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Editor's Note, Spring 2025

Anthony Witten, GCBJM Managing Editor

This issue of the *Great Commission Baptist Journal of Missions* is a snapshot of how the principle of indigenization in missions is shaping IMB missionary efforts currently.

What does a missionary mean when speaking of indigenization? Indigenization in missions refers to the efforts of missionaries to plant churches that can carry out all the biblical expectations of a healthy church with no foreign resources or control placed upon it.

I was first introduced to the concept of indigenization in Christian missions in seminary. Dr. John Mark Terry persuasively argued for the goal of planting indigenous churches that can reproduce themselves. He pointed his students to historic missionary stalwarts such as Henry Venn, Rufus Anderson, Roland Allen, and John Nevius. This principle was established in the middle of the great century of modern missions. It shaped the future efforts of many missionaries who sought God to magnify his glory and establish new churches among peoples and places that had yet to be reached with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Zane Pratt, this journal's editor-in-chief, provides us with helpful foundations for the pursuit of indigenization in missions. Other contributors to this volume will provide you with insights regarding their efforts to plant

churches and equip leaders that will be able to stand firmly on the gospel alone.

The editorial board trusts that this edition of our journal will inform three overlapping audiences. Those who send and partner with missionaries will gain insight about the work that missionary practitioners are doing. Aspiring missionaries will be equipped to think about beginning their work with the goal of indigenization in mind. Current missionaries will be spurred on to pursue establishing healthy churches that are able to flourish where they are planted and to engage in the efforts to reach the nations for the glorious name of Christ.

Thank you for taking time to read the articles in this edition.

FEATURE ARTICLE

Indigenization: The Fundamentals

Zane Pratt

What is indigenization in Christian mission? The heart of indigenization is the conviction that churches that are the fruit of missionary effort should be able to carry out all the functions of a healthy church and be fully engaged in the missionary task both locally and globally, without foreign resources or control. This definition reflects the classic “Three-Self” summary of the indigenization movement in Protestant missiology: churches should be self-governed, self-financed, and self-propagating. Many would add “self-theologizing” as a fourth essential category. In summary, churches that result from the labors of missionaries should reach the point where local believers assume full responsibility for everything the church does, and local resources provide everything needed for that work.

The opposite of indigenization is unhealthy ongoing dependence on foreign leadership or resources. The goal of indigenization is healthy churches carrying out all components of the missionary task without the need of outside help.

Indigenization is a process. Outside help is clearly needed at the start (hence the need for missionaries to begin with), but the end vision must always be to train local believers and churches in such a way that they can carry out entry, evangelism, discipleship, healthy church formation, and leadership development on their own, thus enabling the missionaries to exit to partnership. The goal of missionaries is to work themselves out of a job.

Indigenization is closely related to contextualization, but they are not the same thing. Contextualization refers to the process of making the gospel message, gospel messengers, and resulting churches as much at home in a new cultural context as possible without compromising biblical standards. It is largely a matter of form, and it involves such things as singing songs and hymns in local musical styles, taking your shoes off and sitting on the floor in places where that is the local custom, building buildings (if you build buildings at all) that fit with local architectural styles, and other practices of that sort. For the missionary, it means giving up freedoms and adapting to local culture in areas of life that are spiritually indifferent so that if any offense is taken, it is the offense of the gospel and not the offense of foreignness. For the gospel message, contextualization does not mean compromising the content of the gospel but rather explaining the message in such a way that possible cultural misunderstandings are addressed and the radical impact of the gospel is fully understood.

Indigenization, on the other hand, refers to church authority, responsibility, and resources. The goal of healthy missionary activity is the establishment of healthy churches that are both indigenous and contextualized.

This idea is not new. At the very beginning of Protestant missions, Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg and Henry Plutshau of the Danish-Halle Mission, who went to India as the first Protestant missionaries to the subcontinent in 1706, articulated principles that anticipated the Three-Self formula. Among other things, they resolved that an Indian church with Indian ministerial leadership should come into existence at the earliest possible date.¹ Their work in Tranquebar developed slowly, and the Christian community in the area remained small, but they remained true to their principles. Over the years, the Danish-Halle Mission developed Tamil-speaking churches with local leadership.

William Carey and his colleagues expressed similar convictions in the Serampore Form of Agreement of 1805. These British Baptist missionaries (William Carey, Joshua and Hannah Marshman, and William Ward) articulated their philosophy and approach to mission in a document that included this statement:

1 Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (London: Penguin Books, 1986), 196.

Still further to strengthen the cause of Christ in this country, and, as far as in our power, to give it a permanent establishment, even when the efforts of Europeans may fail, we think it our duty, as soon as possible, to advise the native brethren who may be formed into separate churches, to choose their pastors and deacons from amongst their own countrymen, that the word may be statedly preached, and the ordinances of Christ administered, in each church, by the native minister, as much as possible, without the interference of the missionary of the district.²

The British Baptist team in Serampore went on to establish a college, chartered by the king of Denmark, for training local leaders. That college still operates, although it has wandered far from the theology of its founders.

In practice, though, missionaries from Europe and North America often operated differently in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Church and denominational leadership was kept in the hands of foreign missionaries. Foreign money subsidized both churches and other institutions (such as hospitals and schools) on the mission field. The missionary task continued to be carried out by foreign missionaries or by local workers who were paid with foreign money. All of this was done from charitable motives, but the result was that local churches were practically discouraged from assuming initiative, responsibility, or stewardship in either church life or the further spread of the gospel.

Two men who noticed this issue and who sought to address it were Henry Venn (1796-1873) of the Anglican Church Missionary Society and Rufus Anderson (1796-1880) of the Congregationalist American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.³ Writing in the mid-19th century on both sides of the Atlantic, they came to the same conclusions. They were the mission leaders who started using the term “indigenous” in reference to the strategy that missionaries should pursue, and they were the ones who articulated the “Three-Self” formula: self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating.

2 “Read William Carey’s Serampore Form of Agreement,” article 8, Association of Baptists for World Evangelism, accessed January 3, 2025, <https://abwe.org/blog/read-william-carey-serampore-form-agreement-online/>.

3 John Mark Terry and J.D. Payne, *Developing a Strategy for Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 105.

Neither of these men were missionaries themselves, but an American Presbyterian missionary to China put the ideas into practice in the late 1800s. John Nevius (1829-1893) was invited by American Methodist and Presbyterian missionaries in Korea to consult with them about strategy, and his visit in 1890 proved pivotal in the history of Christianity in that country. Among other things, Nevius recommended that missionaries should not establish institutions that the indigenous church could not manage or afford, that local churches on the mission field should have local pastors, and that church buildings should be built with local resources and in the style of the local culture.⁴ Nevius spelled out his method in his seminal book, *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*.⁵

One of the most famous advocates for indigenous missionary strategy was Roland Allen (1868-1947), an Anglican missionary to China. *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?*, published in 1912, was a far-reaching critique of missionary control and missionary methods that fostered dependence. Allen framed his proposals in light of the missionary methodology observable in the work of the Apostle Paul in the Book of Acts and the New Testament epistles. The book became a missiological classic, which is still widely read today.

Allen followed up his first book with *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church*, first published in 1927. His subtitle, *And the Causes that Hinder It*, showed his overriding concern that missionary methods that create dependence also impede the spread of the gospel. Allen's books were not well-received in his own day, but that would change in the mid-20th century, and they are now regarded as standards in Protestant missiology.

As noted, Roland Allen based his methodology on the missionary practices of the Apostle Paul. Mark Terry and J.D. Payne observe that "all proponents of indigenous missions refer to Paul's missionary strategy. They seek to understand the apostle Paul's strategy and implement it in modern times."⁶ This raises the question of biblical warrant for insistence on indigeneity. Does the Bible command such a method? The answer is mixed.

4 Terry and Payne, *Developing a Strategy for Missions*, 105-106.

5 John Nevius, *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches* (New York: Foreign Mission Library, 1899).

6 Terry and Payne, *Developing a Strategy for Missions*, 104.

It cannot be said that there are clear biblical commands for all the tenets of indigenization. No scripture verse requires that the pastor of a church be a member of the ethnolinguistic people group that makes up the congregation, although scriptural teaching on spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12, Rom 12:4-8, Eph 4:11-16) would lead one to expect that God would raise up members of the church with shepherding and teaching gifts. No passage of the Bible requires that a church be fully self-supporting financially, although biblical teaching on stewardship would point in the direction of churches taking responsibility for their own ministry. When it comes to churches embracing the responsibility to be self-propagating, the Great Commission itself (Matt 28:18-20) would seem to indicate that this is the responsibility of all Christians and all churches.

Does the Bible give affirming examples of this methodology? The answer to this question is an unambiguous yes. It is true that not everything in Paul's life and ministry parallels modern international missions.⁷ However, it is also true that the apostle Paul did not move to a city, plant a church, and settle down as its pastor. In his missionary ministry, local men were raised up as elders/pastors. Paul did not offer financial subsidies to the churches he planted, nor did he exercise any financial control at all. Paul planted churches and moved on.

Paul's entire strategy depended on those churches continuing the work of the Great Commission where they were. Otherwise, he could not have boldly stated that he had fulfilled the ministry of the gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum (Rom 15:19). He had not personally proclaimed the gospel to every individual in the northeast quadrant of the Mediterranean Sea. However, he had planted a strategic string of churches throughout that region, and he expected them to continue the work. The churches we see emerge from the missionary ministry of the apostle Paul were self-governing, financially self-supporting, and self-propagating.

Paul did not abandon the churches he planted, and abandonment is not intrinsic to indigenization. After he left a city, he stayed in contact with the churches he had started. When he could, he returned to visit them. When he could not, he sent coworkers such as Timothy, Titus, Priscilla, and Aquila to strengthen those churches. The very letters of the New Testament

⁷ See, Eckhart Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies and Methods* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008).

are missionary literature, as Paul wrote to address issues that emerged in these young churches filled with new believers. Paul was an apostle, and he possessed authority that was unique to his office. Modern missionaries and church leaders do not possess that same authority, with apostolic succession being not only extrabiblical, but biblically impossible according to the qualifications set out in Acts 1:21-22. Even so, Paul raised up and encouraged local leadership.

The example of missionary activity recorded in the New Testament, then, is consistent with indigenous missionary practices. This raises the hermeneutical issue of the authority of narrative texts in ongoing church practice. Examples of practices shown positively in narrative biblical passages, at the very least, are permissive in nature. In the absence of clear commands, they are not necessarily mandatory. However, when the example lines up with biblical teaching on related subjects, it sets a paradigm that we should be reluctant to ignore. The missionary methods of the apostle Paul line up with his teaching on matters such as congregational authority, spiritual gifts, stewardship, the responsibility of a local church to support its own ministry, and the obligation of local churches to engage in the work of the Great Commission. The New Testament gives us a clear and consistent paradigm of missionary work, and this paradigm lines up with New Testament teaching on the nature and functions of a local church. It also lines up with the principles of indigenization.

It is the conviction of the International Mission Board that biblically bounded contextualization and indigenization are not only permissible, but are necessary for church health and for the ongoing spread of the gospel.⁸ Ongoing foreign control and dependence on foreign resources damage the health of churches and impede Great Commission effectiveness. It is our prayer that the articles in this journal spur believers in the 21st century to reflect thoughtfully on the example of the apostles and the wisdom of our ancestors in the faith, and to shape our missionary strategies accordingly

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⁸ International Mission Board, *Foundations*, 4th ed., (Richmond, VA: International Mission Board, 2022), 55-59.

in Central Asia, for 23 years. He is also Associate Professor of Christian Mission at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has a BA in Religion and History from Duke University, an MDiv from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and is a PhD candidate at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

PEER REVIEWED ARTICLE

Self-Theologizing in South Asia

Dean Sieberhagen

“I live in a city where the spirits are all around us. As a new believer should I still believe in them?”

“Help me understand who the Holy Spirit is and how he works with the spirits in my city.”

“What does the Bible say about the dreams I have every night? Should I pay attention to them?”

These are examples of the questions believers in non-Western contexts struggle with after coming to faith in Christ. Many of them live in cultures where other religious systems dominate. Immediately after salvation they are confronted by what to do with beliefs and practices that now seem incompatible with Christianity. How do they develop a theology that is both loyal to biblical truth and addresses the culture that they live in?

Theologians such as Lammin Sanneh have proposed that a Western influence on the theologizing by the local context is not needed, and the best approach is to leave the locals to figure it out for themselves.¹ On the other extreme

¹ Lammin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003).

are those who completely import an outside theology in both content and approach resulting in a disconnect with locals. Missiologist Paul Hiebert has contributed significantly to the understanding and practice of missions, especially in these cross-cultural contexts. One of his contributions is to raise awareness of the need for self-theologizing.² He argues that when self-theologizing is done correctly it will produce three results:

1. A theology from within the culture that can be called indigenous, where the emphasis is on the worldview of the local culture and an approach to theology that speaks to all aspects of life in this local culture.
2. A theology that is faithful to biblical teaching. This means that biblical teaching has authority over a local cultural worldview with all its beliefs and practices, so that these are critically analyzed according to biblical truth.
3. A theology where outside missionaries do not impose their own understanding on the local context but rather are available as an encouragement to and a resource for the local believers as they self-theologize.

For missionaries serving with Western agencies, this is a constant challenge. In our Western contexts, we have a legacy that points to generations of theologians who ended up producing statements and systems that express our theological beliefs and practices. These speak to our Western contexts so that they fit into our cultures while acknowledging the need to revise as even our own Western cultures constantly change. Our temptation on the mission field is to help believers in the local culture by simply translating our well-developed Western theology into their language. This seems efficient and can be done in a relatively short period of time. We then hold seminars/classes where we teach this to them and answer any questions that arise. For most of the local believers, they become passive receivers of this theology, not risking embarrassment by asking deep theological questions arising from within their own cultures. The result is a largely imported theology rather than that which can be called self-theologizing.

With all of this in mind, I have been blessed and enlightened to see Western missionaries in South Asia directly and intentionally take up this challenge. I was invited by a team of missionaries on two separate occasions, five years

² See the explanation and development of this argument in Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 193-224.

apart, to observe and respond to attempts at self-theologizing. The missionaries had served in this context for multiple terms with significant insight into the local culture and fluency in the language. A brief summary of what took place is as follows.

A network of church leaders gathered together for three days with the purpose of developing their own confession as to a significant biblical/theological belief. The gathering I observed focused on the person and work of the Holy Spirit. There were about fifty people, and roughly 70% were men and 30% women. After some brief introductions, they were divided into small groups of 5-7 people and spent most of the time discussing passages to do with the Holy Spirit. These passages were listed on a board up front by the trainers. Each group had to report each day about what they had discovered as they studied and discussed the passages. The other groups would listen and provide feedback. At the end of the three days, they crafted their confessional belief statement about the Holy Spirit and committed to teaching it to their church members. Some principles stood out in the process.

4. The missionaries allowed the local believers to build the plane while flying. In other words, The missionaries allowed them to grapple with deep theological issues like the Trinity while they were still young in the faith and with limited Bible education and background. These were not seasoned believers in areas well-established in the Christian faith, but rather those from Unreached People Groups and in some cases likely the first generation of evangelical believers. There were missionaries and more experienced believers in the room who were available as resources when questions or issues arose that seemed to hold them back.
5. In any missionary training, there is the constant challenge of balancing the local vs expat involvement. Ideally, the momentum and participation should be led by the locals, and this training method seemed to do its best to make this happen. There were several times I wanted to intervene and teach, but I knew because of the way it was being done that I needed to just watch. When we did address an issue, it was by asking each group pointed questions that drove them back to the Bible and then patiently waiting for them to find a solution. The church in every culture needs outside voices to enhance their understanding and point out blind spots; the key is to do this in a way that allows the local voice to remain primary.

6. The position of the Bible as inerrant, authoritative, and central was clear. I was blessed to see how the confession statement was thoroughly biblical and could stand alongside other statements such as the BFM 2000. After three days together, the leaders had experienced an approach where every day they opened the Bible to find answers. They were not reading other books or going to websites and blogs to find the answers. I'm sure the day will come when they will consult all these other sources, but hopefully the pattern will be set for them as to the priority of the Bible.
7. Of significance missiologically is that they *owned* the confession statement – that is, it came from their study and discussion, and they crafted the words. They self-theologized. At this point, they can now hold their statement up against those who have done the same and allow it to be confirmed or even modified. This builds a great sense of confidence so that even if they are still young in the faith, they can move forward in developing a biblically sound indigenous theology.
8. There is the issue of speed and how long it will take to cover even the core aspects of theology. This was one training on one person of the Trinity, and this network of church planters will now go back and teach others over some months or even a year before going through the same training on another aspect of theology. How long then before they have completed a foundational base of theology? Does it matter how fast or slow the training progresses? Does it depend on each network and allow them to set the pace? These are questions for the trainers to work through.

Will some of these local church planters leave their context and attend Bible Schools or other outside training? Should we try to prevent this? I don't think this is an issue to be concerned about unless those schools teach heresy. They now have a sound biblical foundation, and any outside teaching will simply build on what is already indigenous. They now have their own beliefs and categories through which they can consider adding new information.

Not all contexts are the same, but it will be interesting to see if this approach can be applied in other contexts. In working towards the self-theologizing that Hiebert speaks of, missionaries and their local partners need to be looking for and trying best practices. Is the training being done in South Asia a best practice that should be tried elsewhere? From the evidence that is being

documented across South Asia it does suggest that their approach could be considered in other contexts. These other contexts will need to adapt and modify to fit their needs and in turn, provide new insights for others to consider. All of this helps to address how to develop a theology that is both loyal to biblical truth while at the same time addressing the local culture.

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The Indigenization of Missions and Contemporary Lessons¹

Will Brooks

Throughout much of what is known as “The Great Century” (1792–1910), the two major aims of the mission enterprise were evangelization and civilization.² In the midst of several revivals in Europe and America, significant missionary fervor was released into the world, and that fervor helped characterize missions in this century by its “rapid geographical expansion of the work.”³ At the same time, though, missions was also characterized by its spread of Western civilization to the rest of the world. David Bosch explains that in America, “it was increasingly thought that the overseas mission of the American churches consisted in sharing the benefits of the American civilization and way of life with the deprived peoples of the world.”⁴

In the middle of the nineteenth century, though, the indigenization of missions movement developed in reaction to many of the excesses of this period.

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- 1 The first section of this article was first published in Will Brooks, *Interpreting Scripture across Cultures: An Introduction to Cross-Cultural Hermeneutics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2023). Used by permission of Wipf and Stock Publishers. www.wipfandstock.com.
 - 2 R. Pierce Beaver, “Introduction,” in *To Advance the Gospel: Basic Writings in the Theory and Practice of Missions*, ed. R. Pierce Beaver (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 13. The term “The Great Century” was first coined by Kenneth Scott Latourette in his seven-volume classic on the history of Christian missions; Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*; Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, vol. 4 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937).
 - 3 Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, 2nd ed., *The Penguin History of the Church*, vol. 6 (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 215.
 - 4 David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 283.

This movement was an attempt of missionaries and organizations to ensure that the types of churches they planted looked like they belonged in the contexts where they were planted. Too often, they looked like they belonged in England or the US and not in the locations where missionaries were serving. In the same way, they realized they had also not placed enough emphasis on raising up local leaders.

For missionaries in the contemporary area, it's important to understand this historical discussion since these insights still apply and should inform mission efforts today. Thus, the goal of this article is to examine the writings of key leaders who contributed to this discussion, including Venn, Anderson, Nevius, Allen, Hodges, Brock, and Hiebert, and then make some application points for contemporary missions.

Henry Venn

Henry Venn (1796–1873) was general secretary of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in London from 1841 to 1872.⁵ His life was guided by a passion to see the gospel extend into new harvest fields. During his leadership of the CMS, he placed an emphasis on planting native churches and raising up native leaders. To this end, he developed the three-self formula for indigenous churches — that they should be self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating.⁶

Venn argued that an essential step in founding an indigenous church was for that church to be self-supporting. He wrote that “a second step in the organization of the Native Church will be taken when one or more congregations are formed into a Native Pastorate, under an ordained native, paid by

5 This biographical information is from Max Warren, “Introduction: Henry Venn, The Man, His Thought and His Practice – An Interpretation,” in *To Apply the Gospel: Selections from the Writings of Henry Venn* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 18-25; See also Justice Anderson, “The Great Century and Beyond (1792-1910),” in *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions*, ed. John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith, and Justice Anderson (Nashville: B&H, 1998), 208-09.

6 As is evidenced by the following footnote, Venn tended to use the term “self-extending,” but within the literature related to indigenization, “self-propagating” is more common. I’ve used the latter term in this article for the sake of consistency.

the Native Church Fund.”⁷ For a church to be indigenous, it must be led to support its own ministries.

