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The Practice of Da'wa to Promote Relationship Building



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Introduction

Da'wa (invitation to believe in the religion of Islam) was practiced early in the history of Islam. After Mohammad settled in Medina, he started practicing da'wa via militant jihad. In the early and medieval Islamic periods, da'wa was closely connected to war, expansion, and occupying new territories. While scholars differ about Mohammad's original purpose of da'wa, traditional Muslim scholars claim that he intended right from the beginning to spread Islam beyond Arabia to the end of the world. Western scholars affirm that Mohammad started his invitation to Islam early in his life, but he did not intend for the religion to become a world religion. His followers were "chiefly concerned with territorial expansion, not religious conversion" (Kuiper 2021, 69). More recently, Islamic expansion has stopped, and da'wa has taken a more subtle approach, shifting toward a peaceful invitation to promote Islamic belief among future generations and inviting non-Muslims to believe.

Within the history of Islam, the role of women in da'wa was limited. In the early history of Islam, da'wa was practiced mainly through jihad by expanding into other territories. Local people were given the choice of death or subjugation. Women were not allowed to participate in jihad or lead men in prayer; therefore, they were not allowed to practice da'wa. In modern times, women are still given a limited role. They are not to be imams or to lead men in prayer (Bukhari, Hadith no. 7099), but they can be teachers to female students. After explaining the history of da'wa from early Islam to modern times, I will investigate the shift that occurred in the direction of da'wa and examine several study cases among Muslim women in different Islamic communities. By understanding and applying the principle of da'wa, Christian women in the U.S. and overseas can use culturally accepted practices to promote friendship with Muslim women and answer their questions about the gospel.





The Historical Practice of Da'wa

Da'wa During the Expansion of Islam

Da'wa is the act of inviting people to embrace Islam, roughly equating to the Christian ideas of witnessing and proclaiming the good news. Da'wa was originally proclaimed in a context of inter-religious debate. Mohammad and his followers practiced da'wa in a context of multi-religious groups who devoted a considerable amount of time to define their doctrines and beliefs. The writer of the Qur'an shows great awareness of other religious interlocutors and often addresses them by name with phrases such as "Oh people of the Book" (Surah 3:64), "Oh Polytheists" (or pagans) (Surah 6:106; 9:3), "Oh Jews," and "Oh Christians" (Surah 9:30). So, the Qur'an's da'wa was established among several competing da'was, but it was seen as superior.

In the Qur'an, variants of the word da'wa occur over 200 times (Lane 1968, 882-885). The term includes calling, inviting, summoning, exhorting, and invoking. It can have a secular meaning (an invitation to someone's house) or a religious meaning (calling someone to believe in Allah). In the Qur'an, Mohammad was sent to people as da'i to Allah (missionary preacher or caller). Allah speaks in Surah 33:45-46 stating, "O Prophet! surely We have sent you as a witness, and as a bearer of good news and as a warner, and as one inviting to Allah by His permission, and as a light-giving torch." In the Qur'an, the da'wa of Allah and Mohammad are virtually inseparable. Mohammad states in Surah 4:20, "O you who believe! obey Allah and His Messenger and do not turn back from Him while you hear." Similarly, in Surah 20:24, "O you who believe! answer (the call of) Allah and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life." This is to indicate that da'wa is made decisively through Mohammad, the seal of the prophets (Surah 33:40).

Islamic da'wa is not meant to be local, but international. Mohammad's da'wa was mainly local. He directed it to Arab people. The first people that Mohammad invited to Islam were his wife (Khadija), his cousin (Ali), and his friend (Abu Bakr). Soon after, Mohammad started inviting his tribe. His da'wa began as a local invitation and almost immediately turned into a universal one—especially after he was well-established in Medina. On the one hand, Mohammad was an Arab man who was sent to Arab people with Arabic Qur'an (Surah 42:7). On the other hand, he was sent to the people of the Book, the Jews, and polytheists (Surah 7:157), who are all over the world. Muslim scholars use this analysis to emphasize the international goal of da'wa. Allah did not intend for only the Arabs to believe in him, he wanted the whole world to convert to Islam.



Da'wa during Medieval Times

During the medieval period (AD 632-1100), Mohammad's da'wa continued to expand after his death in AD 632. Within just under 120 years, Muslims conquered and established rules over territories stretching from North Africa and Spain in the West to the Indus River (South Asia) in the East. The generation who carried on Mohammad's conquest was traditionally seen as the best Muslims who ought to be imitated (Ibrahim 2018, 1-8, 145, 236-40). The Islamic beliefs and practices that were developed after Mohammad's death were projected back onto the life of the Prophet in order to grant them legitimacy (Kuiper 2021, 69). The Islamic conquests were understood as following the steps of Mohammad, and many Muslim thinkers and regimes throughout history believed that "expanding the borders of Islam through military jihad was one of the chief duties of a Muslim ruler" (Surah 9:29; also Kuiper 2021, 68).

Muslim commanders issued a da'wa to Islam before attacking new cities. However, scholars do not agree whether the intention behind the conquests was to foster conversions to Islam or to expand into new territories. In the seventh century, the Arab-Muslim elites created a dual society in which the conquerors would constitute an aristocracy and the conquered people became a subject population who worked and served under Islamic rule. As Kuiper mentions, "The former would serve as military elite and the latter as producers and taxpayers. Given their need to fund the expanding Islamic empire, it is clear that the Arab rulers were less than eager to seek the conversion of non-Muslims" (Kuiper 2021, 69). This strategy brought more funding and allowed for more expansion. Because of the conquests, many other nations such as Turks, Persians, Kurds, Mongols, and others embraced Islam to avoid taxes.

During medieval times, the Abbasid Empire was the first Muslim movement to organize da'wa (see Sharon 1983, 19). Guided by divinely sanctioned leadership, their da'wa was a restoration of the pure Islam attributed to Mohammad. This period of history also witnessed a mass production of theological works as they pursued intra-and inter-religious dialogue. Many debates occurred in the court of some caliphs to win Christians to Islam. Moreover, Islam spread as immigrants entered Muslim domains (Dar al-Islam) and gradually converted to the dominant religion. For example, Turkish migration between the ninth and the twelfth centuries led many Turks to become Muslims (Levi and Sela 2010, 48). Muslim sects, such as Sufis, did their da'wa through preaching, offering spiritual protection, building institutions, and serving as heroes of the faith modeling and mentoring other young Muslims (Kuiper 2021, 122).



Da'wa in the Modern Era

During the colonial and post-colonial periods (1500-1945), an idealized epoch of Islamic history started, which included the emergence of tajdid or reforms (Kuiper 2021, 144). Muslims were able to indigenize Islam in new territories. One of the famous eighteenth-century reformers was Mohammad 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792), who allied with Ibn Saud's regime in Najd, creating a military expansion throughout Arabia with the Wahhabi da'wa. Kuiper explains that "in order to justify militant expansionism, 'Abd al-Wahab drew on the hadiths and legal precedents . . . regarding the necessity of extending da'wa to unbelievers before fighting them, and he argued that this principle could also be applied to wayward or false Muslims" (Kuiper 2021, 145). In Wahhabis' theology, da'wa was generally connected to jihad and military expansion.

In the modern era, Muslims started experiencing the world differently. During this time, Europe was experiencing the Enlightenment and the scientific revolution along with new Western styles of schooling, human rights (especially women's rights), and the abolition of slavery. During that time, the Islamic world was ruled by a sole authority, the Caliph or the Sultan, who forbade the use of Western technologies (e.g. printing press) because of the possibility of religious innovation (Robinson 1993, 233). Therefore, Islamic reformation was not an option. Muslims did not practice da'wa because they were not expanding.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the old-style elites (e.g., the sultans) were challenged by foreign administrators, soldiers, and locals who were educated in the West as journalists, lawyers, and bureaucrats. Western technologies, such as the invention of airplanes, telephones, and later, computers, and the internet, changed people's lives, including Muslims. Muslims started using Western technologies to travel, communicate, study, and conduct business. All these things decreased the image of the sultan and allowed the Muslim world to be controlled by non-Muslims. During this time, Muslims began immigrating to Western countries, and all Muslims, immigrants, and those who stayed in their countries began to use Western technologies to conduct da'wa.

Muslim scholars changed their da'wa strategies after being in contact with Christian mission organizations. After benefiting from many Western advancements and inventions that colonialists left behind, Muslims began to translate the Qur'an into many languages. They also started empowering lay Muslim people and preparing them to practice da'wa (Kuiper 2021, 155). The Muslim political leaders who led Muslim nations in the post-colonial and modern periods were secular nationalists or socialists.



Though they look at Islam symbolically, they were largely concerned with shaping modern nations. Kuiper observes, "The peoples of these nations were to be mobilized, educated and disciplined by the state, not for religious ends, but for seemingly secular projects of national development" (Kuiper 2021, 205). Therefore, da'wa took a different direction. It was no longer reliant on jihad, but happened by empowering lay Muslims and by teaching Islam to non-Muslims.

The Process and the Methods of Teaching Da'wa

From its inception until the present era, da'wa has shifted its focus from militant expansion to a more peaceful and educational approach. Islamism and the Back-to-the-Root Movement is a modern political ideology that emerged as a new phenomenon during the twentieth century (Roy 2004). Islamism is a response to the formation of secular states that emerged in postcolonial Muslim countries. Therefore, da'wa has become important to raise awareness of Islam. Nur Fuad states, "Da'wa is seen to be a crucial process to raise consciousness among Muslims on how they can overturn the situation through a religio-political revival" (Nur Fuad 2020, 20).

Although da'wa is directed toward men and women (Surah 33:73), women have been absent from participating in da'wa throughout history. In most traditional societies in the past, men played the decisive role in the socio-economic, political, and religious sectors, while women played the supporting roles. However, after the post-colonial developments and the influence of the West on the Muslim world, many Muslim women in different Islamic countries gained some religious authority, allowing them finally to be part of Islamic da'wa. This progress has helped strengthen the Islamic belief and the community among Muslim women. In what follows, I provide examples of the role of da'iyat (female religious teachers) and how they practice da'wa today in Syria, Indonesia, and the Western world.

Muslim Women and the Work of Da'wa in Syria

Modern da'wa in Syria was established by Imam Ahmed Kuftaru who tried to connect Sufi practice with orthodox Sunni Islam (Chagas 2011, 209). Kuftaru allowed women to have their voice within the system. The female Kuftariyya (named after Kuftaru) is formed by various independent and interconnected circles (halaqat). Each circle is led by a charismatic female who leads hundreds of students. Gisele Fonseca Chagas explains, "They are organized by a hierarchical principle that can be described metaphorically as a pyramidal form, with the top position being occupied by the



da'iyat" (Chagas 2011). One of the Kuftariyya members states, "We are as a tree. Shaykh Kuftaru is the root, Shaykh Ramadan Dib is the stem, Anisa Nadwa [Miss Nadwa] is the branch, and we, as her students, are the leaves. It is a chain and we are all connected" (Chagas 2011). These da'iyat are knowledgeable in Islam. Some are academically trained and hand-picked by Imam Kuftaru himself. They teach the Qur'an and explain it through stories and examples from everyday life.

In Syria, Muslim women doing da'wa focus on strengthening the weak. Chagas describes the bond between the da'iyat and their students:

The strong emotional connection linking the disciple to the shaykh is an important element that gives this relationship a feeling of trust and intimacy, which affects all aspects of the disciple's life... the framework for the love mobilized by the female disciples to their Anisa [teacher], the charismatic leader, was based on her as a role model for embodied correctness performed by her (Chagas 2011, 211).

The women are willing to listen to Anisa and her moral teachings because of her strong charismatic presence. The goal of this movement is to spread Islam throughout the Syrian society, encouraging Muslim women to commit to religious practices such as prayer, fasting, and veiling. The circles meet in the mosques because of the Syrian government's surveillance on their activities to ensure there is no political agenda going on as they grow in their knowledge of Islam. These government limitations are not stopping the circles from growing and influencing more women to become better Muslims.

Muslim Women and the Work of Da'wa in Indonesia

Similar to the Kuftariyya in Syria, the Tarbiyah)education) movement in Indonesia was established to improve the religious life of Muslim women. Emerging around 1968, the Tarbiyah movement grew largely in big cities as a response to social change and emerging political competing parties. Campus mosques in secular universities held weekly studies circles (liqo) during the 1970s and 1980s (Nur Fuad 2020, 25). The liqo focused on improving the private piety of individuals, but they also attempted to develop a public agenda to Islamize local communities and, ultimately, the nation.



Both men and women participated in the liqo, though they met separately. The female liqo were led by Muslim female trainers, and each one included six to ten disciples. The lessons revolved around Islamic ideologies. Trainees were recruited from the neighborhood areas and sessions lasted around three hours (Nur Fuad 2020, 29). Meeting in disciples' homes and focusing on friendship and mutual encouragement, this type of da'wa helped Muslim women to find a community and safe place to share their life stories, find friends, and improve their religious life. On rare occasions, it was also a place for sharing the faith with non-Muslims.

Muslim Women and Da'wa in North America

Da'wa looks different in the Western world. Since Islam is not the majority religion in the US, religious leaders and places of worship function differently than in Muslimmajority countries. For instance, a mosque in the US is seen as a place of prayer and religious activities, including da'wa. The imam is a prayer leader, a preacher, an administrator, a counselor, an educator, an accountant, and a person who has duties related to conducting weddings and funerals (Poston 1992, 95). In Islamic countries, Poston states, "a multiplicity of institutions and officials share the duties of education, administration, and 'pastoring.' Legislative and judicial needs are met by the Shari'a law courts . . . Educational needs are met by the madrasas . . . Moral ethics are enforced by a combination of governmental decrees and the social pressure created by the Islamic ambiance" (Poston 1992, 95). In other words, in Muslim-majority countries, there are Islamic universities run by Muslim faculties who teach the fundamentals of religion to students, who in turn become imams, professors of Islamic studies, and Islamic jurists. The Islamic studies students can specialize in certain activities and not just become imams at the mosques; whereas in non-Muslim majority countries, the imam is just one person who has multidisciplinary roles in his mosque and among his community. This is to say that non-Muslim majority countries lack the institutions and the personnel, and the mosques function as multifunction centers to serve many needs. The multifunctional roles of imams forced many of them to establish multipurpose Islamic centers where they could teach Arabic language, Our'anic studies, and practice da'wa.

Muslims living in the U.S. encounter challenges raising their kids and teaching them about Islam, strengthening their own faith, and practicing da'wa toward non-Muslims. According to Thomas Arnold, unlike Christians, Muslims "had no specially trained agents, organized proselytization system, or priesthood to do missionary work. Muslim individuals of all ranks of society had labored for the spread of Islam" (Arnold 1896, 332-33). Responding to this need, Muslims started practicing da'wa with two goals in



mind. First, they wanted to strengthen the faith of the existing community which was influenced by Western culture and the second is to practice da'wa. Howe writes:

MSA [Muslim Student Association] activities extended well beyond university campuses and included efforts to reach out to non-Muslim Americans. By the 1970s, MSA members had founded mosques, started financial trusts, created educational programs for both adults and children, and published copious periodicals, pamphlets, and other devotional and didactic literature such as the Parents' Manual (Howe 2019, 291).

The goal of these activities is to improve the public image of Islam (Howe 2019, 291). After 9-11 event, Islam lost its reputation as a world religion and was accused of being a religion that encourages hate. As social fears increased, it became more difficult to invite Americans to embrace Islam voluntarily. So, removing the notoriety of Islam among non-Muslims became a priority for da'wa in America. CAIR (the Council on American-Islamic Relations) is an example of another organization that was established in the US "to promote a positive image of Islam and Muslims in America" (CAIR n.d.). The organization uses media relations, lobbying, and education to make sure that Muslims in America are represented and empowered.

Since the beginning of the MSA (Muslim Student Association) movement in 1970s, women have been involved in a very limited capacity compared to their male peers. They served in roles that "reflected the organization's emphasis on gendered complementary spheres of social influence" (Howe 2019, 295). However, the MSA women's committee has had several publications related to parents, children, and families. Condemning sexual immorality and individualism in Western society, they have regarded Islam and the West as incompatible. For example, Jameela, an American Jewish convert to Islam, moved to Pakistan in 1962 and published dozens of books and pamphlets in many languages. She saw Islam and the West in oppositional terms, and she wrote to denounce American feminism. Howe writes, "She expressed horror at the movement's agenda, which included, according to Jameelah, the abolition of marriage, 'unqualified equality for men and women,' and unrestricted access to contraception and abortion" (Howe 2019, 299). Her da'wa was an alert to Muslim women not to be Americanized by Western culture but to protect themselves and their families by adhering to Islamic culture and standards. The early Islamic da'wa in modern times encouraged segregation from Western culture.



