

Christ's Mission

God's heart is for mission. He came to seek and to save that which is lost. That is why He sent Christ. His heart is outreach and evangelism to all people. Our mission is to every person of every nation, of every religion and of every background. We go to the cities and the far away villages, to the civilized and to the naked, with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We preach the free grace of Christ urgently to all men, women and children, compelling them to repentance and to faith through Jesus Christ. This urgency and zeal marks all true believers in Christ.

In this chapter we look at missions as the life of Christ manifested in us, in contrast to a methodological approach. Topics covered include:

- Missions in the 1st millennium.
- Syncretism.
- Contextualization.
- Contextual theology.
- Traditional and biblical factors in missions.
- The social gospel.
- Interviews with missionaries.
- Factors affecting mission in Islamic centres.

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, All power is given to Me in heaven and in earth. Go therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world. Amen. (Matt 28:18-20).

The mission of Christ is based on His victory and His complete authority in all realms in heaven and on earth. This mission does not require the permission of any person, devil or human government. It comes from the highest authority – Christ Himself. We do not have to “earn” the opportunity to preach Christ to any person. We have it already in the Commission.

The mission was not only given to the 11 disciples in this passage, but to the church as a whole. When Jesus prayed for His disciples in John 17:20, He included all that would hear the gospel through them. His commands to them are also His commands to us. The “world” (*age*) in Matt 28:20 refers not to the Jewish age, but to the whole church age before His Second Coming.

Mission is necessitated by the truth of the total depravity of man. All classes and races of men are equal. All are born depraved before God and all require salvation through Jesus Christ. The total depravity of fallen man means there is no superior race and that any blessing a people has comes only from the gospel. This truth has inspired mission to all people. Sometimes people think their nation is blessed because the people are good. No, any goodness is only because of the grace of God.

Some recent theories in mission ignore fundamentals of biblical truth. Theories that find truth in culture or human religion deny *sola scriptura* and *total depravity*. This is a common trend in our time, trying to make the gospel acceptable. Truth is only found in Jesus Christ.

The Scope of Mission

The scope of mission in Matt 28:18-20 encompasses the whole of life, including preaching the gospel to every person in all nations upon earth. It is not limited to any race. The church is not to be racial, but one family of all nations, tongues and races. In all nations the gospel is the same one gospel, unchanged by local conditions.

The scope includes teaching people everything that Jesus handed to us through His first apostles. The message is conservative, not changing with generation or culture. We are to teach faithfully what was handed to us. We have no say in what the message is, but as faithful ambassadors, we are to teach what Jesus taught. We do not add to it, nor take away from it: we must continue in the Apostle's doctrine (Acts 2:42).

This means that mission is teaching the whole counsel of God. It is not specialising in a certain message, such as healing, or prosperity, or kingdom. He did not call us to be "specialists" in the sense of giving people only a part of the message. He called us to be faithful to His whole counsel (Acts 20:27).

"Make disciples of all nations" does not mean of the political nation, but make disciples in all nations. It is the disciples who change the nation by their renewed lives. We are salt, light and leaven in society, bringing godly change at all levels. This is not done by means of churches adopting a "social gospel", but by preaching the true gospel of Jesus Christ. God then transforms people's hearts and they impact society.

We can see in history that if believers do not impact society, but hide their light under a bushel, then society will impinge upon the church and eventually overshadow it. It will be trodden under foot by men, governments, laws and armies. Society is not neutral. It is opposed to God unless the people in it are renewed by faith.

This means that Christians should influence business, government, media, education and arts. This does not mean that we should use these fields just to make money. It means Christians bring God's values, principles and truth into these fields, for the good of the people in society. We are the leaven.

This is one way in which God brings His general grace to the nation for the benefit of all. It allows us to hand on a better society to the next generation. This does not make people in society Christians, but it does mean that all men benefit from the Christian gospel.

Mission includes going into every sphere of human life and preaching Christ and the values of the kingdom of God. We go into all the world (*kosmos*), every part of man's life and preach Christ to the people there (Mark 16:15).

The Un-Reached

Christ's mission is to those who have not heard the gospel. It was Paul's desire to preach where Christ was not known (Rom 15:19-21). Every true Christian and every true church has this heart. A church is not a church of Jesus Christ if it does not have the heart of Jesus. Jesus "came to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). We know a true church in part because it is evangelical and missions orientated, which shows that Jesus is there.

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all orientated towards mission. The Father called Abraham for the purpose of blessing all nations of the earth. Jacob received not only a blessing, but also a birthright.

The birthright was the Father's promise that their seed would bless all nations of the earth (Gen 22:18). Esau cared only for the blessing, for which he shed tears, but not at all for the birthright.

Birthright

Today also there are "birthright Christians" and "blessing Christians". Blessing Christians live off the fruit of the gospel others have laboured for. Birthright Christians labour giving their lives and substance to ensure that the gospel is established. This is not just a duty, but comes naturally from the heart where Christ lives.

Jesus said He came to preach the gospel in every place and village (Luke 8:1). Many are content when Jesus is preached in a few large cities when thousands of villages remain un-reached. The Holy Spirit is centred on Christ's mission. He moves the church to preach the gospel to all people, directing which way to go and confirming the message with signs and wonders. In the book of Acts we see the Holy Spirit initiating outreach to all people. This is His heart and purpose.

Not Related to End-Times

Mission is not an end-times strategy. Some say we must preach to all the Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims and then Jesus will come back. The Bible does not say this. We preach the gospel to all these people, with a heart of strong desire to reach all, because Jesus has commanded us to in His Great Commission and from compassion.

We do it because Jesus lives in us and His heart is our heart. We do it because we care for people. We do it because we have a call from God to do it. We do it because "such as I have, I give to you..." (Acts 3:6). We do it because we want others to share in the fellowship we have with one another and with the Father (1 John 1:3). Basing missions on end-times may excite people, but it is not biblical. It is wrong motivation.

"Jesus is coming in five years!" So everyone rallies and sends out missionaries to reach the world. When Jesus does not come in five years, people lose their motivation and leave the missionaries on the field unsupported. We do not need untrue "popular" motivation for the Lord's work. Mission should come from the heart, rather than from excitement. True motivation lasts and even grows.

Many people are unaware that all nations have already been reached with the gospel. There is not one major people group on earth today that some time in the last 2,000 years has not lived in the vicinity of the gospel message. This shows again that interpreting Matt 24:14 in relation to the Second Coming of Jesus is not correct.

God created the world because it pleased Him to create us, to show us His love and to bring us into fellowship through His Son. He called Abraham and elected him to make him a blessing to all nations (Gen 22:17-18). That is why He has elected us, to work through us to show His love to all mankind. This is the purpose of election, to make us His vessels to reach all mankind with the gospel. Transformed man is then to transform his culture and nation.

The First Millennium

Immediately the Day of Pentecost came the gospel exploded into the nations, fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies about the reign of Christ over all flesh. By the end of the first millennium AD the church in the East was twice as large as the church in the West. Archaeology shows that the main portion of humanity was at least in proximity to the gospel in the first millennium. (America or Australia

is not studied here, in respect to actual population levels, or the possibility of gospel penetration in the first millennium.)

It is evident that by the end of the 1st Century AD the gospel had reached Africa, Russia, the Middle East, Asia, India and Europe as far as Britain. The gospel strengthened rapidly in these regions in the years that followed. By the 700's Christianity had a strong presence in much of China and was in Japan, Indonesia and the Philippines.

These studies are supported archeologically, not by tradition. For an introduction see Samuel Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia* and search Martin Palmer, P.Y. Saeki, John Stewart and John England on the Internet.

It is helpful to ask why missions in some of these earlier reached regions eventually failed and they became largely lost to the gospel. It is helpful also to see how the early church succeeded so rapidly in the midst of strong persecution and heresy. Jesus said, "I will build My church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." (Matt 16:18).

The Book of Acts

Acts records the expansion of Christianity to the West. It was written by Luke who worked with the Apostle Paul. Paul worked west of Jerusalem, as far as Spain. Acts says very little about other missions that were obviously going on concurrently with Paul's.

For example, the Magi came from the east (Persia) when Jesus was born (Matt 2:1). Persia is modern day Iran. Magi were not kings, but wise men, or scientists/astrologers. They took the gospel back to Persia. An African also carried Jesus' cross.

On the Day of Pentecost men were present from "every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5). These included Iranians and Russians and those from Elam, east of the Persian Gulf. These also took the gospel back with them.

In 37AD the church at Jerusalem was scattered in the early persecutions (Acts 8:1). Believers travelled out preaching the gospel everywhere. These at first preached to the Jews only and the largest Jewish community then was in Babylon. These believers would have gone to many places not mentioned in Acts.

In Acts 8 Philip spoke to the eunuch who served the Queen of Ethiopia. The eunuch took the gospel back to Ethiopia. Ethiopia then was a more general notation for the sub-Sahara races, not just limited to the Ethiopia of today. Asians and an African were present at the first church council in Acts 15. There were many other outreaches the Holy Spirit was undertaking that we know very little, if anything, about.

Africa

Early sources tell us that two Christians were shipwrecked off the horn of Africa and started churches in Axum, Ethiopia, which have been related to the church at Alexandria until the present day. Mission to Sudan also established a strong church before Islam. Tertullian, Origen and Augustine (Berber) were all North Africans.

Augustine's mother was Tuareg. The Tuareg are part of the Berber peoples of North and West Africa, who traded across the Sahara to Northern Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon and Côte d'Ivoire. The Berber are descendents of Ham. There was correspondence then between North and West African peoples, with archaeological evidence of churches then in such places as Mali.

Augustine was an early major theologian of the church. There was North and West African influence in his development. Augustinian theology follows the Pauline gospel and contributed largely to Reformation theology and to the present day Evangelical/Pentecostal roots.

Christianity remained dominant in a wealthy Ethiopia until the Persians conquered the trade routes in the late 500's. Ethiopian history is less clear after that but Christianity remained dominant until a new dynasty arose in 1270AD claiming descent from Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Religion became fashioned after Solomonic and Jewish traditions and the worship of Mary.

This continued until Jihad in the mid 1500's. Ethiopia moved its capital to Gondar, where Christian rulers remained until the military coup in 1974. Orthodox Christians in Ethiopia today comprise 43% of the population.

Africans Reached

The Bantu populations of Africa were not widespread in southern regions of Africa until much later. This is well established by language studies and explorers in the second millennium. After initial Islamic expansion in the 7th and 8th Centuries the Bantu people began to migrate south and east from West Africa and populated much of the tropical and southern portions of Africa. It was a slow migration south, still going on well into the second millennium.

In the early years the greatest portion of the African people groups were in the northern regions of Africa and did not have a witness among them of the gospel. God did not abandon Africa until the modern mission movement. When jihad pushed the people south it appears they did not take the gospel with them. It appears also that the Ethiopian church lost its life and failed to reach out.

From the 1800's we see the rise of indigenous churches once again in Africa, but we cannot see a link between any of these and 1st millennium indigenous churches, even though some indigenous churches in southern Africa today bear the name "Ethiopian" to identify them with indigenous tradition. All modern indigenous churches were started after the beginning of the modern mission thrust into Africa.

Asia

There are many traditions about early apostles and their travels. Thomas is said to have preached in India. We do not know this for certain, but it is certain that the church existed in India in the 1st Century. Secular sources show Christians to be living as far east as northern Afghanistan by 196AD, so we know that they were established there before that date.

Christians travelled very early on the trade routes to China and beyond and to India and the sub-continent region. By the 5th Century the Asian Nestorian group was very strong and missions orientated. From Seleucia-Ctesphion in Persia (modern Iran) by the middle of the 6th Century mission groups went to Egypt, Syria, Arabia, Mesopotamia, Persia, India, Ceylon, China and Mongolia.

It is possible that Iran, in its past, sent out more Christian missionaries than any other nation since. They took the gospel all over the world. By the 500's the church in China was strong. By the 700's Chinese bishops were writing their own theology books. There is archaeological evidence of the gospel in Japan, Indonesia and the Philippines by the 700'sAD. Historian John Stewart states:

Whole peoples with their rulers had become Christians and it seems certain that there were few places in the whole of Asia that were not reached at some time or other...and in the 11th Century (the Asian church) is said to have outnumbered the Greek and Roman churches combined.

From the Pacific Ocean in the East to the Mediterranean in the West; from the Black Sea and Siberia to the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea, Assyrian missions were working. Asia Minor, Cyprus, Egypt, Palestine, Mesopotamia, Arabia, Persia, Afghanistan, India, China, Japan, Mongolia, Manchuria and Turkistan...all had missions where the gospel was taught by zealous workers of the Assyrian Church of the East...

Arabia

Before the Islamic conquests of the 7th Century the largest Arab kingdoms were Christian. When Paul was saved he went into Arabia, not to meditate in deserts, but to fellowship with Christians. Persia had a bishopric in Qatar. Yemen in the far south west was evangelised in the mid 300's by Theophilus on route to India.

Persecutions in Persia drove many Christians to evangelise Arabia. Monasteries were built along the Arab side of the Gulf. The Persian Synod of 410 had bishops from Qatar and Bahrain. In 225 settlers found a group of native Christians near Babylon. Nestorians formed Christian communities (*umma*) between normally aggressive tribal groups of Arabia. Some of these Christian communities survived long into the Islamic era.

The Christian Empire of Ethiopia

In the mid 500's an Ethiopian army poured into Arabia to defend Christians being killed by pagan and Jewish persecutors. The Ethiopian king established his rule in Yemen, at a Christian pilgrimage site. Christianity flourished.

The Ethiopian king was the unrivalled ruler of the region, but his army was expensive to keep. The nearby city of Mecca held an annual pagan pilgrimage that was also lucrative. The Ethiopian king marched on Mecca to stop its idolatrous worship of the Kaaba stones. Whether the king was only against idolatry, but also wanted to stop commercial competition from Mecca we do not know.

The leader of Mecca at this time was Mohammed's grandfather. Mohammad was a child. Mecca sued for peace and the Ethiopian king demanded they hand over the Kaaba, which would have ensured that the city no longer had status as a pilgrimage centre. Mecca refused. Surprisingly Mecca was able to hold off the attack and the Ethiopian king withdrew. Later Islam continued to use Mecca and the stones of Kaaba as a pilgrimage centre, ridding it of all pagan gods but Allah.

Islam's justification for war was the idolatry of the church in those regions. Christianity had become syncretised (meshed in) with the cultures of the region. In Egypt and Ethiopia they worshipped Isis the mother god and her son, renaming them Mary and Jesus. It was syncretism, not really Islam, which was the church's downfall. The church has survived in all those countries till today. In Iran there are significant numbers of Christians and Jews who are forced to pay a tax, to allow them some freedom of worship.