Venn also argued for an indigenous church to be self-governing. Responding to critics who claimed his approach to government was too European, Venn explained the need for a cautious transition of the leadership responsibilities:

Though, in the first instance, and while the tentative and transition stage lasts, it may be advisable to give a preponderating influence to European Missionaries, yet as the Native Councilors become efficient, and as the native contributors enlarge, and the Society’s grant in aid is diminished, the European element will be gradually withdrawn, until the Native Church becomes wholly free and independent.⁸

In addition to the need for indigenous churches to be self-supporting and self-governing, Venn added self-extending to his formula. He wrote of the need for an exciting missionary spirit among the native church:

The case needs to be stated to exhibit the warning and the duty that every convert should be instructed from his conversion in the duty of laboring for his self-support, and for the support of Missions to his Countrymen, and to lay himself out as a Missionary among his relationship and friends to bring them to the truth.⁹

He went on to write that passing on a missionary spirit to the native church would open the door to a new day of missionary effectiveness in which the native converts led their fellow countrymen to Christ. He wrote that a missionary spirit “will often give a reality, a vigor, an independence to native Christianity which it now wants (i.e., lacks) . . . and above all the work would

7 Henry Venn, *To Apply the Gospel: Selections from the Writings of Henry Venn* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 70. See also: Henry Venn, “On Steps Towards Helping a Native Church to Become Self-Supporting, Self-Governing, and Self-Extending,” in *Classics of Christian Missions*, ed. Francis M. DuBose (Nashville: Broadman, 1979), 243-49; Henry Venn, “Three-Self Principles,” in *Classic Texts in Mission & World Christianity: A Reader’s Companion to David Bosch’s Transforming Mission*, ed. Norman E. Thomas, American Society of Missiology Series, no. 20 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), 207-09. With the term “native” Venn was describing the local people from the context where the church was being planted. He used this term in contrast to missionaries, who were outsiders.

8 Venn, *To Apply the Gospel*, 76-77.

9 Venn, *To Apply the Gospel*, 64.

spread as we may say of itself, and such an extension would soon appear, as we have hitherto almost ceased to expect.”¹⁰

Arguing for his three–self formula, Venn explained the limitations of missionary–led churches.¹¹ He wrote that when missionary–led or missionary–supported churches are planted, the missionary’s hands become full, and he focuses less and less of his attention on the unsaved. The converts, then, become dependent on the missionary, and the missionary society invests its resources in the ground already gained instead of focusing on “the regions beyond.”¹²

To support this formula, Venn explained the importance of training leaders. He wrote,

Missionaries should remember that it is upon the training up and location of such Native Pastors as we have described that their own labors and the resources of the Society will be best economized; and that a preparation will be made for the transfer of Missionary labors to the surrounding heathen.¹³

He meant that missionaries become good stewards of their organization’s resources by focusing on training leaders. Focusing their time and energy in this way enables them to raise up more laborers capable of shepherding the flock and reaching the harvest fields.

Venn also wrote about the “euthanasia of mission,”¹⁴ in which the missionary cautiously removes himself from the leadership of the mission and begins to focus on new fields. He taught missionaries to keep in view the time when:

the missionary is surrounded by well–trained Native congregations under Native Pastors, when he gradually and wisely abridges his own labors, and relaxes his superintendence over the Pastors till they are able to sustain their own Christian ordinances, and the District ceases to be a Missionary field,

10 Venn, *To Apply the Gospel*, 64.

11 Venn, *To Apply the Gospel*, 67.

12 Venn, *To Apply the Gospel*, 67.

13 Venn, *To Apply the Gospel*, 63.

14 Venn, *To Apply the Gospel*, 63.

and passes into Christian parishes under the constituted ecclesiastical authorities.¹⁵

Working to that end, Venn argued, would lead to a time of great growth and expansion of the indigenous church, similar to the time when “the flowers of a fertile field multiply under the showers and warmth of summer.”¹⁶

Rufus Anderson

A contemporary of Henry Venn and another scholar who wrote on indigenization was Rufus Anderson (1796–1880). Anderson was the senior secretary for the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) from 1832 to 1866.¹⁷ Under his leadership, the ABCFM grew to support 1200 missionaries and focused more attention on evangelism and the training of native pastors.

Like Venn, Anderson developed his philosophy of missions in reaction to the dual emphasis on evangelization and civilization. He believed that the primary work of missions was evangelizing the lost in places where churches did not exist. To that end, he wrote, “Education, schools, the press, and whatever else goes to make up the working system, are held in strict subordination to the planting and building up of effective working churches.”¹⁸ He continued, “The governing object to be always aimed at is self-reliant, effective churches — churches that are purely native.”¹⁹

Anderson looked to Paul as the missionary *par excellence*. He explained the mission work of the apostle through five qualities: the aim was to save men; the means employed was the gospel; the power relied upon was the Holy Spirit; the success was in the middle and poorer classes; and the result was the planting of churches and the ordaining of leaders. He then argued that if these were the attributes of Paul’s missionary work, they ought to be the

15 Venn, *To Apply the Gospel*, 63.

16 Venn, *To Apply the Gospel*, 71.

17 Biographical information is from R. Pierce Beaver, “Introduction: Rufus Anderson, Grand Strategist of American Missions,” in *To Advance the Gospel: Basic Writings in the Theory and Practice of Missions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 10-12; See also Justice Anderson, “The Great Century and Beyond (1792-1910),” 208-09.

18 Anderson, *To Advance the Gospel*, 99.

19 Anderson, *To Advance the Gospel*, 99.

attributes of contemporary missionaries.²⁰ In a separate article, he wrote of Paul, “His manner of treating the native pastors and churches is a model for missionaries and their supporters in our day.”²¹

Anderson argued that missionaries should never seek to become the pastor of a church they plant, and thus, he argued for the importance of investing resources in training native pastors. He wrote, “Without education, it is not possible for mission churches to be in any proper sense self-governed; nor, without it, will they be self-supported, and much less self-propagating.”²² He argued that focusing on training leaders saves time and resources by raising up more leaders:

The cost of a ten-year course of education for five natives of India, would not be more than the outfit and passage of one married missionary to that country. And when a company of missionaries is upon the ground, it costs at least five times as much to support them, as it would to support the same number of native preachers. . . . The cost of educating a thousand youth in India, from whom preachers might be obtained, and afterwards of supporting two hundred native preachers and their families, would be only about \$25,000; which is but little more than the average expense in that country of twenty-five missionaries and families.²³

Missionary organizations, Anderson argued, are better stewards if they train pastors and church leaders rather than allow Europeans to fill those positions.

John Nevius, Roland Allen, and Melvin Hodges

In addition to Venn and Anderson, John Nevius and Roland Allen contributed to the missiological discussion on indigenization. Nevius (1829–1893)

20 Rufus Anderson, “Principles and Methods of Modern Missions,” in *Classics of Christian Missions*, ed. Francis M. DuBose (Nashville: Broadman, 1979), 251; Anderson, *To Apply the Gospel*, 97–98; Beaver, “Introduction,” 14–16.

21 Anderson, *To Apply the Gospel*, 94–95.

22 Anderson, *To Apply the Gospel*, 99.

23 Anderson, *To Apply the Gospel*, 105.

was a missionary to China with the American Presbyterian Board.²⁴ His writings focused particularly on the concept of self-support. Roland Allen (1868–1947) focused on the apostle Paul as the exemplary missionary. His books *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?*²⁵ and *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church*²⁶ addressed the need for missionaries to return to the apostolic church planting pattern by planting self-sufficient churches and relying on the Holy Spirit.

Melvin Hodges (1909–1986) was an Assemblies of God missionary in Central America for eighteen years, and Roland Allen's writings influenced him.²⁷ His work, *The Indigenous Church*, focused especially on self-governing, which he argued was the most difficult to accomplish.²⁸ Within the subset of self-governing, Hodges devoted an entire chapter in his book to the issue of training leaders. Among other concepts, he argued that one key issue of training leaders is self-theologizing.

On the topic of self-theologizing, Hodges wrote, "There must be a standard of doctrine and conduct accepted in common by the believers."²⁹ He went on to state, "One point here deserves special emphasis. The standard of doctrine and conduct must be an expression of the convert's own concept of the Christian life as they find it in the Scriptures."³⁰ Hodges argued that the missionary can help with this process, but ultimately, the native believers must make these decisions for themselves. These new believers must learn to do theology independently, apart from the missionary's leading.

24 The biographical information in this paragraph is from Francis M. DuBose, "John L. Nevius: Introduction," in *Classics of Christian Missions*, ed. Francis M. DuBose (Nashville: Broadman, 1979), 256-57. For a fuller treatment of his life, see Helen S. Coan Nevius, *The Life of John Livingston Nevius: For Forty Years a Missionary in China* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1895).

25 Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962).

26 Roland Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church: And the Causes that Hinder It* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997).

27 Melvin L. Hodges, *The Indigenous Church: A Complete Handbook on How to Grow Young Churches* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1953), 131-34. See also: Hodges, "Why Indigenous Church Principles," in *Readings in Dynamic Indigeneity*, ed. Charles H. Kraft and Tom N. Wisley (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1979), 8.

28 Hodges, *The Indigenous Church*, 22.

29 Hodges, *The Indigenous Church*, 26.

30 Hodges, *The Indigenous Church*, 27.

Charles Brock and Paul Hiebert

Missionary church planter Charles Brock built on Hodges' ideas, mentioning the concepts self-teaching and self-expressing alongside the traditional three-selves.³¹ For self-teaching, Brock looked to Paul's letters in Romans 15:14, 1 Corinthians 14:26, 31, and 1 Timothy 4:13, where Paul commanded these churches to be faithful in teaching their members the Word. An indigenous church must do the same. For self-expressing, Brock explained that an indigenous church must be free to express itself in culturally appropriate ways during worship. All of these are an outgrowth of the indigenous church's ability to think theologically.

While others discussed the concept,³² it was missionary anthropologist Paul Hiebert who coined the term "fourth self."³³ When Hiebert wrote *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, he explained, "Every church must make theology its own concern, for it must face the challenges of faith raised by its culture."³⁴ In other words, a legitimate function of an indigenous church is to develop theologies that speak to the relevant issues in their specific cultural context.

Hiebert stated that two of the crucial questions with which missionaries were wrestling which he sought to answer were, "Should [the native believers] be encouraged to develop their own theologies?" and "What should the missionaries do when these theologies seem to be going astray?"³⁵ Answering

31 Charles Brock, *Indigenous Church Planting: A Practical Journey* (Neosho, MO: Church Growth International, 1994), 92-94.

32 For example, Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005). For a discussion of "dynamic-equivalence theologizing," see Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, 228-44. For his discussion of "ethnotheologies," which is similar to Hiebert's "transcultural theology," see idem, *Christianity in Culture*, 10, 94, 230-33, 305-06, 314, and idem, "Toward a Christian Ethnotheology," in *God, Man, and Church Growth*, ed. Alan Tippett (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973). For a discussion of how this issue relates to the three-self principles, see Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, 247-56, or idem, "Dynamic Equivalence Churches," *Missiology* 1 (1973): 39-57.

33 Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 193-224. Also see: Darrell L. Whiteman, "Anthropological Reflections on Contextualizing Theology in a Global World," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 60-61. For an explanation of how Hiebert's view differs from Kraft's, see: Yoshiyuki Billy Nishioka, "Worldview Methodology in Mission Theology: A Comparison Between Kraft's and Hiebert's Approaches," *Missiology* 26 (October 1998): 468-69.

34 Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 214.

35 Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 193.

those questions, he explained that everyone’s cultural background influences his theology: “We think that our studies of the Bible are unbiased, that our own interpretations of the Scriptures are the only true ones. It disturbs us, therefore, when we begin to discover that theologies are influenced by culture.”³⁶ He continued, “The fact is, all theologies developed by human beings are shaped by their particular historical and cultural contexts – by the language they use and the questions they ask.”³⁷ He then challenged missionaries to teach new Christians not just to teach the people the Scriptures but also to teach them *how to study* the Scriptures.³⁸

Some might ask if that means believers in any context can do whatever they want in interpreting the text, and in response, Hiebert displayed balance in stating, “Although they have a right to interpret the Bible for their particular contexts, they have a responsibility to listen to the greater church of which they are a part.”³⁹ He referred to this dynamic as a “transcultural theology.”⁴⁰ A transcultural theology is formed when each individual culture understands how Scripture speaks to the issues of its day, and then the various cultural perspectives are compared and explored to determine the biblical universals. As this global level hermeneutical community forms, cultural biases and areas of syncretism are uncovered, and ultimately, the church can grow to understand the biblical text in a more complete sense.

This historical survey has shown that in response to the excesses of the colonial period of missions history, the authors in the indigenous movement emphasized that when missionaries plant churches, those churches should be self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating. Though Venn and Anderson did not articulate this point, later authors like Hodges, Brock, and especially Hiebert also explained the need for a fourth-self, that is that a church needs to be self-theologizing.

36 Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 198.

37 Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 198.

38 Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 215–16.

39 Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 217.

40 Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 216–19.

Application and Conclusion

Although this article is primarily a historical study, many applications exist for contemporary missions. First, the reminder is helpful that missionaries should seek to plant indigenous churches that are self-funded and self-led. Even though much mission sending has broadened to include missionaries being sent from formerly mission-receiving countries, the point is still valid that newly planted churches should not depend too heavily on resources from places where the church is strong. It is also still a relevant and needed reminder that missionaries should focus on raising up indigenous leadership.

In that sense, Brooks and Tan are helpful in stating that “the missionary must equip the local leadership to implement biblical forms of preaching, giving, worship, leadership, fellowship, prayer, and of course evangelism and missions.”⁴¹ The indigenization movement and its commitment to indigenous leadership points to the fact that “Missionaries should tirelessly labor to ensure national believers receive the highest quality training in the Word of God that is possible. . . . Treating national believers as truth brothers and sisters – as co-laborers on God’s harvest field – entails doing everything we can to throw open for them the gages of access to Scripture.”⁴²

Second, given the multicultural nature of many large urban centers, it may seem outdated to examine this topic when many of the above authors envisioned missionaries planting churches in monocultural contexts. However, even in an urban context that consists of various cultures, these principles still prove valuable. For example, Paul Salem, sees cities as “cultural blenders” and encourages planting “language-specific, culturally dynamic churches.”⁴³ These authors remind us that even in such contexts, a church should reflect the cultural makeup of its members in its leadership, decision-making, funding mechanisms, etc. Even when a church has members from a variety of cultural backgrounds, church leaders must take the initiative to learn their different cultural values so that they can communicate in culturally

41 Sunny Tan and Will Brooks, “Theological Education as Integral Component of World Mission Strategy,” in *World Mission: Theology, Strategy, & Current Issues* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 179.

42 Tan and Brooks, “Theological Education,” 180.

43 Paul Salem, “Culture and the City: Rethinking Contextualization for Urban Peoples,” *The Great Commission Baptist Journal of Missions*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Fall 2023).

appropriate ways and apply the gospel to their culturally informed ways of thinking.

Let me give an example. Some years ago, I was teaching a course in a large city I considered largely monocultural where most of the students were from a single local church. In talking with the students, though, I realized many of them were from minority ethnic groups and represented a variety of cultural backgrounds. Since their church functioned in a trade language, though, some leaders assumed similar patterns of thinking. However, when I asked if those from the minority ethnic groups if they thought the same way about how decisions should be made in the church, they stated their thinking was actually different from the majority. Not only did this situation affect communication and relationships, but what was more concerning was that the church leaders were completely unaware that this dynamic even existed.

The danger here, then, is that those who are the dominant cultural group will make decisions and communicate them in ways that accord with their own cultural preferences, not realizing that those from other cultural backgrounds may prefer to dialogue or make decisions in different ways. A greater danger, though, is that the dominant group deems their culturally informed communication or decision-making preferences to be *biblical* even though these preferences are not biblically mandated. The result is that when some believers make decisions, process information, communicate, or have perspectives that are contrary to the dominant group's, they may be categorized as unbiblical, indecisive, unethical, or lacking integrity.

How does this point relate to the indigenization movement? The heartbeat of Venn and Anderson's writings was the desire to respect the local culture and cultivate local leadership. When multiple cultures are involved in a local church, these principles still apply in the sense that the leadership of a church needs to both represent and respect all cultures involved. Leaders also need to take the difficult step of communicating in culturally appropriate ways, which is difficult when people from a variety of cultural backgrounds are members of the church. Though it's difficult, insights from these authors remind us it is important.

Next, based on the historical development of this discussion, we can see the importance of self-theologizing, which is helpful on a few levels. It reminds us that the church needs theologians. It needs leaders who can think theologically long after the missionary is no longer with them. This point is critical

when we consider the apostolic nature of the missionary task, that missionaries' goal is to equip the local church, help the local church develop, and then, eventually, leave. A key component of how a missionary disciples these new Christians is the process of training them to think theologically.

At the same time, this conversation is helpful because it reminds us that the leaders of the local church need to do theology in their own context. Because this newly planted church is in a unique cultural context, issues exist in that context for which few people (or possibly none) have ever given any serious theological reflection. For a number of reasons, the leaders of this church must have the theological acumen to think clearly and biblically about these unique cultural issues. These issues may be cultural practices like a certain type of collectivism, polygamy, being a matriarchal society, or a host of other issues. They may also be more theologically inclined concepts like views of the afterlife.

Believers in this context must be able to evaluate their own existing cultural norms and thought patterns to determine which aspects are biblical and permissible and which aspects are not. At the same time, they must recognize how their worldview and cultural ways of thinking affect how they interpret Scripture. This preunderstanding can cloud every interpreter's judgment in any context. Thus, all interpreters must be aware of their own cultural perspectives and how they affect their interpretation of Scripture.

We can also consider the complexity of self-theologizing. Hiebert's comments are helpful here in that, yes, the new church must self-theologize, but at the same time, this new church is responsible for listening to the global church as well. How does the new church think theologically and in culturally appropriate ways while remaining orthodox? This is the great challenge of self-theology, and it requires missionaries to be well versed in both theology and the local context so that they can walk alongside local believers in this task.

As Hiebert said, to find the correct balance here, the new church must be taught how to interpret Scripture. These believers must be able to go to the Scriptures for themselves, to read and apply it to their own context. To be clear, to think well theologically, they must learn in other areas as well — biblical theology, historical theology, etc. However, biblical interpretation is fundamental to being able both to theologize and to evaluate potential theologies.

In conclusion, this article has explored the history of the indigenization movement. Reacting to the colonial period's emphasis on missionaries leading the institutions and churches they started, authors like Venn and Anderson provided a helpful response in their writings that emphasized the need for churches to be self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating. Later authors like Hodges, Brock, and Hiebert added self-theologizing, which is a helpful reminder that indigenous church leaders must be equipped with the skills to do theology in their own context.

Though missiologists have largely moved on from the discussion of indigenization by focusing on contextualization and other topics, in actuality, the insights from these scholars continue to have relevant applications for the church's mission today. Especially important are the reminders to be intentional in studying the cultural perspectives of all people in a local church and in promoting self-theologizing.

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Music, Life Events, Missions, and Indigenization:

A Case Study From East Asia

Ethan Leyton

Looking fearful and uncertain, the dozen or so believers walked into the nondescript conference room in a nameless building in a large East Asian city and sat down. They came for a songwriting workshop, but they had other issues on their minds. On top of persecution by local police, one Christian in their group had recently died. An area pastor agreed to plan and officiate the funeral, and a great many non-believers came, they said. The attendees, though, left unsatisfied and angry – experiencing no sense of closure – because it looked completely different than a normal funeral to them. The believers seemed very bothered by their community’s response to the funeral.

After we introduced ourselves, I started with a Bible discussion on 1 Corinthians 14 with the idea that music holds meaning that its audience should understand, especially when it talks about the gospel. They listed all the different types of music and song genres in their people group and surrounding area, and I taught them a simple songwriting process. But one woman kept bringing up what happened at the funeral – the main idea being that there is an expectation in her people group that attendees must bow down and worship the dead body. “We can’t let people do that because we’re Christians,” she said. “And when non-Christians die in our group, we can’t bow down either. What are we supposed to do?”

Maybe a synonymous statement to her question is: “Tell us what to do,” which would lead to a more colonial approach to missions. The goal, though, for me is indigenization. A cursory Google search brings up this definition of that term: “the action or process of bringing something under the control, dominance, or influence of the people native to an area.”¹ Harvey Conn believes the term describes “the ‘translatability’ of the universal Christian faith into the forms and symbols of the particular cultures of the world.”² These believers were wondering how to reconcile their Christian faith with their culture’s funeral practices. Though not easy, indigenization requires intentionality, adequate discipleship, and empowerment of local believers to avoid grave errors. Though the believers were puzzled by barriers between their faith and their culture’s practices, they applied indigenization to this problem, which we will see as the story continues.

For 20 years, I have been facilitating music, songwriting, and worship workshops among various peoples in Asia. I had suspicions that some missionaries who preceded me to this continent imposed their own musical culture on the peoples they led to Christ. As I began ministering among the people, these suspicions were confirmed. My predecessors encouraged Asians to throw away their instruments and melodies. They also translated Western hymns and songs into their peoples’ languages. The resulting Asian churches, therefore, have a Western face in the midst of an Eastern world. I struggled as a budding ethnomusicologist with the ideas of critical contextualization, incarnational living, and syncretism.

The word *ethnodoxology* was a new concept for me, defined by the Global Ethnodoxology Network as “the interdisciplinary study of how Christians in every culture engage with God and the world through their own artistic expressions,”³ and I wanted to do it right. I also had to deal with the limitations of my own cultural background and linguistic abilities – always needing to

1 Google Search, n.d., accessed January 6, 2025, https://www.google.com/search?q=indigenization%2Bdefinition&sca_esv=ebde43d0a45f2ea2&rlz=1C5GCCM_en&sxsrf=ADLYWIJKv1abPchL7SlgxcxGZyyczjzqZQ%3A1736154459898&ei=W517Z6a4NpvgseMPpe252Ak&start=0&sa=N&stk=ATObxK4YpVTPggv3psF-PgYYyuK2V0zf1zHRRgVTmQ-mwVRGkidx674eUPqVllTXykJBP7K-0Bz4QnYmisEGsRRc3jMsr0fRjXhLUJ5ukjFPGKCsEkBBq7cLt5b19bQfc2BpS&ved=2ahUKEw-jm0e2u3-CKAxUbcGwGHaV2Dps4ChDy0wN6BAgKEAQ&biw=1336&bih=726&dpr=2.