After 9-11, women became more involved in da'wa and contextualizing Islam within American culture. Educated Muslim women engaged in the political, economic, and religious aspects of life. They were also involved in fundraising for mosques, Islamic centers, and long-distance travel to national conferences to promote da'wa movements. For example, Linda Sarsour, who was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, and who became the face of Islamic feminism in America, wrote, "As an American Muslim woman I need to dispel myths about my faith, teach my community's stories, and preach courage in the face of injustice" (McLaren 2017, 147–161). Her da'wa was to increase and improve the public knowledge about Islam among non-Americans.

Another Muslim American woman who practices da'wa in the US but follows a different approach than the ones mentioned above is Haifaa Younis. She is an American who was born in Iraq and lived many years in Saudi Arabia. She graduated from the Mecca Institute of Islamic Studies and founded the Jannah Institute in the U.S. to teach women various Islamic studies courses. Younis' message does not focus on feminism or improving the image of Islam in the US as much as women's purification of the heart (tazkiay) and their relationship with God. Her institution is dedicated to women who would like to strengthen their relationship with God and know more about the Qur'an.

Chen and Dorairajoo interviewed several imams in various mosques in the U.S. to study how da'wa work is practiced in the U.S. They discovered that American Muslims understood da'wa in two ways. Indirect da'wa discusses the similarities between the two religions rather than emphasizing the superiority of Islam (Chen & Dorairajoo 2020, 1-17). Other Muslims took indirect da'wa to embody traits such as good personalities and behaviors. Chen and Dorairajoo explain that "the interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims played a decisive role in changing the latter's negative images of Islam, especially after the '9/11 attacks' when Islamophobia became an American obsession (Chen & Dorairajoo 2020, 6).

Direct da'wa, on the other hand, consists of sharing information about Islam with non-Muslims—regardless of their beliefs—and organizing inter-faith dialogues. However, Muslims did not follow the organized Christian way. Instead of making attractive brochures and distributing them on the streets, they preferred to share resources directly with people who showed interest in Islam (Chen & Dorairajoo 2020, 7). An Indonesian Muslim migrant explains, "I would love to keep in touch with the new Muslims once I meet them. I understand converts' pains and hardships they face from their families, friends, and our society. If we do not offer assistance during their difficult period, they probably will leave Islam soon" (Chen & Dorairajoo 2020, 8). Building



relationships and showing personal interest in people's lives have played a major role in da'wa among women.

The shift that happened in Islamic da'wa can be attributed to American culture. Women who live in the US have the freedom to choose their education, career, and direction in life. Many devout female Muslims took their da'wa from Allah seriously and dedicated their education and career to furthering the Islamic cause. Haifa Younis, for instance, is an American, board-certified obstetrician, and gynecologist; however, she left her job and founded the Jannah Institution to practice da'wa among women. She does not present herself as a theologian (Muslim women leave this job to their male partners), but she seeks to change the wrong image of Islam and strengthen the beliefs of her communities. Christian missionaries can learn several lessons from such Muslim women.

Lessons Female Missionaries Can Learn from Islamic Da'wa

Emphasizing Christian Piety

Piety is a very important trait most Muslims all over the world emphasize in their teachings. Some of them even consider piety as an indirect da'wa that attracts non-Muslims to Islam. For a Muslim, being pious means adhering to religious norms, such as praying, fasting, dressing modestly, and being a submissive wife. Chen and Dorairajoo's study shows that ninety-six percent of their interviewees (who were Muslim converts) had contact with Muslims before their conversion to Islam (Chen & Dorairajoo 2020, 9).

Some of the misconceptions that Muslims have against Christianity are related to fasting and praying. Not all Muslims know that Christians fast, pray, and help the poor. Therefore, Christian missionaries should explain to their Muslim friends that fasting, prayer, and helping others do exist in Christianity. Jesus instructed Christians to pray privately (Matt 6:6); whereas, Muslims' prayer is done in public. The call of prayer (adhan) should be performed loudly to remind every Muslim of the time of prayers. In Muslim-majority countries, men are encouraged to go to the mosques to pray and women pray at home. Moreover, fasting for Muslims is a public act. Muslims—men and women—are commanded to fast during the month of Ramadan. In the Qur'an, fasting is prescribed (Surah 2:183) and in the Hadith, Allah will award those who fast the month of Ramadan by forgiving all their past sins. Mohammad said, "Whoever observes fasts during the month of Ramadan out of sincere faith, and hoping to attain Allah's rewards,



then all his past sins will be forgiven'" (Bukhari, Hadith no. 38). CBS News reports that in the U.S., hundreds of Muslims gathering in Times Square in New York to pray during the month of Ramadan (CBS News, 2022). The article quotes several people participating in this public act to further da'wa and improve the image of Islam in the US.

Many Muslims think that Christians have loose morals, and do not pray or fast. The main reason for this misconception is that Christians pray and fast privately in their homes and churches. In Christianity, praying, fasting, and almsgiving are supposed to be done quietly, not publicly or it will lose its merits (Matt 6:6-18). For a Christian, these acts, especially good deeds, are supposed to be done privately because they are the results of a personal relationship with the Creator. They are not meant to be used for evangelism or to gain rewards in heaven. Muslims, on the other hand, believe that praying and fasting publicly is a form of da'wa. People who see them praying publicly and abstaining from eating food will ask them questions about Allah, which will give them the opportunity to share about Islam.

Christians, whether those who live in Muslim-majority countries or Muslim-minority countries, can take advantage of the month of Ramadan by inviting their Muslim friends over to share a meal and explaining what the Bible teaches about Christian prayer and fasting (Matt 6: 6, 16-17). Christians can even take this opportunity to pray for their Muslim friends who are observing prayer and fasting during this month to have a stronger relationship with God. God can show them the truth while their soul and heart are open during this time.

Answering Muslim Misunderstandings about Christian Teaching

Muslims have many cultural and theological misconceptions about Christianity. They reach these conclusions by reading the Qur'an (e.g., Trinity), or through the teaching of their religious teachers. Since many Muslim women participate weekly in Islamic circles to study the Qur'an, their da'iyat might address Christianity. However, the da'iyat are not qualified to teach Christian theology, and many Muslim women do not study the Bible on their own to investigate more deeply the doctrines that have been taught. Nur Fuad writes, "During my observations, however, I rarely found a situation in which the mentor built a good learning environment that encouraged the trainees to raise questions. In many cases, the trainees were passive, and tended to be afraid to express their opinions" (Nur Fuad 2020, 30). This problem might be cultural, especially since women are encouraged to follow their fathers or husbands; however, many men do not



raise critical questions as well because the Qur'an discourages Muslims from asking critical questions (Surah 5:101).

Christian missionaries, therefore, have a great opportunity to listen to the misconceptions that their Muslim friends have and address them over time. For example, the MSA included several articles where the writers equated the West with Christianity (Chen & Dorairajoo 2020, 7). But do the Western Christians think as Muslims think? Are all Westerners followers of Christ? Christians who live in the West would not agree with this description. Many Christians would not classify Hollywood, for instance, as Christian, but Muslims might equate between the two. Unless a Christian woman takes the time and effort to explain this truth to Muslim women, Muslim women may not have a chance to hear it.

Another popular theological misconception that Muslims raise is related to the crucifixion of Christ. Many Muslims expressed to me that they cannot believe in a God who has died. Mona Siddiqui wrote a chapter exploring the different theological views of the doctrine of salvation and redemption; however, she still cannot understand how can God die. She states, "The cross is powerful and the crucifixion is sorrowful. But as I sit here I feel that while the cross speaks to me, it does not draw me in. Its mystery is moving, but I cannot incline towards what it says about a God in form, a God who undergoes this inexplicable agony for an inexplicable act of mercy" (Siddiqui 2013, 242-243). This objection is very common and may even be difficult to answer. A good response is to clarify that in the crucifixion, God did not die. Rather, Jesus was raised from the dead because he is God. Learning the historical evidence about the resurrection of Jesus and its theological significance might help Muslims understand the redemption plan. The Apostle Paul reminds Christians that their job is to "demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Cor 10:5, NIV). Missionaries, therefore, have a great responsibility to clarify religious and social misconceptions about Christianity.

Creating Religious Circles

Since Muslim women involved in da'wa are already accustomed to participating in religious circles, this could also be a strategy for Christian missionaries. One of the main struggles for immigrants coming to the West is the loss of their families and relationships, especially among women who come from traditional backgrounds and gender roles. Most of these women are stay-at-home moms and often do not speak the local language. I met many who do not want to work because they think that this is a



man's role. Their role is to cook, clean, and take care of the children and the husbands. However, because these women are at home most of the time, they feel bored and need social connections that will fill their time and needs.

Christian women can respond to this social need. When they see a new family in the neighborhood, they can offer their help to settle the new family and orient them to their new environment. Christian women can invite the new immigrants over, teach them English, take them shopping, and learn new recipes with them. Hospitality is a key in ministry. Paul writes to the church in Rome to "practice hospitality" (Rom 12:13). Hospitality is love in action because relationships require time and patience. Hospitality will open the door to many future conversations including religious ones.

When Christian women build community with immigrants, they can start home circles and home groups. These groups require a lot of time, love, and patience. Nur Fuad states, "Most of the ligo or halgat meetings that I attended . . . were noisy, with children crying and screaming. Consequently, the lessons were often stopped for a number of short periods whilst the mothers calmed their children down and got them back playing with their toys or else took them away from the circle. The ligo allows mothers to bring their children as it aims to accommodate mothers' responsibilities" (Nur Fuad 2020, 29). Despite the difficulties and the responsibilities of their children, Muslim women were enthusiastic and committed to improving their skills in learning and reciting the Our'an. Christian women can learn from these circles how to be patient and attentive to their Muslim neighbor's needs. They can understand and use the daily life challenges to build a strong relationship and ultimately share the gospel. Social networking is critical in these circles because it helps build personal relationships. The liqo, halaqat, or Islamic circles made it easy for the mentors to build the ethos of the groups and to disciple the trainees. Christian women have a great opportunity to build something similar to these circles and minister to immigrants.

Conclusion

Historically, women's role in da'wa was limited because of the status given by male theologians. Excluding women from da'wa was mostly for religious reasons and partially cultural. The Qur'an and the Hadiths include many verses that limit women's leadership (Hadith 1409 & Bukhari, Hadith no. 7099), and women's roles in many cultures were limited to the home and family. Despite the historical limitations, Muslim women were able to develop their leadership skills by constructing religious circles to strengthen the belief of weak sisters and spread Islamic da'wa to non-Muslims. While



the Syrian and the Indonesian examples were restricted to a few Muslim women leading other women, the Western examples, relatively speaking, were broader. Western teachers target Muslim women living in the Western world via conferences, published literature, and public lectures.

The main lesson that most Western missionaries can learn is the importance of relationships. Western culture is known to be individualistic; however, female missionaries should learn from Muslim women that personal friendships have more effects on human beings than lectures and written pamphlets. Personal relationships show the person's genuineness. The real change this relationship can make in a person's life is far more effective than hypothetical information. Moreover, correcting wrong conceptions about Christianity is also crucial, especially if it is done in a hospitable atmosphere where personal relationships are prioritized.

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Bringing "the True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven" to Unreached People



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Introduction

Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) was an Italian Jesuit and one of the first Christian missionaries to China in the modern era. He arrived in China during the Ming Dynasty in 1582 and remained for almost thirty years. When he died in Beijing in 1610, his mission was "flourishing" (Neil 1979, 188) and thousands had become Christians. His legacy continues today, as many of the 12-13 million Catholic Christians in China can trace links in their spiritual heritage back to Ricci.

While Matteo Ricci offers much to the study of missiology, many evangelical missiologists seem to miss the depth of his contribution. His work, and that of his fellow Jesuits, went far beyond "accommodating to the local culture, taking their cue from local ... forms and customs." His "success" in China was due to more than merely learning languages and making "friends with influential people" (Beaver 2013, 230), simply "finding Chinese equivalents for Christian terms" (Neil 1979, 163-165), or presenting Christian "teaching in a way that did not necessarily offend" the Chinese (Sundquist 2013, 242). His missional approach was more profound than using "Confucian ideas to assist in making the Christian faith acceptable" (Moreau, 2015, 113). Unfortunately, it's not uncommon to hear some evangelicals suggest that Ricci promoted idolatrous ancestor worship. Our evangelical reflections on Ricci need greater scrutiny. The mere history of one individual can certainly be amended, but I wonder if this consistent deficiency in our assessments of Ricci exposes a superficial understanding of missiology among evangelicals.

Successful missionary activity, the kind demonstrated by Ricci and the Jesuits, requires a rigorous understanding of the philosophies of the people, the ancient undercurrents of their modern thought. It also requires a painstaking comprehension of the Christian faith and how it regularly uses the best philosophy available. Most





importantly, and rarely mentioned by any evangelical missiologist, Ricci's successful missionary strategy exhibits a deep fidelity to Christian orthodoxy. His cultural sensitivity, creative writings, and ground-breaking missional work consistently demonstrate an awareness of the boundaries of ecclesial confession. Our outreach to unreached people will benefit if we examine these deeper causes of Ricci's "success."

Matteo Ricci was a genuine polymath. He was one of the first westerners to master the Chinese language. He translated many western texts, including Euclid's *Elements*, into Chinese. He also translated several Confucian texts into Latin. He was renowned in China for his works as a cartographer, having created the first world map in the Chinese language. He was also remembered as a mathematician, astronomer, and musician. He created the first self-chiming, mechanical clocks in China, and even gifted the Chinese emperor with one. Today, more than four hundred years after his death, the Beijing Center for Chinese Studies identifies Matteo Ricci as "the most outstanding cultural mediator between China and the West of all time" (The Beijing Center for Chinese Studies. n.d.). Above all, however, Matteo Ricci was a missionary for the gospel. As we briefly examine Ricci's seminal work, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (Ricci 2016), written in 1603, our hope is that we, as evangelical educators, will perceive some of the deeper principles necessary for our own missionary work among unreached people.

Matteo Ricci's Context and Approach

Matteo Ricci's *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* is a text directed to a Confucian audience. In his journals, he identifies three primary religious systems in sixteenth-century China: the Confucians, also called the Literati because of their academic erudition; the Buddhists; and the Daoists, also called the Lauzu. To Ricci, Confucianism provided the best conversation partner to bring the gospel into China.

For Ricci, the Confucianists represented classic Chinese thought. He described them as "proper to China," because they were the most ancient, they wielded contemporary political rule, and they were the most celebrated (Ricci 1953, 94). Though the Confucians claimed to be academic and not part of any religious sect, Ricci recognized Christian principles in their teachings. He said their teachings were directed to ends in conformity with "the light of conscience" and "Christian truth" (Ricci 1953, 97-98). In his text, he attempts to show the Chinese people the connections between Confucianism and Christianity and that Confucianism finds its proper completion in the Christian faith (Ricci 1953, 97-98; also Lew 2000, 18; Neill 1979, 414).



In *The True Meaning*, Ricci does not often reference the Bible or church dogma though he was committed to both. Instead, he frequently cites Confucian and other sacred Chinese texts and engages in theoretical philosophy. He was convinced that reorienting the Chinese people to their heritage and reflecting on Natural Law would help prepare them to listen to the Christian gospel. Ricci writes that "to abandon principles affirmed by the intellect and to comply with the opinions of others is like shutting out the light of the sun and searching for an object with a lantern" (Ricci 2016, 25:45). Despite the corruption of sin, Ricci believed that the human intellect was capable of grasping objective reality, including the existence of a personal Creator God. When people go wrong, it's because they have abandoned "intellect" in favor of "opinion." Instead of thinking for themselves, they believe what seems right to them, what they wish is true, or what the culture tells them. This was what happened with Confucianism. It began as a monotheistic tradition, correct but incomplete, but was then corrupted by Buddhist ideas.

Ricci has a twofold mission in his text. First, he aims to clear away the corruption and get back to pristine Confucian belief, which he thinks is compatible with Christianity. Second, he shows how Confucianism, even when correct, is profoundly incomplete, leading his listeners to desire what completes it—the gospel. To complete this mission, Ricci uses the best resources available from the European and Chinese philosophical traditions to build an intellectual bridge across cultures.

Building Bridges and Identifying Roadblocks

Ricci's successful connection between the Christian faith and Chinese thought required familiarity with both traditions while maintaining faithfulness to Christian orthodoxy. Ricci associated two areas of Chinese thoughts with Christian teaching.

Self-Cultivation

Self-cultivation lies at the heart of Confucianism. A superior person is one who nurtures virtue (inner vigor) within himself to such a degree that his inner life is aligned with the natural order of the universe. In the Chinese classic *The Great Learning*, Confucius' disciple Zengzi describes the "cultivation of the person as the root of everything" (Zengzi 2016, 4). Since ancient times, Confucians and others often used the term Dao, which means way or path, to describe the practice of holistically aligning one's daily life with the essential energy and overriding principle of the universe. Acknowledging this central tenet, Ricci opens his *The True Meaning* with an emphasis on self-cultivation (Ricci 2016, 16-17:41-42). It is a good which all people should pursue. Though Ricci



avowed this primary pathway, he exposed Confucianism as inherently incapable of guiding people to its admirable goal.