The rise of Islam was not novel. Mohammed claimed to be the Comforter that Jesus promised would come. Several false prophets before him claimed the same. By *Comforter* Jesus was referring to the Holy Spirit, given to the church on the Day of Pentecost. Manichaeism was a sect started prior to Islam, founded by Mani. His career was strikingly similar to Mohammed's.

Mani claimed to be the Comforter and the greatest in a succession of prophets including Old Testament prophets and Jesus, just as Mohammed did. Islam is a syncretised Christian/Jewish sect. Mani distinguished between more spiritual worshippers and laity, the former *taking confession* from the latter and abstaining from marriage, which the Roman Catholic priesthood followed.

Europe

Gregory *the Illuminator* went to Armenia around 230AD and converted the king. Armenia kept its Christian identity through the centuries. There is an earlier tradition that the Apostle Thaddeus went to Armenia but we do not know that for certain. Christians went very early into Russia. There is a strong Orthodox Church there still today.

The gospel spread as far as Britain before the first apostles died. The Germanic tribes were all reached before the break up of the Roman Empire. At the Nicaea Council in 325AD, 800 bishops from the West and 1000 bishops from the East were present, including one signature from "John the Persian, of the churches of the whole of Persia and in the great India."

The significance of this is that the theology of the early church councils is not Western theology. No one church was in charge. They met as independent bishops in one fellowship of the saints. Reformed Theology is not Western. It is derived from the early church councils before the Roman church became corrupt and before that from Pauline theology and the theology of the first church council in Acts 15.

Augustine brought a partial reformation to the church in the 4th and 5th Centuries, but he was too influenced by the asceticism of Tertullian and Origen to do much. Augustine was able to defeat Pelagius, who claimed that man was not born in sin and could be saved by works, but he did not overcome the syncretism of Greek philosophy in the early church.

Lessons

There is much more evidence of the extent of early missions. A Japanese professor P.Y. Saeki stated that Nestorian Christianity penetrated the whole of Chinese literature and that Asia was widely covered by missionaries. The Nestorians were an eastern branch of the church, which went out mainly from Persia (Iran).

Most of the world was reached in the first millennium. Australia and America are left out of this study. Leaving aside the theories of evolution it is doubtful that their populations were extensive. We need an anthropological study of migrations to show this. Philip Nicolai (1556-1608) claimed that European explorers to the Peruvians, Brazilians and West Indies found evidence of earlier Christian witness.

The Great Commission is not complete: it goes on in every generation. But this shows what a tremendous job the early church did. In the midst of persecution and heresy the European church dominated the continent by the 5th Century. The Nestorians, despite their humanism, made unbelievable strides and were highly dedicated to their task.

God does not require satellites and aircraft to fulfil the Great Commission. Current generations are not more able than past. We should use technology, but it is the gospel that is God's power and God who makes His people willing in the day of His power.

Nestorians

The Nestorian college at Antioch developed a literalist hermeneutics to counter the allegory used by ascetics in northern Africa. But they took their literalism too far, denying all mysteries by making them only symbols.

In the 16th Century Luther argued against this approach. However, the humanist Zwingli defended it on matters related to the communion and baptism. Luther was not upholding Catholic sacramentalism, but refuting humanist Aristotelian logic that denies mysteries simply because they are not understood.

Luther's position regarding scripture was that we should accept its plain meaning and not allow our personal experience or reason to override it. Luther took this stand to refute humanism, which he saw as the greatest risk in eroding the truth of God's word. He was correct, as this humanism in Europe later developed into liberal theology that denied the supernatural.

We believe that Christ has one nature, which is fully God and fully human in incarnation. It is indeed a mystery! But this is the power of the gospel. It neither contextualizes (humanises) or denies human context. It accepts humanity, but meets it miraculously, not on humanity's terms. The human context is sin. The remedy is His faith.

The humanism of Nestorians left certain legacies. One of these was based on their denial of total depravity. They were semi-Pelagian. Today this is often reflected in Arminianism. They believed that all human cultures contained something of God and could be used in theological development. They also believed in derived holiness by works, or progressive sanctification and power through spirituality.

This humanism meant two things: Nestorianism became the fastest and most successful mission movement in history up until today. It moved into foreign cultures with ease and dedication. But the very reason for its success became the reason for its failure. Look at where Nestorianism went. In every one of its mission fields the gospel was eventually lost. We do not want to repeat this today.

What Went Wrong in Asia

Looking at the history of missions allows us an opportunity to see what might have gone wrong. Why was the gospel lost in Asia and Africa after those early years? The Mongols of Asia and the Muslims invaded much of the area, but we believe that syncretism was the main problem.

Syncretism means mixing the gospel with local perspectives of the culture. This happened a lot in the early African church with the adoption of the worship of Mary replacing Isis, for example. It also happened in most places in Asia where the Nestorians preached.

The Nestorians, being more humanistic, celebrated novel gospel interpretations in new cultures. They also went so far away geographically in missions that their "supply lines" grew thin. They were cut off from the main theological development in other sectors of the church.

For example, Bishop Qing Qing of China wrote in 780AD, comparing the gospel to Buddhist Confucian karma. Qing claimed that we return to our original good nature by works. In his *Sutra of Returning to Your Original Nature*, he claimed:

Christ says: From goodness in past lives, people come to this religion and through the faith they find Happiness...Simon (Peter) know this: You ask me about the Triumphant Law. What your ancestors have done bears fruit in you; their karma finds its outcome in you. (Cited from Martin Palmer).

Here is a Christian Bishop making a Christian theology for China 1,227 years ago. He believed in reincarnation. He misquoted Jesus' words to Peter in Matthew 16. He claimed that the original nature of each man when born is good. He said we restore this original goodness through our good works. He said that Simon Peter was blessed, not by the free grace of his heavenly Father (Matt 16:17), but by his own good works. This is Buddhism, not Christianity. This is Nestorian humanism.

When Christianity is no different from local religions what is the point of it? It is absorbed into traditional religion like a chameleon lizard and disappears into the fabric of its environment. This is one of the greatest hazards of international mission. This was the issue Paul addressed in Galatians and was the main problem addressed in the book of Hebrews: the gospel was being mixed with Jewish culture. Paul said that the gospel was then lost.

We also must consider the importance of church mission influencing government. In countries where Christianity did not impact and influence government it eventually lost ground. In Ethiopia, Armenia and Europe it held its ground. It is true that the church was corrupted by government in Europe, but at least there was something there for the Reformation to correct.

The conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine in the West in the early 4th Century brought relief to the Christians from the Roman persecution there. Persecution of Christians had become Roman policy, but Constantine made the Roman Empire Christian.

But Constantine's coming led to a great increase of persecution against Christians in the East. The East and West were enemies then and Persia saw Christians in Persia as potential allies of Constantine in the West and spies. So the Western church celebrates Constantine, but maybe not the Eastern Church.

Anthropology

From the previous discussions we can see the importance of culture in mission. How should we approach culture and other human sciences? By *human sciences* we mean not the study of chemistry or physics, but the study of man and his behaviour and history. Anthropology is the study of man, his nature, his society and his culture. It is an interesting and often very subjective field of study.

Archaeology is another category of anthropology. In the last 200 years a lot has been learnt about past civilizations by excavations, especially in Bible lands. Initially archaeologists were not able to confirm certain biblical narratives, such as the existence of the Hittite Empire.

In such cases rash archaeologists or media would announce that the Bible was inaccurate. They have always been proved wrong as archaeological work progressed. Whether it was about the Hittites, the occupation of Canaan under Joshua, the fall of Jericho, or the cultural practices of Abraham, the Bible has never been shown to be wrong. (See Werner Keller, *The Bible As History*.)

God acted out His redemption plan in history. The historical narratives of scripture, whether the history of nations, the history of creation, or the miracle ministry and resurrection of Jesus, are all literal historical events.

The Hebrew people did not use mythology or symbolic language when recording history. Governor's names are given, cities and villages are identified and time periods are stated. All of these can be traced by independent historical sources and by archaeology. The Bible has not once been shown to be wrong after evidence has come to the surface.

Population Migrations

A study of human society down through the millennia has also verified the migration of humans from Mesopotamia after the Flood and Tower of Babel to all parts of the globe. Population levels in various parts of the world are consistent with a general migration from this biblical time period.

Cultures all over the earth have very similar stories in their history concerning the Tower of Babel, Flood, Creation and the Fall. (See anthropologist Don Richardson in *Eternity in Their Hearts*.) They also have similar constellations. They mostly perceive related pictures in the stars, showing a commonality in ancestry. There are many more myths that are common also.

Anthropology is also valuable in helping us to understand culture. Further below we will look at the extent to which anthropology may help us in the missionary task. First though, we see that anthropology helps us to refute false ideas about religion.

Evolution of Religion

A theory of the evolution of religion states that man started with a primitive understanding of “god” and developed a more complex or sophisticated faith as his society progressed. (See the “founder” of cultural anthropology Edward Tylor, of the 19th and early 20th Century, who developed this theory.)

The theory claims that man started in an unorganised society, with a religion of spiritism, seeing spirits in all objects with no single ruler. As society progressed into tribal chieftaincies man’s view of spiritual rule devolved into polytheism, the belief in several leading deities.

Finally, as people grouped into nation states around the time of Moses and had one main ruler or king, they began to see the spiritual world the same way, with one main god - monotheism. So here we see a progression from spiritism to polytheism to monotheism. It is claimed that Moses was the founder of monotheism.

But biblical evidence shows that monotheism was the belief of all God’s people from the beginning. Abraham, for example, hundreds of years before Moses, was clearly monotheistic. The Greek, who were supposed to be the most advanced, were polytheistic.

Secular authors have stated that religion is a natural phenomenon. They say that man developed religious ideas naturally to meet his need for security. It is true that human religion is natural, developed by man to meet his felt needs. Religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism for example were developed from the imaginations of man and from a twisted view of God’s revelation. “Christianity” without God’s Spirit is the same.

This is human religion. It is a “fig leaf”. It is a substitute for truth. It is not man seeking for God, but man using a cover of religion to hide from God. It is to satiate his conscience. But when God’s Spirit calls us we know that religion is empty of any power to save and empty of any truth. Human religion is a means of hiding from God (as Adam hid), not of genuinely seeking for Him.

True Christianity is not a human religion. It has not developed by men “seeking God”. It is God’s Self-initiative and Self-revelation through grace. God sent Jesus to reveal Himself. Today, through the Holy Spirit and word of God, the knowledge of God is a gift. Man cannot find God through natural theology, reasoning or even self-induced spiritual encounters. A man comes to the knowledge of God because God seeks and finds him.

The Bible says “seek and you shall find”. This must come as a call of the Spirit of God within our heart. We seek Him in truth only if He first calls us. He must draw us to Himself first. “We love Him because He first loved us.” (1 John 4:19).

This is important. It means we that cannot reveal God naturally through human religion or culture as we go into mission. God can only be revealed by His own initiative through His gospel, as we are sent by Him as His co-labourers. We must be sent by God. As Benson Idahosa said, “Some were *sent*: others *went*.”.

Tylor’s evolution of religion model claimed that societies developed in an evolutionary series from Stone Age, Iron Age, Bronze Age, etc. Excavations are “dated” by these artefacts found in them. However, societies progressed and regressed often according to their circumstances and such dating methods are conjecture. Iron and bronze were available in the very earliest societies in Genesis.

Monotheism

Anthropology disproves the theory of the evolution of monotheism. In ancient societies on all continents it has been found that societies started with a belief in monotheism and regressed into

polytheism and animism. They started with some knowledge of God and as time went on and distance from other civilisations increased they went away from the knowledge of God.

This is true for the Australian Aborigines for example. There is evidence that when they arrived in Australia they lived in settled communities with farms. As they went further into witchcraft they regressed into nomadic hunters without settlements. Societies in Asia, Africa and Europe began with a monotheistic faith and regressed into spiritism. It is true of all mankind.

Faulty “evidences” for evolution are still taught in schools as valid. The techniques used to “date” artefacts have flawed presuppositions. “Proofs” in biology are without foundation. Its evidence in geology is better understood as the consequence of Noah’s Flood. Its theories in religion have no basis in anthropology and are unable to answer the historical resurrection of Christ from the dead. Nor can evolutionists account for the occurrence of miracles in our own time.

Problems in Anthropology

Problems arise when people use anthropology as a source of theology. We cannot learn the things of God through the study of man. The ancient Greek goal of education was *knowledge of self* and today secular educationists follow this anthropological route. Theology gives us correct anthropology, rather than anthropology giving us correct theology.

It is sometimes said that we can learn about God from human culture or from world religions. It is also said that we can learn about God from nature or from logic. We will cover some of these areas later, but here we address the idea that when we go into missions we can find truth about God in local culture or religion and then use that to replicate Christian ideas.

This may be seen as a quick way to results in missions and as a way to ensure that mission is local and indigenous rather than foreign and colonial. What may begin with an attempt to understand the local people and their culture may become a substitute for the gospel.

This concept would then be against the Reformation principle of faith called *sola scriptura*; scripture alone! This principle of finding truth about God outside of scripture is a departure from Christian faith. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine...” (2 Tim 3:16). This is the *only* source of theology.

Image of Man

One emphasis in missions has been to avoid imposing values or ideas on others. This is coupled with recent emphasis on “political correctness” where all world views are held to be equal. The tendency is to accept whatever one meets in mission and adapt the Christian message to it. It is believed that this reduces offence. The result is a variety of views on Christianity, according to location.

One of the justifications for this is a claim that although man *fell* he is still made in the image of God and therefore his natural culture and religion will reflect this image in some way. People may then claim new interpretations of scripture based on their cultural views. It is then said that the preaching of the gospel in this culture must adapt to these local views. “We just have to preach this adaptation in that field.” This justification has problems:

1. The assumption that the fall of man into sin is not total, or that it has only partially affected the image of God in man. It is a denial of the Reformed and Evangelical doctrine of *total depravity*.
2. It assumes that what looks like a godly value in human culture is in fact godly according to actual biblical teaching. This concept of *false equivalents* is explained further below.

The notion that there is some residue of the image of God in man after the *Fall* is unbiblical. The Bible teaches that whatever man brings forth that is helpful to society in general is due to God's common grace, not to man's innate intelligence or goodness. It is true that man has intellectual abilities and moral appreciations, but these are due to God's restraining power and kindness. When this kindness is lifted man will resort to his default nature.