2 Harvie M. Conn, “Indigenization,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 481.

3 “What Is Ethnodoxology?” Global Ethnodoxology Network accessed November 1, 2024, <https://www.worldofworship.org/what-is-ethnodoxology/>.

be translated because the trade languages and mother tongues were beyond my ability. I could not write a song in their language and in their musical style. If I tried, I risked Americanizing their artistry, appropriating or essentializing it to any of the stereotypes I believed their music had. Previous ethnomusicologists had succeeded in this before, but I did not have the luxury of time to go deep into the art forms, cultures, and languages represented in the workshops I did.⁴ Ethnodoxologists can easily fall into neocolonialism – choosing traditional genres of music for believers to use instead of letting the local believers make the choice themselves.

At our debriefing session after the first day of the workshop, I asked the leaders if we could take the following afternoon and work through what happens at a traditional funeral in their context. They agreed. After a second morning of more songwriting attempts, we had the participants explain step-by-step what happens at a funeral. As a result, the whiteboard was covered with about 40 events and rituals – some involving local shamans – which aimed to help the spirit of the dead person make its way back to the ancestral home of that people group.

One of the components was each funeral guest entering the home of the deceased, greeting the relatives, and then bowing down to the dead body and crying to the best of his or her ability. The believers said this leads to awkward moments when they attend others' funerals. One of the other leaders reminded the believers that there are few Christians in their area, so maybe they should first focus on what they should do when they go to a nonbeliever's funeral. On the first day of the workshop, they brought up one song genre normally sung to children about why they must do certain things – like household chores or school or hygienic ablutions. They proposed, therefore, to make a song about why they as Christians cannot bow down to the dead body. After a brainstorming and songwriting period, they came back with a song with the gist of it saying: "We're Christians. We won't bow down to the dead body. Don't be sad."

The woman reciting the lyrics in the trade language had an embarrassed look on her face when she finished. To break the awkwardness, it was culturally acceptable for me to start laughing, which led to everyone else laughing. I told them that people in many cultures can sing things in a song that may be

4 Pat Ham, "How About That! That's Our Song!" in *All the World Is Singing: Glorifying God through the Worship Music of the Nations* (Tyrone, GA: Authentic Publishing, 2006) 22-26.

offensive or too direct when they are simply saying them. It was close to the end of the day, so we put all our discussions aside, did another brief songwriting exercise, and then sent them home for the night.

The next morning, they said they had made another song to use when entering the house of a grieving family. The melody was very similar to the one from the day before, but the words were very different. Translated into the trade language and then into English, the lyrics are:

God, You are powerful. Everyone has life because You have given it. God, You have also told us – all people on earth – You will explain many things. They will experience pain, and they will experience joy. Today is a sad day. An elderly person has died. All of us here are very sad. God, You are most powerful. Please tell us: What shall we do? All people on earth have sinned. There is no one who has no sin. Before You, we confess our sin. Please forgive us. All things we have experienced, You know. We pray that You will give us peace. Give us peace.⁵

They all laughed a little when the translation was finished, but more out of triumph than embarrassment. The lyrics expressed empathy and love, and we remarked that families of the deceased who hear this song would see the sincerity the Christians could offer despite not being able in good conscience to bow down to the dead body in their midst. We recorded both versions of the funeral song at the end of the workshop so the believers could test both with their non-Christian friends, and the group left more encouraged, edified, and emboldened than when they arrived. The members of this East Asian people group set aside three days of their lives, not including travel, to mull over the issues dealing with music and art and learned how to apply them to one of the biggest cultural markers in their area – the funeral ceremony.

This workshop happened in January 2017, and I heard nothing about the group until the summer of 2019. The missionary who had invited me to come had visited the believers, who told him a very exciting story. The father of one of the attendees of the songwriting workshop had passed away, and he was a believer. Instead of asking an outside pastor to plan the funeral, the Chris-

⁵ Xiongdí Jiemei, “Funeral Song 2,” translated by author, written January 6, 2017, in undisclosed location.

tians used all the discussion at the workshop to craft a funeral that was more culturally sensitive, but also true to their faith – even sharing the gospel as part of it. They included the second, more empathetic version of the funeral song they wrote at the workshop. Part of the funeral took place outside, and all the attendees noticed that up in the blue sky were a couple of clouds that formed the shape of a cross. One of them took a picture that the missionary shared with me. After seeing the cross-shaped clouds and knowing what the cross meant, an attendee came up to one of the believers and said, “Your God must be real.”

In the span of about three years, these believers went from asking a pastor-outsider to plan a funeral, that the community didn’t accept, to creating a funeral that did not compromise their belief. Moreover, the people group attendees focused not on themselves, but on the God who uniquely created them. The first funeral presented a ritual in forms and an organization they did not understand, but the second one meant more to the audience because the insider-creators crafted it for greater understanding with an innate knowledge of meaning. Intended meanings got lost in the first funeral because the meanings did not transfer in the correct form.

This also happens with music. Poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow posited that music is a universal language.⁶ Most ethnomusicologists tend to disagree, believing that music is a universal phenomenon, but meanings within the music are mostly culturally bound.⁷ The common practice of translating hymns and worship songs into other languages may bring about some cross-linguistic unity in the global church, but it can also convey incorrect ideas like God preferring Western styles of music or God thinking a certain culture’s instruments or melodies are spiritually deficient or evil. Drawing from Harvey Conn’s definition, we can conclude that indigenization is where cultural insiders live out their faith within their culture and within the bounds of Scripture.⁸ The creation of art forms that express faith is key for clear communication of the gospel to the groups the creators represent.

6 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Outre-Mer: A Pilgrimage beyond the Sea*, vol. 2 (Boston: Lilly, Wait, 1834), 4.

7 See, Linda Shaver-Gleason, “Is Music a Universal Language?” Not Another Music History Cliché! accessed November 1, 2024, <https://notanothermusichistorycliche.blogspot.com/2018/01/is-music-universal-language.html>. Cf., Huib Schippers, *Facing the Music: Shaping Music Education from a Global Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Cf., Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-Three Discussions* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

8 Conn, “Indigenization,” 481.

Because of this, indigenization in music and other art forms requires intentionality. Though songwriters have said at times that songs can metaphorically drop out of the sky through their pens and voices, mostly it takes concentrated periods of time to make and polish songs for public usage and performance.⁹ If missionaries want to see churches in their settings become more indigenous, they need to devote specific workshops and seminars to what the Bible says about music and arts and how their culture uses those art forms, in addition to giving time for songwriting and arts creation sessions. Afterwards, they should help each other check their creations for Scriptural and cultural accuracy, edit them, and then adequately distribute and share them with a larger audience.

For indigenization to succeed in an orthodox fashion, the believers must receive a great amount of discipleship. Cultures are full of symbols and associations that show up often in arts and music, and Christians must be astute in biblical knowledge and cultural norms to discern wisely what is appropriate and what the church should avoid. Furthermore, as cultures change over time, Christians must frequently revisit the same questions and standards to see what answers need adjusting. Lyrics and inherent messages in artistic creations must remain faithful to Scripture. I was once in a workshop where we nearly recorded a song saying Noah was sinless, but we caught it in time. For indigenization in missions and arts efforts to be biblical, the believers must know what Scripture says and how to live it out. If the believers crafting the funeral brought in a shaman or allowed some idolatry, syncretism would have replaced the unadulterated truth of the gospel.

Finally, indigenization in music and other art forms requires the empowerment of local believers. If missionaries force a neocolonial agenda which uses only certain art forms, song genres, or instruments without any input from the believers themselves, they are creating a church that does not reflect the heart of those believers. If the believers in East Asia thought themselves inadequate to craft a funeral – as they did some years prior – they would have lost the opportunity they had to celebrate their Savior in a culturally sensitive way when their brother had passed on.

9 See, Scott Miller, “Friends Are Friends Forever – 1983,” *TheScottSpot*, accessed January 6, 2025, <https://thescottspot.wordpress.com/2018/04/04/friends-are-friends-forever-1983/>. Cf., “Xiao Min,” *Women of Christianity*, accessed January 6, 2025, <https://womenofchristianity.com/hymn-writers/xiao-min/>.

During my years in South Asia, I was in workshops with groups who said certain tunes or sounds for them held quite strong associations with Hinduism or Islam, and they were uncomfortable using them. Some groups felt a bit freer and used them anyway after times of prayer and reflection, but others decided using them was not the right thing at that time. In one recording session in a mostly Muslim area, the studio engineers put in effects on a song about Jesus being the Good Shepherd that sounded to one believer like Shiite Muslims whipping themselves on the back in sacrificial self-flagellation. She asked the mixing director to remove that sound, and he did.

One believer from a predominantly Buddhist country told me she was fine with using most of her culture's musical instruments in Christian worship except for a two-sided drum made from the top halves of two human skulls. Monks used the instrument to conjure up spirits. Though I previously held the belief that all instruments could be washed in the blood of the Lamb in worship to Him, I had to agree with her judgment.

When it comes to creating musical and artistic forms with the aim of sharing the gospel in a certain people group, indigenization promises greater success in the correct transmission of meaning and reception. Simply said, the insiders say it better than the outsiders. One of my favorite quotes comes from an airport encounter between Mother Teresa and Bob Geldof, the Irish rock star who organized a bunch of British music stars in 1985 to record "Do They Know It's Christmas?" – two very different people, though both spent much time in humanitarian efforts. When she needed to leave, Mother Teresa told Geldof, "Remember this, I can do something you can't do and you can do something that I can't do. But we both have to do it."¹⁰ I could not effectively write a song in the East Asian language that would communicate that I could not bow down to a dead body at a funeral, but those believers that night wrote an empathetic song infused with prayer and love that allowed them to share about their Savior. We should empower believers in the global church to make art that reflects their culture and their Savior in order for the nations to hear more effectively about Him.

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10 Bob Geldof and Paul Vallely, *Is That It?* (London: Macmillan, 2012), 242.

Theological Seminary, he focused on music and arts strategies but now focuses as an Indian church catalyst in his megacity. He is proud to be dad to three cats.

The Goal for Cross-Cultural Theological Education Is to Produce Indigenous Theologians

Grace Martyn

In the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20), Jesus commanded his disciples to go to the ends of the earth to make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them to obey all his commands. Because of this Commission, many Christians leave their homes and go to faraway lands to take the good news to those who have not yet heard it. When considering this missionary task, some people emphasize only sharing the gospel, planting new churches, and discipling new believers. However, another component of the missionary task that is equally important is theological education – to train the next generation of church leaders and pastors. When the church is young and underdeveloped, though, it might require outsiders to come in and train the new leaders. The fact that this training is cross-cultural in nature presents difficulties when compared with the traditional approach of theological education.

In light of these difficulties, this article will first present some challenges facing cross-cultural theological education. Then, it will look to mission history and the indigenization movement and argue that, though the indigenization movement focused on church planting, the basic principles also apply to cross-cultural theological education. Finally, the article will present some

applications for cross-cultural theological education in Southeast Asia based on the indigenization movement.

Challenges in Cross-Cultural Theological Education

While it is difficult to define theological education, this article refers to degree-granting, formal institutional theological training programs when using the term. On a similar note, there can be numerous perspectives on what situation can be considered a “cross-cultural” experience. In this article, cross-cultural theological education points to an educational experience in which the educator is the outsider who enters a new culture to teach and train in local theological institutions like seminaries or theological training centers. Thus, when cross-cultural theological education is mentioned in this article, it imagines missionaries or theologians from one cultural context (mostly Western contexts) coming into a new cultural context (mostly majority world contexts) to teach and train in the area of theology.

Why is cross-cultural theological education so difficult? Craig Ott explains that the culprit is “culture” when he states, “When a teacher and learners come from different cultures, divergent expectations and ensuing frustration or conflict are preprogrammed.”¹ This section of the article will discuss some common challenges for cross-cultural theological education caused by the cultural conflict between educator and students.

Cultural Challenges Related to Relationship

In a cross-cultural situation, cultural values affect many interactions. They affect people’s communication, their relationships, and their ability to build trust with others. According to Paul Hiebert, culture is “the more or less integrated systems of ideas, beliefs, and values and their associated patterns of behavior and products shared by a people who organize and regulate what they think, feel, and do.”² From this definition, one can see that an outsider from a different culture will embody ideas, beliefs, and values that are likely not aligned with those from the local culture. As a result, outsiders will be driven to think and act differently from the local people, and these differences can affect their relationship with them.

1 Craig Ott, *Teaching and Learning across Cultures: A Guide to Theory and Practice*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), Ch. 1. Available at: <https://www.perlego.com/book/2063294> (Accessed: 20 September 2024).

2 Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 30.

With this definition of “culture” in mind, a few challenges exist when considering how culture affects relationships. For example, we can consider some Western–Eastern cultural differences: people who come from Western cultural backgrounds tend to be direct communicators, task-oriented, and individualistic, while people from Eastern cultural backgrounds tend to be indirect communicators, relationship-oriented, and collectivistic.³ In her book, Sarah Lanier divides cultures into “hot-climate” (relationship-based) cultures and “cold-climate” (task-oriented) cultures.⁴ Thus, when a person crosses over to a culture in which most people possess different cultural values, conflicts and misunderstandings can create relationship-building challenges.

Addressing the important dynamic between culture and relationship, Lingenfelter explains:

Culture, like language, is a powerful tool for communication and interaction.... Culture in its complexity, then, is positive, negative, and sometimes neutral in regard to a relationship with Christ. . . . ministering cross-culturally places special demands on us; we must, to paraphrase Paul, become all things to all people so that by all possible means we might win some (1 Cor. 9:22).⁵

Indeed, culture affects many areas of people’s life, especially people’s relationships with one another.

One can envision a scenario where a direct communicator tries to build a relationship with a group of indirect communicators. This person’s directness in his communication style could be seen as strange, rude, or even disrespectful by the group. And vice versa, to the outsider, the group’s indirect commu-

3 For example, see E. Randolph Richards and Richard James, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Patronage, Honor and Shame in the Biblical World* (Grand Rapids: Intervarsity Press, 2020), esp. Introduction; Sherwood Lingenfelter, *Transforming Culture: A Challenge for Transforming Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); Sarah Lanier, *Foreign to Familiar: A Guide to Understanding Hot- and Cold-Climate Cultures* (Evanston, IL: McDougal Publishing, 2000), 20-21, though Lanier states that the Southern United States often has more of the cold-climate values.

4 Lanier, *Foreign to Familiar*, 16.

5 Sherwood Lingenfelter and Marvin Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally: A Model for Effective Personal Relationships*, 3rd ed (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), Ch. 9. Available at: <https://www.perlego.com/book/2051086> (Accessed: 20 October 2024).

nication style could be seen as indecisive, ignorant, or lacking integrity. As a result, confusion, frustration, and misunderstanding could arise, potentially destroying trust and damaging the relationship. This is just one cultural encounter scenario among many other possibilities. Lanier described the cultural differences this way: “Cultural differences among us provide both the richest color to our lives, and the harshest wounding. Simple communication creates conflict. Innocent comments produce withdrawal and gossip.”⁶

Building good cross-cultural relationships is essential if one wants to do well in cross-cultural theological education because a successful educational experience depends on a trust-based working relationship between the educator and students.⁷ With this thought in mind, the next section will consider some cultural challenges related to education.

Cultural Challenges Related to Education

Different cultures have different educational expectations, which creates challenges for education, especially when the educator and the students do not share the same cultural background. If students’ learning expectations are different from the teacher’s desired learning outcomes for students, frustration and confusion will no doubt appear, and in more serious cases, this conflict in educational expectations will affect trust between teacher and students.

To give one example, students in Asia often have the educational expectation that the classroom will be focused on content delivery and that teachers will primarily use lectures to deliver that content. This expectation grows from their educational experience, where education is often focused solely on exam preparation, and a teacher’s objective is to provide the necessary content for the exam. If a cross-cultural teacher is unaware of this expectation and organizes the course around discussion or other learning activities, students could end up confused and may even consider that the teacher has failed to meet his or her objective.

Even for an experienced teacher, if he does not teach in culturally appropriate ways, he will not build trust with his students. As a result, education fails. One scholar puts it this way when considering what cross-cultural educators

⁶ Lanier, *Foreign to Familiar*, 12.

⁷ Stephen A. Grunlan and Marvin K. Mayers, *Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), Ch. 4, Sec. 8, para. 10.

should do regarding different educational expectations: “Cultural values powerfully influence expected educational objectives. Effective cross-cultural teachers are aware of different expectations even as they attempt to broaden them.”⁸

Another cultural challenge related to education is the different teaching and learning styles between educators and students. Ott articulates: “While individual differences remain – that is, diversity within a culture – collective preferences and expectations are shaped by generally accepted cultural norms regarding teacher-student relations, appropriate teaching and learning methods, and other educational factors.”⁹ One can imagine this scenario: a teacher from an individualistic culture teaches cross-culturally. The teacher assigns students an article to read and asks them to critique the article and state their individual position on the topic.

What are some challenges that will arise in this scenario? First, if the students are not used to an analytical teaching style, they will lack the critical thinking skills they need to critique the article. Pushing students to critique others will embarrass the student and frustrate the teacher. Second, students from a collectivist culture will be hesitant to express their thoughts as an individual in a group setting because they value the group’s opinion more than their individual opinions.¹⁰ Finally, all these conflicts can damage the student-teacher relationship. In Southeast Asian culture, people value relationships above all things, but if teachers use methods that require students to function in ways contrary to their cultural context, it could damage the relationship. This distrust will make students skeptical about the teacher’s ability to teach in the future.

When we think about cross-cultural theological education historically, it has involved missionaries from Western countries going to mission fields in the majority world to teach theology and train church leaders and pastors. This is because the church in these mission fields is not yet well developed, and they do not have any existing theological education in place. However, when

8 James Plueddemann, *Teaching Across Cultures* (Grand Rapids: IVP Academic, 2018), Ch. 8. Available at: <https://www.perlego.com/book/3009118> (Accessed: 30 October 2024).

9 Ott, *Teaching and Learning across Cultures*, Ch. 3.

10 Harry C. Triandis, *Individualism & Collectivism*, 1st ed (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), Ch. 3. Available at: <https://www.perlego.com/book/1595824/individualism-and-collectivism-pdf> (Accessed: September 28th, 2024).

missionaries go to the field, they often lack awareness of the cultural differences and end up teaching in ways they were taught in the West.¹¹

Cultural differences cause these problems and create many challenges in relationship-building and theological education. One scholar addresses this problem well when he states: “When teaching faculty and curricula are not grounded in a cross-cultural understanding of the world, a cross-cultural theology and reading of the Bible, and cross-cultural ministry experience, they will fail to meet the needs of twenty-first-century theological education.”¹² Pursuing a solution that alleviates these problems is not only relevant but also urgent since it will move the church toward effective theological education on the mission field. In the next section, this article will look to the history of the indigenization movement to seek principles to help alleviate these problems.

Insights from the Indigenization Movement

Historian Kenneth Scott Latourette referred to the period from 1800 to 1900 as the “Great Century” of Christian mission.¹³ It was during this period the Protestant mission “came into its own and became a significant global movement.”¹⁴ Cross cultural theological educator Brooks points out that during this century, “the two aims of the mission enterprise were evangelization and civilization.”¹⁵ As the European nations began to civilize their colonies, missionaries moved there to plant churches and set up schools. Initially, they planted churches and schools that looked just like the ones in the West, where the missionaries were from. Many missionaries realized they needed to emphasize planting churches that suited the local context and focused on

11 Ken Coley, “The Perspective of Mind, Brain, and Education Research,” in *Transformational Teaching: Instructional Design for Christian Educators*, ed. Kenneth S. Coley, Deborah L. MacCullough, and Martha E. MacCullough (Brentwood, TN: B&H Academic, 2023), 114.

12 K. K. Yeo, “Made in the USA: A Chinese Perspective on US Theological Education in Light of the Chinese Context” in *Locating US Theological Education in a Global Context*, ed. Hendrik Pieterse (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2019), Ch. 7. Available at: <https://www.perlego.com/book/1377182> (Accessed: 29 September 2024).

13 Kenneth Scott Latourette, *The Great Century: North Africa and Asia 1800 A.D. to 1914 A.D.*, vol. 6 of *A History of The Expansion of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).

14 Edward L. Smither, *Christian Mission: A Concise Global History* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 103.