First, Ricci led his Chinese audience to recognize that only through belief in God, the one supreme "Lord of Heaven," could someone truly practice self-cultivation (Ricci 2016, 28-64:47-71). No God is worshipped in Confucianism. To Ricci, this makes self-cultivation impossible. To make his point, Ricci pursued Natural Law, found both in Thomas Aquinas and within Confucianism, to argue for God's existence. His goal was for his Confucian reader to again "see the great Way" and be "returned to the Supreme Source of all phenomena" (Ricci 2016, 63:71). Ricci also appealed to the ancient Chinese philosopher Mencius to support his claim of an innate "untutored" knowledge of God within every person. Mencius, the pupil of Confucius' grandson (Ricci 2016 29:47 n.), had said, "If you fully explore your mind, you will know your nature. If you know your nature, you know Heaven" (Mencius 2019, 7A; Mencius 2016, VII:1:1, 275.). Ricci showed that ancient Chinese sages "recognized and worshipped one supreme being" but that the modern Confucians had moved away from that practice (Ricci 1952, 93). Honoring the one true God is therefore fundamental to any self-cultivation (Ricci 2016, 13-15:37-39).

To Ricci, the lack of clarity regarding God's existence in Confucianism made its adherents vulnerable to using "despicable" terms of "voidness" and "nothingness" to describe the source of all things (Ricci 2016, 67-76:73-81). Here, scholars recognize that Ricci misinterpreted Buddhist and Daoist doctrines of voidness and nothingness as nihilistic (Ricci 2016, 72:77 n.). Technically, Buddhist emptiness is not nihilism. Instead, it means being empty or void of independent existence. To the Buddha, there is no independent existence; nothing is beyond this realm of dependent things. Things exist for sure, but everything is dependent on something else.

Despite his technical inaccuracies, Ricci and other Jesuits saw the pernicious nature of the teaching. If everything is empty of independent existence, then the existence of God as a prime mover is not possible. Ricci recognized that this belief contradicted ancient Chinese opinion and destroyed any chance for Christianity to take hold among the literati. His text convinces the Confucians that one can only achieve self-cultivation if he is united to the one Creator and true Lord of Heaven.

Second, Ricci underscored that self-cultivation cannot occur without regard to the afterlife. Confucianism had no dogma about future rewards or punishments. The literati were focused on this earthly life and only possessed an opaque image of any future life. Ricci's Chinese interlocutor represented them well when he said, "Now, where does the



way of self-cultivation lead us? Although it is somewhat clear where it takes us in this world, I have no idea what it leads to after death" (Ricci 2016, 17:41-43). We should only trouble ourselves with matters before us (Ricci 2016, 354:249).

Ricci countered that this is a superficial way to look at things, not worthy of honorable human thought. If pigs or dogs could speak, he said, then they would say the same (Ricci 2016, 355:249-251). Instead, Ricci argued, humans are to consider deeply the future life if they hope to cultivate the present.

To Ricci, eternal bliss and punishment are consistent with a supreme Lord of Heaven. And, they should be foundational motivations for self-cultivation. Ricci argued that people naturally demonstrate a desire to "enjoy unlimited goodness" and "perfect blessedness," which includes "an unlimited life" (Ricci 2016, 382-383:263-265). The Confucian who desires self-cultivation must therefore open himself to contemplate a hope for eternal life.

To Ricci, the lack of clarity regarding future life in Confucianism made its adherents vulnerable to synchronization with Buddhist and Daoist teachings on reincarnation. Ricci highlights six specific problems with reincarnation (Ricci 2016, 258-284:197-211). First, the process of self-cultivation is halted by ignorance of our previous lives (Ricci 2016, 258-268:197-203). How can we know that misfortune in this life is due to past sin, and therefore amend our ways, if we have no memory of our previous existence? Few people claim to remember anything from previous existences. While the devil might deceive some to imagine such recollections, the vast majority of people make no such claims. One would naturally think that if our souls were transferred to new bodies, our intelligence from previous existences would be retained. Further, the human soul is spirit and distinct from its body. It does not need a new body to cultivate itself.

Second, advocates of reincarnation forget that the Sovereign on High first created both humans and animals, with their respective souls (Ricci 2016, 269:203). There's no indication that animals today are more intelligent than in the past. Instead, it appears that the Creator's obvious purpose was for living things to remain in their separate species.

Third, Ricci uses the Aristotelian concept of the distinction between three classes of souls—vegetative, sentient, and intelligent—to argue that one class cannot migrate to another (Ricci 2016, 270-275:203-205). The soul of a person cannot migrate to that of a plant, or even a bird. He considers the Buddhists' claim that birds and animals have intelligence like humans to be "irrational."



Fourth, the distinct physical appearance of living things demonstrates that their souls are of different types, making transmigration impossible (Ricci 2016, 275-276:207).

Fifth, there's no evidence that human souls are transformed into animals. Actually, wouldn't such transformation be desirable, not a punishment? "The cruel man who is habituated to slaughter" would be thrilled to grow "sharp claws and saw-like teeth" (Ricci 2016, 277-279:207-209).

Sixth, belief in reincarnation is not livable (Ricci 2016, 280:209). It is inconsistent for those who believe in reincarnation to forbid the killing of animals, for fear it might be their family members, and yet to be comfortable forcing animals to bear yokes and plow fields.

Yin and Yang and Dàfùmù

At the end of chapter 2 of *The True Meaning*, Ricci coins a brilliant new name for God, which encapsulates how he uses natural theology as a bridge to Chinese culture. He calls God 大父母 (dàfùmù), Great Father-Mother. For Ricci, calling God dàfùmù has little to do with gender. Rather, he is identifying a vital point of contact between the Chinese and western philosophical traditions and using the term as a bridge to correct false ideas about God prevalent among the Chinese.

To understand the significance of Ricci's new name for God, we need to sketch out Chinese beliefs concerning the origin of reality. We begin with 太極 taijí, "the Supreme Ultimate," the origins of the universe. Lacking transcendence, Taijí is not God; it is more like the raw material of the universe. Taijí then splits into two principles, 陰 YŅn and 陽 Yáng, which introduce duality and contrast into the world. Yin and Yang are the passive and active or female and male aspects of reality. When these two aspects mix, they form all the phenomena we observe in the universe.

Ricci argues that the distinction between Yin and Yang is the same as the distinction between matter and form in western philosophy. In Ricci's time, any first-year seminary student would know what matter and form were. According to Aristotle and most Christian theologians in history, everything in physical reality has matter and form. Form is active because it makes things exist and behave in a certain way. Matter is passive because it receives form into physical reality. On that basis, Aristotle said that the distinction between matter and form in physics is analogous to female and male in biology. Matter is the passive or female aspect of reality, and form is the active or male



aspect. Thus Ricci argues that form and matter are another way of talking about Yin and Yang.

As a helpful illustration, we can think about a program on a phone or computer. Aristotle would say the software is the program's form and the hardware is its matter. The software on a phone or computer makes it display certain things on its screen and respond to input in a certain way. It is the form or structure that makes a thing what it is and makes it behave the way it does. It is the active component of reality. Software is the form of a computer program. But the matter of a computer program is hardware. Software can't just float in the cloud. Besides an active component—form or structure—we also need a passive component that receives the form and instantiates it in physical reality. The form has to be downloaded onto the matter of hardware.

Once Ricci identifies Yin and Yang with form and matter, he borrows arguments from Aquinas to say that Yin and Yang require a cause outside of themselves. Unlike a principle like Taìjí, this must be a transcendent cause and an actual being such as the person of God. First, Ricci argues that matter cannot acquire a new form unless an external agent acts on it (Ricci 2016, 34:51-52). He gives the example of an astrolabe cast in bronze. The original lump of bronze could never have shaped itself into a complex astronomical tool. The bronze is passive matter in itself that can only get a new form (such as the shape of an astrolabe) if a craftsman provides the new form (Ricci 2016, 34:51-52). Second, anything that lacks intelligence, but has structure, receives that structure from outside of itself. The metal letters in an old print shop are the raw material of literary works. But they can't form Confucius' *Analects* or the *Gospel of John* by themselves. A human has to put them in the right order. Likewise, the order that we see in the material cosmos indicates the existence of intelligence beyond the cosmos (Ricci 2016, 34:51-52). Matter and form or Yin and Yang, exist only because they have a transcendent cause.

The ultimate principle of reality, then, is not the stuff out of which Yin and Yang emerge. It is something external or, in technical western philosophical language, transcendent. In Chinese, one way to express this idea of being transcendent or external is with the word 大 dà, which means "big" or "great." So the ultimate principle of reality is a person who is the transcendent origin of the active or male principle of reality and the passive or female principle of reality—大父母 dàfùmù, the Great Father-Mother.

Matteo Ricci's approach to missions here is instructive for evangelicals today. Using familiar Chinese concepts of self-cultivation and Yin and Yang, he was able to build



bridges for Christianity into Chinese culture. He was able to affirm core Chinese concepts, correct them when necessary, and open the people to new ideas that would prepare them for Christianity. In all of this, he displayed an astute comprehension of Chinese thought and a thorough understanding of Christian theology, using the best philosophy available to him. Importantly, Ricci displayed fidelity to established ecclesial faith which had been passed down to him. His missional innovations in creating a Chinese name for God did not contradict his church. As evangelicals, our attempts to connect with unreached people must seek to discover common ground. To do this, we must grasp the foundation of Christian thought as well as those of the people we are trying to reach for Jesus.

Crossing Over to Revelation

Matteo Ricci's missional strategy included bringing his Chinese friends to the awareness of the need for divine revelation. He brought philosophies to their logical ends of ineffectuality which created a desire for transcendent truths. In his journals, Matteo Ricci said that "save in some few instances" the teachings of the literati, the Confucians, were "far from being contrary to Christian principles." Yet, he saw Confucianism as inadequate. It pointed beyond itself because it could not find the True Lord of Heaven. Ricci saw "Christianity" as the means by which Chinese thought could transcend itself and be "developed and perfected" (Ricci 1953, 97-98). After cultivating a desire for transcendent truth within his interlocutor, he used revelation to explicitly preach Christianity (Lopez 2017, 8).

Fall and Incarnation

Ricci transitioned from a general, monotheistic God discoverable in natural theology to an incarnate God, accessible only through revelation. This is wonderfully seen in his dialogue with his Chinese interlocutor. Once he has shown, through reason, that the ultimate source of existence is not an abstract principle like Taìjí, but an agent, a person, the Confucian character in his book points out a problem (Ricci 2016, 574-575:361):

(The Chinese scholar says): I have now received instruction from you on numerous occasions and therefore regard the Lord of Heaven as omnipresent and omniscient. Since he is the compassionate father of mankind, how can he bear to allow us to live in darkness for so long? Why does he not come down to earth himself and personally lead the masses who have lost their way?



The Western scholar says: I have long hoped that you would ask just such a question.

After hundreds of pages of discussing natural theology, Ricci's non-Christian character brings up the Incarnation. Instead of simply informing his interlocutor about the Incarnation, the western scholar lets the Confucian come to the right conclusion himself after being prepared by philosophy. Ricci is recasting an idea for his Chinese people that goes back to Thomas Aquinas and forward to C.S. Lewis: that human reason is self-transcending. Natural reason, or philosophy, can tell us a lot about God apart from revelation and the Bible and does not necessarily contradict revelation. Yet, it is incomplete in itself and points to something beyond itself. It is precisely when we push our natural capacities to their limits that we conceive a desire for something beyond them. By doing philosophy, we acquire a taste for something beyond philosophy. And that's just what happened to the Chinese scholar in the story.

Ricci's answer to the Chinese character's challenge of "Why does he not come down to earth himself" displays another bridge he built between western and Chinese thought. There is a debate among Confucians going back thousands of years on whether human nature is good or evil. One group taught that human nature was good. People demonstrate an intrinsic tendency towards virtue. Another group taught that human nature was bad. People demonstrate a natural tendency to be selfish and violent, and we need things like government and rituals to chasten and control our desires. Here, Ricci brings in two resources from the West to solve this Chinese debate—Aristotle and the Bible. Aristotle taught that besides our first nature as humans, we can also develop a second nature through our habits. For example, humans cannot naturally read. But through practice and training, we acquire that ability and develop it until it becomes second nature. Aquinas used this idea to explain the human tendency towards evil. Human beings were created good. But at a certain point in history—in the Garden of Eden—the entire human race had a second nature, sin nature, overlaid on top of its first nature. And that becomes the explanation for evil and ignorance of God that Ricci offers. We were created good, but through historical sin, we have added to our nature a propensity for evil.

In doing this, Ricci squared the circle that ancient Chinese philosophers never could, because the answer to the problem lies outside of philosophy. It has to do with a historical event, the Fall of Adam and Eve, given in revelation. It's not something one can just discover by contemplating human nature; it has to be revealed in history. And since the problem of human nature is rooted in a historical event, the answer to that problem must not lie in a philosophical theory like Confucianism or Buddhism, but in



another historical event, one in which God himself takes action and comes down to heal our nature.

Ricci's method is instructive for evangelical missiologists. While affirming the good in the peoples' cultures we are trying to reach and the common ground we share, we must patiently lead them to see the inadequacies of their belief systems and bring them face-to-face with the need for transcendent truth and revelation. We will hinder our missional effectiveness among unreached people if we fail to do the nitty-gritty preparatory work of basic philosophy or abort our fidelity to the revelation of faith "once for all time handed down to the saints" (Jude 3).

Conclusion

Matteo Ricci's attempt to perfect Confucianism by Christianity imitates an early Christian form of missional pedagogy. Bishop Augustine taught his priests that whatever has been rightly said by the heathen should be appropriated by us "for the just use of teaching the gospel." Egyptian gold should be converted for the worship of the true God of Israel (Augustine 1997, II:40:60:75). It's what John's Gospel did with the Stoic Logos and what Paul did with the shadows and reality in Platonism. In a different but related sense, it's what the New Testament did with the Law and Old Testament. The Old Testament is good and from God, but it is incapable of making anyone "perfect" (Heb 7:19). It needs the perfect mediator to come and "fulfill" it (Matt 5:17).

Matteo Ricci illustrates the arduous work needed for successful missionary work among unreached people. He meticulously learned Chinese thought and culture, rigorously examined the deeper theological and philosophical bases of Christianity, creatively connected East and West, and displayed fidelity to traditional, ecclesial faith through it all. His ministry is exemplary for evangelicals today.

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Self-Localizing: The Indigenous Church in Context



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Introduction

The indigenous church model serves as a set of principles to gauge the maturity of a church within a context (Hodges 1976, 3). Such a framework draws upon Scripture for its foundation and proposes independent, God-reliant faith communities (Hodges 1976, 58). As researched by Rufus Anderson, Henry Venn (Shenk 1981, 168), then John Nevius (Nevius 1899, 21-23), and presented by Melvin Hodges (1976, 22), the model contains a three-self formula of governing, propagating, and supporting which correlates to the characteristics of the early church. Further inquiry into the original three selfs produced a supplementary three: theologizing, missionizing, and caring (Hiebert 1986, 195; Newberry 2005, 111-114). Hans Kasdorf (1979: 85) compiled a list of twelve selfs as "open-ended," allowing several recent additions this past decade (Payne 2009, 37). Contextualization seems to be an assumed component within the indigenous church (hereafter IC) model. A lack of metric allows for a lessened emphasis on the element of indigeneity the model seeks. As an attempt, this article describes self-localizing and self-localization, and its implications for the indigenous church model.

The Self-Indigenous Church

The strength of the IC model also serves as a weakness. An IC can become qualified as indigenous without external assistance. Further, *self* implies self-reliance within the organization. An inherent self-characteristic of independence may allow churches to become closed circuits without interaction with those in their locality. The self-governing church may develop healthy regulations without interference from outside of its organization. The self-propagating church may be able to start other campuses in nearby communities without a significant population from each locality. The faith community may also be able to raise funds among themselves to fulfill the self-supporting aspect of the IC. Per the formula, a faith community can exemplify the main





three principles and even the additional three selfs of the IC model to achieve the goal of indigeneity (Hodges 1976, chap. 3). Hesselgrave accentuates the necessity for localization by posing an insight: while adhering to a three-self formula, an indigenous church, can "still be more or less unrelated to the soil in which it must grow" (2000, 366). By this definition, a church can exist to itself without any self determined connection to the context. An IC must interact with those in their proximity if abiding by the example of first-century faith communities.

Localization in Scripture

Scripture records specific experiences and questions people posed to the early church. Consequently, believers considered their model and then determined a response that better represented Jesus Christ. Local experiences catalyze the process of self-localization, which includes critical contextualization of the present form of the selfs. The resulting goal is that those in the locality understand the reason for a faith community, whether they join it or not. Illustration of self-localization within the progression of the early church provides insight into how the contemporary church, no matter their global location, can follow suit.