When God outlawed murder after the Flood *because man is made in the image of God* (Gen 9:6), He was referring to His original creation of man. He did not deny the totality of the *Fall*. God said in Gen 6:5 that *every* thought and imagination of man was evil *continually*. Man's natural state according to God is total, not partial evil.

The command not to murder acknowledges the distinction between man and animal and the original purpose for which God made man, into which we are redeemed by Christ. Evolution tries to eradicate this distinction, by making man an animal. God demands that we honour Him by treating all mankind with dignity, whether they are saved or unsaved. But after the *Fall*, man is born in the image of *fallen* Adam.

False Equivalents

The values man holds to be godly are not godly. They may appear to be God's values but have been distorted and corrupted. The error might be small at first, but whenever we build on a foundation that has an error, the error is magnified as the load on that foundation increases. Eventually the building will fall.

This is similar to having a straight line representing the way God reveals Himself in scripture and another line drawn alongside it that is *almost* straight, which represents man's duplicate of God's value. The difference in angle between the two lines is hardly perceptible.

This second line represents something in the culture that appears true and the same as the principle found in scripture. Missionaries may use this *cultural equivalent*, claiming that it is almost the same as the biblical theme. We then borrow the "truth" from the culture saying "all truth is God's truth" and claim that *this* practice or belief in the culture *is that* value or theme found in the scripture.

Yet, upon closer examination we see that the principle borrowed from culture is in fact different and not really God's gospel truth.



Line 1: The Biblical world view. Line 2: The human world view.

We may say, "So what, why be nitpicky? The difference is small and the advantage in mission is large. We can win a lot of people by using their own cultural values."

When the two lines are extended far enough, the angle between them shows the more, so that eventually the two lines run in totally different directions. It only takes time. In mission, if we are on the wrong line, over time it will not be Christianity that develops, but native religion no different to what was there before the missionary came. This was Paul's point in Galatians. They said, "What is wrong with a little circumcision?". Even Peter did not see it.

Non-Equivalents

The religious ideas of man do not match with the ideas in the Bible. For example, in the Koran *prayer* and *alms giving* are mentioned. We have heard some mission strategies of using concepts in the Koran, such as the ritual of praying five times a day, to promote a shift towards Christianity. That is, we say to the Muslims, "Continue in the Mosque, pray five times a day, but use the name of Jesus."

Religious terms that appear equivalent in cultures and religions, are in fact totally different to what God means by them. *Prayer* in the Koran is quite different to prayer in the Bible. In the Koran prayer is ritualistic ablution. The ritual itself is supposed to wash away sin. Our inner nature, a real relationship with God and the way we live are irrelevant. The whole underlying truth in Christianity is different:

1. We are cleansed by the blood of Christ, as a gift.
2. Man's problem is depravity or nature, not ritual defilement.
3. Prayer is the relationship of a born again person with the Father, not a ritual or work.

We find that religious terms in culture are quite different to God's perspective and therefore cannot be used as equivalents in mission without a biblical transformation in their meaning. This applies to *spiritual warfare*, *giving* and all other themes. Giving (alms) in Islam is to obtain merit. One can sin and then make up for it with the alms.

In animism giving is used to obtain favour. People bring sacrifices to demons to obtain favour in the spiritual realm. If this concept does not change when Christianity comes, people will give to the "man of God" for a miracle. In Christ, giving is from a changed nature and is unconditional love – "Freely you have received, freely give." (Matt 10:8). These ideas are not at all equivalent.

In Islamic "prayer" we see an example of man taking a truth about God and changing it into an entirely different convention. The same word is used, but the meaning of that word is foreign to God. Therefore, we cannot just take words in the scripture and apply them arbitrarily to concepts found in religion or culture. They are not the same.

Man has made a god in his own image. He changes the meaning of religious terms into that which suits his own fallen nature. Calvin stated, "Man perceives God, not as He offers Himself, but as he fashions Him in his own imagination.". Idolatry makes gods in the imagination. Religion becomes an act of rebellion against God. The unregenerate natural man is not subject to the ways of God (Rom 8:7).

Foundational Truth

If there is a residue of God's knowledge in man, culture or religion after the *Fall*, it has been corrupted:

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

And *changed* the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man and to birds and fourfooted beasts and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up...

Who *changed the truth of God into a lie* and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. (Rom 1:21-25).

A *sociological approach to missions* looks for terms or practices in a culture that appear equivalent to the Bible and uses them to move the people into the "Christian religion". When this does not change the values in the people it is supposed that they need a secondary stage called "progressive sanctification". That is, they must add works. Nothing has changed from natural religion. This is not grace.

The Catholics did this in South America. Local pagan gods were given the names of saints. Pentecostal mission does this. Spiritual warfare practices in local areas are continued as Christian. They are just done “in the name of Jesus”.

As important as education and growth are, the new birth is the essential factor. New birth does not come about by a humanist, methodological, or sociological approach to mission. It is not guaranteed by theories of cross-cultural communication. Only the power of God can give new birth. What is essential in mission is *nature change*. Then with new hearts God’s people live at ease in their own cultures and are not ruled by them.

Before we go into missions we should study theology (the word of God) before anthropology or culture. We should study *the straight line* so much that we are able to recognise when we deviate from it. If we do not then our mission will be more social work, just helping people to discover their own god their own way and calling it Christian. If we do not have God’s truth simply and firmly, we will borrow from the human theology around us and use it to sustain our ministry.

Cultural Change

There is no need to change practices in a culture just for the sake of it. If you are Arabic, you do not need to change your name to a Western name. Be an Arab and win the Arabs to Christ. If the name has a meaning in idolatry it may be changed. But changing cultural practices without reason is not good.

The richness and variety of culture is a blessing. We are not speaking about changing culture, but about preaching one gospel of Jesus Christ, as it is in the scripture and not as man or culture see it. We are not out to change culture because we are against it. We are not against culture. We are for Christ.

Some missionaries have looked for ways in which people can come to Christ without destabilising the social order. It may be possible for this to happen, but often the old order resists change, just at the Pharisees did. Jesus said, “Think not that I came to bring peace, but a sword. For mother shall be against daughter...” (Matt 10:35). This is what happens when one goes Christ’s way and another does not. Trying to circumvent this will compromise the gospel.

We do not mean to offend anyone. We are trying to love all. But the gospel does offend. We cannot preach the gospel and avoid offence. Trying to preach a gospel acceptable to cultural values is wrong. But missionaries should not hastily change cultural practices. Foreigners often know little about what they are doing. The Holy Spirit and the local people whose hearts have been changed should spearhead this.

In no way should the foreign cultures of the missionaries be merged with the gospel in the mission field. Changing wedding ceremonies, dress and other local customs may often be unnecessary. Some practices may need to be “cleansed”, but the missionary should not introduce foreign cultural practices.

God gave us all things richly to enjoy (1 Tim 6:17). This includes our cultures. They are marred. They are not perfect. They are corrupted. Perfection is in Christ. When Christ is our Lord and not culture, we can enjoy culture.

It is the same with food and with all things. We are not brought under subjection to anything, but follow and obey Jesus and His values. Christ came to change our heart, not to give us a new cultural

law to follow. "It is not what goes into a man that defiles him, but what comes out of the heart." He came to renew our nature, to do what law cannot do.

Only a Christian can be free to enjoy creation and not be bound by it. The wonderful thing about Jesus is that He enables us to enjoy culture and people, without us being bound by either. Truth comes from the Creator above, while we enjoy His creation below.

This is the way God made life. He wants us to enjoy life and culture, through His redemption and love that is in Jesus Christ. If we attack culture we are not free in Christ. "Whom the Son sets free is free indeed." We can enjoy without being bound.

Truth is only in Jesus Christ. The culture is not truth, for it is fallen with man. God gave us culture and, like the Law of Moses, there are many good things in it, but just as they corrupted the use of law, so man's selfish heart has used culture to make slaves of others. In all of creation "only God is good". Only His word is truth.

Some cultural anthropologists have said culture is from man. It is not. It is from God, according to His general grace, but man has defiled it. Man is not sensible enough to make anything. We have what we have received.

Ease With Culture

When a missionary goes to a new field he or she will find many differences. What we do not want in this case is pride, thinking our own cultural values are more advanced or better. That is certainly not true. We need adaptability to our environment. We need to be able to listen to and hear others. Launching a cultural attack or cultural insensitivity is arrogant.

There are good things in culture. Traditional dowry payments may reflect family love for the bride, where the husband demonstrates his ability and willingness to care for her. There are many traditions like this that reflect such beauty in human values. The "law" is imbedded within culture to protect people. It is wrong to get rid of this because "the law was made for the sinful man." (1 Tim 1:9). It is a common grace and for the good of society.

There are a lot more godly principles in culture than we may realise. Many of the traditions have common sense and mirror the values of God's law. If we will reflect on them a bit more we will see it. The problem is that it has all been corrupted.

Married to Christ

All these principles have been corrupted by man and even the good becomes legalism and is used as tradition to lock God out of society for selfish ends. Man uses the bride price to enrich himself rather than as a token of love for his daughter. When the love of Christ enters people's hearts these cultural activities take on a whole new beauty. It is when they become law on Christians that they become evil. "We are dead to the law that we might be married to another, even to Christ." (Rom 7:4).

God is a jealous God. We are married to Him through Christ and our hearts are His. We do not and cannot belong to culture. To belong to culture is adultery against Christ. It is against the nature of the born again new creature in Christ. We have one culture: the kingdom of God. This culture is "faith that works through love". The letter of human culture is sin, being without faith. Culture can be one of the most binding, controlling and evil tools of man in leading people away from God.

Mission in Culture

We have to know these two things about culture in missions:

1. We are not out to change culture, but to preach Christ, that He may transform people's individual lives.
2. Our theology of Christ cannot come from a culture or human religion, but must come from scripture alone, interpreted by scripture and not by culture.

Two things are important in mission:

1. *Meaning*. What do biblical themes mean? How do we interpret things such as *spiritual warfare*? *Meaning* in all matters must come from the Bible and not from external sources, cultures or experiences.
2. *Communication*. It is good to use things familiar to locals and their culture to communicate biblical ideas. This must be done with diligent care so that the understanding received by the people is biblical and not according to their former cultural views.

Jesus used stories and parables which drew parallels between biblical ideas and common human experiences. But He made sure to communicate the values of His Father and not the values of man, which is why His stories were both helpful to some and offensive to others.

Jesus also taught by expounding the scripture in a formal teaching style, to ensure that truth was understood as God intended (Luke 24:27). In some ways Jesus related to culture. He used every day circumstances in life to teach. But His meaning and ways were entirely opposed to culture, which is why they killed Him.

We are not against the daily life of culture. There is much good in our cultures that we can celebrate and enjoy. There is richness in many parts of almost every culture on earth. Culture is not the problem. It is sin. God came to address man's heart and to make him new in Christ.

It is the values of sinful man that we must address boldly and without compromise in the gospel. This is the only hope man has of transformation by faith. Christ delivers man from self and from culture and brings him into His love and joy. This happens through direct preaching of gospel truths. Once we fear man we have lost the power of the gospel to change the heart.

Syncretism

Syncretism means the meshing of the gospel with culture in such a way that the culture changes the gospel. The gospel is made to conform to cultural values so it will not offend. Hence the gospel is not being preached, but a human form of the gospel. The values of the culture transform the gospel message, rather than the gospel message transforming the people.

We can see this in the book of Galatians. People tried to *Judaize* the Christian message. In adapting the gospel to a form that was acceptable to the Jews, Paul said they lost the whole gospel. The book of Hebrews highlights this danger. If the Hebrew believers would not leave their cultural values behind and accept the values of Christ then they were in danger of forsaking Christ altogether. Their culture would take them away from Christ.

Acceptability

One of the main causes of syncretism is an attempt to make the gospel acceptable to gain a greater response. A message that is acceptable with man is not acceptable with God, for "the wisdom of God

is foolishness to man.” (1 Cor 1:23). There is no middle ground with God. It is either our way or His way. It is either our culture or His gospel. We cannot love both. A message that is acceptable to culture is not acceptable to God.

Every born again believer breaks with their culture. This does not mean that they come out of their world, but they are not bound by their culture. Their choice is to follow Jesus. Where the culture is against the commands of Jesus they will follow Jesus. This is a disciple of Christ. Jesus said, “He who would come after Me, let him deny father, mother, brother, sister...and self, take up his cross and follow Me.” (Matt 10:37-39). The kingdom of God comes first.

This is one reason that Christians are persecuted. They do not conform to the cultural values of the day. We are a threat to the traditions and plans of men and governments that work against God. The light is a threat to darkness.

Christians are not of this world. There is something in our heart that makes us faithful to Christ and His values. Paul said, “I am crucified to this world and the world is crucified to me.” (Gal 6:14). Discipleship is not a process. You are born into Christ a disciple. Your heart is circumcised in Christ, meaning the blindness of the world is taken away by faith at the new birth.

Discipleship

When we say discipleship is not a process we do not mean there is no growth in the knowledge of God. We grow in Christ because we are His disciple by new birth. That which makes us a disciple, a renewed heart and that which separates us from the world to Christ, is an instantaneous work in the new birth.

From the day that we are born again we have the mind of Christ and we follow Him. We cannot *disciple* that into someone gradually. We cannot educate that into someone by a process. Someone is either a disciple of Christ by a changed nature or they are not. “A leopard cannot change its spots” by education and training.

When Jesus said *make disciples*, He meant disciples of Himself, which the Holy Spirit does. He did not mean to put them under a human religious system. When we go into missions we are making men disciples of Christ by co-labouring with God’s Spirit. We are not bringing them into discipleship programmes. Programmes will not change their hearts.

Religion produces syncretism. The new birth makes disciples.

Compliance

Syncretism is compliance. Cultures have a terrible habit of demanding compliance to what is socially normal. If there is a culture of dishonesty in a work place, then the person who refuses to comply with that culture by being honest will be persecuted by the others. Cultures work to enforce the compliance of the members of the society.

The culture is often the basis of each member’s identity and so they comply. They do this not only for a sense of identity, but also to ensure that they are not ostracised and their basic needs are met. People comply to get promotions in their career.

The only way a person can overcome this is to be born again. When we are born again we have a new identity. Christ is our identity, not a religious creed, but He lives within us. It does not matter if anyone takes away our natural identity because we are secure in our identity with Christ. Paul said, “Henceforth we know no man after the flesh.” (2 Cor 5:17). We also will not be controlled by the fear of losing our career. No fear can control of person born of God’s Spirit.