15 Will Brooks, *Interpreting Scripture across Cultures: An Introduction to Cross-Cultural Biblical Interpretation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2022), 41.

training local church leaders. As some missionaries began to write and teach on this topic, this movement became known as the indigenization of missions movement. Among many leaders who contributed to this movement, Henry Venn is one scholar who introduced a principle regarding planting and training native church leaders.¹⁶

Venn's Three-Self Policy

Both Henry Venn of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and Rufus Anderson of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions had concluded that for the gospel to advance in the field, missionaries need to build churches that are self-governing, self-supporting, and self-extending (the three-self policy). Though both Anderson and Venn came to the same conclusion around the same time separately and independently,¹⁷ this article looks only at Venn's writing on this topic. Venn was appointed as the general secretary of the CMS in Loddon in 1841. He held the position for nearly thirty years (1841-1872). During these thirty years, his writing and understanding of the need to plant native churches "exercised a direct influence on so many of those who were actually taking the opportunities for evangelizing the world."¹⁸

In terms of self-supporting, Venn argued that the financial support of the native churches should eventually come from the native churches themselves, not from the missionary organizations. He stated that this principle would "sensibly and permanently relieve the Society of a large expenditure incurred in the maintenance of schools, in buildings and other matters, which should more properly be charged to the account of the Native Congregations themselves."¹⁹

16 For Venn's writings, see: Henry Venn, "Three-Self Principles," in *Classic Texts in Mission & World Christianity: A Reader's Companion to David Bosch's Transforming Mission*, ed. Norman E. Thomas, 207–09, American Society of Missiology Series, no. 20 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998); *To Apply the Gospel: Selections from the Writing of Henry Venn*, ed. Max Warren, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971); "On Steps Towards Helping a Native Church to Become Self-Supporting, Self-Governing, and Self-Extending," in *Classics of Christian Missions*, ed. Francis M. DuBose, 243–49, (Nashville: Broadman, 1979).

17 Max Warren, ed., *To Apply the Gospel: Selections from the Writings of Henry Venn* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1971), 51.

18 Warren, ed., *To Apply the Gospel*, 23.

19 Warren, ed., *To Apply the Gospel*, 96.

He explained the importance of this principle to both the missionary and the mission-sending organization. He explained that organizations have limited funds, and if it falls upon the organization or missionaries to financially support all new works, missionaries will decide not to enter new fields simply because they lack the funds to support new churches. In fact, this reflection was not just hypothetical; it was an actual situation his organization dealt with. He explained that “with such limited means at their disposal, the Committee of the Church Missionary Society might have declined to extend their missions and have been content with carrying on the missions which they had already formed, upon the plea that the means furnished to them would not be more than sufficient.”²⁰ In this sense, the principle of self-support served to advance the gospel into new areas.

On the self-governing policy, Venn realized a weakness in church-based mission organizations of his day since it was hard for the missionaries to balance evangelizing unbelievers and ministering to the native church. Thus, he proposed “introducing into the native church that [the] elementary organization which may give it ‘corporate life,’ and prepare it for its full development under a native ministry and an indigenous episcopate.”²¹ In other words, the goal of the missionary should be to start the church in such a way that the church had its own leaders who could evangelize and minister to the local believers. Doing so would enable missionaries to focus on other unevangelized areas.

He believed that in order for the native church to develop and thrive, missionaries needed to train local teachers and church leaders and help them develop towards eventually governing the church on their own. This policy was evidenced in many of Venn’s writings, one of which stated, “It is expedient that native converts should be trained, at as early a stage as possible, upon a system of self-government, and of contributing to the support of their own native teachers.”²²

Finally, on self-extending policy, Venn proposed to introduce the missionary spirit in the native church as he wrote:

20 Warren, ed., *To Apply the Gospel*, 122.

21 Warren, ed., *To Apply the Gospel*, 68.

22 Warren, ed., *To Apply the Gospel*, 68.

Every convert should be instructed from his conversion in the duty of labouring for his self-support, and for the support of Missions to his Countrymen, and to lay himself out as a Missionary among his relations and friends to bring them to the truth. . . . the Native Converts were in many cases ready and willing to do far more themselves than we expected.²³

This policy encouraged the native church to take on the task of evangelism among unbelievers and help the native church to grow. Venn also believed this policy would bring new effectiveness to the mission because if the native believers took on the task of sharing the gospel with their countrymen, it would free the missionaries to move on to other evangelized regions. It would also help the native church establish independence.²⁴ To help the native church to become self-supporting, self-governing, and self-extending was Henry Venn's "supreme aim" because he believed that was the best way to spread the gospel to the end of the earth.²⁵

The Fourth Self: The Addition of Self-Theologizing

Many native churches were established under the three-self policy. However, as these churches continued to develop and grow, other issues regarding church health arose, especially those related to doctrine and theology. Melvin Hodges raised the need for the churches to add a self-theologizing element to their development plan when he wrote:

The standard of doctrine and conduct must be an expression of the believers' own concept of the Christian life as they find it in the Scriptures. Knowing the missionary's belief is not enough. This is a vital distinction. Nothing is gained by taking our ideas and forcing them on others as if to say, "Here is our set of rules. If you are to be a member of our church, this is what you must do."²⁶

Essentially, Hodges proposed the need for the native church leaders to learn to do theology on their own: self-theologizing.

²³ Warren, ed., *To Apply the Gospel*, 64.

²⁴ Brooks, *Interpreting Scripture across Cultures*, 43.

²⁵ Warren, ed., *To Apply the Gospel*, 52.

²⁶ Melvin Hodges, *The Indigenous Church and the Indigenous Church and the Missionary*, 1953 reprint (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2009), 37. Available at: <https://www.perlego.com/book/2050297> (Accessed: 20 October 2024).

Building on other missiologists' discussion on this concept, Hiebert echoed the need for this concept and gave a more detailed explanation of this "fourth self" principle for indigenous church planting. Hiebert noted that while scholars wrote extensively about the three-selves:

little was said about the fourth self: self-theologizing. For the most part, national leaders were not encouraged to study the Scriptures for themselves, and to develop their own theologies. Deviation from the missionary's theology was often branded as heresy. To young, nationalistically minded leaders this was theological colonialism. . . . Whether we like it or not, young theologians around the world are reading Scripture and interpreting it for their own cultures.²⁷

Not only did Hiebert understand the need for indigenous church leaders to develop their own theologies, but he also explored the connection between people's cultural backgrounds and the way they understand theology. In his book *Anthropological Insights for Missions*, Hiebert wrote,

We think that our studies of the Bible are unbiased, that our own interpretations of the Scriptures are the only true ones. It disturbs us, therefore, when we begin to discover that theologies are influenced by culture. . . . The fact is, all theologies developed by human beings are shaped by their particular historical and cultural contexts – by the language they use and the questions they ask.²⁸

Hiebert encouraged missionaries to train native church leaders to think theologically and try to help the native church produce theologians who could wrestle with doctrinal and theological questions in their native cultural context.

To summarize the importance of self-theologizing, Brooks points out that all missionaries eventually leave the mission field. Thus, it is crucial to include the self-theologizing element in the church indigenization process. Another reason this addition is crucial is that the newly planted church "is in a unique cultural context," and "believers in this context must be able to

²⁷ Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 46-47.

²⁸ Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 198.

evaluate their own existing cultural norms and patterns to determine which aspects are biblical and permissible and which aspects are not.”²⁹

The three-self policy and the later self-theologizing addition of the church indigenization movement helped missionaries worldwide to plant churches led by local believers and existing for local believers. Missionaries should not plant churches that look exactly like their home church because each cultural context on the field is unique. Training people who are experts in their local culture to be church leaders and theologians is a more effective and healthier way for church planting.

How, then, does understanding the church indigenization movement help alleviate the problems in cross-cultural theological education mentioned in the first section? In the next section, this article will unpack this question by examining the Southeast Asian cultural context.

Applications for Cross-Cultural Theological Education in Southeast Asia

The previous section of the paper discussed principles of planting indigenous churches. However, these principles, especially self-theologizing, can be applied to cross-cultural theological education to alleviate cultural problems and challenges related to relationships and education. The indigenization movement helped the church to be self-supporting, self-governing, and self-extending. It helped to train native church leaders to be self-theologizing because missiologists recognized cultural context was a key component that affected many aspects of the church’s health. Likewise, if seminaries in Southeast Asia can produce more indigenous theologians and faculty, it will be a more effective way to do cross-cultural theological education than solely providing the seminaries with Western theologians as faculty support.

Following the principles of indigenization, this author proposes that the goal of cross-cultural theological education should be to produce indigenous theologians. Drawing inspiration from the indigenization movement in missions history, one can see that if seminaries produce more indigenous theologians, it alleviates challenges in theological education caused by cultural differences. This last section of the paper provides practical application

²⁹ Brooks, *Interpreting Scripture across Cultures*, 50.

as to how cross-cultural teachers can help seminaries in a Southeast Asian cultural context to produce indigenous theologians.

Teach with Humility

The indigenization movement of the church speaks to the importance of the humility missionaries should have as they help local churches gain autonomy. Missionaries need to have a humble attitude and treat native leaders and believers as equals so that they can walk alongside them on the journey to church indigenization. In the same way, cross-cultural theological education also requires cross-cultural teachers to be humble learners if they want to help seminaries in Southeast Asia produce more indigenous theologians. As one cross-cultural teaching expert remarks, “Effective teaching demands that the teacher be as well versed in the learner’s culture as in the subject matter. To be a teacher of students, one must first be a student of students.”³⁰

When cross-cultural teachers adopt this posture of humility, it alleviates the challenges related to both relationships and education. Humility leads the educator to learn how people think and then communicate in culturally appropriate ways, building trust and strengthening relationships. Moreover, a posture of humility leads educators to study and learn about cultural modes of learning, thus increasing their ability to teach in ways that help students achieve course objectives.

How does this humble learner’s attitude translate into practical actions for cross-cultural teachers? First, cross-cultural teachers need to be aware of their cultural dynamic and avoid falling into the pit of cultural ethnocentrism. If a cross-cultural teacher who teaches in a seminary in Southeast Asia does not come into the culture with a humble learner’s attitude, he might be in danger of becoming culturally ethnocentric, which will hinder his interaction with the students.

Ott explains that ethnocentrism is “the tendency to see one’s own culture or ethnicity as superior or right and to see others as inferior or wrong.”³¹ The danger of cultural ethnocentrism is that the teacher will think his approach to education, or his understanding of the learning content, is superior to that of the local teachers or students. Therefore, he will only teach in the ways in which he is used to learning. Thus, he will easily miss the opportunity to

30 Plueddemann, *Teaching Across Cultures*, Ch. 3.

31 Ott, *Teaching and Learning across Cultures*, Ch. 2.

learn the more effective ways the local students learn.³² Furthermore, he may end up thinking that these students will never be good enough to be teachers one day themselves.

Also, with a humble learner attitude, cross-cultural teachers will be more mindful of their teaching methodology and more proactive in utilizing culturally appropriate teaching methods. Adopting the attitude of a humble learner will encourage the teacher to do some research about his students; he will want to learn about what cultural background his students are from, what kind of educational methodologies they are used to in learning, and what approach he should take if conflicts occur in class. Cultural context matters in any educational approach, but it is crucial in a cross-cultural educational setting. When Plueddemann writes, “the key problem for many cross-cultural teachers is assuming that their subject matter expertise can be transmitted to their students without taking into account the context and cultural values of the learner,”³³ he highlights the importance of teaching in context.

Teaching in culturally appropriate ways can ease cultural problems related to both communication and education. It is a more effective way to approach education and meet students’ needs, and to build trust between the cross-cultural teacher and students. It will lay a solid foundation for the students to one day grow into the next generation of indigenous educators and theologians.

Raise Up Indigenous Scholars

During the indigenization movement, a pivotal principle was to help the native church leaders develop the ability to self-theologize because it can ensure the church’s health even long after the missionaries leave. This principle, when applied to the cross-cultural theological education sphere, reminds cross-cultural teachers to help seminaries raise up indigenous scholars – scholars who can both master the content in their subject fields and can think critically about theological problems that arise from their local culture. In other words, seminaries need to raise up scholars who not only *know theology* but also can *do theology* in their local cultural context.

32 Liyun Brooks, “Improving Students’ Critical Thinking Ability in a Cross-cultural Teaching Environment in Southeast Asia,” (Ed.D. research paper, Southeastern Seminary, 2023).

33 Plueddemann, *Teaching Across Cultures*, Ch. 3.

However, what specific process can seminaries use to produce such scholars? One significant step is for the seminaries to help students improve their critical thinking ability. On the importance of critical thinking ability, Marty MacCullough articulates:

Biblical worldview thinking is a form of critical thinking. . . . Critical thinking is more than a process. It includes the understanding and use of knowledge. Therefore, one who understands the big ideas and the general organization of a subject area should be able to connect related facts better than one who does not and be able to critique new information as well.³⁴

Critical thinking ability equips students with the ability to reason, evaluate, apply, and create.³⁵ Thus, for cross-cultural teachers who seek to train indigenous scholars who can think through complicated theological problems in their own cultural context, equipping students with the ability to think critically will be a strong starting point.

That said, developing students' critical thinking ability is not always the primary objective in the Eastern educational approach. One cross-cultural teacher who taught in Singapore noted, "In the East, the emphasis seems to be on preserving time-tested truth as passed on by 'the master' – but adapting these truths to changing circumstances. In the West, the education system seems to promote the creation and discovery of new ideas."³⁶ Shaw also describes differences in educational approach between the West and the rest of the world when it concerns critical thinking:

The linear-analytical thinking of Greek philosophy and Enlightenment, which has so shaped the educational systems of the West, is globally atypical. While the specifics differ, the general pattern of information processing throughout most of the world tends towards holism and networked thinking,

34 M. MacCullough, K. Coley, and D. MacCullough, (2023) *Transformational Teaching* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2023), Introduction to Sec. 4. Available at: <https://www.perlego.com/book/3837705> (Accessed: 10 October 2024).

35 Peter A. Facione, *Think Critically* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: 2011), 6.

36 Perry Shaw, César Lopes, Joanna Feliciano-Soberano, and Bob Heaton, *Teaching Across Cultures: A Global Christian Perspective*, (Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2021), 145.

in contrast to the tight specificity so typical in the Western “analytic-critical” approach.³⁷

For a cross-cultural teacher from a Western educational system, trying to help students in a Southeast Asian seminary develop critical thinking ability requires much cultural understanding and creativity in course and curriculum design. Since critical thinking ability was not the main focus in most students’ previous educational experience, cross-cultural teachers need to explain the importance and usefulness of critical thinking to students without being seen as arrogant or ethnocentric.³⁸

They also need to design classroom activities and assignments that emphasize developing students’ critical thinking abilities but do not contradict students’ cultural preferences. For example, asking students to critique the teacher’s teaching or other students’ work in front of the whole class is a common class activity to test students’ critical thinking ability in the Western educational approach. However, doing so will make students uncomfortable in a Southeast Asian classroom because they are from a collectivistic, honor-shame culture, and they value relationships above all things. To publicly say something negative about the teacher or other students’ work will shame them and, thus, damage their relationship.

Produce Indigenous Theological Resources

A final application of the indigenization movement is that cross-cultural educators should help indigenous scholars produce their own theological resources. Cross-cultural teachers need to equip students with skills and abilities to exegete Scripture and do theology so that they can produce resources that speak to the needs of their culture. Doing so can help alleviate the need to always rely upon resources from outside of their culture.

Generally speaking, more theological resources are produced by theologians from the West for Christians in the West. Tennent addresses this situation in his book when he points out the fact that Christianity continues to grow in the Majority world while declining in the Western world, but “Western theological writings and reflection somehow represent normative, universal

³⁷ Shaw, *Teaching Across Cultures*, 145.

³⁸ L. Brooks, “Improving Students’ Critical Thinking Ability.”

Christian reflection whereas non-Western theology is more localized, ad hoc, and Contextual.”³⁹

This situation is understandable considering the timeline of church history and how the gospel spread worldwide since the European countries (the West) have a longer history of Christianity than the Majority world. Yet, this situation is not ideal since many theological resources written in the West do not speak to issues confronting the church in other parts of the world. Yeo understands the reality of this situation as it relates to the lack of theological resources in Chinese culture, for he writes, “Most Chinese Bible commentaries do not relate to Chinese culture, but simply ‘reincarnate’ the humanity and divinity of the commentator’s Eurocentric mentors.”⁴⁰ While reproducing theological content from another location may be a helpful starting point for a newly planted church, a long-term goal and an indicator of a healthier local church is when they have locally produced theological resources that speak to the needs of that particular context.

Students in Southeast Asian seminaries can access many theological resources. However, similar to the situation in the Chinese context mentioned by Yeo, limited resources are produced by indigenous theologians and address theological problems specific to their local ministry context. Thus, helping the local church produce more indigenous theological resources is a worthy long-term goal for cross-cultural theological education in Southeast Asia.

Conclusion

Cross-cultural theological education encounters challenges arising from culture. Many of the challenges related to relationships and education are difficult for cross-cultural teachers to navigate. Insights from the indigenization movement teach the four-self principles (self-supporting, self-governing, self-extending, and self-theologizing) that missionaries utilized for church planting. These principles are helpful for cross-cultural theological education and can alleviate some challenges created by cultural differences between cross-cultural teachers and local students.

39 Timothy Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2009), Ch. 1. Available at: <https://www.perlego.com/book/558244> (Accessed: 30 October 2024).

40 Yeo, “Made in the USA,” Ch. 7.

These principles helped native churches in the mission fields to gain autonomy and become self-sufficient, healthy churches. Likewise, if educators apply the principles in cross-cultural theological teaching and adopt a humble learner's attitude, they can achieve the goal of helping local seminaries raise up indigenous theologians and produce indigenous theological resources.

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Historic Protestant Missiology and the Urgent Release of the Missionary Task to Local Believers

Luke Taylor

Recent missiological debates among evangelicals have centered on “movement”¹ modes of missionary practice.² The relationship of movement missiology to historic protestant missiology is an aspect of those debates.³ This article will argue that historic protestant missiology consistently aspired to the priority of the release of the missionary task to local believers. This tradition is expressed today explicitly in movement missiology.

1 Although “movement” does not describe a monolithic missiological category, a general definition is helpful. The 24:14 Coalition says, for instance, that a “CPM (Church Planting Movement) is a multiplication of disciples making disciples, and leaders developing leaders, resulting in indigenous churches...planting more churches...spreading rapidly through a people group or population segment...” Dave Coles and Stan Parks, eds., *A Testimony to All Peoples: Kingdom Movements Around the World* (Spring, TX: 24:14, 2019), 315; quoted in Warrick Farah, ed., *Motus Dei: The Movement of God to Disciple the Nations* (Littleton, CO: William Carey Publishing, 2021), xiii.

2 A list of resources critiquing movement methods can be found at Kenneth Hayward and Matt Rhodes, “A Bibliography for the Proclamational Approach to Church Planting Overseas (and Critique of Movement Methods),” *Biblical Missiology* (blog), September 27, 2022, <https://biblicalm-issiology.org/blog/2022/09/27/a-bibliography-for-the-proclamational-approach-to-church-planting-overseas-and-critique-of-movement-methods/>; A recent publication provides responses to critiques of movement methods. Farah, *Motus Dei: The Movement of God to Disciple the Nations*.

3 Cf. Warrick Farah, “The Genesis and Evolution of Church-Planting Movements Missiology,” *Missiology*, 2022, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/00918296221097652>.

The International Mission Board (IMB) defines the missionary task as consisting of six parts: entry, evangelism, discipleship, healthy church formation, leadership development, and exit to partnership. This framework is implicit in the present article's argument and is comparable to frameworks held by missionaries throughout this history of protestant missions, especially by the authors discussed below.⁴ A key aspect of this framework, as it is described by the IMB, is an emphasis on the multiplication of disciples and healthy churches.⁵ Likewise, multiplication is an important emphasis in the missiology discussed by these authors.⁶

William Carey is often regarded as the “father of modern missions.” Though this characterization is somewhat hagiographic, Carey's importance for the genealogy of protestant mission thought and practice is unassailable.⁷ His ministry in India, especially after joining with William Ward and Joshua Marshman in Serampore, is “one of the most famous...in the whole history of the Christian Church...”⁸ At the onset of their ministry together, this “Serampore Trio,” as the missionary team is often called, developed a statement of belief and practice. “The Bond of the Missionary Brotherhood of Serampore” described the fundamental values upon which the team would develop their missionary engagement.⁹ In it, a key theme is a clear emphasis on the priority of the release of the missionary task to local believers. They write:

4 “Exit to partnership” is the element of the IMB's definition that is least developed in these authors.

5 International Mission Board, *Foundations*, 4th ed., (Richmond, VA: International Mission Board, 2022), 44. They write, for instance, “...(The) most effective way to advance the gospel into the unreached world is to multiply churches that multiply churches.”

6 Stefan Paas provides a helpful survey of the concept of church planting throughout the history of Christianity. He notes the shift from “planting the church” to “planting churches” that took place within protestant missions. Stefan Paas, *Church Planting in the Secular West: Learning from the European Experience* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2016), 10–33.

7 Cf. Rufus Anderson's comments about Carey's influence on modern missions: Rufus Anderson, *Foreign Missions: Their Relations and Claims* (Florida: Hardpress, 2017), Chap. 2, Kindle.

8 Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, 2nd ed., vol. 6, *The Penguin History of the Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 224.

9 A copy of this document is included in the appendix of the biography of Carey written shortly after his death by George Smith. George Smith, *The Life of William Carey, D.D.: Shoemaker and Missionary* (London: John Murray, 1885), 441–50.