Self-Care

The early church became known in their locality for their ministries of healing and deliverance "among the people" (Acts 3:6-8; 5:12-16). However, at certain moments, because of its structures, the church did not address the needs of local people. Acts 6:1-6 displays how the church neglected Hellenistic widows alongside Hebraic widows. Schnabel shares that no "social or theological differences considering the two groups of widows" existed (2012, 329). Such lack of consideration and engagement by those in their faith community reveals an opportunity for new forms of self-care and governance to meet the internal, local needs. To regain unity, the apostles employed nineteen Jewish leaders with Greek names to serve the community (Keener 2012, 1287; Fitzmyer 1998, 344-345).

Another account of ecclesial growth regarding self-care concerns Tabitha, a Jewish woman "of special rank" (Acts 9:36-43). Known for "always doing good and helping the poor," she declined in health until she died (Keener 2012, 1716). In response, the disciples sent two men to gather Peter, who prayed and called for her to rise. Tabitha was presented to the mourners with the news of the truth of her healing, which was "known all over Joppa" (Schnabel 2012, 470). The expanding self-care aspect of the church challenged those in the locality to reconsider their theology. Their self-



missionizing shifted as believers sent fellow workers to assist the needs of the people. The resulting actions of the church compelled "many people" (Acts 9:42) to believe in the Lord.

Self-Support

The early church was in the habit of selling "property and possessions to give to anyone who had need" (Acts 2:45), exemplifying a characteristic of self-support (Acts 2:45; Schnabel 2012, 182). Acts 4 recounts how those in the community "shared everything they had" with "no needy persons among them" (Acts 4:32-37). F. F. Bruce proposes that their communal life allowed a "sense of spiritual unity" that "was exceptionally active" (1988, 74). Though diaspora would challenge the continuity of this community, the generosity and care that served as a hallmark of the behavior of Christians would soon follow their dispersion throughout the region, as in the case of Tabitha.

Localities, such as towns and cities, take on the characteristics of the inhabitants. In effect, believers in other localities could then recognize and assist the characteristic needs of the people far away from their own experience. There exists a progression of how the church learns and is understood in a locality, now stretching into assisting other churches with their localities (Barnett 1997). Giving across the Greco-Roman world was not uncommon since some charitable initiatives were present in the Greco-Roman world (Longenecker 2010, 66). Thus, Paul's collection for people experiencing poverty in Jerusalem was not entirely rare in its form. Yet, the unique motivation for such an "illustrative model of his theology" differed from the obligated giving for the poor in their locality (Martin 1985, 251). Participation in this collection was for a "nonlocal" or "extra-local" entity (Kloppenborg 2019, 263). The churches of Macedonia sent a "voluntary" offering to Jerusalem to help the widows and orphans there (2 Cor 8: 3-5; Longenecker 2010, 186; Verbrugge and Harris 2008).

Paul notes his desire that the Corinthians would "also excel in the grace of giving" (2 Cor 8:7). Further, Paul hopes that the church in Corinth might both care for their "brothers and sisters" in their immediate sphere and adopt the concern, devotion, and volunteerism of the Macedonians (2 Cor. 8:8; Barnett 1997; Furnish 1984, 413; Meeks 1983, 89; Seifrid 2014). Accounting for people not physically present in one's "face-to-face" locality serves as a sign of interactive care, "an evident feature of the development of human society" (Giddens 1979, 204). Extending care beyond the local would express 'Gentile solidarity' with the Judean Christians. Such an "interchange" in partnership of supporting and caring for one another beyond one's locality, in the knowledge of a situation in another locality, seems a valid progression of the self-localization concept



to flow into cross-cultural support, caring, and mission (Garland 1999, 369; Seifrid 2014).

Self-Missionizing

Missionizing contains the fundamental work of proclaiming the gospel cross-culturally (Schnabel 2012, 613). The Greco-Roman context of the time provided opportunities to speak with rural pagans, city-dwellers, followers of Zeus, and worshippers of Artemis (Acts 17:16-34; 19). Paul, Phillip, Prisca, Aquila, and others spoke "boldly for the Lord," "told... of the good news of Jesus," "preach[ed] the gospel," and "explained... the way of God more adequately" in multiple, differing host contexts (Acts 8:4-8, 35; 14:1-7; 18:26). Their missional way of living removes the clutter of a monolithic "mission-less theology and confession" of Christianity while accentuating the potential for believers of all local churches to be sent cross-culturally (Kärkkäinen 2021, 168).

The church at Antioch displays the fundamental capacity to set apart global workers from their people to communicate with different localities (Acts 13:2). The newly formed faith community, largely Gentilic in populous, trusted as the Spirit led them in the endeavor while also recognizing the need of people who had not yet heard the gospel (Polhill 1992, 290). Such believers shared about Christ through messages tailored to fit the ears of the local people, inevitably leading to new local gatherings of disciples (Peterson 2009, 280).

Self-Propagation

Following the characteristic of self-propagation, where disciples make disciples, contextualization helps to make sense of the gospel to local people (Banks 2020, 100). The New Testament records multiple accounts of new disciples following Jesus across various localities. Their social meeting places ranged from house assemblies to gatherings at businesses, in tents, and by riversides. They retained unity with other churches through an "enduring relationship" in Christ (Adams 2013, 49, 142; Banks 2020, 39). The believers did not demand that local people adopt a vastly different way of meeting but adapted to the context. It seems significant that their social gatherings be locally accessible.

Self-Theologizing

The disciples learned about Jesus by posing questions about his methods and ideas amid their shortcomings (Mark 4:10, 10:10, 9:28, Acts 1:6; Lane 1974). In like manner, once the Spirit-led believers established groups in context, people in their localities posed



questions to the faith communities (Acts 2:7, 8, 12, 37; 3:3; 4:7, 16; 7:7). Questions posed to the early church resulted in the believers explaining the words and teachings of Jesus, highlighting his fulfillment of Jewish Scripture. In essence, they theologized. The self-theologizing early church learned about God's inclusion of the Gentiles in his salvific plan via Peter's encounter at Cornelius' house (10:47-48).

Spirit-led meetings throughout Acts 10 removed remaining doubt that the local Gentiles could be equal parts of the larger church (Keener 2012, 1813). Flett (2016, 258) contends, "The resulting theological conclusion that 'God shows no partiality' becomes decisive for the Jerusalem council." Acts 11 and 15 emphasize the readiness of the Gentiles to receive the gospel and the resistance of the Jewish people, which culminates in a theological debate (Ladd 1993, 239). The presence and response of Gentile believers in their localities challenged their theology, which then affected their governing to "not make it difficult for Gentiles who are turning to God" (Acts 15:19). Gentiles were not expected to respond to the gospel as they did—in far greater numbers than their Jewish neighbors (Acts 15:15-18; Bruce 1988, 294; Peterson 2009, 432).

Additionally, the Jerusalem Council's (Acts 15) decision to appropriate some forms of living and to remove Jewish forms of identity displays a result of the localization process. "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals, and sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things" (Acts 15:28-29).

The development of the IC stems from interaction with local questions and experiences. Simultaneous lessons about theologizing, governing, propagating, supporting, and caring would affect the early church as they became aware of those in their locality. Stephen Bevans (2002, 92) contends that "the outsider . . . has some part to play in constructing a local theology, even though it may be quite limited and auxiliary." If contextualizing the gospel into a locality is a priority, this characteristic of the church is best preserved through an additional self principle.

Localization in Concept

Contextualizing the gospel into the host cultural context is a fundamental value of the indigenous church. A goal of the faith community is to communicate Christ where the "forms [are] local [and the] meanings [are] Christian" to construct an "appropriate church" model (Kraft, 1996, 377). As a central concern of missiology, contextualization



focuses on the "forms and symbols sufficiently familiar to a particular culture" to "maximize understanding and acceptance of the gospel in that culture" (Netland 2001, 272). The indigenous church aims to enact the appropriation of such forms according to a place and time (Bevans, 2009, 25). The term self-localization emphasizes the need for ongoing contextualization by the faith community.

Defining Local

The "local sociocultural contexts" where "people live [their] everyday lives" serve as the boundaries for a localized experience (Hiebert 2008, 246, 247). One may encounter people of differing ethnicities, languages, thoughts, and traditions (Bakke and Hart 1987, 138). Though living in close proximity to neighbors, the peoples of a geographic region may carry out distinctly different living patterns from others. Further, a perceived cultural expression of a group of people adds to a generalized characteristic of a locality. "Localization" serves as a chosen name for this particular self (see further Berger 2014, 20; Haleblian 1979, 96; Hiebert 2008, 249; and Schreiter 1985, 8).

Whatever the terms used to understand peoples of a local place, there will be an ever-shifting lexicon to identify social phenomena (Buswell, 1978, 93-94). In one such attempt at categorization, Berger's "degrees of indigeneity" consider three categories held by those in the locality with their characteristics spanning from "relational" with an implicit "sense of 'local" to a "less relational identity" while still retaining local roles (2014, 31). Amid these categories, the containers of "local" include all people of a geographic area, regardless of their participation or role. By such a framework, anyone can participate in a locality, relating in differing ways to the world and their immediate neighbors. Berger's most pronounced category of what it is to be local includes that the inhabitants are implicitly "indigenous" to the place and that, regarding diversity, no ethnicity is primary (2014, 23). As a result of Berger's research, "local" serves well to operationalize a "contextualized model that functions within the framework of social and spiritual mores of the host country" (Newberry, 2005, 95).

Local in Proximity and Time

Scripture shows how the early church developed through regarding the host peoples' geography and cultural symbols. Self-designation of identity, such as "the saints" in Scripture, shows boundaries through which believers understand themselves within their culture. Yet, such self-designation did not negate their actions from being understood by those outside of their community (Trebilco 2012, 128,129). Jesus restates the Levitical care intended to extend beyond the Jewish community by emphasizing loving one's neighbor wherever one is located (Lev 19:18; Luke 10:25-37). The parable



of the Good Samaritan serves as an example of how a traveler considers someone else as a "neighbor" in their immediate locality (Garland 2011, 442). Believers "orient to others" in word and deed to best acquaint the faith community with the people in their everyday lives (Kurylo 2013, 367). Again, *localization* considers understanding those in proximity. Flett (2016, 250) recounts Andrew Walls' theology of Christian history as "bound to the local appropriation of the gospel, and so its translation into local forms. The church apostolic is the church historically and so culturally pluriform."

Lukan literature also shows church growth amid a host culture's geography and symbols. Hesselgrave (2000, 367) contends that historical church polity tends to reflect the context of their "inception," leading to different expressions of leadership. Temporal boundaries bind people in any locality. As people change and their behavior changes, so do the characteristics assigned to the locality. Forms designed to serve peoples in the past may not prove helpful to reach those in a present, contemporary locality. Localization serves as an engine to continually contextualize the indigenous church, considering the understandings current in the context. Myopically honoring a past synchronic indigeneity may become an obstacle to approaching people in the present locality with their "symbolic meanings" of forms that "change with time" (Netland 2001, 329). People live as "distinct communities" without significantly merging the global and local (Hiebert 2008, 250). To this end, self-localization serves well as a principle for the indigenous church.

Localization as a Process

Three components in the localization process can assist in connecting a faith community to a context: listening, dialogue, and a localizing question. Believers who sense a responsibility to start a faith community will find that a more robust understanding of the context and people in their locality results from taking on these three components in their practices of grounding a theoretical contextualization. The first two steps, listening and dialogue, are intertwined, while the localizing question reflects how the locality understands the forms and functions of the church.

Listening and Dialogue

Getting to know people in a locality demands an investment of time. Church planter Steve Pike asserts, "The key activity in the first three to six months will be listening to the neighborhood residents" (Pike, 2022, 115). In each of their writings, Warren Newberry and Tim Keller assert that focusing on assessing the needs and



understandings within a locality can lead to a "relevant" model (Pike, 2022, 115; Keller, 2012, loc 3261). Keller agrees with the importance of needs as a connection point: "Ultimately, the most important source for learning will be the hours and hours spent in close relationships to people, listening to them carefully" (Keller, 2012, loc 3223). When the believing community meets the needs of a locality, the community will understand the functions and intentions of the church.

Pike's team draws a correlation between the number of meaningful conversations with people and the connection to the worshipping community (Pike, 2023). Gateway Fellowship Church in San Antonio challenged their team to have twelve hundred meaningful conversations so that "people knew their names and other people knew theirs" (2008). Discussions ensure that the believer's social and theological presuppositions become informed by interaction with the locality. At the beginning of their campus ministry in Copenhagen, Denmark, Chuck and Sally Haavik found that asking multiple students about their dreams for their lives led to meaningful connections (personal conversation 2018).

Listening and dialogue inform the missionary about the needs of the people in the context. Consequently, assumptions and pre-understandings about a culture used to construct a theoretical contextualized approach can be corrected to live out a life as a believer in context more faithfully. To communicate more effectively, Rod Carlson of Oak Hills Church in Eagan, MN, implemented a "Parish Response Group" to assist in identifying words used in sermons that may impede a local person's reception to hearing a message about Jesus Christ (2016, 97). Further, localization emphasizes interdependence with other churches and believers in their locality, minimizing a faith community adopting characteristics of unhealthy independence and becoming closed circuits without interaction with other believers. Without an aptitude to listen and dialogue with their neighbors, believers attempting localization would be in danger of contextualizing their faith community to satisfy their own perception, vision, or church culture rather than to connect with their locality.

The Self-Localizing Question

Along with listening and dialogue, contextualization remains a necessary discipline of the church as "the gospel cannot find expression apart from cultural form" (Flett, 2016, 246). As the church translates itself into a host context, assessment of its forms and functions must be allowed as a part of the maturing indigenous church. The proposed question catalyzes a contextualization process within the faith community to critique its current forms and functions, seeking a scripturally faithful yet culturally understood



expression (see figure below). *Is the reason (logos) for the faith community understood by those who reside as part of the local context?* The question critiques the current iteration of the relatability of the church to its locality in this process, serving as the engine for all self principles to mature and progress.



Mirroring the reevaluation of the early church in Acts 6, methodologies such Paul Hiebert's critical as contextualization investigate present cultural forms and functions spiritual expression through Scripture in light of the surrounding locality as an extension of the primary question posed above (1987, 186-187). This "constant check on the church" serves a similar purpose to Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration, where a recursive action led by change agents leads to transformation throughout time (1984, 25; Hiebert, 1987, 191). The early church critiqued present, assumed practices and forms of their faith community in culture to express "a pure faith and an essential gospel... in an indigenous garment" (Tippett

1979, 401). While their learning may begin with one function, other functions are affected as the church establishes a faithful orthopraxy to serve the locality.

Implications of Self-Localization

A faith community has the potential to be planted as a campus, outpost, or church, but still fail to address the needs or understanding of the neighbors around it. In all contexts, the local church has the potential to be "indigenous according to the classical definition and still be more or less unrelated to the soil in which it must grow" (Hesselgrave et al., 2000, 366). Similarly, Tim Keller writes that a church might have practiced theoretical contextualization but still not have "adapted" ministry to the local culture (2012, loc 2488). Lamin Sanneh notes the realization of the early believers that "God's impartial action in all cultures" would have specific expressions as they shared



equality before God (Sanneh, 2015, 53). The mission to establish the church in all contexts includes proclaiming the gospel cross-culturally (Schnabel, 2012, 613).

Localization in Partnership

By working together in localization, local believers and missionaries avoid the pitfalls of allowing uncritical translation of the gospel from the home culture of the worker while minimizing syncretism by the host culture (Hiebert, 1987, 185; Shaw, 1988, 207). Kurylo (2013, 282) describes "intracultural variability" as the ability of global workers to recognize variations of a specific form across cultures, posing a critical question during the contextualization process. However, believers must earn trust. Perceptions exist about how visitors and newcomers to culture can "live in their bubbles without having much interaction with their overseas counterparts, much less the locals" (Livermore, 2015, 61). They must make visible their commitment and ties from one church to another, with a "voice from the outside" to provide "broad perspective and critique" (Hiebert, 1986, 230). Flett asserts that "African Christianity will not 'mature' into a form corresponding to the Western experience but will continue to develop its forms corresponding to its questions" (2016, 245). Missionaries must faithfully attempt to address the questions of the host context while remaining aware of both their home and host contexts (Hiebert, 1986, 229). Resulting expressions from this partnership must reflect the host context, not the missionary's home experience, lest the faith community become unrelatable to the locality. A considerable measure of participation by local believers and missionaries together leads to the "acquisition of adequate understanding about life" (Nida, 1975, 270). On an individual level, "no person is an individual 'de facto,' that is, capable of fulfilling God's will and mission by his/herself" (Koeshall, 2012, 253). In isolation, it cannot reflect the universality and diversity of the Body of Christ, nor grow into maturity" (Tippett, 1987, 92).

