methods creates a more diversified corps of missionaries that demonstrates the universal scope of gospel of Jesus Christ.

In reading this book, mission leaders in the Majority World will likely find new funding ideas to consider for their context and Western mission leaders will be challenged to consider how their current funding models restrict the demographic base of their membership. The brevity of the book makes it a quick read, but serious readers will find many of Welch's points underdeveloped and some of the suggested funding models inadequately explained. A full chapter on the implications of diverse funding models represented on multiethnic teams and in partnerships would have been warranted.

As an introduction to the importance of using diverse missions funding models and as a tool to open Western mission leaders' eyes to the expanding missions force from the Majority World, this book is well worth the quick read.

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