It is only by means of native preachers that we can hope for the universal spread of the Gospel throughout this immense continent.¹⁰

If the practice of confining the ministry of the word to a single individual in a church be once established amongst us, we despair of the Gospel's ever making much progress in India by our means.¹¹

Let us therefore...continually urge our native brethren to press upon their countrymen the glorious Gospel of the blessed God.¹²

Still further...we think it our duty, as soon as possible, to advise the native brethren who may be formed into separate churches, to choose their pastors and deacons from amongst their own countrymen...as much as possible, without the interference of the missionary of the district...who will...give them advice...correct any errors into which they may fall, and...direct his efforts continually to the planting of new churches in other places, and to spread of the Gospel throughout his district as much as in his power.¹³

Under divine blessing, if, in the course of a few years, a number of native churches be thus established, from them the word of God may sound out even to the extremities of India, and numbers of preachers being raised up and sent forth, may form a body of native missionaries...¹⁴

10 Smith, *The Life of William Carey*, 446.

11 Smith, *The Life of William Carey*, 447.

12 Smith, *The Life of William Carey*, 447.

13 Smith, *The Life of William Carey*, 447.

14 Smith, *The Life of William Carey*, 447.

The advantages of this plan are so evident, that to carry it into complete effect ought to be our continued concern.¹⁵

These quotes from the Serampore Trio describe an emerging conception of what would eventually be called, as described below, the “three-self formula” whereby churches planted in missionary contexts have indigenous leadership and are propagated through indigenous efforts. However, Carey and his colleagues faced a tension in the pursuit of this value. Carey writes:

God has given us several native Brethren who have good gifts for making known the Gospel. They must be employed, but it is desirable that they, for the present, should be under the eye of a European brother.¹⁶

We are thinking much of scattering them over the country that they may be more extensively useful, but we need more European Brethren to superintend them.¹⁷

Carey wanted to entrust the leadership and multiplication of disciples and churches to local believers, but he worried about a lack of “knowledge or experience,” especially of young believers.¹⁸ Such challenges are to be expected in the context of Carey’s missionary praxis. Cross-cultural missions was a radically new endeavor for Carey, his colleagues, and the churches who sent them. Subsequent generations of missionaries who were committed to the value of committing the missionary task to local believers would face similar tensions. However, the priority and urgency of releasing the missionary task to local believers would grow among mission theorists.

Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson were born shortly after Carey arrived in India and represent the protestant missionary movement’s second generation. They are remembered as 19th-century missionary statesmen who championed a vision for the three-self formula of “self-governing, self-expanding and

15 Smith, *The Life of William Carey*, 448.

16 William Carey, *The Journal and Selected Letters of William Carey*, ed. Terry G. Carter (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 251, Kindle.

17 Carey, *Journal and Selected Letters*, 311.

18 Carey, *Journal and Selected Letters*, 311.

self-supporting churches.”¹⁹ Venn and Anderson “assumed they were living in a period when missionary principles were inchoate,” and therefore “took as their personal responsibility the task of carefully examining past and present missionary experience with a view to identifying underlying principles of action.”²⁰ Anderson documented his convictions about missionary practice more extensively than Venn.²¹ He wrote a book from a series of lectures on the topic, following years of observing missionary practice around the world.²² In it he writes:

(A) foreign missionary should not be the pastor of a native church. His business is to plant churches...committing them as soon as possible to the care of native pastors; himself sustaining a common relation to all, as their...adviser...related to a score of churches, and even more.²³

Anderson’s strategy accords with similar statements recorded by Carey above. Of note is Anderson’s motivation for espousing this strategy:

I am now prepared to state...what I believe to be the true and proper nature of a mission...(based on) the mission of the Apostle Paul...When he had formed local churches, he did not hesitate to ordain presbyters over them, the best he could find; and then to throw upon the churches... the responsibilities of self-government, self-support, and self-propagation.²⁴

Anderson compares contemporary mission practice with that of the Apostle Paul and laments the fact that missionaries had been “slow to believe,

19 Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), 232; See Wilbert Shenk’s article on the remarkable similarities in the two men’s lives in Wilbert R. Shenk, “Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn: A Special Relationship?” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 5, no. 4 (2016): 168–72.

20 Shenk, “Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn: A Special Relationship?” 170.

21 See Henry Venn, *To Apply the Gospel: Selections in the Writings of Henry Venn*, ed. Max Warren (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971).

22 Anderson, *Foreign Missions*.

23 Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, chap. 8.

24 Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, Chap. 8; See also Venn, *To Apply the Gospel: Selections in the Writings of Henry Venn*, 68.

that native churches, or native pastors...could stand without foreign aid.”²⁵ Not only did Anderson espouse the value of releasing the missionary task to locals as primary in missionary practice, he used this value as a means of evaluating the fruitfulness and faithfulness of missionary efforts. That is, for Anderson, a key question in evaluating missionary practice was if churches planted by missionaries were “self-propagating from the very start...(with) as soon as possible, a native pastor...”²⁶

Of course, “as soon as possible” is subjective. How soon is that exactly? Anderson’s perspective on this matter was impacted by prejudices about the superiority of Western society and its representatives.²⁷ However, John Nevius, a missionary to China, in the next generation of protestant missions, would insist on pressing missionary practice further towards the urgent release of the missionary task.

Nevius is remembered for developing missiological strategies in response to what he called the “old method.”²⁸ That is, he developed a critique and response to the approach to the missionary task which he observed among many preceding missionaries based upon “principles...distinctly traceable in the New Testament.”²⁹ He writes of the “new method”:

The characteristic feature of our stations is that the principal care of them is entrusted, not to paid preachers set over them... but to leaders belonging to the stations...These leaders are simply church members, pursuing their daily calling.³⁰

25 Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, Chap. 6.

26 Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, Chap. 7.

27 See Anderson’s comments Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, Chap. 7; Similarly, compare to comments of Henry Venn in Venn, *To Apply the Gospel: Selections in the Writings of Henry Venn*, 78.

28 “These two systems may be distinguished in general by the former depending largely on paid native agency, while the latter deprecates and seeks to minimize such agency.” John L. Nevius, *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*, 3rd ed. (New York: Foreign Mission Library, 1899), 9, Kindle. The immediate context of Nevius’ thesis is the use of finances. However, he insists in his explication of the “new system” upon entrusting local believers and local churches, from the beginning, with both self-propagation and self-governance (i.e. self-leadership).

29 Nevius, *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*, 55.

30 Nevius, *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*, 31.

Nevius makes a clear distinction between preachers, who in his view occupy formal paid positions, and “leaders.” This distinction is related to the formal Presbyterian ecclesial system of which Nevius was a part. Nonetheless, his missionary system envisions, for his time, radically indigenous expressions of church government, without immediately and completely divorcing himself from his own denominational commitments, through this distinction between pastors, elders, and “leaders.”³¹ As to these leaders, “Though (their) knowledge...may be elementary and incomplete...what they do know is just what the others need first to learn.”³² Ultimately, Anderson develops a missionary praxis whereby organic self-propagation and self-governance emerges in which “each man, woman, and child (is) be both a learner...and a teacher of someone less advanced.”³³

In this way, Nevius envisions the missionary task being entrusted immediately to local believers and churches. That is, churches develop internally and externally through their own agency, with the missionary serving in a supporting role from the start by providing systematic instruction, which is subsequently spread throughout the community.³⁴ Not only does Nevius suggest that missionaries entrust the inward and outward growth of churches to the local believers themselves, but Nevius encourages these churches to then plant new churches in new areas with which they are connected. In this way, new churches “radiate from self-propagating centers.”³⁵

Roland Allen belonged to the fourth generation of missionaries in China. He, like Nevius, was critical of much of the mission practice that he observed.³⁶ Indeed, Allen suggested, going further than Nevius, that rather than founding missions with “leaders” rather than “pastors,” missionaries “ought to return to the Apostolic practice and found Churches in every place where we

31 See his discussion in Nevius, *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*, 58–65.

32 Nevius, *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*, 35.

33 Nevius, *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*, 31.

34 Nevius, *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*, 34–38.

35 Nevius, *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*, 41.

36 Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), 3.

make converts, Churches equipped with all the divine grace and authority of Christian Churches.”³⁷

To the point, Allen writes:

We are quite ready to talk of self-supporting, self-extending and self-governing Churches in the abstract as ideals; but the moment that we think of ourselves as establishing self-supporting, self-governing Churches in the Biblical sense we are met by...a terrible, deadly fear...We instinctively think of something which we cannot control as tending to disorder.³⁸

For Allen, a key missing element to the missiology which he saw as falling short was a robust pneumatology. Allen believed that “(t)he fatal mistake has been made of teaching the converts to rely on the wrong source of strength... Instead of seeking it in the...Holy Spirit...they seek it in the missionary.”³⁹ Instead, Allen believed that, like the Apostle Paul, missionaries should trust the Holy Spirit to equip and sustain believers and churches. He promoted a simple formula for establishing new churches. Missionaries should:

(Deliver) to them what St. Paul called “the tradition” (of which the Apostles’ Creed is the later expression)

(Deliver) to them the Gospel, that they may know where to turn for instruction. For they must learn from the very beginning to rely upon God, not upon men, for spiritual progress; upon the Bible, not upon human teachers, for spiritual instruction.

(Make) sure that they have learnt the manner and the meaning of (the Sacraments). They must be taught how to administer them, and how to receive them, practically.

37 Roland Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church: And the Causes That Hinder It* (1927; reis: Jawbone Digital, 2011), 35, Kindle. Like the men discussed above, Allen’s inspiration comes largely from a comparison of the missionary practice he encountered to his reading of the example found in the New Testament, especially in its accounts of Paul’s missionary activity.

38 Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church*, 15.

39 Allen, *Missionary Methods*, 81.

(Deliver) the authority to administer the Sacraments and to guide and govern the Church in its religious services and its daily social life (to ordained ministers)

(Tell) them what to do when they have made converts in their neighbourhood too remote to be intimately attached to their own body, or in case people from a neighbouring village came to them to learn the Christian Faith. He should tell them first to make sure that the new converts are really converts to the faith of Christ and understand the use of the Creed, the Gospels, the Sacraments and the Ministry...⁴⁰

Allen, thus, builds upon the value espoused in the previous three generations of missionary theory and praxis in his insistence that missionaries can fully follow the pattern of the Apostle Paul and release the missionary task to local believers. The missionary should give the Bible along with simple instructions to new believers and churches. Then, with confidence rooted in the Holy Spirit's work to keep and grow new believers and churches, Allen insists that they can be immediately autonomous, vested with full spiritual authority.⁴¹

Allen, Nevius, Anderson, and Carey, represent four successive generations of protestant missionary thought and practice. Moreover, they are regularly regarded as key thinkers in the history of protestant missions. Their words as presented are abstracted from the broader context in which they were originally written, but they present an accurate synthesis of a key strand of each thinker's conviction, nonetheless. Found therein is a clear line evolving through the history of protestant missions up until the early twentieth century. Namely, historic protestant missiology has considered the release of the missionary task to local indigenous believers and leaders as an urgent priority.

A few aspects of this synthesis are important to note.

40 Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church*, 171–75.

41 Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church*, 1.

First, each account grounds the priority of releasing the missionary task to local believers in the New Testament, especially in the example of Paul.⁴² This is particularly important given the context in which Western missionaries were developing their missiology in the first century of the protestant missionary movement. Mission theory and practice during this period were epistemologically linked to colonialism. This entailed a frequent conviction that mission required, for instance, the establishment of Western culture alongside the planting of the church. Although these authors did not recognize and account for all of the ways European culture impacted their missiology, their insistence on following the New Testament example enabled breakthroughs which in some respects put them ahead of their times.⁴³

Besides the common grounding in the New Testament and the writings of Paul, several consistent methodological similarities emerge across the writings of these men, though the tactics in their application differ. For one, both evangelism of non-believers and discipleship of new converts are commended to local believers from the moment of, or soon after, their conversion. A strong emphasis on mobilizing the laity to participate in the missionary task is clear. Two, there is an emphasis on planting churches that are quickly led by local leaders, sometimes with the formal installation of pastors and sometimes without. This conviction develops over time, culminating in Allen's pneumatologically grounded insistence that new churches be led immediately by pastors from their own communities. Finally, there is an expectation that new churches be multiplied through the efforts of young believers and churches.

This value of the release of the missionary task to local believers was aspirational from early on in protestant mission efforts, and the efficacy of missionary practice in realizing this aspiration was a consistent point of critique throughout this history. That is, as practitioners and missiologists sought to evaluate and adjust mission practice, the pursuit of this central value guided innovation and adaptation. Missionaries sought to understand why it was so difficult to achieve this goal, and they adjusted their practice in an attempt to more consistently realize it.

42 The one exception above is that there is no explicit reference to the New Testament in Carey's quotes. However, throughout the articles from which these quotes come, Carey appeals to the example of Paul and other New Testament Apostles.

43 See for instance Dana L. Robert, *Christian Mission* (United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), Chapter 4, Available at: <https://www.perlego.com/book/1009186>.

The point here is not to suggest that historic protestant missionaries and their missiology were without problematic elements. While their wisdom should be availed, it must also be remembered that they were people of their times.⁴⁴ Twenty-first century readers have the privilege of hindsight. They can assess and describe the ways in which protestant missionaries were always socially located and unaware of cultural blinders that impeded their progress towards the goal of indigeneity. They can also find examples of missionary practice where this goal was seemingly absent. Nonetheless, it is clear that within the broad landscape of historic protestant missions, this goal of releasing the missionary task from the control of the foreign missionary was a chief and fundamental aspect of the missiological imagination.

Shortly before Allen published *Missionary Methods*, the Edinburgh world missionary conference took place. This important event in the history of Western missions is remembered, in part, after more than one hundred years of Western protestant missionary advances around the globe, for being woefully underrepresented by non-Western delegates. It also took place on the cusp of rapid upheavals in the social and political contexts across the globe through world wars, the breakdown of colonialism, and a global reckoning with racism. These upheavals led to fundamental shifts across Christian consciousness towards the question of missions. Shifts rapidly occurred, as well, within Protestantism, leading to specifically evangelical missionary thought and practice in the latter half of the twentieth century. As such, Edinburgh's conference marks a reasonable demarcation for the end of historic protestant missions. It also provides a means of adjudicating the previous century's success in bringing the value and vision of indigeneity to life. Ultimately, "Edinburgh 1910...gives no reinforcement to the supposition that the commitment...to the *principle* of the three-self formula had weakened... that commitment in principle was one thing and the will to achieve practical implementation quite another."⁴⁵

A century later, evangelical mission thinkers and practitioners find themselves in a different geo-political context while wrestling with many of the

44 Bevens and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 231; See also, Dana L. Robert, "Rethinking Missionaries' from 1910 to Today," *Methodist Review* (19465254) 4 (January 2012): 59, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=asn&AN=124598945&lang=nl&site=ehost-live&custid=s3628809>.

45 Brian Stanley, "The Church of the Three Selves: A Perspective from the World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh, 1910," *Journal of Imperial & Commonwealth History* 36, no. 3 (September 2008): 437, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086530802318524>.

same questions from throughout the history of protestant missions, not least among these: the priority of the release of the missionary task to local believers. The points derived from the brief analysis of the four authors discussed above create a constellation around this priority of indigeneity for historic protestant missions. They are also hallmarks of the values that undergird movement approaches to the missionary task. For instance, in the first resource published describing elements of CPM approaches to the task, David Garrison suggests ten universal elements followed by ten common factors. Among these he notes:

Missionaries involved in Church Planting Movements often speak of the self-discipline required to mentor church planters rather than do the job of church planting themselves.

(A) reliance upon lay leadership ensures the largest possible pool of potential church planters and cell church leaders.

(N)ew believers are expected to become witnesses immediately; these new disciples immediately become disciplers of others and even church planters.

It is important that every cell or house church leader has all the authority required to do whatever needs to be done in terms of evangelism, ministry, and new church planting without seeking approval from a church hierarchy.

A key concern is to minimize foreignness and encourage indigeneity. Rather than waiting for new believers to prove themselves worthy of leadership, missionaries begin by drawing new believers into leadership roles through participative Bible studies and mentoring pastors from behind the scenes.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ This booklet was followed up a few years later with a book length presentation of the material. Other authors began contributing to the discussion about movement missiology. David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements* (Richmond, VA: International Missionary Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1999), 33–40.

Garrison's booklet would soon be followed by several foundational texts for movement missiology.⁴⁷ Although there are certainly important differences between these various works, the ideas drawn from Garrison's seminal work remain consistently foundational for these contemporary missiological thinkers. Importantly for the present article, these ideas are remarkably consistent with the values of the early protestant missiology described above. Namely, a fundamental animating value of movement missiology is its insistence on the urgent release of the missionary task, especially multiplying disciples and churches, to local believers. Indeed, from an analysis that finds indigeneity to be a crucial and foundational aspiration of historic protestant missiology, movement missiology is a contemporary mode of Western missionary praxis particularly consistent with the trajectory initiated by William Carey and many of those that followed in the generations after him.

This is not to claim that there are no important differences between movement missiologists and the four authors cited as representative of historic protestant missions. Much more could be drawn from an analysis of their writings and their work in comparison to contemporary missionary theory and practice. Movement missiologists would likely be well served to reflect carefully on the wisdom found in their missional forbearers.

At the same time, any approach to the missionary task today, especially from the West, which does not adequately prioritize indigenous authority in it, is simply untenable in today's global world. Missions is firmly established as the purview of the global Church. Movement missiologists should certainly be open to critique and correction, from voices old and new. Those new voices should, likewise, recognize and attend to this fundamental substance of movement approaches to the missionary task, the challenge of prioritizing the release of the missionary task to local believers. Western missionaries can ill afford to advocate for indigeneity while practicing modes of mission that prevent the urgent release of the missionary task to local believers. This urgency is not the only value that a robust missiology should include, to be sure. However, movement missiologists have matured historic protestant mission practice on this point, developing a praxis which accomplishes that to which previous generations aspired.

47 Cf. Steve Smith and Ying Kai, *T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution* (Monument, CO: WIGTake Resources, 2011); and David Watson and Paul Watson, *Contagious Disciple Making: Leading Others on a Journey of Discovery* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2014); For a more recent example see Mike Shipman, *Reenact Missions: The Post-Pentecost Pattern* (La Habra, CA: i2 Ministries, 2024).

In summary, it is beneficial to compare contemporary modes of missionary practice to those of previous generations. In so doing, indigeneity is an important point of comparison. Previous generations of missionaries aspired to the priority of the release of the missionary task to local believers, but this aspiration was consistently impeded in various ways and for various reasons. Indeed, this same challenge remains today. Movement missiologists have established missional praxes that make this aspiration a reality. These praxes should stand open to evaluation and wise correction, but any correction should not come at the expense of maintaining the faithful empowerment of local believers with the missionary task as a primary and urgent value.

The debate about movement missiology in some corners of evangelicalism is often charged. It is an important conversation, with implications for the future of evangelical missiology and its relationship to God's mission through his global Church. Amidst these debates, all participants would be aided by remembering the words of Jonathan Edwards and his own thoughts about "movements."

Instead of coming to the help of the Lord, we shall actually fight against him, if we are abundant in insisting on, and setting forth the blemishes of the work...Not but that the errors that are committed ought to be observed... and the most probable means should be used to have them amended: but an insisting much upon them...or speaking of them with more appearance of heat of spirit, or with ridicule, or an air of contempt...has no tendency to correct the errors; but has a tendency to darken the glory of God's power and grace, appearing in the substance of the work, and to beget jealousies and ill thoughts in the minds of others, concerning the whole of it.⁴⁸

**Name denotes pseudonym.*

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⁴⁸ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of President Edwards*, vol. iii (New York: R. Carter and Bros, 1879), 332, <http://archive.org/details/workspresidente16edwagoog>.

Is Indigenous the Goal?

Church Planting as a Response to the Great Commission

Paul Salem

In a mountainous region of Taiwan called Pingtung, there is a “European-style indigenous church.” The Church of Our Lady of Fatima is a Catholic church building with a majestic cathedral style but filled with symbols corresponding to Taiwan’s indigenous peoples.¹ It is a grand edifice with two columns of ancestral souls of chieftains and pews carved with faces of indigenous people. In Protestant missions circles when someone says they want to plant indigenous churches, this is likely the furthest thing from their minds.

In the last 150 years, missionaries have been striving to plant “indigenous churches.”² This sounds good on the surface, but the problem is the way *indigenous* is meant does not match the definitions of *indigenous* used in different disciplines, such as horticulture, anthropology, political science, and missiology. In missions, an indigenous church has traditionally meant a church

1 *Indigenous Catholic Church in Mountainous Pingtung Touted as Tourist Site*, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-4pgty0v1E>.

2 Jonathan Lewis, *World Mission: An Analysis of the World Christian Movement*, Vol 2 (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1994), 6-23.

that is self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-governing, sometimes referred to as a three-self church.³ However, this is not what many people think of when they hear the word *indigenous*. This conflict in connotations has led to confusion in church planting circles. Indigeneity is a complicated and somewhat unhelpful term when we consider church planting. Rather than trying to plant indigenous churches, we should plant local, culturally attuned churches.

This article will walk through the development of the indigenous church principle and what it has come to mean. We will then examine how the word *indigenous* is used currently. This will lead us to analyze the principle and think through a more helpful way to consider church planting that takes context seriously while working towards healthy, thriving, reproducing churches that are not dependent on outside resources.

The Development of the Indigenous Church Principle

In the mid-nineteenth century, Western missionaries developed tendencies towards paternalism.⁴ The funding for church planting was foreign, and pastoral leadership was mostly foreign. This was during the height of the colonial era. There were a few prescient missionaries who began to see the problems with planting churches in ways that made the new churches dependent on missionary resources and leadership. Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson separately concluded that missionaries need to strive for an approach to church planting that introduced independence as early as possible.⁵ Although it may have seemed inventive during their time period, Christopher Little notes that Paul and others in church history practiced this approach.⁶

Missionaries in Korea and China began to implement church planting that was self-governing, self-propagating, and self-supporting at the beginning of the 20th century. In Korea, there was a revival that led to masses converting

3 John Mark Terry, "Indigenous Churches," in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapid, MI: Baker Books, 2000).