Reglamento Local

Contextualization was a primary concern for Melvin Hodges and those who worked in similar contexts. Church leaders of El Salvador implement a local rule (*reglamento local*) to serve as guidelines in the faithful practice of the believers in the context. Realizing the limitations of how *local* was understood, believers and missionaries decided that a church would need to exist within walking distance of local people. In their services, they had their own songbook and service schedule. "Meetings would be held on Sunday afternoons and not mornings, as the early parts of the day were for going to market for the week" (Rance, 2023). Rance adds, "the church is one church, the body of Christ, but each local congregation is unique. The seed remains the same, but the distinct soils



produce diverse expressions within the broader community of faith" (Rance, 2017, 186). *Reglamento local* ensures that a church remains relevant to the flow of life within a locality. The *reglamento local* would be reassessed every three years to ensure a faith community's adaptation to an ever-shifting context. Localization to a time and place connects expressions of faith to the local people to provide an efficient reception of the gospel rather than allowing a dissonance in understanding to become an obstacle.

Urban Setting

Upon arriving in New York in 1989, Tim Keller began investigating the demographics of New York to frame how he could contextualize the gospel to the city (Keller, 2012, loc 3221). As he prepared sermons, Keller recognized a disconnect, so he dialogued with the people of the locality, learning about what would work best. To better understand the locality, it seemed necessary for this family also not to live outside of the community they would pastor. As Collin Hansen notes, "The Kellers were *in* the city if not entirely of the city (2023, 192). Keller proposed that a faith community should meet local needs in a "sacrificial" manner to communicate that "believers are motivated more by love and not a desire to accrue power" through conversion growth (2018, 197). One perceived need in New York City was the lack of community (Mattingly, 2023). Michael Green, an inspiration to Keller, argued: "Churches that live for themselves die by themselves. If our evangelism is to be effective, the church must be concerned to meet the surrounding need" (1992, 101; Hansen, 2023, 156). In its context, the local church tells the surrounding community about the character of Christ in a way that they would understand.

Keller's work moved from philosophy to praxis when he realized that personal connection and recognizing people's giftings might not be achieved because of the size of a larger church (Schrock, 2023). Keller and the team recognized the importance of splitting their large church community into "three neighborhood churches" to better serve the locality (Keller, 2015). Keller developing a localizing understanding of New York by looking at the neighborhoods within the boroughs. By referring to neighborhoods a "slices of pizza" with diverse toppings was a way to communicate as a New Yorker to New Yorkers (Keller, 2012, loc 3737).

Responding to Bretherton's question "How do we build a common life in places characterized by deep religious and cultural diversity?" (2015, 291), Keller asserted that "Christians cannot think that their role in life is strictly to build up the church, as crucial as that is. As neighbors and citizens, they must also work sacrificially for the common life and good" (Keller, 2018, 161). By this, one can suppose that a localized



approach includes listening and dialogue; however, acting to meet needs reveals the motivation or reason for the faith community.

Rural Setting

Josiah Tonder serves as pastor in the rural community of Long Prairie, Minnesota. Upon arriving in 2019, his family encountered a robust Latino community in the schools, businesses, grocery stores, and local everyday life. Out of curiosity, Tonder studied the town's demographics (population 3,697) and found that nearly 50 percent of the community were broadly Latino (MNAOG, 2023). Observing the disparity between the population of the churches and the community, he noted, "Our church doesn't look like our city" (Tonder, 2023). Tonder initiated opportunities to listen to and dialogue with Spanish-speaking pastors and the people of Long Prairie to grasp how the church was not understanding or meeting the needs of Long Prairie.

The greatest obstacle for their congregation would involve addressing the language barrier within the church.

With great intentionality, Tonder began sharing his vision in words and practice, by shifting their services and expressions toward Spanish speakers in the community. This change challenged the congregation as they moved from being monolingual to bilingual in worship. Worship songs were sung in both Spanish and English and the sermon, given in Spanish or English, would also be translated (MNAOG, 2023). Communicating through a physical symbol that showed that the church understood its community, they invested significantly to build a soccer pitch on their property (Tonder, 2023).

Though Tonder knew people in his community from various cultural backgrounds, the culture of the church did not match those relationships. In this transformation, the church became known by the community. This example follows Pike's "leading metric" conversations (2023). The noted churches in El Salvador, New York City, and Long Prairie, MN, exhibit the three elements of a localization process, which continually pose: *Is the reason (logos) for the faith community understood by those who reside as part of the local context?*

Localization and Syncretism

Self-localization can help the church to safeguard against syncretism. Robert Priest writes that "a mission church with indigenous leadership, making full use of local cultural forms, and doing its theologizing is likely to create a form of Christian faith that more deeply satisfies . . . [than other religious practices]" (2013, 314). Kevin



Vanhoozer (2006, 103) purports that "syncretism stems from an assumption that all religions and philosophies are ultimately about the same thing." Hesselgrave adds, "Syncretism is sometimes induced by underestimating the uniqueness of the Christian faith while overestimating the validity of competing faiths" (2006, 72). The early church would face Gnosticism and other ideologies leaving it at risk of being "subsumed as an accessory of the dominant cultural systems of the age" (Sanneh, 2015, 54). To gain relatability, believers of host contexts may allow the positive aspects of other spiritual experiences to eclipse their expression.

Both mature and new faith communities will benefit from working with missionaries who share a concern for their locality. The unique and transcultural nature of Christianity poses a challenge to followers of other belief systems. As the gospel is introduced into a culture, those already partaking in other belief systems in the host culture may attempt to negotiate and incorporate Jesus or Christian meaning into existing forms of worship (Hiebert and Shaw, 2000, 194). The external perspective of the missionary, which presupposes the permeability of social groups, assists in preventing Jesus Christ from becoming subsumed into other belief systems. Believers help new disciples navigate liminality when separating the meaning of their old belief systems in contextualization (Meeks, 1983, 88). Moreover, without missionaries as a part of localization, the translation of Jesus Christ into different cultures may result in him being adopted as a Bodhisattva within Buddhism, an avatar of Vishnu in Hinduism, a guru to the Sikh, and a wise minimalist to the secular humanist (Barker, 2005, 23).

As part of the center or periphery of a faith community, missionaries listen and dialogue with the faith community in what Schreiter and Bevans call the synthetic model of forming theology (Schreiter 1985, 22; Bevans 2002, 93). This dialogue does not terminate in the "accommodation" and summation of the most accepted parts of the world's faiths as John Hick advocates (Hesselgrave and Rommen, 2000, 151). Instead, dialogue proves helpful where the meanings of Christianity are treated as truth in the critique of present forms while developing an "ever-expanding" awareness of the factors involved (Schreiter 1985, 20). Both listening and dialogue ensure that those in a locality fluently dialogue in "openness" to understand the gospel (Bevans, 2002, 93).

Suppose the social contract of a context validates gatherings of eight to ten people as the primary way of growing in a relationship according to the host culture (Rousseau, 1920). It may be best practice to design gatherings that converge with the present sociological pathways of how ideas travel within a context. It may seem odd to Paul and the early church that believers commute to another city or neighborhood, leaving their



unknown neighbors well behind, to populate a new local church campus in another locality. In this circumstance, though this church may grow numerically and be considered successful, there is no evidence to suggest whether this church is meeting the needs or understanding the people in their locality. If localization is not emphasized as a characteristic of a mature church, the believers' neighbors and the local faith community become overlooked.

Just as missionaries may potentially set up or transmit a faith community into a host context without meeting the people of the locality or addressing their needs, church planters in all contexts, western included, can potentially do the same. Missionaries may not be welcome based on how the gospel was initially transmitted. If a form were prescribed upon a culture, without the challenge of localization, the structure would smack of an imported culture. We must endeavor toward "mission as *translation*" rather than "mission as *transmission*" (Johnson, 2022, 29). The patriarch Jacob gained his identity after his wrestling match with the Lord (Gen 32:22-32). The challenging work of localization provides a more apparent identity and new relatability for the church in context.

Conclusion

This article proposes self-localization as a necessary characteristic of a mature indigenous church. Early church contextualization practices showed their missionizing efforts, care for others, support, disciple-making aptitude, and ability to critique their theology. The catalyzing question encourages the translation of the faith community while considering the present forms of the meaning of a context. The engagement of first-century believers with the peoples of their locality challenges the contemporary church to make sense of the gospel for the hearer. The ultimate localization stems from the example of Jesus, who humbled himself, entered our earthly context, took on the form of a servant, and communicated in a way that we would understand. He became local and challenges the contemporary church to do likewise.

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Embodying the Seven Movements of Christ: Postures and Pathways for Participation in Mission



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Introduction

In the 2009 movie *Star Trek*, a character is presented with a seemingly impossible task. Spock suggests that in order to complete their mission, they will need to transport people from a planet to a starship that is currently speeding across the galaxy. The response, given by Scotty, is that "the notion of transwarp beaming is like trying to hit a bullet with a smaller bullet whilst wearing a blindfold, riding a horse" (Abrams 2009). When I talk with churches and students about the challenges Christians face today in participating in global missions, given the changing state of the world, this quote has been helpful for naming just how complex and impossible it feels to even begin thinking about how to do it well. Recent complications like COVID, refugee crises, war, poverty, and terrorism layer onto historical factors such as colonialism and denominationalism, not to mention long-term trends of church expansion in much of the majority world and church contraction in many western nations. Given those challenges, what's the best way to responsibly participate in Christian missions?

Analogies from science fiction may be useful for describing the complexities we are facing and the emotions we are feeling (see Howell 2013), but where can we find other useful resources for educating missional practitioners today? How can we think differently about participating in mission that could make it more manageable and less mystifying? How can we find a vision for education in contemporary missions that is more reasonable, practical, simple, and accessible for the church? One place to start is to return to the central language of the earliest disciples and missionaries.

In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus primarily uses the language of the "Kingdom of God," while in the Gospel of John the idea of "eternal life" takes center stage in Jesus' conversations. The Apostle Paul, though, leaves those expressions aside and orients his communication around the idea of being "in Christ." Paul uses that





phrase, or a slight variation of that phrase, almost 100 times in his letters (Gorman 2001, 36, ft. 39; Rom 6:8-11; 8:1, 10; 1 Cor 9:1; 2 Cor 13:5; Gal 2:20; 3:28; 5:6). Being in Christ is the centerpiece in Paul's missionary correspondence. It's the major theme on which all of his other concepts and counsel are built. We could think of being in Christ as the key or the cipher or the puzzle box lid that helps us piece together what his vision for the people of God was all about.

Michael Gorman notes: "this language is not so much mystical as it is spatial, to live within a 'sphere' of influence. The precise meaning of the phrase varies from context to context, but to be in 'in Christ' principally means to be under the influence of Christ's power, especially the power to be conformed to him and his cross, by participating in the life of a community that acknowledges his lordship" (2001, 36). One fascinating example of how Paul uses this idea is found in Colossians 1:27-29, where we see the participatory, interrelated dynamic of what it means to have "Christ in you" and for you (as a disciple) to be "in Christ." But how does this work? How can a person be in Christ as well as having Christ in them? One way of understanding this is through the metaphor of breath and how we inhabit air: "Just as the air of life which we breathe is 'in' us and fills us, and yet we at the same time live and breathe 'in' this air, so it is with St. Paul's fellowship of Christ: Christ in him, he in Christ" (Deissmann 1912, 128).

Following this line of thinking, then, being in Christ is both the mode and the model for missional engagement of the world. Whatever mission looks like, it will need to look like Jesus. While that seems like something that could be taken for granted, tragically churches, missions agencies, and missionaries have often not followed the way of Christ. Christian missions have done harm when we have allowed colonialism, racism, sexism, and other powers that be to co-opt our original purpose, aims, and programs. Effective education for contemporary mission should be a call for and training in practical and personal participation in Christ in the world (see further Gorman 2019). That kind of radical, practical Christology leads to a missiology that is primed to help us engage the complexities of our world.

This article will begin by looking at an underused paradigm for missions touched on briefly near the end of David Bosch's seminal work, *Transforming Mission*. His short proposal for missional engagement is based on the major movements in Jesus' own story. Then we will look at how an adaptation of that framework has proven useful for preparing missional practitioners in Mozambique and the United States as it helps unpack the story, skills, and strategies for embodying the way of Jesus in the world. This approach outlines an embodied, practical theology of mission that is reproducible and flexible for the church to engage in possibilities for ministry in a variety of contexts.



The Movements of Christ (and Dance) in Western and African Contexts

Bosch's overview of different paradigms for participation in missions covers six epochs of Christian history. He notes that "we should . . . with creative but responsible freedom, prolong the ministry of Jesus and the early church in an imaginative and creative way to our own time and context." (1991, 181). Our mission, our being in the world, then, should be done in Christ and it should look like Christ, which will look different in different contexts. Near the end of *Transforming Mission*, in the section titled, "Faces of the Church-in-Mission," Bosch (1991, 512) states,

Our mission has to be multidimensional in order to be credible and faithful to its origins and character. So, as to give some idea of the nature and quality of such multidimensional mission, we might appeal to images, metaphors, events, and pictures rather than to logic and analysis. I therefore suggest that one way of giving a profile to what mission is and entails might be to look at it in terms of six major 'salvific events' portrayed in the New Testament: the incarnation of Christ, his death on the cross, his resurrection on the third day, his ascension, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and the parousia.

Bosch states that these "six christological salvific events" or movements should never "be viewed in isolation from one another" (1991, 518). Instead, together, they collectively tell a compelling story (or way) of living and serving that the church should seek to pattern herself after. Bosch ends his book with the following statement: "looked at from this perspective, mission is, quite simply, the participation of Christians in the liberating mission of Jesus . . . It is the good news of God's love, incarnated in the witness of a community, for the sake of the world" (1991, 519).

It would be hard to overstate the impact of Bosch's book in missiological education since the 1990s. I read *Transforming Mission* in a graduate course before my family moved to serve the Makua-Metto people in Mozambique, and years later, the professor who taught that course led a group of intercultural workers through an exploration of Bosch's six movements of Christ. This proposal for missional engagement is one that I have been challenged by and have been chewing on for many years now. I should begin by saying that I would propose one correction, or change, to Bosch's six movements of Christ (1991, 512-518). While his list includes the Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, Pentecost, and Second Coming, I would add one more: Life



and Teaching. Bosch skips over the ministry of Jesus as one of the "events." This is problematic for those of us who want to take the Rabbi's example seriously as the one we disciples pattern our lives after. Christ's life should also be instructive for the practice of mission as well. These seven movements of Christ have become foundational for both my practice of missions and my pedagogical approach to missions. I am convinced that learning to live each of these movements, postures, or pathways is a prime way to practice robust participation in the mission of Christ.

At one point in my research on these seven movements, I encountered a piece about the seven movements of ballet (Tellier 2015). I was intrigued, not because I have any familiarity with ballet, but because ballet is considered such a challenging form of dance. Tiekka Tellier notes that "ballet is often regarded as the most precise and difficult dance form in western culture. Though ballet includes hundreds of specific steps, the technique is based upon seven fundamental movements of the body" (2015). She lists and describes "the seven movements that provide the basis of ballet pedagogy" (2015), and those seven are listed in the chart below next to a potentially corresponding movement of Christ:

Seven Movements of Christ	Seven Movements of Dance	
Incarnation	Plier - to bend	
Life and Teaching	Glisser - to glide	
Crucifixion	Etendre - to stretch	
Resurrection	Relever - to rise	
Ascension	Sauter - to jump	
Pentecost	Elancer - to dart	
Second Coming	Tourner - to turn	

This is a way to playfully connect these two lists of seven movements and explore their meaning as practices that one must embody in order to become proficient in that complicated medium or mode. Tellier concludes her piece: "practicing the seven movements described above build(s) the necessary strength, coordination, and control to move fluidly at any tempo. So the next time you think that learning ballet is like drinking from a fire hose, it may help to remember that you're really working towards perfecting the seven movements. Happy Dancing!" (2015).



Tellier's post captured my imagination. What would it be like to think of practicing the seven movements of Christ like learning the seven movements of dance? Practicing the seven movements of Christ, tapping into those postures, and following those practices and pathways, could be what allows us to become skilled practitioners in his way of being. While both ballet and participating in mission can feel "like trying to hit a bullet with a smaller bullet" while "wearing a blindfold" and "riding a horse" (Abrams 2009), we can break the seemingly impossible task down into focusing on becoming proficient in each of the seven movements. Missions education and formation, then, could be made practical by concentrating on learning and participating in the seven movements of Christ. While it is certainly challenging, this is an embodied way of approaching missional engagement that allows us to see it as part of a lifelong practice (see further Paul 2021, 61-62).

Two concepts have consistently surfaced with American audiences when I describe Christian missions as embodying the seven movements of Christ. First, this paradigm helps us consider missions communally. Ballet is performed by a company of dancers, and participants in mission should also be in good company, as part of the church. Christian missions as a solo project does not align with the biblical accounts of an expanding kingdom and is one of the surest ways to end in failure. Framing the seven movements of Christ as being embodied as part of the company of dancers (the church) has been useful in shifting the discourse with western audiences from focusing education for Christian missions on the individual and broadening it to the communal level.