Identity

Identity in Christ is the antidote to syncretism. The believer's identity is no longer their tribe. Tribalism is contrary to Christianity. The church is one body in Christ, no matter the ethnicity of its members. When people have a Christianity of their own tribal traditions it is not Christianity. They are not following Jesus. If we are not persecuted by our culture then we are not a Christian. If the world does not hate us then we are not following Jesus (John 15:18-19).

This is not an excuse for stubbornness or self-willed living, claiming people are against us because of Christ. But if we stay with what is true in Christ rather than with what is popular, we will be persecuted either passively or actively. The Bible says friendship with the world is enmity against God (James 4:4). Jesus said, "If they have done this to Me the Master, they will also do it to you." (John 15:20). If we are in Christ the world will treat us as they treated Christ. This is one of the signs that follow true salvation.

The Bible says, "On the night that Jesus was betrayed He took bread...". That is Christianity. We are called to follow Him.

God or Mammon

Syncretism is caused by us wanting to be acceptable. Some avoid persecution by adapting their Christianity to their locality. But this is not Christian. Jesus was crucified because He would not mould the Father into the image of man. Paul said "All who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." (2 Tim 3:12). The only way we can avoid it is to say nothing against the evil. But then this shows that we are not Christian.

Sometimes we do not want to speak out because we do not want to be persecuted. We do not want to lose our positions and risk our livelihood. In this environment, when we put our comfort and families ahead of God, the church will soon be trodden under foot by men. Jesus said that salt that has lost its flavour is good for nothing.

It is interesting that in a time when the world is advocating political correctness, mission also sometimes advocates a culturally acceptable gospel as a strategy for evangelism. Such an approach may fill churches, but will not save souls.

This is why Jesus said we cannot serve God and mammon. We will love one and hate the other. We cannot cleave to God and to man, to God and to our natural family, to God and our financial security, to God and our culture. "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Matt 6:21).

As a missions strategy we can promote popular doctrines that are not the full truth in order to gain crowds and thus justify our mission work. This way our mission effort will attract support. It is pragmatic. It "works". But it is not the kingdom of God.

Greek Syncretism

Syncretism became a major problem in the early church. As more Greek converts came into the church some tried to Hellenise the church. They tried to make God's truth conform to their Greek ideas. They did this as an evangelism strategy. They thought that if they could present the gospel as fulfilling Greek culture they could present in part way a "Greek gospel" which would at least be a bit more acceptable.

Early church fathers such as Justin Martyr presented the gospel as a "higher philosophy". They claimed Christianity was a fulfilment of their philosophical search. They claimed philosophy was a pre-expectation of Christ in the Greek culture just as the Old Testament was in the Hebrew culture. Although this appealed to the Greek ego, it was not the truth.

A strategy might be employed for its practical value, but if it is not the truth we will pay for it down the line, as Geoffrey Chaucer said, "When dining with the devil, use a very long spoon.". If we make a pact with the devil for practical advantage we will have to settle his invoice later. Christianity is not a philosophy. Philosophy is the search for truth through human reason and experience. Christianity is God revealing Himself by grace, as a gift, to enemies who are not searching for Him, though we claim to be.

Jesus came as a witness, not as a philosopher. He came from the bosom of the Father and testified faithfully what He had seen (John 1:18). A philosopher climbs hill and dale in search of truth and finds nothing. A witness is one who is given faith and testifies of it (1 John 1:1-3). "Climb every mountain, ford every stream, follow every rainbow, till you find your dream!", (lyrics from *The Sound of Music* musical).

The next text refutes Arminianism and universalism in one verse. "All taught of God" is said by Jesus to mean *all* the Father calls. The verse refutes all philosophy as a way of knowing God. God is known only by grace.

It is written in the prophets and they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that has heard and has learned of the Father, comes to Me. Not that any man has seen the Father, save He which is of God, He has seen the Father. Verily, verily, I say to you, He that believes on Me has everlasting life. (John 6:45-47).

We are witnesses of Christ in us through new birth. A witness testifies of what he receives, what he has been shown as a gift. A philosopher testifies what he has worked out himself. As Greek converts came into the church, the whole tone of the church changed. Many went into asceticism, works and related false doctrine. The church did not just win the Greek, but the Greek also won the church.

For further explanation see *Our Father Abraham: The Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith*, by Marvin Wilson. This book explains the shift from the church's Hebraic roots to Greek themes. When we speak about going back to our Hebraic roots, we are not speaking about going back to the law. We are speaking about not interpreting scripture by foreign perspectives.

Western Syncretism

The same problem followed after the Reformation. This will be examined in the next chapter. After 1000AD there was a rise of Aristotelian philosophy and rationalism in Western Europe. Sections of the church became scholastic and intellectually formal and moved into a dead heterodoxy, meaning their doctrine was correct in part, but without faith.

Then *liberal theology* arose claiming that there were no miracles, no virgin birth of Christ and no resurrection. The gospel was preached in a way acceptable to rational/carnal man and lost its power.

Syncretism continues in its various forms. Today in the West there is a post-rational or *Post Modern* age. Personal experience and emotion are held as more important than truth. Churches are presenting God as an experience, an encounter or an emotional fulfilment.

Emotion can be the main attraction, where at times very little biblical truth is presented. If there is truth it is often anthropological truth, principles of business, human relations, or other lessons from the behavioural sciences. Scripture out of context is often used to reinforce these human teachings. In such a case churches can differ little from the culture that they are meant to transform.

We may hear whole sermons about attitude, motivational or behavioural patterns. We could get the same message in any secular counselling office. While there is some help for some people in matters that relate to self-esteem, it is not the gospel and should not be the preoccupation of ministers of the

gospel. We are called to preach the word of God in its own context and not in the context or perspective of the humanities.

Nothing said here is meant to be against the legitimate use of the humanities and counselling techniques. As far as the science of counselling is concerned, we are not qualified to comment, just as we are not qualified to comment on most medical issues. It is not our field. Our field is the ministry of the gospel.

Christianising

Syncretism is a sociological attempt to Christianise a people group. It is seen as a quick way to create a “people movement” to Christ. It is renaming the existing culture in Christian terms, or finding biblical parallels to what already exists in the culture, business community or the natural thinking of the people. It is harmonising what is already in their minds with passages in the Bible.

This brings a “new” way of looking at scripture and interprets scripture not by its own context but in the light of cultural perspectives. “Missionaries” in this context would be more sociologists than apostles of Jesus Christ. It is moving people culturally towards Christianity, rather than individually into new birth. Traditional Christian mission is the preaching of a biblical gospel for personal new birth through the Spirit of God.

This new birth transforms the individual into the image of Christ and circumcises their heart making a new creation. In other words it makes Christ, not culture, their internal compass. Only the power of God can do this. It cannot be done through a sociological approach. We do not want to rename existing culture in Christian terms. We want individuals saved by meeting the person of Jesus Christ.

Power Syncretism

The gospel can be presented as a power in spiritual warfare. It was not like this in early Pentecostal breakthroughs. Initially the victory of Christ was preached and people were told to turn away from spiritism and live by the faith of Christ’s finished work. They understood “Greater is He who is in me than he that is in the world” and were “delivered from the power of darkness.” (1 John 4:4, Col 1:13).

Today millions are attracted into churches with the promise that using Christianity as a power source they can secure blessings such as promotions at work, prosperity and victory over their enemies. Many midnight meetings are held to conduct warfare against witches and evil spirits.

Agents of the devil in families are “discerned” and prayed against. Long prayers and fasts are said to be the key to breakthroughs in one’s personal ambitions. There are countless prayer formulas that are purchased and recited for victory over various powers.

Pentecostal pastors are burying charms outside the door of their church to attract people to the services, so that they can get more money out of them. They go to their crusade ground at midnight before meetings start to exorcise the area so that more people will come. They “anoint” the church “altar” with oil and holy water so people who stand there will receive their miracle. They have departed from the gospel. They say, “You must give the people something they can see.” This is idolatry.

They are selling “anointed oil”, prayer cloths and “holy water from Jerusalem”. “Is there no balm (Jesus) in Gilead?”, that people have to buy charms from the church (Jer 8:22). Pastors receive money for dedicating cars and land, to assure safe travel and to ward off evil spirits.

People are told to fast and then to bring an offering for healing or forgiveness of sin. Corruption has filled the house, but pastors hold to these teachings for the profit they make. Even the concept of friendship is corrupted. “Friends” are people you can bribe with gifts so that you can get a pass grade for an examination you failed. This is not the exception today, but the rule in thousands of churches.

Paul said, "Rebuke them publicly that others may fear." (1 Tim 5:20). A cloak of silence covers sin and allows it to grow. It is sin not to speak out when wrong is being done. The unjust steward made friends so that he could eat (Luke 16).

Pastors are using their flocks as merchandise. On television viewers are promised a special blessing if they give \$58 for Isaiah 58. If they multiply it by seven (the number of God) and give \$406 they get the "complete blessing". If they keep Old Testament feasts by sending in their "feast offering" they will get stylish watches and suits, houses, cars and boats.

Pastors will fast and pray and conduct spiritual warfare so that false applications for illegal immigrants can be "successful". They pray that a man, with a wife in his former nation, can find a new wife in the new nation. Others start "prayer fellowships" to attract people from other churches and then start a church. They lie about their agenda.

Pastors claim that if you do not give them a personal offering God will not bless you, or you will die in an accident. These are worse than the Pharisees of old and stand under the condemnation of the Lord. Many today, who have had biblical training for ministry, have turned aside to witchcraft. Pentecostal pastors carve out sticks and call them mantels and say that the sticks carry and transfer the anointing and then sell them to politicians who use them to ward off evil.

These so-called Pentecostal pastors use the sticks to bless people, carrying them into churches with their Bibles that speak against them and then prophesy for money, telling politicians they will win and others that good fortune is coming. They are the prophets of Baal. We describe only a fraction of the evil that is being done by covetous ministers.

But this is not new. Paul found the same in his day. He said all served their own interests. He said Demas left him, having loved this present world (2 Tim 4:10). All in Asia forsook Paul when he was in prison (2 Tim 1:15, 4:16). Paul's conclusion was that he would stay true and that he would suffer all things for the elect's sake (2 Tim 2:10). God has His people. He still has 7,000 who have not bowed the knee to Baal.

For this cause have I sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved son and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church. (1 Cor 4:17).

But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy shortly to you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state. For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's. But you know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he has served with me in the gospel. (Phil 2:19-22).

Health and Wealth Syncretism

Syncretism is found in the modern prosperity gospel. Some preachers are "positive motivationalists". There is no "bad news", only the news that Jesus has come to bless and prosper. A "right atmosphere" is maintained where "negativity" is shunned.

Preachers are advised, "Make the people happy with your preaching and they will give more. We cannot have last week's preacher back because the people did not give well enough after he spoke.". In some places books will only sell if they are about how to get rich quickly or how to get delivered from enemies. People often want something they think will fulfil their natural desires. Preachers know this and tailor their missions strategy towards it.

Need-Felt Missions

This is preaching at where people feel their need. Preachers know about *felt-need* and often write books that comply with what they perceive these needs are, so that they can easily sell the books. The dollar dictates the message and form of ministry. The love of money is a big problem. Some will fascinate the congregation with new teachings, entertainment, exhibitionism and even false miracles.

Some will compromise their message, tone down their speech, not correct rich elders when needed and even turn the direction of their ministry away from what God called them to do to gain supporters. It is true as Paul said, "The love of money is the root of all evil." (1 Tim 6:10). Paul told Timothy and Titus to correct with all long suffering and let no man despise them (Titus 1:9-14).

Uproot First Then Plant

Jeremiah was told that through him God would pull down before He built up.

See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down and to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant. (Jer 1:10).

If our mission's strategy is to build up without pulling down it will not work. If we want to build Christ on a foundation of culture it will not work. Wrong foundations must be removed and the foundation of Christ must be laid. If people understand Christ according to their tradition and natural ideas then they do not have the real Christ.

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1 Cor 3:11).

The foundation must be right first. We cannot build on whatever foundation we find in mission. We must first lay the foundation of Christ. It is not in culture, not in any culture of the world anywhere. The mission strategy of "be nice and find something in the culture to build gospel acceptance on" is not scriptural. Man's mind and stronghold must be exposed as degenerate by the preaching of Christ. God must expose man's pride, not build on it.

One Gospel

There are many Jesus' as Paul said. But there is only one gospel.

But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that comes preaches another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if you receive another spirit, which you have not received, or another gospel, which you have not accepted...(2 Cor 11:3-4).

Jesus did not die to prosper us, to deliver us from our enemies, or to heal us. These blessings are the fruit. He died to save us from our sin, to give us new birth and transform our inward man. "He became poor... to make us rich" refers to eternal life, not to money (2 Cor 8:9).

In gospel preaching conviction of sin is necessary. It is positive because it leads to salvation. A doctor must cut out the cancer before he stitches up the wound.

One result of syncretism is that there are millions of people in churches who might never have heard the gospel and do not live by the gospel. Millions live by traditions of witchcraft, using a "Christian" approach to it. This is not a peripheral problem. It affects mainstream Pentecostalism today.

Pentecostal Beginnings

Modern Pentecostalism began in many places as an *acultural* movement, meaning it did not begin as a culture friendly movement, but one which came to correct the ways of man and lead us to repentance and to Christ. The call was “Jesus Christ is the way the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father but by Him.”. People were called very plainly not to follow the ways of the world.

Today Pentecostalism has used culture as an ally for advancement. Rather than coming against cultural corruption, it is institutionalised by a form of “biblical teaching”. Take for example bribery. Instead of coming against bribery in society, where money is given to gain favours, a doctrine of gaining favour with God by sowing seed gains wide acceptance. People will sin, but then give “God” money to gain favour.

Preachers boldly declare that just as one gives gifts to witchdoctors, so one brings gifts to the man of God “to build an altar to the Lord” for God’s blessing. They demand large sums of money before praying. They say plainly that they are taking their theology from animism.

In spiritual warfare, instead of the Christian values of obedience, honesty, gentleness, good works, work ethic and trust, we get the “values” of force, power, manipulation, fear, distrust, superstition and trickery and the ministry becomes a type of *preistcraft*, meaning intermediaries get you favour from God.

Once men took money to the witchdoctor to get power, now they take it to the minister for the same. They teach that problems are not the fruit of lifestyle, but a lack of power. Religion is seen by millions of people today in this context.

No man overcomes by power. Christ was obedient and therefore God highly exalted Him (Phil 2:8-9). The promise that man should overcome by power was the devil’s temptation to Eve. It has passed down to all men through witchcraft. The message is, “Use God’s power for what you need or want.”. God empowers us by His gift of faith.