4 David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 282.

5 Wilbert R. Shenk, "Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn: A Special Relationship?," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 5, no. 4 (October 1981): 168–72.

6 Christopher R. Little, "Mission in the Way of Paul: With Special Reference to Twenty-First Century Christian Mission" (PhD diss., Pasadena, CA, Fuller Theological Seminary, School of Intercultural Studies, 2003), 75.

to Christ. Following the lead of John Nevius, the churches were planted in a simple, reproducible manner with Korean leaders.⁷ Similar events in China led to a church that was organized and led by Chinese leaders. Roland Allen, who served in China, illustrates the immediate impact of this paradigm shift in church planting: “the moment converts were made in any place, ministers were appointed from among themselves, presbyter bishops, or bishops, who in turn could organize and bring into the unity of the visible Church any new group of Christians in their neighbourhood [sic].”⁸

After World War II a new cadre of missiologists with training in cultural anthropology came along and critiqued the three-self churches as being culturally Western. It was possible to plant a three-self church in a culture, but it still felt foreign. Prominent among these voices calling for truly indigenous churches were Alan Tippett, Eugene Nida, Donald McGavran, Charles Kraft, and Marvin Mayers.⁹ Missionary vocabulary began to include terms like “worldview,” “functional equivalents,” “functional substitutes,” and “contextualization.”¹⁰ In other words, for Christianity to take root in a new culture, there was a need to adapt language, forms, symbols, and expressions that made sense in the receiving culture. Ultimately, says Paul Hiebert, these missiologists and others began to call for self-theologizing.¹¹ Self-theologizing eventually led to ethnotheologies.¹²

There is much about the emphasis on indigeneity to be praised. One of the providential byproducts of this emphasis resulted in churches all over China being empowered to continue without formal leadership even when the harshest persecution was brought on by Mao Zedong. Christianity not only survived during these dark decades, but thrived, emerging in the 1980s num-

7 John Nevius, *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*, Reprint of the 4th ed. (Nutley, N.J.: P & R Pub., 1973).

8 Roland Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church: And the Causes That Hinder It*, Reprint (Portland, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1997), 7.

9 Terry, “Indigenous Churches,” 484.

10 Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, *Transforming Culture: A Challenge for Christian Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), 15.

11 Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), 195.

12 Harvie M. Conn, “Ethnotheologies,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Moreau (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000).

bering in the millions.¹³ And, around the world, missionaries committed to indigenous church planting were also committed to Bible translations in the vernacular languages of the world, leading to the development of local language lexicons and grammars and other Christian resources. These were critical in preserving languages and often the cultural identities of hundreds of ethnic groups.¹⁴ Furthermore, one African theologian attributed the rise of newly developed nation states in West Africa to the three-self approach to planting churches.¹⁵

Over the years, some missiologists have seen this three-self formula as inadequate or even misguided. In a conclusion pertinent to this study on the indigenous principle, Christopher Little points out these three selfs are not necessarily indigenous: “the formula fails to take into consideration that it is possible to establish a three-self church and remain culturally irrelevant as a consequence of adopting imported theology, structures, leadership patterns, and worship styles.”¹⁶ In other words, the three selfs brought independence, but not necessarily indigeneity.

A number of missiologists have suggested additional selfs to actually move towards indigeneity. As mentioned earlier, Paul Hiebert suggested self-theologizing. Alan Tippett reworked the list to have six selfs (self-image, self-functioning, self-determining, self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-giving).¹⁷

The Many Meanings of *Indigenous*

When a term is used with the frequency that *indigenous* is used, it is worth understanding the origins and use of the term. The word derives from the Latin *indigena*, meaning “a native.”¹⁸

13 Carl Lawrence, *The Church in China: How It Survives and Prospers Under Communism* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1985), 31ff.

14 Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 164–67.

15 Johannes Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 188.

16 Little, “Mission in the Way of Paul: With Special Reference to Twenty-First Century Christian Mission,” 77.

17 Alan Richard Tippett, *Verdict Theology in Missionary Theory* (Lincoln Christian College Press, 1969).

18 “Indigenous,” in *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), <https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=indigenous>.

Indigenous has been used in botany and horticulture in identifying plants that were native to a particular region.¹⁹ A plant that has been growing and perpetuating in a particular place for thousands of years is considered indigenous. The language of church planting uses agricultural language, but the goal is actually attempting to plant something in every kind of soil rather than something that can thrive in only one soil and climate.

Indigenous in contemporary use refers to people who have been linked to a particular place for thousands of years. The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues describes indigenous peoples as those who have historic continuity to a pre-settler society with their own distinct culture, language, and beliefs. This same document describes these groups as minorities in their lands.²⁰ It recognizes that most people on the planet have migrated at one time or another to new lands. Therefore, even though people may have migrated several hundred years ago to a different land, they are not considered indigenous.

Further complicating matters, the field of anthropology has prioritized the study of “bona fide indigenous culture.”²¹ Secular anthropologists have viewed Christianity as a pollutant to truly indigenous cultures and, thus, have neglected any study of Christianized segments of a particular ethnic group.

In missiology, indigenous is used in two different ways. For Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson, an indigenous church exhibited signs of independence and self-sustainability. It had little to do with the culture of a particular people and more to do with encouraging the new church to take care of everything a church does without outside help. This approach encouraged local ownership from the beginning. Indigenous is also used to encourage a process of inculturation, a “process through which existing cultural and social practic-

19 J. Raymond Tallman, *An Introduction to World Missions* (Kendall/Hunt Pub. Co, 1989), 190; Zane Pratt, M. David Sills, and Jeff K. Walters, *Introduction to Global Missions* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2014), 215.

20 Oisika Chakrabarti, “Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous Voices: Factsheet” (United Nations: Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues), accessed October 1, 2024, https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfi/documents/5session_factsheet1.pdf.

21 Harvey Whitehouse, “Appropriated and Monolithic Christianity in Melanesia,” in *The Anthropology of Christianity*, ed. Fenella Cannell (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 296.

es can be fused with new Christian meaning.”²² A significant problem, and one reason for this article, is that missiologists will use the term in both ways without clarification.

In seeing the different ways people use the term *indigenous*, it is easy to see how confusing this can be, especially in our modern era. Word definitions change continuously. If someone told the average church member that he wanted to plant an indigenous church, it is likely the hearer would assume he intends to plant a church among minority indigenous peoples.²³ After all, what is an indigenous church in New York City or London? There is not a clear original culture in either of these cities, making it hard to know the focus of an indigenous church plant. Although the emphasis on indigenous church planting was useful for a period, the term is no longer helpful.

Consequences of an Indigenous Focus in Church Planting

In order to make a stronger case for a new way to think about church planting that reaches all nations, it is important to think about the consequences of an indigenous focus in church planting. What does an indigenous church look like? Often the assumption is that it will be ethnically homogenous. But is this type of church likely to achieve what we hope it will achieve? The following five statements highlight some issues that surface when indigeneity, and the frequently resulting ethnic homogeneity, is the priority.

An indigenous focus fosters an inward orientation for the church. Due to our sinful world, the human default is to divide from others and group with those perceived to be like us. This stands in contrast to the New Testament churches who were intended to welcome all who follow Christ and were encouraged to send co-laborers to be on mission as well as serve other churches.²⁴ John

22 Timothy Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2010), 346.

23 As an example of the missiological use of indigenous to refer specifically to aboriginal peoples, Tan Kang San in describing the church in Malaysia says: Christianity draws its adherences mostly from Chinese, Indians, and indigenous peoples.” In this case, Chinese and Indians are not considered indigenous. Kang San Tan, “Evangelical Missiology from an East Asian Perspective: A Study on Christian Encounter with People of Other Faiths,” in *Global Missiology for the 21st Century: The Iguassu Dialogue*, ed. William D. Taylor (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000), 298.

24 There is no indication of the early church segregating based on ethnicity. In Paul’s letters to Romans and Ephesians unity between Jews and gentiles in the church clearly stressed.

Carter lists one drawback of the indigenous principle is that it only gets to the initial establishment of indigenous churches, but not the ongoing work of welcoming and sending across cultures, which is core to the mission of the church.²⁵

When my wife and I were involved in international student ministry a number of years ago, we partnered with a fellow seminary student from Japan. He was particularly focused on reaching Japanese students with the goal of integrating them into the Japanese church in our city. That was the goal until the pastor of the Japanese church made it abundantly clear that he did not want Japanese students in the church. They had developed a comfortable culture of Japanese Americans and were not interested in newer, younger Japanese joining them. What my friend realized, grievously, was this church had become less of a church and more of a culture club. In this case, both groups are Japanese, but the prioritized focus on a single culture made the church unprepared for welcoming a new generation of Japanese. In other words, an indigenous church focus can lead to viewing the church as a culturally bounded set.²⁶

An indigenous focus assumes cultures are both static and siloed. Often attempts at indigenization have to adopt a caricature of a culture in order to make it appear indigenous. One can observe this tendency by looking at the entrance to Chinatown in San Francisco. It is an exaggerated expression of culture for the sake of tourists' superficial understanding of the culture. This same tendency to build off of a superficial understanding of culture can happen with church planting. The church planter assumes a cultural profile that is no longer accurate. Phil Zarns warns that “[m]yopically honoring a past synchronic indigeneity may become an obstacle to approaching people in the present locality with their ‘symbolic meanings’ of forms that ‘change with time.’”²⁷ Cultures never stop changing. This is due, in part, to ongoing cross-cultural interactions. Many missiologists and missionaries are stuck

25 John F. Carter, “The Indigenous Principle Revisited: Toward a Coactive Model of Missionary Ministry,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 1, no. 1 (1998): 73–82.

26 Mark Baker describes a bounded church as one that “creates a list of essential characteristics that determine whether a person belongs to that group....[and] have a sense of exclusion of those who do not meet the requirements.” Mark D. Baker, *Centered-Set Church: Discipleship and Community without Judgmentalism* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021), 21, 24; Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 107–36.

27 Phil Zarns, “Self-Localizing: The Indigenous Church in Context,” *Journal of the Evangelical Missiological Society* 4, no. 1 (2024): 35.

in an old paradigm of anthropology that viewed culture as unchanging and wholly distinct from other cultures.²⁸ Brian Howell and Jenell Williams Paris argue: “This is flat out wrong, all cultures have changed and continue to change.”²⁹ To observe these changes, one needs only to look at the adoption of coffee culture around the world or Swedish inspired home design due to Ikea. Globalization and urbanization (Glurbanization) have been accelerants for increased cultural interactions. If cultural indigeneity is prioritized, it is a moving target that is ultimately a misguided one.³⁰

An indigenous focus encourages ethnic identity over identity in Christ. Sherwood Lingenfelter sees an overemphasis on cultural identity as problematic: “Indigenization may lead to dead churches in the third and fourth generation of believers.”³¹ When indigeneity becomes the priority, cultural concerns begin to subvert the calling to identify in Christ alone. A church’s primary identity should be in Christ. We should have more in common with a sister or brother in Christ from the other side of the world than with someone who shares the same cultural heritage.³² A church should express the truths of Christ in the culture(s) of the context. Culture is merely a vehicle for gospel proclamation, however. An indigenous focus can shift the focus away from Christ.

An indigenous focus does not set the church up well for our urbanized and globalized present and future. The rapid growth of cities and increasing globalization has meant less and less homogeneity. When someone works in a diverse context and wants to invite a coworker from a different ethnic background to church,

28 Michael D. Crane, “To the Ends of the Earth through Strategic Urban Centers: Reexamining the Missions Mandate in Light of the New Testament’s Use of the Old Testament,” in *Advancing Models of Mission: Evaluating the Past and Looking to the Future*, ed. Kenneth Nehrbass, Aminta Arrington, and Narry Santos, Evangelical Missiological Society Series, No 29 (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2021), 100; Brian M. Howell and Jenell Williams Paris, *Introducing Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 77–78; Peter T. Lee and James Sung-Hwan Park, “Beyond People Group Thinking: A Critical Reevaluation of Unreached People Groups,” *Missiology: An International Review* 46, no. 3 (July 2018): 212–25.

29 Howell and Paris, *Introducing Cultural Anthropology*, 37.

30 One of the problems with the term indigenous is it can limit our understanding of culture. When missionaries began to apply anthropology to the work, they selectively began incorporating ethnographies. However, cultural anthropology is a broader and more complex field that William Smalley called the “science of culture.” William A. Smalley, “Anthropological Study and Missionary Scholarship,” *Practical Anthropology* 7, no. 3 (1960): 114.

31 Lingenfelter, *Transforming Culture*, 16.

32 Hesselgrave notes that pure autonomy is not actually a healthy posture for Christ’s church. David Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally: A Guide for Home and Foreign Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 366.

a truly indigenous church will feel unwelcoming to the coworker. Increasingly, people are learning to navigate a variety of cultures and, in places where different cultures come together, a hybrid culture becomes the norm. Even in homogeneous cultures, global youth culture is changing generations in such a way that indigenous would not be the appropriate term to use.³³ Cheong and Ro make a compelling case for contextualization that is mindful of globalization in their forthcoming book: *Emplacing Globalization: Contextualizing Global Mission among People, Places, and Processes*. They argue that the world is far more globalized than we think, and it has many implications for church and mission.³⁴ On a pragmatic level, when a church is not so deeply immersed in one culture, it is more ready to welcome other cultures as well as send out those who will take the gospel to places lacking in gospel witness.

An indigenous focus is not what we see in the New Testament. We have the most data about Paul's church planting efforts that span from Jerusalem around to Illyricum (Rom 15:19). It appears that Paul was more intent on planting churches in urban centers. The churches he helped start were inclusive of all the ethnic groups represented. The church in Antioch that sent Paul and Barnabas out was clearly multicultural (see Acts 13:1). The emphasis on bringing different ethnic groups together is an expression of the gospel breaking down barriers between different cultures (Eph 2:14). The church is to be "one new humanity" (Eph 2:15) which becomes a witness of God's work of reconciliation in Christ.³⁵ This also means that our central gathering principle is our unity in Christ, not our cultural identities. If this new humanity is going to succeed, members will need to find cultural common ground to express worship, teaching, and the many other ways in which culture plays

33 Dannie Kjeldgaard and Søren Askegaard, "The Glocalization of Youth Culture: The Global Youth Segment as Structures of Common Difference," *Journal of Consumer Research* 33 (2006): 231–47.

34 John Cheong and Jonathan Ro, *Emplacing Globalization: Contextualizing Global Mission among People, Places, and Processes* (Oxford: Regnum Press, 2024).

35 David E. Stevens, *God's New Humanity: A Biblical Theology of Multiethnicity for the Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2012).

a role in the gathering of the church. This means particular cultures take a back seat to a shared culture.³⁶

The Need for Local Expressions of the Church

Those who began to emphasize indigeneity were on to something vital to the process of establishing churches in new places. When the church remained tied to foreign support and leadership, the tie to support was an obstacle for the church to reach into the community. Lamin Sanneh has built a strong argument for the translatability of Christianity.³⁷ From the very beginning, Christianity was free to move into new cultures, to be articulated in different languages, and even for worship to take on new forms. When Christianity moves from place to place, it is able to take root there. Sanneh elaborates:

Christianity sought indigenous coefficients, and, finding them, flourished by them, so that both borrower and borrowed were transformed in a common direction.... Translation thus came to invest Christianity with indigenous solidity. The vernacular became a necessity for the life of the religion, the soil that nurtured the plant until its eminence acquired doctrinal heights.³⁸

Once the truths of the gospel are translated into a local language, the gospel moves into more homes and more hearts of people who were once lost. Throughout Christian history, when Christianity is understood in local languages and cultural forms, the church grows in those places.

In order for the church to multiply in a culture, there is a need for local leaders. As Paul and Barnabas established churches throughout the Mediterranean, leaders for the churches were chosen in each place. John Hügel observes this trend in 1 Corinthians: “The pericope 16:15-18 is key evidence that Paul intended for the church to generate leadership from among its own

36 The work of finding common ground and negotiating different cultures as one body of Christ is not simple or easy. The following works lay some groundwork in this field. Mark DeYmaz and George A. Yancey, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church: Mandate, Commitments, and Practices of a Diverse Congregation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2020); Mark DeYmaz and Bob Whitesel, *Re:MIX: Transitioning Your Church to Living Color* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016); Michael Crane, “Multicultural Churches in Global Cities,” in *The International Pastor Experience*, ed. David L. Packer (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015), 121–35; Nam-Chen Chan, “The Intercultural Church: Moving Beyond Mere Statistical Expressions of Multiethnicity,” *International Journal of Urban Transformation* 2 (April 2017): 83–102; Gerardo Marti, *A Mosaic of Believers: Diversity and Innovation in a Multiethnic Church* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

37 Sanneh, *Translating the Message*.

38 Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 70.

members, leaders concerned to serve and edify the church.”³⁹ Paul sought to raise up local leaders rather than import them.

A Reassessment of the Goal of Church Planting

The indigenous principle served the mission community well during a time of more isolated cultures. However, the term has now become confusing and misleading. Little concludes: “[I]n view of the fact that the three-self church formula is wrought with undeniable difficulties, one must search for another term to define Paul’s churches.”⁴⁰ To move towards language that better serves our purposes in planting healthy, culturally relevant churches in localities around the world, it is helpful to highlight some key points.

Planting Churches Rooted in Christ

Throughout the New Testament, our calling is to establish churches that build on Christ as the foundation (Matt 16:18; 1 Cor 3:11; Col 2:20). The missions charges given to Jesus’ disciples centered around the witness of Christ (Matt 28:18-20; Luke 24:46-47; John 20:21; Acts 1:8). Paul made it his goal for Christ to be the focus of his ministry (1 Cor 2:2). Culture must play a role in any human endeavor, but it must always be in Christ, through Christ, and for the glory of Christ. Devotion to Christ is not a cultural matter; it is “supercultural.”⁴¹ It is through devotion to Christ, as revealed through Scripture, that we make determinations about church teaching and activity. By centering around Christ, the congregation must discern what aspects of culture to embrace and what aspects need to confront or reject.

Planting Churches that are Local in Culture and Geography

It was stated earlier that Paul was more focused on planting churches based on geography than planting ethnic-based churches.⁴² Geography is the only sure way of reaching everyone with the gospel. The people group approach

39 John L. Hiigel, “Leadership in 1 Corinthians : an exegetical study in Paul’s ecclesiology” (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1999), 153.

40 Little, “Mission in the Way of Paul: With Special Reference to Twenty-First Century Christian Mission,” 79.

41 William A. Smalley, “What Are Indigenous Churches Like?,” *Practical Anthropology* 6, no. 3 (June 1959): 137.

42 For a more thorough discussion of this point, see: Michael D. Crane, “Urbanization and the Great Commission: Hitting the Refresh Button on Missiology,” in *The City Not Forsaken: Biblical Theories and Mission Practice*, ed. Michael D. Crane and Yong Yuan Teh (Kuala Lumpur: Greenhouse Publishing, 2023), 68–74.

does not adequately reach everyone. In cities, especially, people groups have become mixed, and cultures have blended. This means cities are filled with people who do not fit into an overly simplistic list of people groups.

This does not mean culture is discounted entirely. Culture plays a vital role in planting local churches. Simply put, people cannot be cultureless. Language, music, seating arrangement, style of teaching, expressions of worship and theology, leadership styles, and fellowship are all clothed in culture. It only makes sense to draw from culture the aspects that make the most sense in a particular locality.

Planting Churches that are Global

William Smalley wrote much about the indigenous church principle. As far back as 1959, Smalley already noticed an “inevitable” cultural shift due to connections to a global economy.⁴³ The process of decolonialization meant the global economy expanded and globalized, with each newly independent nation entering the global economy. Smalley could not have foreseen the ways technology has further connected the world. In the same way, the church has always been a global network and is at its best when it is able to draw from the church around the world for the sake of its mission. One of the things that has hurt our global mission effort has been the lack of cooperation between churches.⁴⁴ The New Testament portrays the early churches as quick to help one another as well as take joint ownership of carrying the gospel forth to new places.⁴⁵

Terminology That Helps Us Going Forward

The notion of an indigenous church is problematic on a number of levels. The term has been used to intend such different goals, resulting at the least in considerable confusion. If one applies the more contemporary use of *indigenous* to the work of church planting, it places a disproportionate focus on a particular homogenous culture. If a church is so indigenous that it cannot

43 Smalley, “What Are Indigenous Churches Like?” 161.

44 John Gilchrist, *The Christian Witness to the Muslim* (Benoni: Jesus to the Muslims, 1988), 392.

45 The church in Philippi gave financially to help Paul (Phil 4:14-18). Other churches helped the church in Jerusalem during famine (Rom. 15:25-27; 1 Cor. 16:3; 2 Cor 8:20-21). Paul went back to Antioch to report of his church planting efforts (Acts 14:27). Peter O’Brien makes the case that Ephesians calls for a unity that is broader than a local church and extends to the wider church. Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1999), 25–26.

or will not engage with other cultures, it is not really the church of Jesus. The church will inevitably take on cultural forms wherever it is planted, but when those cultural forms become the source of pride or are guarded to the point that mission is restricted, then it is a problem.

No matter what terms are chosen, there will be an insufficiency in communicating all that the term should convey. This author suggests the term *local* is preferred over *indigenous* because it captures the geographical aspect. *Local* does not get bogged down by a focus on a particular culture. Although Zarns maintains the use of the term *indigenous* because he defines it as *local*: “By such a framework, anyone can participate in a locality, relating in differing ways to the world and their immediate neighbors.”⁴⁶ If that is the case, then *local* is the directly understood term.