A second significant connection with western audiences concerns our view of habits. Drawing on the work of Daniel Kahneman (2011), Jonathan Haidt (2013), Charles Duhigg (2012), and others, we can see that much of what we do as humans is instinctual rather than based on deliberate cognition. While people often perceive themselves as being rational creatures who consider every behavioral choice, in reality, most of our behavior has already been decided by our habits. By framing the seven movements of Christ as practices or habits, over time we can transition these actions out of the deliberate mode and turn them into behaviors that are ingrained (what we do naturally and automatically). To actually live the movements of Christ, we will need to practice them and make them habitual. One phrase that has been useful for discussing this dynamic is this following reminder: practice makes the complicated automatic.

In presenting the seven movements of Christ in Mozambique, in southeast Africa, two things that consistently resonated with church members are worth mentioning here. First, there are practical implications of Paul's contrast of being in Christ to being



in sin or evil (Rom 7:14-17). In the breathing analogy, our Makua-Metto friends connected with the truth that the more time we spend breathing in (living in the reality of the Kingdom of God), the more that reality gets inside of us. And the more time we spend in the competing Kingdom of sin, death, and Satan, the more that air gets inside of us and keeps us from breathing well.

To illustrate this dynamic in Mozambique, the following example was helpful. Many vehicles in Mozambique have faulty emissions systems and it is common to see cars and trucks belching out smoke. I would ask groups to imagine themselves trying to hitchhike to a nearby town. Picture a person who ends up getting a ride in the back of an old pickup truck. This dubious vehicle is ancient and rickety (will it even make it?) and the driver looks untrustworthy. But tired of waiting, they pay the fare and hop in the back. As the truck starts moving, though, the rider realizes that this truck is spewing all kinds of fumes out of the exhaust and these fumes are rolling up into the bed of the truck. The rider cannot see, their eyes are burning, and they are breathing toxic air into their lungs. All of the passengers begin coughing as this noisy, cloud of fumes bumps along the road. The passengers are so concerned with trying to breathe amid the noxious exhaust that they do not even notice that the truck has stopped moving. The driver is drunk and asleep at the wheel. The truck is stuck in a ditch, but it continues belching its toxicity as the motor runs even though the truck is not going anywhere. Then another driver comes along and stops. Our passenger is so busy coughing, though, that they do not even notice. Suddenly, a hand reaches through the fumes, grabs our rider, and pulls them out. This friend offers our passenger a ride to where they were intending to go all along. In this car, the rider is now breathing in fresh, clean air. No longer in the smoke (and having the smoke in them), our passenger has stopped coughing and can enjoy the driver's company along the road, leaving the toxic truck with its drunk driver behind.

For our Makua-Metto friends, this was a helpful way to explore how Paul considers being in Christ in contrast to being in sin or evil (Rom 7:14-17). This story connected the truth that life in sin and evil is bad, and bad for you, and how riding with Christ is infinitely better. For Christians, then, "the presence and power of Christ have replaced sin as the power that lives within him and the power within which he lives" (Gorman 2001, 38-39). Understanding it this way shapes our own experiences of healing and transformation, as well as ways to participate in the liberating mission of Christ in the world.



Additionally, the seven movements of Christ especially resonated in Mozambique as a way to talk about Christology in a multifaceted way. Serving in a predominantly folk-Islamic context created challenges for approaching the identity of Jesus, but the seven movements provided a framework for surveying different ways of relating to and seeing Jesus, for example, as Firstborn, Rabbi, Prophet, Companion, Traditional Healer who overcomes death, King, Guide, and Judge (Howell and Best 2021, 132). The seven movements approach not only deepens our missional participation in Christ, it also fills out our picture of Christ, as it aids us in contextualization. The seven movements of Christ, then, is both a way to frame our missional engagement as well as to deepen the impact in that context.

Story > Skills > Strategy as a way to explore the Seven Movements of Christ

The seven movements of Christ intersects with my overall pedagogical approach to missions. When teaching missions courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels, I have found it useful to frame missions education in terms of the following inequality: Story > Skills > Strategy. Although sometimes people assume that success in missions is about finding the silver bullet strategy, in reality, that is the least important thing. We are wiser to focus on being rooted in the right story and being skilled in the spiritual disciplines and only then allow discernment to lead us to the best strategy for that season and situation.

Using greater than language to compare the importance of story, skills, and strategy, allows us to consider their relative influence. We should center our participation in mission around the story of God's work in the world. When our pet doctrines or favorite programs have the most influence or gravity, though, things go wrong. The story then orients our engagement in mission more than a favorite strategy. Disciple-making, then, is less about having the right plans and more about being the right kind of person, formed and shaped by the big story. Skills like study, sabbath, stillness, sharing, hospitality, singing and worship, fasting, and discernment are all crucial to involvement in the mission of God. So being oriented around God's story moves us to be grounded and learn these practical skills.



Story	Skills	Strategy
Jesus invites us into the Kingdom of God, calling us to be his disciples (filled with the Holy Spirit).	We align our lives (body, soul, spirit) with the Kingdom of God by rooting ourselves in the spiritual disciplines.	We contextualize and implement proper plans of action to achieve the goal of making disciples of Jesus.

The focus in this section is on describing the story, skills, and strategy of each of the seven movements of Christ to help us all learn how to embody them in everyday life. These short (and certainly not exhaustive) popular-level descriptions have been proven useful in introducing the concepts and setting the stage for further conversations, explorations, and applications. That will then be followed by a chart with summary statements about each of the movements and their impact for shaping the practice of Christian missions.

Incarnation (John 1:1-18; 14:9)

Story: Jesus is God-in-the-flesh who came to live among broken, impoverished humanity, fully identifying with us and integrating himself into culture, revealing the depth of God's commitment to creation, and ultimately showing us what God is really like. Instead of merely following a holy book, Christians have a holy, living model (God-in-Christ). Through the incarnation, God's message to humanity is this: "I want to be with you." The church, as Christ's body, is the second incarnation, showing a broken world what the true God looks like.

Skills: Keywords—Humility, Presence. We practice being fully and humbly present with others so that those postures will become automatic in our lives. Disciples of Jesus must accept our limits as human beings—we can only be in one place at a time. In this movement, we see that God is willing to go small in a big way by pouring life into a handful of people, so I can also be focused on those around me. This movement can help us keep the fear of missing out from having too much power over us. We can focus our lives and our attention on doing a few things well.

Strategy: We learn language and culture as core elements in an incarnational approach. Jesus' ministry began after thirty years of being among us. Since God's response to the world is personal, our response to the world must be personal, too. We must be wary of impersonal ways of sharing the gospel. If we don't dwell with people,



we are taking a different gospel. Gospel witness requires gospel with-ness. Like Christ, we must go to people and meet them on their turf and even become culturally savvy. That personal approach shapes both our methods and our message (for example, how we engage cultures that are primarily oriented around guilt, shame, or fear).

Life and Teaching (Matthew 5-6; 9:35; 11:25-30; 23:1-4)

Story: Jesus went from village to village calling for true change by announcing the Kingdom, teaching about citizenship in the Kingdom (loving God and loving one's neighbor), and demonstrating the Kingdom life through powerful service. When the church follows her King's lead and lives well, we will be bearing true witness in word and deed.

Skills: Keywords—Invitation, Demonstration, Transformation. We practice what we preach and connect with others in ways that draw them into the Kingdom. This movement reminds us that to be a disciple, we must also be involved in making disciples. We also become proficient in imitating Jesus' radical commitment to loving his enemies.

Strategy: We evangelize and make disciples the way that Jesus instructed us to (e.g., looking for people of peace, Luke 10). We call for and model a change in devotion/heart, thinking/mind, and actions. We follow Jesus' commitment to walk alongside others. Knowing that any kind of brokenness that Jesus encounters he addresses, we also work diligently to act holistically. Since, in Jesus, we see how the preached Word is the practiced Word, we too will practice what we preach. Strategically, our main way of engaging the world is by making disciples of Jesus, teaching them to follow his life and teaching.

Crucifixion (Mark 8:31-38; 10:35-45)

Story: Jesus, the true suffering servant, brought about his Kingdom by living out his calling all the way to his death on the cross—a shameful death that points to his glorification. Christ's followers also take up their crosses daily and follow him, embracing suffering, selfless service, and servant leadership for the sake of his kingdom.

Skills: Keywords—Sacrifice, Service, Radical Forgiveness. We embrace suffering and service and forgiving others even at a deep cost because we are committed to taking up our crosses as well. We follow a God who says to humanity: "I'm prepared to die for you" and deals with sin so that it does not get in the way of relationship.



Strategy: We risk in order to serve others and lead sacrificially. The cross also leads us to die to our own cultural preferences and to be vulnerable in engaging in cross-cultural relationships. We will participate in the pain of those around us. We give and receive hospitality in light of the cross.

Resurrection (John 11:1-27; 1 Cor 15; Eph 1:19-20)

Story: Jesus defeated death, so the grave no longer has the final word! The resurrection of Jesus proved his identity and that event has become the linchpin of history and is the central pillar of our faith. Through the resurrection, God inaugurates a new creation at work here in the present. The church is made up of disciples who share in Christ's resurrection life, participating in his powerful victory over sin, death, and Satan.

Skills: Keywords—Hope, Power. We practice hope and live with the assurance that death cannot defeat us and that the power of the resurrection is present in our lives. Since Christ's resurrection paves the way for our own and that even now Jesus has a body (that's how committed he is to us), we cultivate courage that empowers us to live creatively revolutionary lives. This hope leads us to bring our whole selves to solving complex problems in broken humanity, believing that the power of God inside us can impact the world around us.

Strategy: We embody new life to a dead and dying world. We follow God's commitment to creation and work to redeem and renew broken cultures. As disciples of Jesus, we do not fear death, and that leads us to participate in systems and institutions in ways that can breathe new life into them through our strategic resurrection presence.

Ascension and Enthronement (Acts 1:1-11; Rom 8:31-39; Rev 1:12-18; 7:9-11)

Story: Jesus' ascension means that even now he sits on the heavenly throne in powerful authority. Jesus entrusts and empowers the church to guard and carry out his mission until his eventual, similar return. Visions of the ascended Lord sustained martyrs like Stephen and can sustain us as well.

Skills: Keywords—Confidence, Patience. We practice serving from a place of deep conviction that intercultural workers are sent by the ruling Lord of heaven and earth. Authorized by the one on the throne, who is worthy of worship, we act with confidence and patience. We practice disciplines that prepare us to give our lives for the cause of Christ.



Strategy: We act in confidence and with patient endurance as we have the stamina to practice long-term engagement. We will try different approaches in engaging the world because our allegiance is not to them, but to him who sits on the throne. As we disciple others we equip them with patient endurance, knowing that this path may mean eventually embracing martyrdom.

Pentecost (John 14:15-27; Acts 2)

Story: According to Christ's promise, God's Spirit is breathed out and poured out on his disciples. Through the Spirit, Christ is inside all of us. The church has not been abandoned, it is not left alone, but relies on the Spirit's power and presence in every one of the members of her body to breathe life and joy into the world.

Skills: Keywords—Power, Presence, Protection, All Disciples. We practice practical dependence on the work of the Spirit in our lives and the global church community. Christ through his Holy Spirit will take up residence in his disciples and work in us to show the glory of God and fulfill God's purposes. Filled with the presence of God's Spirit, we all are empowered to live well as people of wisdom, discernment, and holiness.

Strategy: We practice empowering partnerships and resisting hierarchies. Pentecost means that the same Holy Spirit that is in us is also in them. God's Spirit levels the playing field and fills all of his servants empowering us to follow the example of Jesus, writing the new law on our hearts, helping us to find seekers, and sanctifying both us and them along the way.

Second Coming (Matt. 25; 2 Pet 3:8-14)

Story: This age will not simply continue as is, but at some point Jesus will return and judge the world, bringing his heavenly kingdom in its fullest form to the earth. The end of time will involve heaven crashing down on earth. The church (Christ's bride) prepares herself and others for the return of the bridegroom (Christ). Though the date and details of his return remain a mystery, the church keeps waiting, working, and witnessing, bringing our end goal nearer and sooner with every act of love and kindness, trusting that God will make good on his promises on that great day.

Skills: Keywords—Urgency, Expectation. We have a proper sense of expectation and urgency that comes from our confidence in Christ's return. Since Christ is coming soon to judge the world and see his redemption plan through to the end, we speak to that while also resisting the temptation to act as judge and jury. The spiritual disciplines



keep the truth in front of us that Jesus will put an end to sin, death, and Satan. Enacting this future reality means that participating in it will look less like following a script and more like collaborative improvisation as we bring this reality into being with God.

Strategy: We will engage the powers that be, speaking truth to broken individuals and institutions about justice and a day of judgment. We work with diligence and intensity to dismantle injustice. We are enacting this future realm of reality as we comfort the afflicted and help them anticipate our own resurrection, where God will make something even more glorious out of us. The second coming of Christ also reminds us that the future involves both cities and gardens—the church will reach both urban and rural contexts knowing that the future reality will incorporate both of them.

Seven Movements of Christ	Seven Movements of the Christian in Mission Summary
Incarnation	Being fully and humbly present with others
Life and Teaching	Living the disciple life—one marked by invitation, demonstration, and transformation
Crucifixion	Embracing suffering and service and forgiving others even at deep cost
Resurrection	Assured that death cannot defeat us, we are filled the hope and power of a new creation
Ascension/Enthronement	Authorized by the one on the throne, we bravely act with confidence and patience
Pentecost	Filled with the presence of God's Spirit, we all are empowered to live and serve well
Second Coming	Confident of Christ's return, we have a proper sense of expectation and urgency for a just reality

Conclusion: The Seven Movements of Christ in Practice

The phrase *playing God* is often used to refer to the ways that dictators, kings, leaders (and even missionaries) pridefully act in ways that are destructive and disastrous. They



fail because they play the roles that gods like Mars, Venus, and Mammon model for them. Christians, however, are to embody Jesus' practice of power, since he "is the God we are meant to play" (Crouch 2013, 281). The seven movements of Christ are a practical and memorable framework for education for playing God as revealed in Jesus in contemporary mission. While they do not provide foolproof step-by-step instructions for missional practitioners, they provide postures, pathways, and possibilities for robust participation in mission. In conclusion, I will share three ways to use the seven movements framework to encourage further personal and communal exploration and application.

The first tool is discussion questions that are useful for helping groups unpack the significance of these materials. Early in the teaching process, have people consider something they are good at. Follow that up by asking: How did practice play a role in you getting good at that skill? Who helped you? How was perseverance involved in your improvement? These questions get people to begin thinking about the seven movements in terms of habits and practices. Later, after they are familiar with all of the movements, further questions are helpful: Who do you know who embodies one of these seven movements well? What does embodying that movement look like in their life? Which of these movements does the church do well? Which one of these does the church need to practice more of today? What else stood out to you regarding the movements? How do we see the early church practicing these movements? Questions like these have proven effective in stimulating discussion.

A second tool I have used involves analyzing case studies from the life of William Carey (Howell 2023). Case studies have also played an important role in missions training and education. Many of us are familiar with and were formed by Paul and Frances Hiebert's influential book *Case Studies in Missions* (1987). While that book focused on training for challenging cross-cultural situations, it can also be helpful to use case studies that explore different aspects in the overall formation and work of a missionary. My students read and analyze a series of seven thematic and illustrative case studies from the life of William Carey in light of the seven movements of Christ. After formulating principles gleaned from each of the case studies, I ask them to offer their reflections on the life of Carey as a whole, how they see each of the seven movements of Christ in Carey's story, and how this contributes to their understanding of mission strategy today. Combining the seven movements of Christ with historical case studies has stimulated productive conversations about the past, present, and future of Christian missions.



A third resource for provoking further conversation about application of the seven movements is exposure to art. I show my students pictures of seven wood carvings that my wife Rachel created with a Mozambican wood carver. These carvings represent each of the seven movements of Christ, and I love the way that the scenes depicted are also contextualized to and shaped by Makua-Metto culture. For example, in the incarnation carving, Mary and Joseph are sitting in front of a hut. In the resurrection scene, Mary is carrying a baby on her back the way that our African friends carry them. It is important to remember that missional practitioners will need to contextualize these seven movements of Christ in different contexts. Living out the urgency of the second coming, or the confidence of the ascension in one context may look different than another. We develop discernment skills to know how to practice and participate in each movement well cross-culturally.