Contextualization

Contextualization is God come to reach man through man. He comes in the flesh, as He came in Jesus Christ. In the Great Commission it is not us or our method of contextualization that works, but Christ through us, in and through the gospel by His Spirit. It is abhorrent to hate culture, but it is Jesus who does the work of transforming individuals through His faith.

Contextualization means preaching the gospel in a way that will enable it to be understood in a different context or field. The first step is using the local language or an interpreter who can accurately portray the message in the local setting. This is fine, but God does not always even need this.

When theories of contextualization claim that we need to adjust our message to the world view of the hearers then we have a problem. There are extremes of contextualization. One reason for this is an over-reaction to past colonialism, a kind of self-abasement and false humility, but really a form of disengagement, abandonment.

A problem arises when mission training majors on cross cultural communication and it is assumed that this is the key to reaching other people with the gospel. People may be trained as excellent cross cultural communicators but may not have a call of God and may know very little about the gospel. When they get into foreign situations they do not know what compromise is and what is not. They have no theology and so are ill-equipped.

A person has limited training and goes to the mission. For the first few years the ministry goes well. After some time he finds that he lacks theological development and is unable to grapple with issues

as churches take on a more local emphasis and become successful. He then borrows from his local environment for his “theological” development, as that is his only resource. This is how syncretism occurs.

Assumptions of Contextualization

An assumption of the contextualization concept is that if we can remove communicational barriers to the message then people will be receptive to it. It assumes that man is neutral to the gospel and will be receptive if sociological barriers are shifted. This assumption is contrary to the Bible, which says that natural man does not receive the things of God (1 Cor 2:14).

Man is not neutral to the gospel message, but opposed to it. His mind is enmity against God (Rom 8:7). He may be religiously converted but not renewed within. Human nature, not just cultural distance, is the barrier to man receiving the gospel. This is a fundamental truth of ministry and mission. If mission is seen as giving a culturally relevant message, then all we need is an understanding of intercultural communication. Once we have this it is assumed that people will come to Christ.

In some mission schools it is likely that a greater percentage of the study will be in the field of culture, communication, anthropology, sociology and world religions. The idea is that if you have the right human skills you can lead people to Christ. These schools will likely lack in-depth studies on the content of the gospel message.

It is sometimes assumed that the content is basic and that the important thing is the skill in the delivery of the message. Proper theological development is seen as counterproductive. When the people go into the field they are communication experts, but find that they have little depth in anything else. This will not result in many genuine converts. If people are saved their development in truth will be difficult.

Not Human Skill

The contextualization approach assumes ministry, to some extent at least, is skill. This shift began to take place around 1850 with Charles Finney’s Bible College. Finney claimed that creating the right environment, attracting people and persuading them intellectually or emotionally to make a decision for Christ was the key to “saving souls”.

His college therefore changed its curriculum to include anthropological courses such as psychology, anatomy, political economy, public speaking, poetry and sacred music. Courses such as homiletics (preaching skills) today are 90 percent anthropology: skills in communication and presentation.

Finney believed that salvation was an act of the human will, as man did not inherit sin from Adam. The new birth to Finney was not a nature change but a change of mind. Missions, then, is to get this change of mind. Thus Finney believed that Bible Colleges should be geared towards this new form of ministry, as Finney stated in his *Memoirs*:

A revival is not a miracle, nor dependent on a miracle, in any sense. It is a purely philosophical (scientific) result of the right use of the constituted means (cause and effect of the right skills).

These concepts often mean that ministry is more about style to get the best response. But this response is not salvation. It often does not result in new birth. It can be just a human response.

God’s Ministry

The Bible says that the minister is to be equipped in the word of God and is thereby furnished for every good work (2 Tim 3:17). The Bible says that ministry is a calling from God. No matter the skills

we have, when we go into the field if we are not called by God then we will not be equipped to make any real difference for the kingdom of God.

We will end up being social workers with no power of the Holy Spirit. The Bible says that the gospel is the power of God to salvation (Rom 1:16). Only God's power can break human resistance to God and bring about new birth.

This means that the most essential aspect in gospel ministry is the gospel itself, not communication skills. Therefore contextualization is not the key to missions. Rather calling, training in the word of God, exposure to other proven ministers, the gospel truth uncompromised and the power of God are the keys to genuine church missions.

Communication skills and so-called *strong anointings*, can excite cultural groups of people. They can move large numbers of people into "churchianity", but cannot bring about genuine new birth and transformation of life. They cannot really change anyone.

The Saviour

We do not save people by how well we preach. People are saved when they hear Jesus Christ speak into their heart from heaven. It is never our voice that saves them, no matter how well we preach and no matter how true our preaching is. People are not saved by "making a decision". They are saved "by the hearing of faith".

Jesus speaks into every heart He saves. This is the only way to be born again. He does this through the preaching of the gospel. The gospel must be preached by those called of God. "How can they hear unless it be preached?" "How can it be preached unless the preacher is sent?" (Rom 10:8-17). It is God who sends preachers. He confirms His message through them.

T. L. Osborn went to Thailand in the 1950's and preached from a modern translation of the Bible. He was careful to explain the message so everyone could understand. He had no response at all. He was upset and asked the Lord why. The Lord said, "I said preach the gospel. You explained the gospel.". The next night Osborn preached from the KJV without explaining anything. He saw a great response and miracles of healing.

50 years later those converted were key leaders in the main Pentecostal churches. This is not an advertisement for the KJV, or for poor communication. God said, "Where is the wise? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world and chosen to save man by the foolishness of preaching?" (1 Cor 1:18-29). The one thing that counts in mission is the call of God. God confirms those He sends, not by a show of response, but with lasting fruit.

After Paul tried to reason with the philosophers in Greece he wrote 1st Corinthians from Athens: "And my speech and my preaching (among the Corinthians) was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." (1 Cor 2:2-5).

God calls and sends the minister. He confirms that minister by saving souls, regardless of how affective that minister is in proclaiming the message. Salvation is by the power of God, not by the skill of human method. The Holy Spirit by a miracle meets the barrier between God and man (sin) and renews the heart by the gift of faith which is beyond human comprehension. Human method makes syncretised church members that discipleship programmes cannot help. The power of God makes sons (John 1:12).

Hyper-Contextualization

It is when we get to hyper-contextualization that we have real problems. Hyper-contextualization means that we do not just seek to communicate the original message in a plain understandable way, but we seek to adjust both the content of the message and the delivery style of the message to suit the culture that we are reaching. In this vein two things are often taught:

1. If the world view of the people we are reaching is one of *shame* (for example), then we do not teach the sin/justification themes found in Romans, but we look for a way of expressing the “gospel” in terms of Jesus taking away our shame: “He came to save us from our shame”. The idea is that many will grab this “gospel”.

If the world view is one of *power*, then we present Jesus as the power: “He gives us power.” These points may not be wrong, but are fruit of the gospel, not the gospel itself. Contextualization can mean passing the message according to the world view of the hearer, rather than according to the world view of the scripture.

2. Hyper-contextualization means that we deliver the gospel message in the style that suits the local culture. This style may be “friendship evangelism” or story telling, or using the elders in order to go through cultural channels. This means that if preaching is not common in the local culture, then we should not preach. Preaching may be seen as a Western/Greek form of behaviour and not something that God has specifically chosen as the primary means of gospel delivery.

It can likewise be claimed that music is the best approach in one culture, or meeting people in their houses and not bringing them together as a church is more culturally appropriate in another. This view is so easily adopted that sometimes preaching is pushed to the back and seen as less important. Though in persecution, people may not always have a choice.

Some forms of hyper-contextualization are advocated frequently in Evangelical literature. Some examples are:

Olu Alana in the *Evangelical Review of Theology* (July 2001) advocates “cleansing and using” African magical arts with the gospel and encourages Nigerian *Spiritual Churches* who do so, for an indigenisation of Christian healing ministry. However, these spiritist churches are well known occult groups in Africa.

James Brownson in his book *Speaking the Truth in Love* stated that although there is only one gospel message there are many cultural perspectives of that message, giving “sanction (to) a distinctive and particular dimension in each reading of scripture”. Here we have as many different “gospels” as we have perspectives.

Rick Brown claimed in the *International Journal of Frontier Missions* (Oct-Dec 2000) that a belief in the substitutionary sufferings of Christ may not be necessary for salvation or as an essential part of the gospel in the evangelisation of Muslims, despite Paul’s assertion in 1 Cor 15:3-4 to the contrary.

S. Steinhaus in the same journal advocates an initial approach in mission where the gospel is not presented, but rather the Spirit’s power in meeting felt needs. However, how can the Spirit be presented without Jesus Christ? These *friendship/felt need* approaches to mission may be common, but not always stated so bluntly.

Traditional Missions

In the above examples a human pattern of mission is substituted for a biblical one. God said that He has chosen the foolishness of preaching to save the lost (1 Cor 1:21). He told His disciples to preach the gospel to every person throughout the world. Jesus came to preach, teach and heal (Matt 4:23).

Due to political correctness missions is sometimes seen as not going to preach, but going to learn. Contextual missionaries go to discover something new about God and to help the people discover the “God” already in their culture. They see this as the more humble or “Christ like” approach. Their theology on salvation fits a more secular and broader view, rather than new birth.

Colleges more in line with this view will not teach missionaries the gospel, for that would be a form of “colonialism”, but teach them sensitivity to the views of others. This approach is common in Christian missions literature and the “ethics” of it has a wider appeal.

Hyper contextualization claims that we should *fill* existing cultural forms and practices with Christian names and meaning. Sam Schlorff, writing in *Seedbed*, states that this cannot be done and still be Christian:

The Quran and Islamic culture cannot be considered a neutral vehicle that may be used as a contextual or theological starting point, or source of truth and filled with Christian meanings. These are words used only as a communicational starting point to help the receptors connect to the biblical message.

While statements in the Koran may give us a communicational starting point, we must very clearly and boldly present a biblical theology in everything that we preach and teach. Lack of clarity in this area is where the problem arises. People do not have a biblical world view naturally. This must be boldly declared without apology.

Therefore Schlorff concluded that contextualization is not the key to missions:

Certainly, as necessary as contextualization may be, contextualization is not the key, whatever the contextual model that is followed. I firmly believe that what is required is giving faithful attention to fulfilling those foundational tasks our Lord gave us at the beginning: proclaiming the Good News (which includes Bible translation), discipling the new believers, gathering them into churches and training leaders who will pass on to other disciples what they have learned.

Communicational Starting Point

If the missionary understands the culture well enough he may use some aspect in it as a bridge of communication, or a starting point in communication. There is no need to treat culture as evil or to reject it. It is good to identify with the people from the heart. Paul did it with the altar to the unknown God, but Paul’s theology was completely Hebrew Old Testament and not in the least bit Greek (Acts 17:22-33).

It is *meaning* that is the key. What meaning are we communicating? We may choose a communicational starting point, but the meaning or theology we go on to express must be entirely biblical. We must not allow contemporary values to reinterpret biblical meaning. We must expose any error in contemporary values and correct them. Never take theology from culture, but only from scripture in its own biblical context.

Communicational starting points are fine, but theological meanings must never be taken from culture.

Unless people are born again they cannot understand the message, no matter how well the meaning is communicated. Only when born again will they throw off the ritual and the culture and be fully

teachable in Christ. Their eyes will be open in Christ and the veil will be done away in Him. Contextualization cannot do this. The word of God cannot be communicated sociologically. He is a person. He opens the eyes.

Contextual Theology

An important part of contextualization is related to teaching. It means developing a theology that is appropriate to the local context. We need a theology to answer polygamy and wedding ceremonies for example and situations where witchcraft is involved. Anthropology can be of assistance in properly understanding the culture.

Every group needs a theology that addresses their circumstances. In the West we need a theology that addresses morality, abortion, terrorism, environment and science, for example. Christians need to be involved in these areas, rather than yield the ground to atheists. We need theological development appropriate to every culture, but entirely biblical in its principles and values.

Apologetics

Apologetics is influencing society with Christian truth. Apologetics does not lead people to Christ. It is not evangelism. No one can be rationalised into Christ. Being born again is a miracle of new birth through the faith of Christ. However, apologetics brings general grace and Christian influence to society. Early church leaders wrote to the government officials of the day defending the Christian faith, explaining the values of Christ and of the church and their benefit to society.

Through history church leaders have done this. Calvin's *Institutes* was written to the king of France. It is church engagement at all levels in media, government and the intellectual levels of society. If the church abdicates these roles atheists will take them over and the society in which we live will suffer. This is what Paul meant when he said to pray for leaders, that we may live a godly life in peace. This prayer is to be with involvement (1 Tim 2:2).

Pastors in any society need to be diligent to speak Christian values into the society, to educate all people. If they withdraw and look only to their church, society will become more and more ungodly. A part of the Pietist heritage is withdrawal. This must be stopped. Christians must be a voice to society. The church is God's voice. If it is silent it is good for nothing.

Theological Development

Missions includes developing a theology that is relevant to the society in which the church lives. Theological development means looking at each situation that the Christian is facing, whether in his family, work place or community and asking, "What values does this practice reflect? Are these values biblical? Do we have to throw out the whole practice, or can Christians with a changed heart continue it in a Christ honouring way if they choose to?"

In assessing these practices all idolatry has to go, as well as its values. The form of the practice may remain, if believers with a new heart can continue it with biblical values. Transformation is the key. Liberty arises out of genuine new birth and fellowship with Christ. Old forms should not just be thrown out and replaced with Western forms for example. We want individual new birth and a genuine church of Jesus Christ based on His word.

Christians need freedom to choose. They may want a "white wedding" for example, or they may want a traditional wedding with Christian values. The church should not impose. Culture should not become law. We should work in love.

Traditional authorities should be respected, even if we cannot follow their ways. If old values remain and become part of the preaching of the gospel we are putting new wine into old wineskins and both

will be lost. If people are not born again and have an attachment to old values they will draw back from following Christ. This was the danger with the Hebrew Christians that the book of Hebrews addressed.

Take Christmas and Easter: both were pagan festivals, but now have Christian meaning, or at least should have with those who honour Christ. There is nothing wrong with this unless it is forced on people. Social obligations can be overbearing, but there is nothing wrong with voluntary celebrations. Cannot Christians in foreign fields celebrate Christ during their own festival times?

Do they have to adopt the Western ones? Some may say an internationalised time such as Christmas is good, but it is not in the Bible. In all these things there should be liberty, so long as biblical values are being expressed. There is no merit with God in any *day*. It is clearly individual choice.