In any particular locality, there is a need to plant different churches based on language and other contextual needs. For example, if a city in Europe has a large Vietnamese population, it is good to plant a church that prioritizes the Vietnamese population in terms of language and accessibility. This church would not be an indigenous church, but it would be a local church. *Local* is inclusive of everyone, whether they have been in a place long-term or have just arrived. For this church to be healthy, they would be seeking to share the gospel to others in the city. This means this church is not merely for the Vietnamese in the city, this church is outpost of the gospel for all who come.

The emphasis on *local* rather than *indigenous* aids in a shift of mindset that prioritizes all the people in a geographical area, rather than those that fit a particular cultural expression of a particular ethnic group. If we aim for culturally homogenous churches, we will never be able to plant enough churches to include everyone. There are too many cultures and subcultures. The New Testament paradigm was to plant churches in a place that draws on local cultural expression, while continuing to welcome all cultures in a place. Culture is important, even necessary, but should not eclipse the role of the church as welcoming to people of all nations.

An emphasis on planting local churches does not negate a connection to the wider Body of Christ. There is an element of interdependence among church-

⁴⁶ Zarns, “Self-Localizing: The Indigenous Church in Context,” 34.

es.⁴⁷ While a local congregation has the resources to be the church fully in a place, it is not healthy to be cut off from other churches. As noted previously, the language of indigenous and self-sustainability can give the false assumption that each local church is to be isolated. The posture of planting *local* rather than *indigenous* churches helps a new church maintain a vision for reaching a whole locality.

Church planting in the twenty-first century requires updated terminology that can foster church planting that is biblical as well as aware of a world that has become more urban, more locally diverse, and more globally connected. Our prayer is we plant churches that are set up to welcome the nations and readily send witnesses to the nations. This is the church's work.

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47 Proponents of indigenous church planting recognize the importance for churches to relate to one another for mutual encouragement and help. But the drive towards true indigeneity can cause a church to pull away from others. Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church*, 150–51; Charles Brock, *Indigenous Church Planting: A Practical Journey* (Neosho, MO: Church Growth International, 1994), 35.

Indigenization and Contextualization

A Case of Russian-speaking Believers in Central Asia and Israel

Doug Tate

Introduction

This study aims to explore the process of indigenization and contextualization among Russian-speaking believers in Central Asia and Israel. Context is “surrounding conditions – the circumstances or events that form the environment within which something exists or takes place,”¹ but “indigenizing” refers to increasing local participation in tasks previously performed by outsiders.² Indigenous people can collaborate with former colonialists to revive their suppressed ideas and practices.³ The cooperation presupposes the pro-

1 *Encarta World English Dictionary* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 392. In this definition, it is very likely that “something” refers to the reality of *logos* and *ethos*.

2 *Ibid.*, 915.

3 The suppressed ideas and practices may include indigenous language, religious rituals, and indigenous systems of nomadism and agriculture.

cess of reconciliation and decolonization⁴ in that the dynamics of symbiosis is indispensable.

With these definitions in mind, I will first examine how the religious context and political history of Central Asia and Israel shape the presuppositions missionaries must consider. And then, I will explore how the social positioning and practices⁵ of Russian-speaking believers reveal missional landscapes. Why are those believers significant? What commonalities exist between these distinctive worlds?⁶ What might a divine plan look like for Russian-speaking peoples in these two regions?

Religious Context of the Russian Speakers in Two Regions

Central Asia is home to five main ethnic groups (Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, and Tajiks), primarily Turkic-speaking, with nomadic traditions among the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz.⁷ Historically, this region was a crossroads of religious influence: Iranian Zoroastrianism, Indian Buddhism, and aboriginal Tengrism before Islam spread in the 8th century. Although Nestorian Christianity emerged during Mongol rule in the 13th and 14th centuries, Sunni Islam remained dominant until the late 19th century.⁸

As the Russian Empire expanded southward in the late 18th century, Central Asians were gradually exposed to Orthodox Christianity. The formation of the Soviet Union in 1922 transformed indigenous Islamic culture into an atheistic communist society.⁹ Although the socialist regime initially en-

4 Reconciliation refers to efforts to repair the relationships between indigenous peoples and settler societies by acknowledging past injustice, while decolonization is the process of dismantling communist ideologies – authoritarian governance, centralized economic structure, Soviet-imposed borders, and the like.

5 Social positioning, whether as a majority, minority, or marginalized group, is a missional indicator, while practices are missional expressions.

6 Both regions are characterized by monotheistic faith – Islam and Judaism.

7 Tajiks are Persian speakers.

8 For the sake of ethnic Russians, V. V. Bartold summarized the religious background of Central Asia. See, V. V. Bartold, *Istoriya Kulturnoi Jizni Turkestana* (Leninrad: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1927), 1-66.

9 The Soviet Union brought into Central Asia spiritual death, as lamented by Nursultan Nazarbayev: “The long years of building communism were accompanied by the destruction of mosques, churches, holy places and other religious buildings, active anti-religious propaganda and even the physical destruction of representatives of the clergy of all confessional movements, including the Muslim clergy.” *Kriticheskoe Desiyatiletie* (Almaty: Atamura, 2003), 89.

couraged the creation of a peaceful paradise, it ultimately disillusioned local ethnicities, culminating in its collapse in 1991.

During the transitional period (1987-1995), Central Asians sought to fill the spiritual void left by the regime, restoring traditional Islam in reaction to the influx of foreign religious organizations. While foreign religious organizations sent their workers into Central Asia and reached out to the nationals, local Muslims viewed these foreigners as cultural colonialists.¹⁰

In the past decade, however, external religious influence has waned, and local governments recognize only registered religious organizations. In Kazakhstan, for instance, Muslims comprise 69.3% of the population, Russian Orthodox believers make up 17%, and evangelical Christians account for just 0.2%.¹¹ Other Central Asian countries reflect similar demographics, with Muslims as the majority.¹²

The region of Palestine has been home to local Muslim Arabs for over a millennium, beginning with the Islamic expansion in the 7th century until now. Under Ottoman Empire (1517-1917), Islam became the official religion.¹³ However, the political upheavals of the 20th century drastically altered the local demography that entailed a switched political and religious landscape.¹⁴ Today, Israel's religious composition is predominantly Jewish (73.5%), fol-

10 In the early 2000, strict countries like Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan banned foreign religious movements. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan also adjusted religious laws in response, with local scholars critiquing foreign religious activities as potentially divisive. Cf. Karabaeva Z, "Voprosii Pravovovo Obesptcheniya Religioznoi Deyatelnosti v Kiruigizstane," *Prava Cheloveka na Svobodu Religii I Verisповedanii* (Almati: Universitet im D.A. Kunaeva, 2011), 60-67.

11 <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/kazakhstan/summaries/>

12 Oleg Korotki highlights several factors contributing to the revivalistic phenomena within Islam: the massive publication of Quran, the increase of missionary activities and in mosque construction. Oleg Korotki, *Philosophy and Methodology of Education in Central Asia Context* (PhD Dissertation [in Russian], Baptist Bible Seminary, 2010), 70-71.

13 The Empire allowed thousands of Sephardic Jews to live with Palestinian Arabs.

14 In its early years, Israel aimed to establish a secular framework, potentially including a constitution. However, amid ongoing conflicts, it shifted toward nationalism, and in 2018, the parliament formally declared Israel a "Jewish" State, solidifying a religious-ethnic identity. This contrasts with early Jewish scholarship, which advocated for a democratic vision in the Middle East including constitutionalism and the separation of religion and state. See, Jacob Robinson, "A Democracy in an Autocratic World," in *Israel: Its Role in Civilization*, edited by Moshe Davis (New York: Harper, 1956), 146-64; Yehuda L. Kohn, "The Emerging Constitution of Israel," in *Israel: Its Role in Civilization*, edited by Moshe Davis (New York: Harper, 1956), 130-45; and, Hayim Greenberg, "Religion and the State in Israel," in *Israel: Its Role in Civilization*, edited by Moshe Davis (New York: Harper, 1956), 165-76.

lowed by Muslim (18.1%), Christian (1.9%), Druze (1.6%), and other (4.9%, 2022 estimate).¹⁵

Within this framework, individual identities often blur in favor of national collectivity,¹⁶ which tends to overlook non-Jewish minorities. Russian speakers in Israel encounter multi-layered Jewish society, including Ultra-orthodox (*haredim*), national religious orthodox (*dati-leumi*), traditional orthodox (*Masorti*), and secular (*heloni*) communities. Russian-speaking believers often face restrictions in expressing their faith and securing places of worship.¹⁷

Political History of the Russian Speakers'

Permeation into the Islamic and Jewish Worlds

First, the spread of ethnic Russians into Central Asia began in the 18th and 19th centuries, during a period of vigorous colonization by the Russian Empire and Western powers amid a political vacuum among indigenous peoples.¹⁸ By the early 20th century, the Russian Empire had established control over Central Asia, with ethnic Russian military personnel, administrators, merchants, and farmers settling in the region and influencing its political, economic, and social landscape. V. V. Bartold estimates they constituted about 12.5 % of the population.¹⁹ The tribal and nomadic lifestyle of ethnic groups made it difficult for them to confront colonial powers.

In the 1930s, Stalin forced relocation of ethnic and non-ethnic Russians to develop agriculture and industry in Central Asia.²⁰ Before and after WWII, he deported Volga Germans, Crimean Tatars, and Chechen-Ingush to Siberia or Central Asia.²¹ To maintain control, the communist party assigned Russian nationals to lead administrative positions in the region. It is estimated

15 <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/israel/>

16 "Judaism," *The Harper Collins Dictionary of religion*, edited by Jonathan Z. Smith (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995), 592.

17 Jews are Jews whether they are religious, secular, atheist, or Buddhist, but if Jews accept Jesus as the Messiah, they are no longer Jews, as per Rabbinic law.

18 The territorial expansion of the Russian Empire ranges 1795-1914: the territory of Kazakhs (1796-1855) and the territory of other Central Asian ethnics (1855-1914). Patrick. K. O'Brien, ed., *Atlas of World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 180.

19 Bartold, *Istoriya Kulturnoi*, 149. For instance, from 1893 to 1912 were 2,513,000 Russian peasants in *Semirechenskoi Oblasti* and 2,307,000 in *Semipalatinskoi Oblasti*.

20 O'Brien, *Atlas of World History*, 223.

21 O'Brien, *Atlas of World History*, 236.

that, by the 1970-80s, the number of ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan nearly matched that of indigenous Kazakhs.²²

During the social upheavals of the 1990s, however, Russian-speaking individuals rapidly repatriated to their home countries,²³ due to various reasons.²⁴ Five Central Asian countries experienced serious population decline.²⁵ Today, Russian speakers account for 16.8% of Kazakhstan's population, totaling 3,403,681 out of 20,260,006.²⁶

Second, the migration of Russian-speaking Jews to Israel had several waves: first Aliyah ("immigration"/Going up to Jerusalem) – about 25,000 immigrants (1882-1903); second Aliyah – about 40,000 immigrants (1904-1914).²⁷ After the Romanov dynasty fell, many Jews actively joined the socialistic movement of the Bolsheviks, but about 35,000 immigrants made the third Aliyah to Palestine (1919-1923).²⁸ During WWII, Soviet Jews fought against Nazi Germany, and after the war, the USSR provided a substantial support for Jewish people to establish the State of Israel, perhaps intending to create communist ally in the Middle East. However, Israel gradually took a different political route – Zionistic and democratic. In 1967, Israel won Six-Day war

22 Sebastien Peyrouse, "The Russian Minority in Central Asia: Migration, Politics, and Language," translated from Russian, Occasional Paper #297 (Kennan Institute of W. Wilson International Center, 2008), 4.

23 A church podium in southern Kazakhstan bears inscriptions in two languages: "Lord, help me" (in German) and "We preach the crucified Christ" (in Russian), symbolizing the community's recent history of ethnic migration. The emigration of multi-ethnic groups includes Russians, Belarussians, Ukrainians, Georgians, Germans, Greeks, Moldovans, Azerbaijanians, and Armenians.

24 Peyrouse highlights several key reasons for the rapid emigration of ethnic Russians: the rejection of dual citizenship (between Russia and Central Asia), the promotion of linguistic nationalism, the ethnicization of political life, the deterioration of the education system, a pessimistic view of the future, and concerns over potential Islamization. Peyrouse, "The Russian Minority," 1-22.

25 Peyrouse detailed the 2007 statistics of Russian emigration from five Central Asia republics. Peyrouse, "The Russian Minority," 3-5. In May 2014, however, the Russian Federation established the Eurasian Economic Union with Kazakhstan, so the further emigration of ethnic Russians has been curbed.

26 <https://www.cia.gov/.../kazakhstan/>

27 During 1882-1903 there were about 25,000 immigrants primarily from Russia. Bernard Reich, *A Brief History of Israel*, 2nd Edition (Washington D.C.: Checkmark Book, 2008), 320. Many fled the Russian Empire to escape pogroms, and with the spirit of pioneers, they relocated to Ottoman controlled Palestine and laid the groundwork for future Jewish society.

28 Reich, *A Brief History of Israel*, 320.

which entailed another immigration: approximately 220,000 Russian-speaking Jews left for Israel during the 70s.²⁹

By the 1990s, amid political and economic crisis and rising ethnic nationalism, Russian Jews began emigrating to other Western countries, along with almost a million immigrants to Israel. This influx significantly altered Israel's demographics. Following the outbreak of war between Ukraine and Russia, tens of thousands of Russian and Ukrainian Jews also moved to Israel. Today, Russian speakers, one of the largest immigrant groups, roughly represent 15% (1,500,000) of Israel's population of 10 million.³⁰

Social Positioning and Activities of the Russian Speakers in the Two Cultures

What is the social position of 3.4 million Slavic people in Kazakhstan? Over generations, they have been positioned there, becoming fully assimilated and acculturated.³¹ To the local ethnics, they are identified as Russian Orthodox, with icons depicting Jesus as a Russian God. In areas where ethnic Russians live, Central Asians recognize that they form sub-cultural enclaves that contain Slavic customs, traditions, and aspirations. Ethnic Russians either love to remain with their ascribed privileges (European history, Slavic culture, and rich traditions) or strive to achieve new positions in wider social matrix of Central Asia.³²

How are 1.5 million Russian speakers contextualizing themselves in Israel? There are two social layers – Jewish and Israeli. The first two generations prior to 1991 have leaned toward Jewishness. Jewish society has been hospitable for those who had ethnic kinship, but simultaneously hostile for those without Jewish roots. As the second generation Russian-speaking soldiers enter the Israeli army, for instance, they often undergo conversion processes to attain Jewish status. According to Anita Shapira, the first generation Russian-speaking immigrants after the fall of Soviet Union are, however,

29 Delia Rahmonova-Schwarz, "Migrations during the Soviet Period and in the Early Years of USSR's Dissolution: A Focus on Central Asia," *Revue Europeenne des Migrations Internationales*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (2010), 23.

30 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Jews_in_Israel

31 So, ethnic Russians visiting the Russian Federation often encounter discrimination from native Russians, who perceive them as being Central Asian rather than truly Russian. On the other hand, some Central Asians acknowledge them as their fellow citizens.

32 They invest in "ethnicized businesses" (cf. "The Russian Minority," 15) or often act as political, economic, and educational liaisons between Central Asia and Russia.

exposed to “a divided society . . . between religious and nonreligious, . . . left and right,”³³ which is less collectivistic. In fact, those Russian speakers who experienced the totalitarian ideology in Soviet Union become secular and multicultural.³⁴ It is thus feasible for them either to preserve their ascribed Russian status or to navigate their achievable positionings in Israeli society.

Missional Living of Russian-Speaking Believers as Minority Movement

In the Republic of Kazakhstan, there are 301 Russian-speaking Orthodox churches.³⁵ While I do not know the total number of their membership, it is well known that the Russian Orthodox is supportive to local government and officially recognized by it. Apart from orthodox churches which are liturgical, there are evangelistic Russian-speaking churches. Evangelical Russian Baptist membership in Kazakhstan, for example, stands at 9187 across 256 churches (2023),³⁶ being a minority group among 3,403,681 Russian-speaking citizens (0.27%) and among 19.9 million total population (0.046%).

In Israel, there are 280 Messianic congregations.³⁷ Russian-speaking churches are, whether they want to be called or not, categorized as part of Messianic churches. Russian-speaking believers make up around 7447 across 136 congregations, being a minority compared to 1,500,000 Israeli Russian speakers (0.49%) and to 10 million total Israeli population (0.074%).

How then do Evangelical Russian Baptists carry out their missions? The overall ministry spectrum of the so-called Evangelical Christian Baptist Unions³⁸

33 Anita Shapira, *Israel A History*, trans. Anthony Berris (Waltham, MA: Brandeis Univ., Press, 2012), 453.

34 Shapira views the current Israeli society as “a society of diverse cultural communities.” Shapira, *Israel A History*, 465.

35 <https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/qogam/activities> – religious sphere.

36 The downsized Union of Evangelical Christian Baptist in Kazakhstan was due to the continuous emigration of its members. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_of_Evangelical_Christian_Baptists_of_Kazakhstan.

37 The epithet “Messianic” derives from their faith in Jesus as the Messiah of the Jews. Based on the report of the Caspari Center, Messianic congregations account for 15323 members, in *Mishkan: A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People* (Issue 86 / 2023), 7. On the other hand, Israeli government statistics presents a different picture: 36,630 non-Arabic Christians, which includes all aged from 1-85+, though. *Oclosiya lefi kvutzat oclosiyah, dat, gil, vmin – omdal mefaked haoclosiyah* (2022).

38 In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the current denominational landscape resulted from a merger between most Protestant Germans (Mennonites, Moluccans, and Lutherans from 1946 to 1991) and minority Ukrainian and Russian Baptists (1917 to 1991).

reflects the transition of ethnic Germans to a Russian majority. In 1992 when the Union of ECB of Kazakhstan was formed, however, it collaborated with four other Central Asian Baptist Unions, organizing annual conferences for pastors, evangelists, and teachers. Under the umbrella of Union, there are regional associations and autonomous local churches that primarily focus their ministry on Slavic people. Yet educational institutions, emphasizing the importance of contextualized ministry, provide appropriate trainings for future leaders.

What are the missional activities of Russian-speaking believers in Israel? Their ministry lacks systematic organization due to the absence of a unified denominational structure.³⁹ Nevertheless, various pseudo-denominations have emerged among Russian-speaking churches, including Pentecostal, Living Israel, and “baptistic” fellowships, which aim to reach Russian immigrants and socially marginalized peoples. Many churches often adopt charismatic worship styles to attract individuals seeking spiritual support. Baptist churches emphasize expository preaching, relational evangelism and discipleship. Particularly, Baptist-minded leaders accentuate theological education for the existing and potential church leaders, aiming at church multiplication all over Israel.

Indigenization and Contextualization

Missiological Necessity for Ethnic Russians in Central Asia. During the colonial and communist periods (1860s-1991), ethnic Russians invaded, controlled, and transformed the Central Asian region. They extracted and exploited its natural resources while asserting dominance over the native peoples. Although their presence contributed to the modernization of indigenous communities⁴⁰ and the industrialization of the region,⁴¹ their colonial and totalitarian

39 Messianic Judaism, a newly born phenomenon in Israel, is non-denominational or often anti-denominational.

40 Russian pedagogists utilized existing Islamic schools (*madrashas*) and seminaries to implement European way of education – Russian literacy, law, arithmetic, and craft. Bartold, *Istoriya Kulturnoi*, 131-32.

41 Masanov points out that “Only in the 20th century did industrial production come to Kazakhstan, when the process of urbanization began.” N. E. Masanov, et al, *Istoriya Kazakhstana, Narodui I Kulturui* (Almaty: Daik-Press, 2001), 18.

practices⁴² also triggered widespread discontent, leading to rebellion and migration among the ethnic groups. So, with historical grievance against ethnic Russians, the five Republics of Central Asia undertook under indigenous sovereignty the process of ethnicization in every area of life (politics, public service, education, culture) as a way of retribution.⁴³ These phenomena are the signs of decolonization which cannot be completely pursued without the process of reconciliation.

Who can then take an initiative in the process of reconciliation between Russian-speakers and Central Asians? Evangelical Russian Baptists can take that issue into serious consideration because they are representatives of ethnic Russians.⁴⁴ Ethnic Russians might ask themselves: “Were our parents forced to relocate to Central Asia as political victims, or did they volunteer to the region? Did they contribute to oppression under communist ideology?⁴⁵ If Central Asians harbor grievances against us, can we create a safe space for them to share their trauma? How can we help reduce unresolved biases, contempt and discrimination toward one another?” By addressing these questions, Evangelical Russian Baptists can pursue reconciliation both individually and institutionally.⁴⁶

Was there any example of indigenizing partnership in Central Asia? During and after Perestroika,⁴⁷ when Russian Bibles were scarce, foreign mission

42 Gavin R.G. Hambly notes that “the Soviets developed an ingenious strategy for neutralizing the two common denominators . . . Islamic culture and Turkish ethnicity.” Practically, SU consolidated individual landholdings and labor into state-controlled farms. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-Central-Asia-102306/Under-Russian-Rule>.

43 Peyrouse, “The Russian Minority,” 13-14.

44 Historical grievances extend even to Russian-speaking believers. In fact, ethnic Russian and Slavic believers took part in peasant colonization during the imperial period.