The framework of the seven movements of Christ empowers us to participate in the mission of Christ in the world. When Christology shapes our missiology, we corporately honor God in our expressions of ecclesiology in a given context. The seven movements of Christ help missional practitioners develop the missiological imagination necessary to effectively engage and impact the complexities we are encountering in the world today. Educating for contemporary mission is not about trying to choose the silver bullet strategy and "hit a bullet with a smaller bullet" while "wearing a blindfold" and "riding a horse" (Abrams 2009). Instead, participating in Christ through a seven-movement approach is more like learning and embodying ballet proficiency where we are practicing one movement after another while part of a company of dancers in local ways around the world.

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Internalization: New Frontiers in Learning Scripture



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Introduction

Scripture memory continues to be recognized in western society as a valued practice for children and adults alike (Boykin 2015, Houser 2014, Pope 2013, Smalley 2014). Internalization of Scripture takes this practice a step further by connecting learners with content in such a way that they understand not just the words but also the underlying concepts, including both the semantic and pragmatic functions of the original material. Successful internalization allows these functions to be reconstructed in other contexts, whether in a different form or register or in another language altogether, thereby making the material accessible to other audiences.

Drawing on learning theory, brain science, principles of memorization, and the world of oral Bible translation, this article proposes four components essential to effective internalization: the four Es of *encountering* the passage, *experiencing* the details, *engaging* the whole, and *establishing* consistency in the retelling. The combination of these elements provides a simple but powerful framework that can easily be adapted for learning and sharing God's Word in any context.

After laying out some foundational concepts, including a brief definition and history of internalization, I present the suggested framework, then discuss factors involved in adapting it across contexts. Ultimately, I hope this work will strengthen the hands of those seeking to learn, recall, and share Scripture as part of discipleship training, pastor education, Bible translation, or any other type of Christian formation.

Foundational Concepts

The notion of internalization appears in a variety of contexts, but only in the last few decades has it become connected with learning and reproducing Scripture. The





following subsections provide a basic definition of internalization, explain how it differs from the related discipline of memorization, and give a brief overview of its application to Scripture, beginning with initiatives in oral Bible storying and translation.

Defining Internalization

The words *internalize* and *internalization* date back to the 1850s (etymonline.com). Current dictionary definitions of these words generally reference absorbing or incorporating something into a system, as found in a variety of disciplines: psychology (adopting attitudes or behavior, Oxford Dictionary); economics (absorbing costs, Oxford); biology (bringing materials inside a cell membrane, Oxford); public speaking (mastering a message before delivery, Zumwald and Company 2020); and language learning and acquisition (knowing some aspect of a language well enough that it can "be retained and retrieved when needed for communication," British Council, n.d.).

In each case, internalizing conveys the idea of getting (and keeping) something inside a person or system. Likewise, the internalization of Scripture refers to getting (and keeping) God's Word inside of us in such a way that it becomes part of us.

Differentiating Internalization from Memorization

In many ways, internalization resembles memorization and can draw on many of the same techniques. Indeed, memorization remains a useful practice for many settings. Internalization takes memorization one step further, differing in one key aspect—reproducibility in other contexts.

Memorizing focuses on retaining the exact presentation of content, such as the sounds, word forms, and word order. Someone can memorize material by reproducing the sounds and the rhythm without understanding the content. Someone can also memorize material and understand the content deeply in a variety of ways, from relating to it personally to understanding its linguistic features. Internalization focuses specifically on a functional grasp of two dimensions (inspired by Rett Parker, personal correspondence, 2022):

- 1. Understanding the meaning of the words, including their connotations and associations (semantics).
- 2. Understanding any other effects intended by the passage, such as what emotions are involved, the intended illocutionary force, or which parts receive more emphasis (pragmatics).



Ultimately, internalization focuses on understanding the material in such a way that the concepts can be expressed both accurately and naturally in a new context. Someone who has internalized material can change the exact words, sentence order, and other factors as needed to communicate to a different audience. For example, someone might change the register of the material, choosing simpler words and sentence constructions for a little child. In cross-cultural situations, people can express internalized material in a completely different language.

A Brief History of Internalization and Oral Bible Translation

Internalization comes to us from the world of oral Bible storying and translation, which began with chronological Bible storytelling by New Tribes Mission in the Philippines in the 1960s (Toler 2020). In 2007, Robin Green proposed that a full oral Bible translation should be possible. As more teams embraced the idea of oral translations and started developing the practice, internalization became a necessity—somehow the mother-tongue translators needed access to the source text, and it would have to happen orally.

Since that time, individuals and teams all over the world have been learning how best to facilitate internalization. With my background in arts and education, I was invited to join the conversation in 2017 by helping train Dallas International University students in internalization as part of their oral Bible translation coursework. More recently, practitioners have started codifying best practices in their experience, such as the documentation produced by Suzuki (2022), Kelly (2020), and Stahl and Stahl (2019).

The field is still young. Many of the current recommendations for internalization overlap while also manifesting the kinds of variations expected from the authors' different experiences. This article proposes four core components that can anchor this body of recommendations, providing a memorable, easily transmittable, readily adaptable framework for internalization across contexts. Drawing on my own experience in the worlds of education and memorization for music performance, I also demonstrate how the framework is founded on well-established theories and scientific research. In providing this information, I hope to equip many within but also beyond the translation world to proceed with confidence in internalizing and reproducing Scripture in their ministry contexts.

The Four Es—A General Framework

Four components, or the four Es, can effectively anchor the internalization of a pericope. The process begins with a strategic first *encounter of the passage* and its



context, situating the content relative to what the learner already knows. After this initial *encounter with the big picture*, the learner *experiences the details*, exploring the pieces that work together to make up the whole. Thus equipped with an understanding of the finer points, learners can return to the big picture, *engaging the whole* by interacting with larger themes and patterns in the material and processing how the content affects them personally. Finally, learners *establish consistency* by retelling the passage multiple times, locking it into long-term memory. These stages, while roughly sequential, may also be revisited iteratively according to the needs of the learners.

The first three of the four Es follow the well-acclaimed *whole-part-whole* model of learning (Swanson and Law 1993), in which learners start with the big picture before exploring the details. Once learners have spent time with the particulars of a passage, they can integrate those details back into the big picture, and, with this deeper understanding of the material, better connect the whole with their personal situations. This integrated understanding becomes a strong foundation for consolidation in long-term memory.

Another well-tested educational principle, *associations*, threads through each stage. "We learn best by associating the new with what we already know" (Klemm 2007, 64, 68). Paul references Sui and Humphrey's 2015 work: "the act of self-reference—connecting new knowledge to our own identity or experience—functions as a kind of 'integrative glue,' imparting a stickiness that the same information lacks when it is encountered as separate and unrelated to the self" (2021, 62). Simply attending to information and connecting it with something else produces astounding effects, as shown by memory experts who use farfetched actions or associations to achieve feats of supermemory (Campayo 2010, 24).

A third principle, *emotional connection*, also undergirds the process of internalization. According to Tyng et al.'s metastudy, emotionally engaging experiences release "the hormones necessary to remember new things" (2017, 8), increasing the ability to pay attention, learn, and remember (2017, 16). As a result, "learning strategies that emphasize emotional factors are more likely to result in long-term knowledge retention" (2017, 16). At all ages, due to the brain's plasticity, "emotions contribute significantly to brain development and the learning process" (Adams 2021, 135-136). In other words, effective, efficient internalization must tap into the affective domain. As Odendahl says, "If the formation of meaning has its origin in affectively shaped experiences, then all comprehension of meaning must also be emotionally grounded" (2021, 489).



With this general overview established, the following subsections provide more details on the stages of the internalization process. Each section includes both practical considerations and grounding in research from a variety of disciplines.

Encounter the Passage

The first stage guides people in their initial encounters with the passage and its context. The primary goal is to connect what people already know with the material of the passage to be internalized, "activating learners' prior knowledge" and "forging a connection between their lives and the subject matter" (Gonulal and Loewen 2018, 3). Several educational theories provide insights at this stage. *Scaffolding* provides "specific just-in-time support" to activate learners' mental schemata appropriate to the material to be learned (Gonulal and Loewen 2018, 3-4). Krashen's *input hypothesis*, first proposed for language acquisition but since applied to many other fields of learning, suggests learners need "comprehensible input" to move from i, their current competence, to i+1, the next level of understanding (1982, 20-22).

Practically speaking, learners need to make three types of connections. First, they need to be able to situate the passage relative to their own experiences. To this end, Kelly suggests learners relate similar types of stories that they already know (2020, 104). As mentioned earlier, anything that taps into people's emotions will prime learning, and stories "build the kind of constructive emotional arousal that helps the brain learn" (Adams 2021, 141). Secondly, learners will benefit from connecting the passage with other parts of Scripture they know, situating its content within the larger context. Third, learners need to process the big picture of the passage itself, building familiarity with the characters, setting, sequence of events, and any relevant background information that will help them interpret the story. The five Ws of journalism often prove effective for this purpose: Where/when does the story take place? Who is involved? What happens? Why/how do the events develop?

Naturally, people's degree of biblical literacy will impact the specifics of how this stage unfolds, with the goal of providing whatever will help people understand and connect with the material. From Odendahl's perspective, "Teaching text comprehension always means, first and foremost: establishing access to a 'world comprehension'" (2021, 492). Learners should interact with the whole text several times at this stage, whether by listening or reading. Engaging other senses, such as acting out the story or using visualizations, will also strengthen connections, as will processing initial emotional reactions to the material.



Experience the Details

Building on the strong connections created with the big picture in the first stage, the second stage guides people in exploring the details. During this stage, learners gain intimate knowledge of all the parts of the passage such that they can express these ideas appropriately in new contexts. In order to achieve this level of familiarity, learners must register and attend to each relevant point and form associations long enough to move the concepts into longer-term memory (Klemm 2007, 63).

Since humans think more effectively when they distribute their cognitive load across multiple regions of the brain, relying *only* upon words will hinder this stage of intense mental engagement. Lampinen and Beike suggest engaging "as many modalities as possible" (2015, 281), and Campayo lays out considerations on visual, aural, and kinesthetic types of memory (2010, 11-13). In other words, drawing symbols, making motions, manipulating objects, or engaging in other sensory activities can strengthen the internalization process of making associations with the details of the text.

Even with strong sensory associations, humans have limits to working memory. Campayo suggests breaking material into progressively smaller units (2010, 83-84), a process known as chunking (Stangor and Walinga 2014, 270). Based on Miller's (1956) widely accepted claim that humans remember information best in chunks of "seven, plus or minus two," each layer of division should include a maximum of nine units, with the smallest chunks generally featuring between five and seven thought units. These smallest units, ultimately chosen by those leading the internalization process, might loosely be defined as "coherent clauses" (Holly Younghans, personal correspondence, April 10, 2023), phrases that can be associated well with one piece of sensory input.

Within the iterative process of learning these chunks, "each step is linked to the next" (Klemm 2007, 69). In this way, the parts build to the whole until the person has immediate cognitive access to all the pieces needed to render the full text effectively. Frost (2022, first handout) provides a collection of ideas for structuring this stage of internalization, including using emotions and tone of voice as opportunities for learners to connect empathetically with the material. The following subsections delve into two specific internalization techniques: the benefits of movement and the benefits of visualizations and props.

The Benefits of Movement. Of all the different modalities involved in creating meaning, physical movement rises to the top in some of the latest research. Odendahl provides an excellent summary of *embodied cognition* (2021, 487-488), while Paul



provides evidence that even "low-intensity" movements like standing rather than sitting boost overall engagement (2021, 48). These benefits only increase "by looping in the meaning-bearing movements of our limbs," which activates both *procedural* and *declarative* types of memory (2021, 54). Paul references the Noices' research, in which this "enactment effect" resulted in students remembering 76% of the material they were learning, compared with only a 37% recall rate for those who did not include movements in their learning (2021, 56). Overall, it seems that "simply forming the *intention* to move in connection with a piece of information seems to tag that information with a mental marker of importance" (2021, 56-57), strong evidence for the power of taking the time to associate each primary thought unit of a text with an intentional movement.

Two types of motions mentioned by Paul seem particularly suited to internalization. *Congruent* motions "enact the meaning of a fact or concept" (2021, 58). *Self-referential* movements encourage embodied imagining, putting oneself in the middle of the action (2021, 61-64). This concept overlaps with Odendahl's comments on the power of tapping into personal "body-bound experiences" (2021, 487-488). Both congruent and self-referential movements, then, create meaningful connections between the movements and the material being absorbed.

Likewise, using intentionally designed gestures "advances our understanding of abstract or complex concepts, reduces our cognitive load, and improves our memory" (Paul 2021, 80). Gestures particularly enrich collaborative learning and social interactions (Ferreira 2021, 1464). Paul notes that simply seeing others' gestures enhances communication by catching people's attention, facilitating comprehension, and promoting memory (2021, 80), but students who make gestures themselves seem to learn more than those who simply observe (2021, 86).

The Benefits of Visualizations and Props. Memory expert Campayo claims "the strongest memories are those based on images, and even stronger if they are composed of moving images, which I call *mental video*" (2010, 11). Holly Younghans (personal correspondence, April 10, 2023) uses the more memorable alliterative phrase "movie in my mind." Indeed, the brain can process visual cues in just 13 milliseconds: "Our eyes move to take in new information three or four times a second, and our understanding of the visual input seems to keep pace with this information flow" (Potter et al. 2014, 270). In his book *Cool Infographics*, Krum explains that humans primarily use sight to process the world around them and find the information they need to make decisions. Comprehensible, data-rich visualizations feed this natural tendency, resulting in the *picture superiority effect* (2013, 4-20). For example, people might remember only 10% of



a text after three days, while they can retain 65% of a text accompanied by relevant visuals (2013, 22). These considerations suggest the power of incorporating visual elements into the internalization process.

Planned props (Suzuki 2022, 22, 27, 44) or "random objects" found in the learning environment (Frost 2022, first handout; Kelly 2020, 104) combine the benefits of visualizing with the benefits of movement in manipulating the items. Ferreira explains that "learning environments that have different artifacts supporting students to store, process, and recall information, and specific protocols prompting the coupling with external world during learning process can address complexity and non-linearity in content thinking and problem-solving, which increases not just the engagement but also the learning outcomes of students (Haupt, 2015)" (2021, 1465-1466).

Engage the Whole

Once the learners have internalized the details and own the passage as a whole, they will benefit from taking intentional time to interact with the larger themes and patterns in the material and process how this content affects them personally. This stage serves as a logical extension to the theoretical perspectives already mentioned—wrapping up the whole-part-whole sequence and making deeper personal and emotional associations with an integrated, better understanding of the material.

Learners with an analytical bent may enjoy looking for connections throughout the text, for example, examining the function of repeated words or the use of conceptual metaphors. All learners can benefit from activities that help them process the text more deeply, especially prompts that elicit what they found most salient in the text, what they found disturbing or surprising, or how this passage might impact their lives and relationships in the immediate future. For example, Discovery Bible Study (2020) discussions provide a predictable structure guiding people to integrate what they have learned from the passage into their broader understanding of God, humanity, and the people in their immediate context. Steffen and Bjoraker (2020) cast a vision for how character-centric discussions can help people connect the story with their own situations. Likewise, the *Simply the Story Handbook* provides guidance for leading people through identifying spiritual "observations" and "applications" in a passage (Miller 2012, 37-47).

Establish Consistency

Even after the material has been processed thoroughly through an initial encounter, time with the details, and integration back into the big picture, the content will fade if



not reviewed and intentionally moved into long-term memory. Stangor and Walinga explain that whether information is retained or forgotten depends on how it is "attended to and processed" (2014, 366). Likewise, Klemm lays out rehearsal, consolidation, and cueing and recall as essential elements in the memorization process (2007, 63). Research provides additional insights into how to retain the material most effectively.

Karpicke and Roediger highlight the importance of "repeated retrieval" (as opposed to "repeated encoding during additional study") for effective long-term retention (2008, 968). Biologically, new information gets stored by the "strengthening of the synaptic connections between neurons," a process called *long-term potentiation* (Stangor and Walinga 2014, 385). Scientists have been able to identify and track the biochemical traces generated by reactivating the material; these traces need to overlap for potentiation to take place (Smolen et al. 2016, 9). In other words, learners must rehearse material within a critical period, otherwise the biochemical trace will decay, failing to strengthen the connection.

For some years, educators have recognized the role of *spaced learning*, that is, presenting new material at intervals, such as in ten-minute segments, rather than all at once (Klemm 2007, 70). In this vein, Kelley and Whatson (2013) demonstrate how "distractor activities" between periods of input improve long-term memory formation. Smolen et al. add to this discussion by suggesting that irregular spacing of retrieval works best (2016, 11), but the research has not advanced far enough to determine the exact times ideal for each situation. Maddox and Balota suggest that "the efficiency of retrieval practice is likely to be influenced by the precise lag used, the retention interval, the difficulty of the materials to be learned and the ability of the learner" (2015, 14).