Take also the word *Theo*, meaning God in the Greek language. This word would not have had the full Hebrew meaning for God (*Jehovah*) in the Greek culture, but some word had to be used. Eventually theological training was able to fill the word with the right meaning. The same goes for the word *god*, which comes from pagan sources in the Germanic tribes.

For most Western cultures *God* now has a biblical meaning, though this meaning is becoming less clear in these cultures. This process with local words occurs in all nations. Contextualization is essential in theology, but must be undertaken with rigorous biblical education.

So in a sense we are filling old forms with Christian meaning, but only where there is new birth and not by changing biblical meaning by cultural relativity. In developing theology for any people that theology must come from the values of scripture and not from our own societies.

The claim that all that former Western missionaries did was convert people to Western culture is not correct. For some missionaries this was the case. But many others gave their lives in faithful gospel preaching and passionate service. In many nations they achieved great results. These include both African and Western missionaries.

Many missionaries in the early modern period were Africans, especially those earliest ones who went out from Sierra Leone to Nigeria and other parts of West Africa. A study of these and others is very beneficial, which unfortunately we do not have in these notes.

African Theology

African theology means a theology from scripture alone that addresses life in Africa. It does not mean theology taken from the traditional African religion and culture. In the same way Western theology must be theology from scripture alone that addresses life in the West.

The need to be relevant does not mean that we embrace the values of people to win them. *Relevance* means using biblical principles to address situations that people face in life. Take *rap music* for example. If by using it we are communicating the values of the rap community (such as disrespect, sloppiness and over familiarity) then we should not use it. These are not the values of the church.

Becoming like others will not win them. We present the answer, the values and life of Jesus Christ. When Paul said that he was all things to all men, he meant that he did all he could to win them to Christ. He did not portray ungodly values (1 Cor 9:22). *Relevant* means that we speak biblically to a particular culture in which people live.

Polygamy and Abortion

What theological values does the Bible express regarding polygamy for example? Jesus said that God's original plan was Adam and Eve, one male and one female cleaving together and procreating and that man deviated from this due to his hardness of heart (Matt 19:4).

During the time in which Jesus ministered polygamy was not widely practiced by Jew or Greek. They practiced divorce and remarriage, like Western communities do today. It is “civilized polygamy” if you will, one wife or husband at a time!

The Bible does not teach that a polygamist cannot be saved in their current state. The Bible does not say that a man must put away all his wives but one, for him or the wives to be saved. Paul gave a general principle in the New Testament where he said, “Let the person continue in the same state in which he came to Christ”, though he was not directly speaking of polygamy in this case.

He did say that God has called us to peace (1 Cor 7:20, 24). That is, He is interested in putting lives back together, not in destroying them by the law. After coming to Christ a believer with a wife should not marry more wives. However, to say that he must drive away his current wives applies law and may be harmful to people.

It is important to rely on the Holy Spirit to convict hearts and to show the best solution. He does not come to apply law, but to give a new heart, where people live for the good of others rather than to please self. When we apply the letter of the law we will drive people away from God. If the man has to cast off wives arbitrarily they will be destitute and this is not love.

In each case we rely on the Holy Spirit to show us what to do, what edifies and what can best repair a bad situation. Each case must be taken on its merits, as the Spirit of God leads us from scriptural principles.

God is not interested in the law. He is interested in people and in well being. He wants families healed and children protected. These things are said in the context of polygamy and not to be applied to homosexuality or fornication, which are acts of self-gratification and not love. Love considers the welfare of others above self.

In abortion the issue is not the woman’s rights, but the baby’s rights. If the woman did not want to get pregnant then she should not have slept with a man. (We are not speaking about rape here.) The man also must be responsible for his actions. Our responsibility is to do what is right for the child. If we say, “Let’s abort the child so it will not have a deprived life”, then why do we not apply that to our self also? We understand there are some cases when there is nothing we can humanly do.

We should not get angry or violent about abortion, but the level of abortion in society shows the type of society we have. It is a good indicator of the state of the heart of man. It is one thing that shows whether we live for our own convenience. We certainly need strong Spirit filled preaching to turn the hearts of people back to God and to their children.

Leadership

A polygamist should not be a leader in the church. Paul said to Timothy the elder must be “the husband of one wife” (1 Tim 3:2). Paul was not speaking of polygamy here, for the people in Timothy’s district did not practice it. They practiced divorce and remarriage. The principle in 1 Tim 3:2 would equally apply to polygamy. A polygamist should not be a leader in the church because his marriage relationships do not reflect God’s standards. He is not an example for others to emulate in that regard.

1 Tim 3:2 would speak to the Western nations today. Paul meant that the leader must be an example in all things. If the leader divorces at his will and remarries then how much more will the rest of the church? This is why we have a problem in Western churches today concerning serial divorce. It starts with the leadership. Paul’s admonition to Timothy is serious and is given to protect families from continual marriage breakdowns.

Spiritual Warfare

Contextualization and spiritual warfare are promoted by many recent books, often written by anthropologists. Increasingly lectures at ministry training colleges are given by anthropologists. As anthropologists, their focus is to look into cultures to gain insights for contextualization and spiritual warfare. Charles Kraft and C. Peter Wagner have taught that we may consult local traditions, testimonies, pagan sources and cultures for our theology and strategy on missions.

Authors have taught that the Bible does not have all the insight we need for spiritual warfare. They claim that theology is like science: The Bible mentions a little about nature and leaves the sciences to find out more. They claim that what the Bible does not say in some areas of theology we must find out through anthropology. In this way we add to or interpret the scripture by external sources. It is claimed the Bible says little about the devil, so that we need to consult other sources for further strategic knowledge.

Lausanne

The *Lausanne Committee* is a contemporary meeting of world Christian leaders, both theologians and anthropologists. Some of their statements are very good and others mix views, trying to find middle ground. This statement is from the *Lausanne Covenant*:

We affirm the divine inspiration, truthfulness and authority of both Old and New Testament scriptures in their entirety as the only written word of God, without error in all that it affirms and the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

We also affirm the power of God's word to accomplish His purpose of salvation. The message of the Bible is addressed to all men and women. For God's revelation in Christ and in scripture is unchangeable. Through it the Holy Spirit still speaks today.

He illumines the minds of God's people in every culture to perceive its truth freshly through their own eyes and thus discloses to the whole Church ever more of the many-coloured wisdom of God.

The above passage states both:

1. The Christian view of inerrancy of scripture and God's word in new birth.
2. The view of sociologists that human cultures inspire new insights into the interpretation of scripture.

In other words, the meaning of the scripture is not found in the text itself, but in the mind or eye of the person reading the text. The statement said a new culture brings a *fresh* meaning to scripture. In this case it is not God who gives man meaning, but man who gives God's word a subjective meaning.

...Unless we claim that God has spoken in the culture and use that to cast a new meaning on scripture for the further *benefit of us all*. The problem with this is one of hermeneutics. Without an objective measure, how can we say which parts of culture God has spoken in and which parts He has not spoken in? This is why we have scripture, interpreted by its own context.

Interpretation

The view expressed in the above statement is popular and can be used to justify a definition of spiritual warfare that is not scriptural but cultural. The cultures of man are said to shed new light on what the Bible means. This is not interpreting the Bible by what the Bible says, but by the world views of mankind. This statement shows a standard in missiology that supports syncretism.

From the 2000 Nairobi Conference the *Lausanne Committee* published a statement called *Deliver us From Evil*, in which they both disagreed and agreed with recent practices such as warfare prayer against territorial spirits in mission. They are unsure whether they should allow contemporary cultural views and experience to interpret scripture.

The concept of territorial spirits is a recent innovation in missiology. The theory is that each cultural region has demonic powers over it and these powers can be manipulated in some way: by prayer to God, prayer directly against the powers themselves, confessing the sins of the people, fasting, or some sort of cleansing ceremony in the region. It is claimed that this should give success to evangelism.

The Barrier

The view is similar to the contextualization view: that if you can remove a barrier to faith, in this case a demonic barrier, then the people will come to faith. However, it is not the devil that causes man to reject the things of God, but each person's own human nature. This is why it is the preaching of the gospel and not the binding of Satan that brings salvation to people. The gospel is the power of God to salvation.

Videos, books, visions, prophecies and testimonies of anecdotal nature are used to support territorial spirit teachings. Testimonies of witches flying, animals turning into humans and curses put upon Christians circulate without truth. People accept that the devil has power and Christians must continue in a struggle against evil spirits. This puts the Christian under bondage to fear animals, birds, curses, witchdoctors and "agents" in their family.

Superstition stifles development. If we believe that demons control a sea then it will be out of bounds to fishing, swimming and research. People cut down trees because birds that are said to be evil spirits land in them. This is poverty. Such superstition is not Christian. We must rebuke such fables, not encourage them.

The *Lausanne Committee* and many missionaries around the world have a lot to offer in missions. Missionaries in the past have left great legacies to follow. It is only that some extreme views have taken on popularity and these must be stopped.

Social Work

The prophets of Israel spoke a lot about the social conditions in nations in the Old Testament era. They corrected the oppression of the poor. The *Law of Moses* also had special provision for caring for the stranger and needy, but insisted that judgement in court should not favour either the rich or poor, but be impartial.

Jesus said that the world would know that we are His disciples by our love for one another (John 13:35). Jesus did not give a commission for the church to care for the world in the same way, but charged the church to preach the gospel to the world. In John 17 Jesus said, "I pray not for the world but for those whom the Father has given Me out of the world...". The world needs the gospel because:

1. They need forgiveness of sins and eternal life.
2. Only the gospel can change the heart, which then changes the conditions in the society.

If the church goes about meeting the physical needs of people it will do no good, because unless development comes from the heart of the people any advances will not be respected and will soon be lost. If the church does not preach the gospel, who will? The United Nations?

Jesus gave money to the poor on occasions. In the book of Acts we do not see the church in an organisational way reaching out to the world around them to care for their material needs. When there was a famine they raised support from the churches for the believers in Jerusalem, not for the world at large.

One would assume that the believers did good to all men as they had opportunity (to their “neighbour”), just as Jesus did, but there was no church policy of ministering to the material needs of society. The church’s task as far as the world was concerned was to preach the gospel.

The *Great Commission* is that we preach the gospel. Jesus said, “Let the dead bury the dead.” (Luke 9:60). This means that the church should not focus on doing what others will do. If we do not preach the gospel then it will not get preached. So this is the one task that the church must see to.

The real need of people is eternal life. Their material needs are not primary. What the church has to offer is far better. We must focus on what is most important and the one charge that Paul said to Timothy, “I charge you before God and Jesus Christ and His angels, preach the word...” (2 Tim 4:2).

Corruption

Corruption is a main reason for poverty. No matter what the United Nations does, in all their expensive hotel conferences, four wheel drive vehicles and staff benefits, they will never eradicate poverty because the root of it is corruption and the UN contains corruption.

Some people look down on traditional missionary ministry and believe that setting up sustainable businesses for people is more beneficial. Before we sink a water bore hole for a community, we need to ask why there is not one there already. The conditions that have prevented a bore hole in the past will in the near future treat any externally motivated help the same way.

If mission is helping to set people up in a business, the business will not be sustainable while the conditions of corruption in the nation continue to exist. If the conditions of the community and wider nation do not change, any investment we make into it will fail. Change must come from the people. Orphanages are the same. They treat the symptoms and not the cause.

Helping in these areas is not wrong. It is simple compassion and we should show compassion. It is just not the solution. The gospel treats the cause by changing men’s hearts. That is why Paul said that he was not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God. We believe that some are ashamed of traditional missionary gospel work and look for something more “cool” and acceptable to the world.

The conditions that result in HIV orphans will continue to make more orphans while they exist. The solution is the way that the next generation is raised. We have visited many orphanages started by Christians some time ago, but to get public funds they have agreed not to preach the gospel. This is the way many orphanages and social projects go. It is the only way they can get funding.

We have met Christians who say giving to tax deductible projects is a better stewardship of money. If we are not putting our effort into the preaching of the gospel it is poor stewardship of our life in God’s sight. The gospel has no prestige in the world. People challenge it and say, “But what are you doing tangibly to help people?”. This is because they think the wisdom of God is foolish, in their human estimation of things.

People have also said that providing social care gives us an opportunity to preach. In these cases the preaching is often secondary, or subliminal, or to some extent takes a back seat. We do not need an opportunity to preach the gospel. We have that already from the Commission of Jesus Christ. “Permission” to preach comes from God, not from man. People liking us will not make them Christians.

A handout does not help people.

The Answer

We have seen pastors with 20 orphan children in their homes, bringing them up with Christian love, the word of God and sound education, in their own families. These children have the right conditions to ensure that the past is not repeated.

It is best to train pastors who preach the gospel. When we have opportunity to help others we should do it, but the task of the church is to preach Christ. If Christian individuals then change governments and fix economies, conditions will improve. Nations with godly leadership can then do a lot to help others in need.

Social work is not a biblical principle for drawing people to Christ. Jesus did not feed the 5,000 to win them, but from compassion. They all went away from Him when they did not continue to get food. So if it was a strategy it failed (John 6:26). Giving people rice, clothes, medical care and education will not make them Christians. We are sent to preach the gospel.

This is not said to discourage medical work among those who do not have access to it. Activities like that are good and Christians should be involved in helping people. Christianity produces a *Good Samaritan* heart in people, which blesses the whole world. This is good. But the gospel is better. When it comes to the task of the church in missions, it is the traditional factors of gospel preaching, teaching and training of leaders. This is missions.

We are the salt and light of the world. Whatever job we work at and in whatever sector of society or government we appear in we are to “hold forth the word of life.” (Phil 2:16). The early church was a witness of Christ. They were in society to speak and display different values of honesty and faithfulness. This is what society needs: truth from genuine believers.

Melchizedek was first king of righteousness, then king of peace (Heb 7:2). There is no peace and social order without righteousness and there is no righteousness without the gospel. The early Jews said Isaiah’s prophecy of the “lamb lying down with the lion” was a symbol of the Messianic kingdom. The gospel has brought this blessing to many nations and will do so in the future if the Lord tarries.

God changes nations *from the inside*. This means the insides of people’s hearts are changed by the gospel. It also means it must be the indigenous who are changed and who then change their nation – the *insiders*. Unless they (or we, in our own nation) do it, it will never be done.

Trade and Aid

Aid comes from a compassionate heart and is very good. But as ministers of the gospel and missionaries we must preach the gospel. If we win people based on aid we have not won them to Christ. Aid will not change a community. Change must come from the heart of the people. A community and a nation must learn to help itself.