In the meantime, we can move forward confident in the idea of irregularly spaced review sessions. Based on my work with memorization in organ performance and my experience in a variety of educational contexts on three continents, I currently recommend a starting formula of 20-2-24 for the first three rehearsals: *twenty-ish minutes, two-ish hours*, and *twenty-four hours*. For cultures less attuned to exact timekeeping, these prompts can become *after a short task, after a longer task*, and approximately the same time tomorrow. Most people will need to continue reviewing the material every 24-72 hours for a few weeks before dropping further in frequency. As people get to know their own abilities, they can adjust these times accordingly.



Revisiting a passage at intervals also allows for subconscious processing to take place. In many cases, learners will find themselves expressing concepts more naturally over time, a most desirable outcome because internalization focuses on the *function* of the communication rather than on exact words or word order. Learners will, of course, need to check their renditions against the original input, especially in the beginning. Over time, the retelling will settle into a consistent delivery of the material.

Factors and Adaptations for Different Contexts

My goal has been to provide a memorable framework that can stay constant across different contexts while also leaving room for necessary adaptations. Indeed, the possible variations on internalization settings are as diverse as the number of people and cultures around the world who might wish to learn and recall Scripture. The following subsections provide insights on five topics that can support practitioners in considering possible modifications: working alone or in groups; honoring learning preferences and expectations; preparing for internalization; facilitating narrative versus non-narrative passages; and communicating the framework of the four Es to others.

Individuals and Groups

Individuals can certainly internalize effectively. My husband, proficient in Greek and doing his own exegesis, had the resources and motivation to set up his own encounter, experience, and big-picture engagement to internalize all of 1 Peter. For establishing consistency, he used the built-in spaced repetition feature of Anki flashcards to prompt him. Similarly, I have seen dozens of undergraduate and graduate students internalize effectively for various class assignments.

At the same time, a great deal of evidence suggests distinct advantages to working in groups when possible. Studies have shown that more brain regions get activated, with more connections among those regions, when people engage with each other, allowing people to learn better (Paul 2021, 191-192). Paul adds, "Human thought is exquisitely sensitive to context, and one of the most powerful contexts of all is the presence of other people. As a consequence, when we think socially, we think differently—and often better—than when we think non-socially" (2021, 189). Adams brings out research showing how both emotional and social factors play an essential role in learning (2021, 136), while Ferreira presents evidence that collaborative learning lightens participants' cognitive load in a number of ways, especially when groups use gestures and other physical motions to communicate (2021, 1463-1464).



Learning Preferences and Expectations

Internalization works best when structured around the learning preferences of the people involved. The Lingenfelters provide a concise introduction to different factors that affect learning, including learning styles and perceived roles of teachers and learners across cultures (2003, 59-86). While Vella (2000, 2002), *Learning that Lasts* (n.d.), and other resources on andragogy provide an excellent starting point for supporting adult learners, Hatcher warns not to assume that these principles transfer across cultures but calls for the study of "ethnomethodology" in each context (2008, 14). Even within a group from the same cultural background, learners may have different pacing needs or ways of processing information. In other words, facilitators should expect internalization to look slightly different in nearly every context.

When designing internalization experiences, facilitators will want to tap into the culture's expressive resources and avoid introducing approaches outside those resources. For example, drawing symbols will not work for a culture that does not communicate with two-dimensional representations. Working with the Sakalava of Madagascar, Laura Bracy (email to author, February 8, 2023) asked her team how they liked to play as children. When one of them mentioned building sand sculptures, she brought in a pile of sand, which led to an elaborate retelling of Ruth with stones for Moab and Judah and sticks for Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah, complete with leaf hats. In a variation on the technique of random objects, the man internalizing the story moved these stick figures while learning the text.

Especially in the first and third stages of internalization, which might include questions to help learners process the material, facilitators must consider the communication preferences of the team. For example, direct questions may create offense in some contexts, while indirect communication may not be effective in others. During one of my webinars (Frost 2022), a participant told me my questions felt very "literate" to her and would not work in her primarily oral context in Brazil. Rountree identifies some significant factors in communication styles across cultures (93-117), followed by examples of these factors (2001, 93-117, 194-195, 202-203). Facilitators will benefit from humbly dialoguing with participants to establish a comfortable and productive working environment.



Preparation for Internalization

Exegesis of a passage prior to internalization must be given adequate attention, or the rest of the process will suffer. Internalization depends on a thorough understanding of the material; any gaps in the foundational stage of exegesis may affect the quality of the internalization. Some groups may prefer to exegete a passage together, while others may assign the task to one or more people. The goal is to have one or more people "knowledgeable about the Bible so that difficult issues are dealt with immediately before the team begins crafting the story" (Stahl and Stahl 2019, 6).

Intentionally designing the activities for internalization will make the process more enjoyable and effective. The second posted handout of my webinar (Frost 2022) provides an example guide of how to think about the exegesis and other preparation for an internalization session, being sure to consider both the nature of the text and the preferences of the group. The first handout provides an inventory of possible activities.

Narrative and Non-narrative Strategies

The four Es equally support internalizing non-narrative (poetry, exhortations, lists, etc.) or narrative passages; however, the kinds of information that best support learners in the initial encounter phase differ. For example, learners encountering a narrative generally benefit from discussing the characters, their relationships, and their development, while learners encountering non-narrative can better concentrate on key themes, their relationships, and how they unfold through throughout the passage. Frost (2021) provides additional discussion and recommendations on how facilitators can prepare for different kinds of texts.

When it comes to the second stage, experiencing the details, non-narrative passages may require even more careful, methodical connections with sensory input, including plenty of review. While narratives often progress through familiar, mostly chronological patterns of building tension to a climax and resolution, non-narrative passages may require a more intentional focus on the details and on the relationships among those details. For example, understanding how chiastic or parallel structures work in Hebrew poetry may help learners retain the details more effectively.

Ultimately, the key for both narrative and non-narrative texts lies in understanding the passage deeply and therefore being able to connect with it emotionally. Perhaps this point explains why non-narrative can feel so much harder—we do not always understand these passages as well, which makes it harder to connect with them in the



affective domain. Given what we know about how emotions help learners absorb and remember content, facilitators may wish to give extra attention to helping people understand and connect emotionally with non-narrative texts.

Transmitting the Framework to Others

Although the underlying principles can remain the same across contexts, the mnemonic of the four Es may need adaptation. Teams in some English-speaking contexts may find the four Es too high of a register and wish to use simpler terms. In other languages, a different opening letter (or sound) may work far better than E. Some teams may prefer to develop memorable motions or visuals rather than focus on catchy phrases. Whatever the form of transmission, the goal is to provide others with a memorable way to retain and apply the underlying principles of the framework.

Conclusion

The sheer variety of nuances possible in each learning context suggests the need for a broad yet flexible framework for internalization. The four Es presented in this paper attempt to provide a memorable, well-grounded starting point, a compact way to present the key pillars of learning while still allowing ample room for creativity as needed per situation.

Internalization comes to us from the world of oral Bible translation, but it is applicable much more widely. From pastor and discipleship training to any other type of Bible-based formation, including personal and family devotional lives, this practice can help people understand and then express Scripture naturally. I have watched student after student return, aglow with stories of being able to share Scripture across boundaries, whether with their children or with a full translation team (see Toler 2020).

One story stands out in particular, as it happened before my eyes. One of my students, from Brazil, had internalized Psalm 67 in English for our course assignment. The next day in class, I asked him if he knew the psalm in Portuguese. He said he did not. On a whim, I asked him if he would be willing to try expressing it in his native language. I'll never forget that moment. He looked up at the ceiling, paused a few seconds, and then started talking, continuing without hesitation. As he finished, the look on his face was priceless—the content was solid, as engrained in his heart as if he'd learned it in Portuguese in the first place. Internalization had brought Scripture to life for him in another way, in another language.



The world is full of people who need Scripture to come to life for them in their context, in their language. Internalization according to the four Es provides a simple but powerful framework for learning and sharing God's Word in any setting, whether in one's home culture or across cultural or linguistic boundaries. May God strengthen our hands as we explore these new frontiers in expressing His Word.

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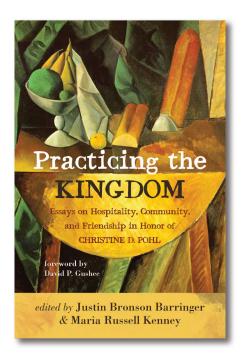


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REVIEW: Practicing the Kingdom Edited by Justin Bronson Barringer & Maria Russell Kenney



REVIEWED BY JESSICA A. UDALL Barringer, Justin Bronson, and Maria Russell Kenney, eds.
Practicing the Kingdom: Essays on Hospitality,
Community, and Friendship in Honor of Christine D. Pohl.
Eugene: Cascade, 2022. Pp 236, ISBN: 978-1-4982-1801-6
\$31.00 paperback.



Practicing the Kingdom was written as a festschrift in honor of Christian ethicist Dr. Christine D. Pohl and was published soon after she retired from Asbury Seminary. Pohl has researched and written widely on topics that, according to David P. Gushee's foreword, have also deeply characterized her daily life—notably the practices of hospitality, community building, and friendship. In this collection of essays, thirteen contributors explore and expand the themes of Pohl's work to honor her contributions and continue her legacy.

Pohl's life and work display a commitment to academic excellence alongside a "dedication to exploring, teaching, and living an ethic of applied, practical faith" (p. 2). The polar opposite of an

ivory-tower academic, Pohl "never cloistered herself behind abstractions," (p. 222). Rather, even her most philosophical ideas are meant to be lived out on the street level, bringing the kingdom of God to bear on everyday life.

Part One of the book explores the topic that Pohl is most well-known for (hospitality) with three essays considering spiritual hospitality for those whose ideas about God are different than ours—the distinctives of Christian hospitality as compared with civil and market-driven hospitality, the paradoxical importance of a transforming holiness as a fundamental aspect of biblical hospitality, and the liturgical season of ordinary time as a resource and context for the cyclical practice of ordinary hospitality.

Pohl is realistic and clear-eyed when she advocates for the importance of hospitality and community—this kind of closeness with other humans, even within the church, is





often complicated and requires much wisdom. Part Two delves into the messiness of Christian community, exploring the Western pitfall of individualism, the way that vulnerability with others helps to form strong and healthy communities, and the illusion of idealism that threatens such vulnerability.

Part Three looks at friendship as integrally connected with hospitality and community, defining friendship as welcome of the other in imitation of God, considering how many modern friendships fall short in the areas of mutuality and acceptance, and reimagining friendships in light of the Kingdom of God. Part four widens the lens and considers Pohl's work on the previously discussed topics from the broader perspectives of evangelical ethics, evangelical feminism, and the love of God as the creative center of the Christian faith.

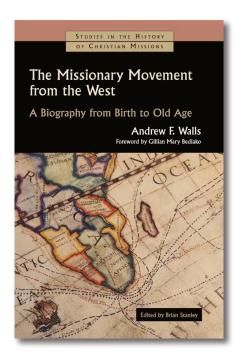
For those who want their academic study to stay integrally connected to and useful for the practices of the Christian life in community, this book will be a thought-provoking encouragement and exhortation. For those who are specifically interested in the work of Christine Pohl, this book should not be viewed as a substitute for reading her own books and articles, since the various contributors are self-admittedly taking what they have learned from her and running with it in their own unique ways. But for those who are interested in writing on the same topics Pohl emphasized while adding their own perspectives, these essays demonstrate the various ways that others are already building upon the foundation that she laid, and reading this work will perhaps spark the reader's own insights to join the ongoing conversation on hospitality, community, and friendship in the kingdom of God.

Jessica A. Udall

REVIEW: The Missionary Movement from the West by Andrew F. Walls (ed. Brian Stanley)



REVIEWED BY EDWARD L. SMITHER Andrew F. Wells (ed. Brian Stanley), The Missionary Movement from the West: A Biography from Birth to Old Age. Michigan: Eerdmans. Pp 295, ISBN: 000-978-0-8028-4897-0 \$32.99 paperback.



The Missionary Movement from the West is the final published work from Andrew Walls (1928-2021), the father of the study of world Christianity. Walls served in mission, primarily in education, in Sierre Leone and Nigeria before returning to the UK where he held posts at the University of Aberdeen, University of Edinburgh, and Hope Liverpool University. At Aberdeen and Edinburgh, he pioneered the Centre for the Study of World Christianity.

Walls never wrote a monograph. Rather, his award-winning published works—*Missionary Movement in Christian History* (1996), *The Cross-Cultural Process in Mission History* (2002), and *Crossing Cultural Frontiers* (2017)—were all essays

compiled by others into Walls readers. *The Missionary Movement from the West* follows this pattern. Walls originally gave the chapters in this book as lectures that trusted friends then transcribed. Since Walls passed away before the work was completed, his Edinburgh colleague Brian Stanley edited the book into a coherent whole.

The book is organized into four sections comprised of four chapters each. In part 1 ("Birth and Early Years: The Origins of Western Missions"), Walls shows how global mission followed what he calls "Greater European Migration"—Europe's movement toward the world for economic and political gain (chap 1). He then discusses how Jonathan Edwards influenced western mission sending through the publication of the *Life of David Brainerd* (chap 2). Next, he narrates the rise of missions among German pietists and early mission societies from Britain (chap 3). Finally, he shows how





evangelicals were involved in social action and humanitarian work at an early point in the Protestant missionary movement (chap 4).

In part 2 ("Toward Middle Age: Western Missions in the Nineteenth Century"), Walls begins by showing how developing eschatology—particularly toward premillennialism—influenced mission theology and practice (chap 5). Next, by focusing on the work of Henry Venn, Walls navigates the relationship between western and non-western churches, including Venn's famous three-self paradigm (chap 6). Using southern Africa as a case study, Walls probes the nineteenth-century understanding of race and culture (chap 7). Finally, he explores the work of key western missionaries in China and how an appreciation for indigenous culture changed the perspectives of western missionaries (chap 8).

In part 3 ("Midlife Crises: Western Mission in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries"), he first shows how western missions had become an acceptable enterprise by the mid-nineteenth century (chap 9). Next, he surveys the optimism and organization of the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh (chap 10). He then discusses the rise of missionary specialization, particularly the work of medical missionaries (chap 11). Finally, in contrast to Edinburgh 1910, he shows how the 1938 Tambaram (India) conference highlighted the voices and influence of non-western church and mission leaders (chap 12).

In part 4 ("Old Age: The Second World War and the Western Missionary Movement"), he surveys the developing post-colonial and post-missionary churches in India (chap 13), China (chap 14), and Africa (chap 15). He concludes the work with a call for local and contextual theology, arguing that western Enlightenment-influenced theology is too small for the needs of the global church.

Professor Walls' work contains rich insights that often begin with a reading of Scripture (e.g., Daniel, Ephesians) about the realities of world Christianity. He also includes some framing motifs about the western missionary story that have certainly challenged and clarified my thinking. First, he juxtaposes the paradigm of a crusader versus that of a missionary. The crusader is prepared to compel while "the missionary can only demonstrate, explain, entreat—and leave the rest to God" (14). Though early western missions developed in a context of Christendom and western colonial expansion, missionaries do not base their gospel work on political or economic power.

Second, he asserts that the Protestant western missionary movement was fueled by Pietists and those who have experienced authentic spiritual renewal. Walls likens this



radical Christianity to the rise of monasticism in the fourth century—those who wanted to press on as spiritual martyrs even when Christianity had become an accepted way of life (21). Both monks and radical evangelicals contributed much to the story of global mission.

Third, the general trajectory of the second half of the book showed how western missions contributed to and became a part of the world Christian movement. Missionaries in China, for example, worked hard to understand and engage culture, which caused them to revisit Scripture with fresh eyes and change their theology and practice of mission.

I have just two lingering concerns after reading the book. First, structurally, there was much overlap. Though the origins of the work—a series of lectures given in various places over time—explain this, I do feel the editors could have done a bit more cutting on repeated themes such as Greater European Migration and the Enlightenment's effect on western theology.

Second, Professor Walls asserts that the fourth-century Nicene Creed was largely a Greek product that addressed Greek concerns (242). Though the original creed was produced in the Greek language and certain terms in the creed such as homoousios were quite Greek, I'm reminded that the Arian controversy was birthed in Egypt and the key theologian who opposed Arius—Athanasius—was probably from a Coptic background. The heresy spread to Asia Minor where Arius had fled, which prompted the Roman Emperor (with the help of his Latin-speaking Spanish theological advisor) to call the first ecumenical council. Though the majority of the 300-plus bishops hailed from within the Roman Empire, Bishop John of Persia attended and signed the Nicene Creed on behalf of the churches of Persia and India. The building material for the creed had been the baptismal creeds of the early churches; a reflection of the rule of faith. Following the fourth-century council, global churches (e.g., Syrian, Persian, African) continued to affirm the Nicene Creed in their liturgies as a faithful summary of the gospel.

Quibbles aside, I really love this book. Professor Walls' oral method, winsome voice, and rich insights offer a welcome invitation to the study of western missions in world Christian studies. Professors and students of mission history and global Christianity will greatly benefit from this study.

Edward L. Smither