When David Livingstone went to mission he preached the gospel and was effective. His aim was to open the way for other missionaries to follow. He also saw that a nation could help itself if trade routes were opened. It could then deal in honest and beneficial trade and compete favourably to itself and legally. Christian business leaders who have worked in aid for extensive periods conclude that trade is the key.

We need aid and trade: Aid for love and for giving people opportunity and trade for long term solutions. Trade builds markets, industry and employment within the nation. Nations must develop their power grids and banking systems, to give opportunity to all its citizens to build businesses. One of the biggest impediments to this is corrupt bureaucrats.

God has one strategy for missions and the nations and it is the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is what Jesus left the apostles and this remains the single task of the church. God's strategy is this:

1. The gospel changes the heart of the person.
2. The renewed person changes the nation.

Interview of 20 Missionaries

In the year 2000 we interviewed 20 missionaries working in three people groups which are considered to be resistant to the gospel. These groups are the Kanuri, Fulani and Hausa people of Islamic sub-Saharan Africa. The Kanuri people only had 20 converts to Christ among them in Nigeria. Most of the missionaries we interviewed were born again indigenes from among these groups. They came from a variety of denominational backgrounds. We asked the missionaries two questions:

1. What do you believe are the main reasons these groups resist the gospel?
2. What do you believe are the best means of reaching these people groups with the gospel?

The tables below summarize their answers to the questions. The tables also show the people group the missionary was born into, whether the missionary is a convert from Islam and the people group among whom they serve as a missionary. "X" means a positive response.

Table One

The columns on the right of Table 1 (see below) show the missionary's responses to question one, "Why these groups resist the gospel?". All those interviewed responded in accordance with one or more of the headings listed, e.g. they considered either "Islamic Theology" or "Islamic Persecution" (or other factors) to contribute towards gospel resistance.

A column near the right hand end of the table reads "Mono-Culturalism". This means that the missionary felt that the lack of contextualization was the problem and that the gospel was being resisted because it was presented in a foreign format and not in the world view of the people.

As we have seen, "mono-culturalism" is a main issue presented in missions literature and addresses factors such as:

Changing the style of Christian worship, focusing on cultural themes of shame or power, not offending Muslims by saying Jesus is the Son of God, using friendship evangelism or tribal elders instead of preaching, allowing Mohammed to be held as a prophet or the Koran to contain in part the word of God, allowing the idea that we both at least try to serve the same God, or allowing converted Muslims to continue in Islamic ritual worship while using Christian meanings.

Not one respondent mentioned issues connected to mono-culturalism in gospel presentation as a reason for resistance to the gospel, despite much recent missiological literature to the contrary. Most of these respondents should know, since they themselves were once Islamic and part of the "resistant" peoples.

According to all those interviewed, in their current work among the said people groups there is no evidence found of a *People Movement* to Christ using Islamic forms or the Koran in worship. A *people movement* is a sociological group movement en mass, rather than a traditional individual conversion.

Table 1. Summary of interviews – reasons for resistance (Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri):

Name People group ► Ministry to (Fulani: N=Nomadic, S=Sedentary)	Ex- Muslim	Islamic theology	Islamic persecution	Cultural cohesion and tradition	Family structures	Animism	Nomadic lifestyle	Dependence	Lack of convert care	Gospel presentation	Christians seen as enemy	Christian lifestyle	Mono-culturalism	Lack of witness
Ibrahim Bature Hausa ► Hausa	x	x	x	x	X				x					x
Habila Mato Hausa ► Hausa	x	x	x	x						x				x
Paul Musa Chamba ► Hausa	x	x	x	x										x
O. Olumide Yoruba ► Hausa		x	x	x	X						x			
Lawal Barau Hausa ► Hausa	x		x	x	X	X								
Rhema Okolo Igala ► Hausa	x	x	x	x	X	X						x		x
Neal Childs Hausa ► Hausa		x	x	x	X			x						x
David Okpikpi Ebo ► Fulani/N		x		x			x							
Exhorter Noah Ichen ► Fulani/N		x	x	x	X	X	x	x	x					x
Ganuwa Joshua Kamuku ► Fulani	x	x	x	x	X		x	x	x	x				x
Paul Shettima Fulani ► Fulani/N	x	x	x	x	X		x			x				x
Mohammed. Abulahi Fulani/S ► Fulani	x	x	x	x	X		x			x	x			x
Gideon Bwala Bura ► Kanuri			x	x					x	x		x		x
Moses Umoru Margi ► Kanuri	x	x	x											x
Musa Ali Kanuri ► Kanuri	x	x	x	x	X									x
Wakawa Habila Bura ► Kanuri		x	x	x					x	x				x
John Idoko Yoruba ► Shuwa Arab		x	x			X		x						x

Name People group ► Ministry to (Fulani: N=Nomadic, S=Sedentary)	Ex- Muslim	Islamic theology	Islamic persecution	Cultural cohesion and tradition	Family structures	Animism	Nomadic lifestyle	Dependence	Lack of convert care	Gospel presentation	Christians seen as enemy	Christian lifestyle	Mono-culturalism	Lack of witness
Sue Pearson USA ► Shuwa Arab		x	x	x				x	x					
Colin Bearup England ► Shuwa Arab/ Fulani		x	x	x	X			x						
Pade Tokun Yoruba ► Fulani		x	x	x	X	X		x		x				

A popular theme in mission literature is that the church is somehow responsible for the lack of response to the gospel among Muslims, because of the Crusades 1,000 years ago, the economic imperialism of the West today, or the West's support for Israel. The idea is that if the West becomes apologetic or weak the Muslims will see their sincerity and convert to Christ. Scriptures such as "turn the other cheek" are used in this regard.

Our own experience in Islamic centres does not bear this out. Weakness is generally taken as victory for Islam. In Nigeria we have seen that a position of strength by Christians saves lives. It also gains a greater respect and response among Muslims to the gospel. Many Western Christians have not developed a theology of self-defence when their families are attacked because they have not needed to.

Referring to Table 1, only one converted Muslim missionary saw this *Western enemy* concept as a reason why Muslims resisted the gospel. If they saw the church at fault, the fault was that the church was negligent or non-committed in reaching out. When they spoke of improper *gospel presentation* they referred mainly to the social gospel. By negligence they meant no sustained witness, no miracles, no training of converts and no knowledge of the community, culture or language.

Missionaries interviewed were mainly converted Muslims working among Muslims. They saw Islam itself as the main reason why the people resisted the gospel. These answers were quite distinct from most of the literature we have read, having surveyed hundreds of different sources that take a far more Post Modern relative view than the people working in the fields. For a full evaluation of interviewee responses see the Masters Dissertation with the *University of Wales* by Kent Hodge, *Reaching the Resistant*.

Table Two

Table 2 below shows the missionary's answer to the second question, "How best to reach the resistant?". Not one of the 20 respondents mentioned issues relating to *adapting the gospel to Islamic culture* as a means of reaching them. All the missionaries who were themselves converts of these Islamic groups were successful in missions and had all led many Muslims to Christ.

Two persons interviewed identified *spiritual warfare* as important in reaching the resistant. They did not mention recent strategies related to territorial spirits or spiritual mapping, but felt that engaging spiritual powers in prayer battle was important. Neither of these persons were former Muslims, nor had favourable results in winning their target people to Christ.

The responses below relating to *cultural sensitivity* and *communication starting points* include factors such as knowing the language, customs and parts of the Koran that may assist in communication. They believed in the importance of indigenous Spirit filled missionaries who would be effective in more traditional forms of contextualization.

The respondent's answers were therefore quite different to recent missiology and much more in line with traditional missiology.

Table 2. Summary of interviews – how to reach the resistant (Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri):

Name People group ► Ministry to (Fulani: N=Nomadic, S=Sedentary)	Ex- Muslim	Community care	Education	Communicational starting point	Adapting Christianity to Islamic culture	Living among them	Christian's lifestyle	Direct preaching	Spiritual warfare (SLSW)	Miracles	Suffering for the Gospel	Care of converts	Cultural sensitivity	Training indigenes
Ibrahim Bature Hausa ► Hausa	x		x	x		X				x	x	x	x	x
Habila Mato Hausa ► Hausa	x			x		X	x	x		x	x		x	
Paul Musa Chamba ► Hausa	x						x	x		x	x	x		
Omoboye Olumide Yoruba ► Hausa		x							x			x	x	
Lawal Barau Hausa ► Hausa	x					X	x				x			
Rhema Okolo Igala ► Hausa	x						x	x		x				x
Neal Childs Hausa ► Hausa			x					x		x	x	x		x
David Okpikpi Ebo ► Fulani/N		x				X						x		
Exhorter Noah Ichen ► Fulani/N		x				X		x		x	x	x		
Ganuwa Joshua Kamuku ► Fulani	x	x					x							
Paul Shettima Fulani ► Fulani/N	x			x		X				x		x		x
Mohammed Abulahi	x			x		X	x	x		x	x	x		

Name People group ► Ministry to (Fulani: N=Nomadic, S=Sedentary)	Ex- Muslim	Community care	Education	Communicational starting point	Adapting Christianity to Islamic culture	Living among them	Christian's lifestyle	Direct preaching	Spiritual warfare (SLSW)	Miracles	Suffering for the Gospel	Care of converts	Cultural sensitivity	Training indigenes
Fulani/S► Fulani														
Gideon Bwala Bura► Kanuri				x			x	x			x	x		
Moses Umoru Margi► Kanuri	x					X		x					x	
Musa Ali Kanuri► Kanuri	x			x		X	x			x	x			x
Wakawa Habila Bura► Kanuri		x		x		X	x	x				x	x	x
John Idoko Yoruba► Shuwa Arab		x	x							x				
Sue Pearson USA► Shuwa Arab											x	x		
Colin Bearup England► Shuwa Arab/ Fulani					x			x						x
Pade Tokun Yoruba► Fulani		x	x	x								x		

Traditional Factors in Mission

Every Muslim convert we know came to Christ because of a miracle. We know many other missionaries not mentioned above and their testimonies are the same. One does not leave Islam without good reason, as it is very costly. Either Jesus has revealed Himself to people or they have seen His power in healing the sick and in miracles.

The new birth itself is of course a miracle. Jesus reveals Himself to the heart and mind of people with such powerful conviction that they cannot turn away. One way or another they must know that Jesus is the Son of God before they will follow Him.

Really we do not win Muslims. We preach Christ. He wins Muslims Himself. If we win Muslims we must promise them things and then fulfil them. That is quite a responsibility, because life is difficult for them. If we are not the Saviour then neither are we responsible for the converts. They are His converts. We are responsible in the sense that we do all we can, but we are not the Saviour. When Christ builds His church He does a much better job of it.

We are not saying that we should not be involved in the care of converts. Of course we should, but as Christ enables us. He is the one who reveals Himself to Muslims and saves them by Himself. This is the only way someone can be saved and Jesus keeps those He saves. He can keep them better than we can. We are co-workers with Christ which means we work with what He is doing, rather than ask Him to work with what we are doing.

A traditional mission does not bring individuals out from their people, but out of cultural values that are contrary to the kingdom of God. Some of those interviewed are not included in the above table, such as Kosheika Bashir who stated:

Converted Muslims who maintain old forms of worship have serious struggles with commitment to Christ as they go on in their faith. There has not been a distinct break with their past life and ties to their former ways become a stumbling block...The convert must make a complete break with cultural and religious thought that is contrary to the Word of God, rather than adapt biblical teachings to it.

The Republic of Niger

Neal Childs stressed the need for a *loud voice* in ministering to Islamic populations. He said, "The message must be clear, direct and understandable. There must be a clear distinction made between Christianity and Islam. Where missionaries become intimidated their witness is almost unnoticeable."

Childs preached on radio in *The Republic of Niger*, stating that Jesus is the Son of God. The first to object regarding the direct nature of the message were the established churches. Later 500 Muslims came and burnt down Child's church and Bible College in Maradi.

This obtained national media coverage. Today a better church and a Bible College twice as large have been erected. Hausa people come from many parts of the country to ask for gospel literature and churches are opening.

When they see that we stand true they trust our message. They know that we believe it and so the message must be worth something. Childs said *Friendship Evangelism* is not working in Niger. Christians told to practice it are going back to Islam. The influence of Islamic culture is too strong for a new convert.

Testimonies

Bature Ibrahim, a converted Hausa Muslim, does not believe in changing the message of Christianity to suit the recipient's culture. When asked whether Christians needed to change their worship style (of dancing and singing and mixed gender meetings) to accommodate the Hausa/Muslim culture, he answered:

No. Muslims are getting used to the biblical way of worship. David danced before the Lord (2 Sam 6:14). This style of worship is a part of Christianity so you cannot change it. Just encourage and teach the new converts about worship. This worship style is not Western. The joy in the person worshipping is in the heart so it is real.

Habila Mato saw many Hausa converted in one of the toughest areas of Nigeria and seven churches started. Mato began with what he thought would work. He spoke Arabic and Hausa. He sang Hausa songs in worship. He visited with the Hausa at important occasions, like naming ceremonies for their children. He helped the Hausa on their farms and helped them build their houses.

During these times Mato had interaction with the Hausa so that they were able to see his way of life. Finally, Mato said, it was when the Hausa saw God's miracles in healing the sick that they began to turn to the Lord. Until that time he had no converts after many months.

Five Points

From all those interviewed the following five points were commonly made:

1. The Hausa, Fulani and Kanuri need people who will *live among them*. Visiting ministry is not enough. Converts need to be nurtured by people who do not go away. Those who visit and provide for the medical needs of Fulani and leave are appreciated, but the Fulani take their assistance without accepting their message.
2. The Muslims need to see the *Christian's lifestyle*. A Muslim cannot live free of sin. When they see the Christian's lifestyle they come to understand that what they were taught about Christianity is not true. They will never be disabused of their wrong notions about Christianity unless real Christians live among them.
3. The need for *miracles* was stressed. The unfortunate aspect here is that many of those sharing the gospel with the Hausa, Fulani and Kanuri do not believe in the healing power of God. The Pentecostal Christians who do either are not reaching these groups, or they do not know the languages of the people. Many Pentecostals are caught up in the *prosperity message* and are not reaching out.
4. Those reaching the people must care enough about them to learn their ways, be interested in their way of life and learn their language and *communicate with them in their own context*. Musa Ali commented that missionaries do not speak Kanuri and that this hinders reception.
5. The need for proper *follow up care* of converts was stressed. As converts are cast out from their people, there needs to be care for them among the Christians, even when the Christians themselves face the threat of harm from Muslims seeking retribution for the incursion.

Reaching these people requires believers filled with the Spirit, whose lives reflect the power of the new life in Christ, who minister in the power of the Spirit, who care about the people enough to communicate in the local context and risk reprisals while they nurture converts. Miracles help overcome resistance as they are proof of the truth we preach. The traditional answer is that Christians must live among them, calling upon God, preaching a direct biblical message and caring for the converts, until the results come.

Extractionism

We are not saying that converts must leave their culture, their people or their forms of worship. We are not saying that they must join churches in square buildings, sing foreign worship songs, or have hierarchical leadership structures in church denominations as in the West. We are saying they must be free to follow Jesus and His values. In all of these things the Holy Spirit must be their guide and have the freedom to do as He wishes.

If Muslim converts go back to their mosque and convert all the members then that is wonderful and we hope we would do nothing to hinder the work of the Spirit in any way. We are not calling for rigidity in missions. The "letter" kills. The Holy Spirit works in manifold ways and where the Spirit of Christ is there is liberty. "Faith works through love."

The Book of Acts

The book of Acts describes missions in the early church:

1. Clear and direct preaching of the gospel by Spirit filled disciples was paramount (Acts 2:32, 3:15, 4:10, 29, 31, 6:78:5, 8:35, 9:20, 10:36, 11:1, 11:19, 12:24, 13:5 – 2:4, 4:8, 4:31, 6:8, 9:17, 13:9).
2. Signs, wonders and miracles were vital in presenting and validating the gospel (Acts 3:11, 4:29, 4:33, 5:12-14, 16, 6:8, 8:6,9:34-35, 42, 11:21).

The Bible defines mission as clear proclamation of gospel truths, from the outset of engagement with the receptor culture (Luke 24:47). Those who received salvation were called out of the world and into the body of Christ (Acts 2:47). Churches were planted and the apostles trained leadership and contended for the biblical faith in the context of Gnosticism, legalism and hedonism (Jude 3).

In Acts there was total commitment from the disciples. No matter the personal cost they were *witnesses* – meaning they were first hand partakers of the power and life of Christ and they gave their lives in proclamation of it (Acts 4:3, 5:18, 33, 40, 7:58, 9:23, 12:2, 14:19). This biblical *blueprint* for evangelism has not changed to this day. When asked what measures can be taken to reach the Hausa, Neal Childs answered:

Many more labourers are needed to impact the Hausa in their culture with uncompromised preaching and teaching of God's word. Only the power of God breaks the religious thinking of people. Christians cannot compromise their beliefs to have harmony with the Muslims and then expect to reach them.

Through the planting of churches throughout the cities and villages a network of support is established to overcome the effect of persecution on the new converts and plant the gospel in the land.

Traditional factors in missions include:

1. Full engagement.
2. Gospel preaching and teaching.
3. Signs and wonders.
4. Church planting.
5. Training of indigenes.

Missions is church planting and training of locals. Dissemination of literature and all forms of media are helpful in fulfilling these tasks. Indigenes can do far more than the missionary. We cannot call, only God can. But we can teach the word of God and care for those He gives us. To teach effectively, our own lives must be the prime example.

It is also helpful not to put our own name on the output of the work. This means that a country does not need another foreign denomination. We can do far more by equipping locals. We can help to train 100 locals who will start 200 churches and leave our name off them. They may do far more for the kingdom of God.

The Taliabu

The Taliabu tribe is located in Indonesia. You can get their full story on the *New Tribes Mission* website. Two missionaries went with their families and lived with the Taliabu for two years learning their language and culture. The Taliabu had never previously seen foreigners. After two years all the neighbouring village people moved into the central town to attend the long expected meetings.

The missionaries began meetings in the local idol worship centre because it was large enough. They taught the scripture for six months starting in Genesis 1 and working right through the Bible. When they came to the Law of Moses the tribal elders were stricken with remorse, saying they had broken all these commandments and that this demonstrated to them their ungratefulness to such a kind and good God.

They determined never to break the commandments again. But when they found that they continued with sin they were struck with the real issue. They asked, "What kind of people are we?". During this six months the Holy Spirit laid a solid foundation in the people's hearts, highlighting their great need.

After six months of meetings the teachers finally came to the resurrection of Christ and demonstrated how the cross took away our sin. Hundreds of the people from the villages were born again. Miracles and healings occurred. Here we see an example of mission where time was taken to lay the right foundation.

Often today we rush into villages and preach the gospel, get decisions, lay hands on the people and count the converts for our newsletters. This is not always wrong, but if this is not the Spirit of God there will be no foundation in the people's lives and no genuine salvation.

Witchdoctors tried to curse the missionaries and their children but they ignored them knowing they were safe in Christ. They did no spiritual warfare at any time and used the idol hall as a church hall peacefully.

Mission and Islam

The Koran may be used as a tool to introduce Muslims to Jesus, but the Christian is not to imply by this that the Koran is in any sense inspired by God. A few ideas in the Koran were taken from the Bible but this is not any indication of inspiration in the Koran. References to Christ in the Koran can effectively be used as *communicational starting points*.

(God may even put these communicational starting points in a culture for this purpose. See Don Richardson's books *Eternity in Their Hearts* and *Lords of the Earth* and Bruce Olson's book *Bruchko*.)

The Koran says of Jesus:

1. He was born of a virgin (Surah 19:16-35).
2. He was the Messiah (Surah 4:71).
3. He was a Spirit from God (Surah 4:171).
4. He was the word of God (Surah 4:171.)
5. He was faultless (Surah 19:19), while the Koran states that all other prophets sinned: Adam (Surah 2:36, 7:22-23), Abraham (Surah 26:82), Moses (Surah 28:15-16), Jonah (Surah 37:142), David (Surah 38:24-25) and Mohammed (Surah 47:19, 48:1-2, 33:36-38).
6. He is illustrious in the world and in heaven (Surah 3:45).
7. He was taken up to heaven by God (Surah 4:158).
8. He will come again to earth to judge (Surah 43:61).

Muslim's View

PM (name withheld) grew up as a Muslim in Yola in the north-east of Nigeria. For nine years as a Christian he went to the Mosque to avoid persecution. He said that Islam indoctrinates people with a spirit of hatred toward those who turn to Christ. He added that the Muslims of Nigeria follow not only the Koran, but also the writings of Mohammed's followers, known as the *Hadith*, or Islamic traditions.

The Hadith is a collection of sayings by Mohammed, which Muslims believe are the basis for an inspired interpretation and commentary on the Koran. "Since Allah delivered the Koran, only Allah through Mohammed his prophet may interpret it." No other Muslim may interpret the Koran. PM said that the Hadith calls for converts from Islam to be killed.

When PM finally took an open stand for the gospel his own family threatened his life. We could name in this book person after person we know who passed through this same situation. PM summarised some of the views Muslims have concerning Christianity:

Christians believe in three Gods (Surah 6:102, 17:110-111). Christians do not pray five times a day. Christians are divided into many churches. Jesus is only a man and cannot die for the sins of others. The prophet Ezekiel said, "The righteousness of a man benefits himself alone". (Ezek 14:14-20, 18:20-22. Surah 35:8 claims, "And whoever purifies himself does so for the benefit of his own soul.").

Jesus did not die on the cross or rise again (Surah 4:157). Jesus predicted that Mohammed would come (Surah 61:6 and John 14:16). Muslims observe the five pillars of their faith and worship more frequently than Christians. Christians worship in an irreverent way, dancing, clapping hands, sitting on chairs, in mixed male/female congregations.

The *Five Pillars of Islam* are the confession of faith, prayer five times each day, almsgiving, the fast of Ramadan and the pilgrimage to Mecca, the *Hajj*.

It is a mistake for Christians to compete with this false view of righteousness. Some have said that they must *out-fast* the Muslim and *out-pray* them. Prayer is ritual in Islam so competing with that is a waste of time. Our righteousness is of Christ and has nothing whatsoever to do with Islamic theology.

Some have said, "Except your righteousness exceeds that of the Muslim..." referring to Jesus' comment with regard to the Pharisees (Matt 5:20). Jesus was referring to the righteousness of faith, as opposed to that of the law (Rom 10:3, Phil 3:4-10).

Theological Factors

Islam has certain theological factors which sets it at variance with Christianity:

1. The sin of associating any created thing with God. This belief rejects the incarnation of Christ (Surah 19:35-36, 92, 112:3). This view is derived from the Muslim notion of God's complete transcendence. He cannot associate with flesh. He is unknowable. God is totally free. There is no assurance of salvation. He makes no promises and is morally neutral. Man is not responsible for his sin, as God authors both good and evil in His sovereignty.
2. Muslims do not agree with the Christian doctrine of *original sin*. They admit that man is weak, but see the gap between man and God as a result of God's transcendence, not man's sin. Correct ritual is all that man needs to be in right relationship with God. Importance is not placed on moral law. There is no need of salvation, but only to follow the five pillars of Islam. There is no personal sense of sin, since God is not seen as a person, but only as a distant raw power.

Such positions make the biblical concepts of *original sin*, *redemption* and *atonement* foreign to Islamic ritual. The teachings of Islam seem specifically aimed at refuting such Judeo-Christian ideas.

Persecution

The *Law of Apostasy* is one of the most significant factors contributing to resistance. According to Islamic law, the *Shariah*, an adult male apostate is to be given opportunity to return to Islam or he will be punished according to their law, which includes being stripped of all civil rights, losing his wife, his children and property and any Muslim is free to kill him.

Surah 2:256 reads, "Let there be no compulsion in religion." Commenting on this verse, an Islamic commentator, Ali Ahmad al-Wahidi, wrote in *The Quran and its Interpreters*, "This verse was before the Messenger (Mohammed) of God was ordered to fight the people of the book.", meaning Christians and Jews. Ali Ahmad believed that Surah 9:29, calling for *jihad*, abrogated tolerance as normative religion. In Islam the *principle of abrogation* means latter verses abrogate earlier ones.

Here are just a few of the countless number of personal stories we know from among former Muslims who made it through. We have left their names out:

1. IB (Hausa) lost all his land and his inheritance. His brothers would have tried to kill him when they had a chance, but were waiting for him to return to Islam. He noted that in Kano there is a law that prohibits converts of Islam from being employed by the government or private companies.
2. RO was studying at a Koranic school in Kano when Jesus appeared to her in a vision. She delayed her response, wanting to make sure of the vision. She said it is a total shame for a Muslim to become a Christian. She yielded to Christ. Her life was immediately in danger from her family members and she had to flee from that state.
3. EN works among the nomadic Fulani, in Taraba State, Nigeria. He said, "The Fulani men are resistant. If they receive Christ they lose everything."
4. MA (a sedentary Fulani) was forced to flee to the south of Nigeria, after several attempts against his life. His uncle drew a pistol from his agbada dress to shoot him, but he escaped. He lost his inheritance, wife and children.
5. MA, a Kanuri, was taken by his family members with a gun from his church and was then given three days to recant. When he refused to recant he was taken to a forest and left to be attacked and killed by wild animals. Armed robbers who had escaped from the police and were hiding in the region rescued him.

Relationship With Christianity

John Esposito in *Islam, Opposing Viewpoints* believes there is a degree of divine inspiration in the Koran, but believes that *Dark Ages* interpretations remain the problem today. A Christian however cannot agree that the Koran has a divine source while at the same time claiming to believe the Bible is the word of God.

The Apostle John said that any one who denied that Jesus was the Christ come in the flesh was of the spirit of antichrist (1 John 4:3). While the Koran honours Jesus as a prophet it denies that Jesus is the Son of God, placing it in contradiction to the gospel:

Christ the son of Mary was no more than a messenger. Many were the messengers that passed away before him (Surah 5:75).

They say, The Most Gracious has betaken a son. Indeed you have put forth a thing most monstrous. (Surah 19:88-89, see also Surah 9:30-3).

It is true that this was in part aimed at the idolatry of the Mary/Son (*Isis goddess*) worship in the region when Islam began, but it also includes a rejection of the true doctrine of Christ's sonship. The idolatry of the church was an excuse for Islam.

The Koran instructs the Muslim to fight against those who do not submit to the teachings of Islam:

And fight them on until there is no more persecution and religion becomes Allah's in its entirety (Surah 8:39).

Richard Bell in *The Gunning Lectures, Edinburgh University* traced the attitude of Mohammed towards Christians. Early on Mohammed had a tolerant attitude towards Christians and this is reflected in some of the Koran's verses (Surah 2:62, 5:69). However later, when Christians would not submit to Mohammed's teaching, Mohammed accused them of concealing the true meaning of their scriptures and urged them to return to the true interpretation (Surah 5:66). "Thus the relationship with the Christians ended...in war."

Neal Robinson in *Christ in Islam and Christianity* traced verses chronologically in the Koran, showing the decline in the relationship between Islam and Christianity, thus accounting for the apparent contradiction in the Koran's attitude towards Christianity. These verses are not arranged in chronological order in the Koran, so it is difficult for the casual reader to see this. Islamic scholars have affirmed this historical perspective.

Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the Religion of Truth, from among the People of the Book (scriptures), until they pay the *Jizya* with willing submission and are themselves subdued. (Surah 9:29, see also Surah 4:76).

Let those fight in the cause of Allah, who sell the life of this world for the hereafter. To him that fights in the cause of Allah, whether he is slain or gets victory, soon we shall give them a reward of great value. (Surah 4:74).

The Koran thus advocates *jihad* (holy war) against those not in submission to the *Ummah*, Islamic community. Enemies are those not under *Sharia Law*. Those who fight are holy warriors (*mujahidin*) and those who give their life in killing the unbeliever are martyrs who receive reward in heaven.

Esposito described this as normative faith for Islam, "In this way, early Islamic history provides Muslims with a model and ideology for protest, resistance and revolutionary change." Reza Safa in *Inside Islam* claimed that this is not just the social behaviour of some cultures, but "the very nature and teaching of Islam".

Those who attempt to paint Islam in a more accommodating light suggest that *jihad* means to strive intellectually, "to struggle on all fronts, moral, spiritual and political, to create a just and decent society". Mohammed Malek in *Islam, Opposing Viewpoints* maintains *jihad* "is not a *holy war* against non-believers as is commonly understood".

Etymologically *jihad* means to strive intellectually, however it is used more generally to mean, "to strive or struggle". Others claim in *Sharia Law* *jihad* has primarily one meaning: a military action intended to increase the boundaries of the dominion of Islam. Esposito believes that this objective represents normative modern Islamic ideology.