45 Or “were my/our grand-parents part of imperial colonizer?”

46 Its metaphysical basis can be found even in the theological underpinnings of Russian Orthodoxy, particularly its emphasis on interpersonal relationships within the doctrine of Trinity. Michael A. Meerson argues that “the Holy Trinity [is] ontological love, over-flowing and self-diffusive, excluding the absolute loneliness of the one and consummating itself in the eternal communing of the three divine persons.” Michael A. Meerson, *The Trinity of Love in Modern Russian Theology* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1998), xix. The Orthodox anthropological understanding of “personality” as a “*sobornyi*” entity, rather than a component of collectivism, should be deeply considered in the process of reconciliation. *Sobornost* . . . ‘spiritual harmony based on freedom and unity in love,’ in *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged*, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. (1976), 3:2161.

47 In Russian, “rebuilding,” which means political and economic reform.

organizations⁴⁸ produced illustrated children's Bibles, leading many Russian speakers to faith. These organizations also supported linguistic contextualization efforts in the region's Bible translation projects.⁴⁹ A "Biblica" project with a group from GCC and International Mission Board with ethnic editors produced *indigenized* scripture for Russian-speaking Central Asians familiar with Islamic culture.⁵⁰

How can then Evangelical Russian Baptist churches be vital partners in the process of indigenization? The first strategic approach is planting churches targeting *Russian speakers* in urban and small-town areas of Central Asia⁵¹ The second approach is to reach native Asians. Russian-speaking believers have established "House of Prayer" (*Dom Molitviy*) churches, which attract *Central Asians* and enable them to hold native worship services within these host Russian churches. God raises up visionaries from Russian Baptist churches to engage in cross-cultural ministry. Russian Baptist churches sometimes collaborate with indigenous church leaders to help them minister to their own communities. Fortunately, some Protestant churches actively engage multiethnic communities, including younger generations,⁵² while Orthodox churches primarily attract ethnic Russians.

Outreach to Central Asians in small towns and villages requires a different approach, as they often preserve pagan practices and Islamic folk traditions, resisting outside influences.⁵³ Ethnic Russian believers can humbly facilitate

48 Bible League, Bible Mission, and Institute for Bible Translation produced their own pictorial Bibles for Russian-speaking children.

49 IBT translated the Bible into Tajik (1992), Uzbek (2016), and Turkmen (2017).

50 Artemev explains Central Asians' view of Quran as follows: "(They) 'believe that the Quran was the last in the chain of revelations from Allah, which includes the hundred scrolls sent down to the ancient prophets (alayhi-s-salam), as well as the Taurat (Torah), Zabur (Psalms) and Injil (Gospel).'" A.I. Artemev, et al, *Religii v Kazakhstane*, Vol. I: Filosofiya I Istoriya Religii (Almaty: Antei, 2002), 6. Therefore, *Svyashennoe Pisanie* (Holy Scripture) published in 2003 offered a semantic translation of the Torah, Prophets, Psalms, and Gospels, using name *vsivushniy* (the Most High = Allah) for God, and into *Isii Masich* for Jesus, aligning with Islamic terms, which had faded during Soviet times in favor of *heristos* (Christ).

51 The process of a mother church reproducing a daughter church has proven to be an effective and replicable model.

52 Korotki observes that in major cities like Alma-Ata, Bishkek, Dushanbe, Tashkent, and Ashgabat, postmodernism has influenced many young Central Asians, leading them to view Christian and Islamic values as relative. Korotki, *Philosophy and Methodology*, 68-69.

53 For details of the cultural modes and *ethos* of five Central Asia countries, particularly regarding those rural dwellers see, Korotki, *Philosophy and Methodology*, 24-69.

dialogues that encourage indigenous people to raise probing questions about their religious tradition and reorient it into correct worldview and ethos.⁵⁴ After attending a course on Messianism, my Russian students learned how to ask thoughtful questions to local Central Asians. They would say, “The Quran gives Jesus the title ‘Isa Masiah,’ right? But what does ‘Masiah’ really mean?” Later, one shared, “I used to be afraid to share the gospel with Muslims. Now I can confidently explain how Jesus is the Savior, not just a prophet, by using this very title from the Quran.” Ethnic Russians, with their language barriers,⁵⁵ are unlikely to effectively reach sedentary and nomadic dwellers in remote areas. Instead, Central Asian ethnic believers, supported by Russian Baptist churches, can engage these communities through “translatable” methods like storytelling, poetry, proverbs, and music.⁵⁶

Missiological Challenge for Russian-Speaking Believers in Israel. As indicated in III-A, contextualization poses challenges for Russian-speaking believers in Israel. To succeed in assimilation, Russian speakers establish subcultural communities within the broader Israeli society.⁵⁷ Like various ethnic synagogues, churches can serve as primary platforms for new immigrants to adapt to their new environment and achieve social positions. At a micro level, the Russian-speaking church can foster social dynamics through the active participation of its members, each entrusted with specific rights and

54 As a reformed Muslim, Irshad Manji who experienced the freedom of her soul in a relocated place raised self-critical questions about Islam theology, hermeneutics, and praxis: “Will we snap out of our rites and spark our imagination in order to free Muslims worldwide from fear, hunger, and illiteracy? Will we move past the superstition that we can’t question the Quran? By openly asking where its verses come from, why they’re contradictory, and how they can be differently interpreted, we’re not violating anything more than tribal totalitarianism. If my analysis is wrong, can *you* (‘fellow Muslims’) explain why no other religion is producing as many terrorist travesties and human rights transgressions in the name of God?” Irshad Manji, *The Trouble with Islam: A Wake-up Call for Honesty and Change* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2003), 236.

55 A Russian living in western Kazakhstan speaks fluent Kazakh but struggles with his ethnic language.

56 Harvie M. Conn defines indigenization as “a term describing the ‘translatability’ of the universal Christian faith into the forms and symbols of the particular customs of the world,” Harvie M. Conn, “Indigenization,” *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Moreau (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2000), 481.

57 Shapira, *Israel A History*, 456. Shapira takes note of new phenomenon among Russian immigrants who had not known a community life in their native country and now desire for a Russian speaking community that does not encounter criticism from the Israeli establishment. Of course, Christian or Messianic congregation who wants to rent is not always welcome by local landlords, but its formation is not prohibited.

responsibilities.⁵⁸ Theologically, the church as the body of Christ is not at society's periphery but rather at its central core, as illustrated in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (1:20-23; 3:10). To reach out to Russian speakers, like-minded church leaders emphasize the formation and maturity of local faith communities. Encouragingly, in major cities, there are church-planting candidates and practitioners aged 40 to 50 actively engaged in this business.⁵⁹ These individuals play key roles in fostering formative faith communities.

In a welcoming local church, the dependent and vulnerable individuals become a meaningful agent in which various social patterns arise: Reflection on life in the Former Soviet Union, new look at gospel truths within their cultural context, and navigating complex issues like interracial wars, religious nationalism, and messianic Judaism. For instance, many Israeli believers tend to overlook 2,000 years of Christian history under God's providence, emphasizing Midrashic over doctrinal interpretation of the scripture. As this tension reflects the imbalance between Scripture's universal truths and cultural distinctions,⁶⁰ my Russian-speaking national partner's statement should not be underestimated: "The 95% of Gospel content is far more important than the 5-10% of cultural aspects." Believers from the Former Soviet Union, exposed to Orthodox and Protestant traditions, naturally connect with global evangelical Christians, as seen with Alexander Men. As an orthodox priest, Men had been freely associated with Protestant believers. Repatriated Russian-speaking believers are also receptive to Christian theology, including Jesus' divinity and the Trinity. Their openness to Western Judeo-Christian civilization⁶¹ is vital to the growth and maturity of evangelical communities in Israel.

58 Social positioning theory, as an extension of critical realism, clarifies how individuals and objects "are relationally organized as instances of community components." Stephen Pratten, "Social Positioning Theory and Dewey's Ontology of Persons, Objects and Offices," *Journal of Critical Realism*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (2022), 288.

59 Four brothers we relate to became believers during the tumultuous '90s, felt divinely called to Israel, and are now planting churches.

60 James E. Plueddemann, *Leading Across Cultures: Effective Ministry and Mission in the Global Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 150

61 Abba Eban, valuing modern Western civilization which the Hebrew spirit has profoundly affected, wanted to position Israel "not as a national entity of the Middle East but as the Mediterranean country that influenced the Western world spiritually and accepts it," "Nationalism and Internationalism in Our Day," in *Israel: Its Role*. 22, 127-28.

First-generation Russian-speaking believers are focused on establishing themselves in a new context, so outreach beyond their community is not their immediate priority. Having come from the Former Soviet Union and trained within Baptist traditions, including IMB, they are likely to see their 2nd and 3rd generations to reach Former Soviet Union Russian speakers with the gospel.⁶²

Conclusion

Why should we seriously consider Russian speakers as potential people group in these two challenging worlds? First, geographical and demographical reasons rooted in geopolitical events highlight their significance. Just as European believers have reached out to Africans and North American Christians to South Americans, Russian speakers – long integrated into Central Asia and immigrated to Israel – can impact the two monotheistic-religious worlds of the south. The presence of Russian-speaking believers, within the framework of divine sovereignty, is a unique and fundamental aspect of social reality that cannot be reversible.

Second, the religious implications are profound. Russian-speaking believers, especially Baptists, embody a blend of Russian Orthodox and Protestant evangelical traditions. Their influence extends into the *monolithic* Islamic world alongside Central Asian believers, while those in Israel engage actively in church planting as explicit and implicit norms. This positioning, unconsciously competing and breaking any cultural hegemony, suggests that these minority groups are well equipped to fulfill the *missio Dei* in their contexts.

Finally, ethnic Russians, including Russian Jews, are patient and resilient, akin to farmers waiting for the right season to cultivate the soil. Russian literature often uses land as a symbol of the Russian spirit. Leo Tolstoy notes, “Spring is the time for making plans and resolutions, and Levin, like a tree which in the spring-time does not yet know in which direction and what manner its young shoots and twigs . . . will develop, did not quite know what work on his beloved land he was going to take in hand, but he felt that his

62 Shapira, *Israel A History*, 455. Shapira rightly observed that “The immigrants from Russia did not ‘divorce’ the country of their birth. Connection with the *Rodina* (motherland), Russian culture, and preservation of the Russian language were all important to them.”

mind was full of the finest plans and resolutions”⁶³ These analyses strengthen our conviction as expatriates that the sovereign God is using His called ones in Central Asia and Israel as the disciples of the Messiah.

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⁶³ Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, trans. Louise & Aylmer Maude (New York: Everyman's Library, 1992), 181.

Multiple Cognitive Orientations (MCO):

A Proposed Learning Theory for Indigenization in Pastoral and Church Leadership Training

Trevor Yoakum

Practitioners for Majority World pastoral training must keep two foci in tension. On the one hand, they must ensure that their educational methods, teaching strategies, and lesson plans are contextualized for their target population. That focus is on localization. Yet, at the same time, they must ensure that their learning goals and objectives share certain universal features. Otherwise, trained ministers from one continent may not share a common point of reference with church leaders from another part of the world. That focus is on globalization. This tension is true for all manner of pastoral and church leadership training, from institutional to non-formal theological education. Pastoral and church leadership training, then, must become *glocal*.¹

1 Bob Roberts, *Transformation: How Glocal Churches Transform Lives and the World*, ; Bob Roberts, *Glocalization: How Followers of Jesus Engage a Flat World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007). “Glocalization,” has been a popular expression since Roberts’ works on the subject.

Four forms of glocalization for missiology include “vernacularization . . . nationalization, transnationalization [and] *indigenization*” (emphasis mine).² Indigenization in education, including theological education, seeks to maintain a healthy tension between global and local with respect to the use of traditional teaching strategies. Educators, intent on indigenization, should adopt learning models that reflect this approach. However, educational learning theories that embrace indigenization that are not antagonistic to the missionary task are hard to find. This article introduces *multiple cognitive orientations* (MCO) as a proposed learning theory for indigenized church leadership training.³ A description of MCO and specific examples in sub-Saharan Africa will explain both the theory and practice of this missiological approach to indigenization.

Three Axes of Cognitive Processing

Multiple cognitive orientations is a proposed learning theory whose central premise is that human cognition is not a monolithic phenomenon. Rather,

2 Victor Roudometof, “Forms of Religious Glocalization: Orthodox Christianity in the *Longue Durée*,” *Religions* 5, no. 4 (2014), 1017-1036; <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel5041017>.

Roudometof identifies four types of glocalizations. Each represents a distinctive manner of “fusion between religious universalism and religious particularism,”

“Vernacularization blends religious universalism with specific vernacular languages. This glocalization is certainly far more common in pre-modern or pre-literate cultures, in which access to sacred texts was limited and religious efficacy could be tied to a specific language.”

“Nationalization operates through the use of religion as a potential source for nation formation or the intertwining of religious and national markers. The Church of England is perhaps emblematic of such a relationship, but it is not an isolated example.”

“Transnationalization,” is a process in which “[t]he global construction of nation-states and the nationalization of their citizens have necessarily created a residual category of ‘transnationals’ (*i.e.*, all those currently residing within a host state but who are not viewed as belonging to the host nation). In this sense, transnationalization represents the other facet of global nationalization. In the context of migration, transnational people reconstitute their ties to both host and home countries, and they engage in a creative process of blending elements from both points of reference.”

“Indigenization,” in comparison to the previous forms of glocalizations, “blends religious universalism with local particularism by adopting religious ritual, expression and hierarchies into the specifics of a particular ethnicity. Most often, the sense of distinction thus constructed blends religious and ethnic difference.”

3 This article presents a summary of a forthcoming work by Elizabeth Mburu and Trevor Yoakum, *African Pedagogy* (Carlisle, UK: Langham Publishing, 2025). This book not only introduces the proposed learning theory of multiple cognitive orientations (MCO), but specifies how this approach would be useful for African education in general and theological education in particular.

human cognition represents a social cognitive expression that exhibits the influence of the local culture on the thought processes of the community.⁴ MCO proponents contend that human cognition operates along three axes: the *conceptual*, the *psychical*, and the *concrete relational*⁵—all of which this article will explain. Hesselgrave and Rommen explain that all cultures manifest all three types of thought processing.⁶ The differences in human cultures occur at the level of priority assigned to each axis (*conceptual* over *psychical* and *concrete relational*, for example). No single axis of human thought processing is superior to the others. In fact, each axis has its own set of strengths and weaknesses, and each axis contributes to human thinking and knowing in its unique way.

Conceptual Cognitive Processing

The first axis of human cognitive processing is the *conceptual*. The conceptual cognitive orientation primarily entails both deductive and inductive reasoning. Deductive reasoning describes how human beings form conclusions based on one or more statements known as a premise or premises. Metaphorically, one could say, then, that deductive reasoning works in a straight line.

Besides deductive reasoning, there is also inductive reasoning. Inductive reasoning describes how human beings form a general conclusion based on a fact or limited group of facts. Inductive reasoning operates almost in reverse to deductive reasoning. Whereas deductive reasoning begins with an idea, makes observations, and then forms a conclusion, inductive reasoning begins with general observations, analyzes them to recognize patterns, and

4 Space does not permit a lengthy explanation of the ontological and epistemological foundations for multiple cognitive orientations. It is important to note, however, that MCO does *not* advocate that human cognition is merely a social construction; rather, MCO follows a form of critical realism that recognizes the veridicality of sensory phenomena and of the natural laws that govern them; these sensory and natural laws are themselves concomitants of divine law, hence MCO's reliance upon a proposed theodramatic critical realism, influenced by theologian Kevin Vanhoozer as well as philosophers Polanyi and Lonergan. For a fuller treatment of theodramatic critical realism, cf. *African Pedagogy*, forthcoming 2025.

5 David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1989), 205-6; Cf. also David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally: An Introduction to Cross-Cultural Communication* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991); David J. Hesselgrave, "Contextualization that is Relevant and Authentic," *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 12, no. 3 (July-September 1995), 115-119.

6 Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 205-6; Hesselgrave, "Contextualization that is Relevant and Authentic," 115-119.

then develops a theory.⁷ While inductive reasoning lacks the level of precision and certitude that is found in deductive reasoning, it does enable one to make reasoned conclusions about circumstances or a relevant subject.

In most discussions about the capacities for human reasoning, the conceptual axis is the dominant type of cognitive processing to which people refer. Western civilization, in general, has developed this type of human thought since the establishment of its earliest educational institutions.⁸ It would be erroneous, though, to conclude that this axis of human thought is representative of all human thought processes. Two others, the psychical and the concrete-relational, merit attention.

Psychical Cognitive Processing

Another axis of human cognitive processing is the psychical. Psychical cognitive processing refers to what is also known as intuition. Filmer Stuart Cuckow Northop describes the differences between the conceptual and intuitive in *The Logic of the Sciences and the Humanities*.⁹ Northop first describes the differences between conceptual and intuitive thinking. Someone can view an object and identify its color by either postulation (conceptual cognitive processing) or by intuition (psychical processing). For example, individuals can have the idea of purple that informs their understanding of that color, or they can experience the color and learn it by its name. Both are equally valid ways of knowing something. Having the idea of purple that informs one's understanding of that color is an example of postulation or conceptual understanding. The experience of purple followed by associating the name, "purple" to it would be an example of psychical processing.

Concrete Relational Cognitive Processing

Concrete relational cognitive processing is a third manner of human thinking in which certain cultures, particularly in Africa and certain regions of

7 Gregory Johnson, *Argument and Inference: An Introduction to Inductive Logic* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017). Noah Porter, *Inductive Reasoning or Induction* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2010).

8 Cf. Karen Ettenhuber, "A Brief History of Early Modern Logic," in *The Logical Renaissance: Cognition, Literature, and Argument, 1497-1630* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 27-68. For the development of logic at Oxford University and the University of Paris, cf. also Alain De Libera, "The Oxford and Paris Traditions in Logic," in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 174-87.

9 F. S. C. Northop, *The Logic of the Sciences and the Humanities* (Wirral, UK: Meridian, 1959).

Asia, interpret, process, and articulate information.¹⁰ It is distinct from the conceptual and the psychical in many details. First, individuals and communities who exhibit concrete relational thinking view reality concretely, not as mental abstractions. Second, concrete relational thinkers view themselves emotionally bound in relationship not only with others but with every aspect of reality, e.g., aspects of nature, including the trees, the river, or the land.

Because of their concrete thinking, people who exhibit this manner of cognitive processing tend to see reality in wholes rather than in parts. Instead of analyzing a problem by examining its individual components, concrete relational thinkers tend to see the entirety of a situation and look at how certain concrete actions impact circumstances. Concrete relational thinking, therefore, is distinct from both the conceptual and the psychical. Theological educators should consider this axis when designing educational curricula and in their reflections on pedagogy.

Multiple Cognitive Orientations in West Africa

I have had the privilege of teaching formal and informal theology courses at over ten institutions across eight different countries, both as a faculty member at a seminary in Lomé, Togo and in my role as the theological education consultant for West Africa.¹¹ I have produced curricula for informal theological education not only for sub-Saharan Africa but also for Eastern Europe as well as closed countries in North Africa and Asia. The following examples represent the application of the use of the above principles to teaching in West Africa.

Teaching systematic theology in its classical expression can be difficult for concrete learners to follow. The problem is in the communication of abstract propositions to concrete thinkers. Jay Moon proposes the use of African proverbs as a syllogistic device for the articulation of an argument. For example, a description of the “already/not yet” tension in the Christian life from the

10 Northop, *Logic of the Sciences and the Humanities*.

11 These West African countries include Nigeria, Togo, Burkina Faso, Benin, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Liberia, and Guinea. The institutions include Kaduna Baptist Theological Seminary (Kaduna), Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary (Ogbomosho), *Ecole Supérieure Baptiste de Théologie de l'Afrique de l'Ouest* (ESBTAO) (Lomé), *Institute Biblique Baptiste du Togo*, *Institute Biblique Baptiste du Benin*, *Institute Biblique Baptiste du Koudougou* (Koudougou, Burkina Faso), Northern Ghana Baptist Theological Seminary (Tamale), *Institute Biblique Pastorale et Missionnaire* (Toumoudi, Ivory Coast), as well as a nonformal training site in Conakry, Guinea.

Protestant Reformation is the expression, *simil iustus et peccator*, or “simultaneously just and sinful.” From a surface level, this expression appears to be a contradiction in terms.

The use of an African proverb can help in teaching this truth. Among the Ewé of southern Togo is the proverb, “The crab walks sideways but it always finds its way home.” Essentially, this traditional proverb recognizes that even though the crab has the handicap of walking sideways, it still can find its way to its destination. Theological educators can apply the lesson of this proverb to the reality of the Christian life. Like the crab, we go about our lives after conversion by walking sideways because of our struggle with indwelling sin. Nevertheless, if we are sincere believers in Jesus Christ, we will make our destination of heaven. We will find our way home.

The use of role-play, common in some parts of West Africa, can also serve as a powerful learning tool. In teaching a Great Religions and Cults course, I wanted to do more than transfer information about other religions and heretical groups to students. I also wanted to instill situational awareness in evangelistic encounters with adherents of other religions or of cults. Role-play affords me the opportunity to create a laboratory in which students must perform more than simple information recall; they must engage an individual and formulate a plan to present the gospel in a manner unique to that specific encounter.

“Oral composition” is also a teaching technique that I use for courses in homiletics. It is a technique contemporary storytellers in West Africa use. It combines orality with minimal written composition. The students must follow the steps of sermon preparation that I teach throughout a week-long modular course to deliver an actual sermon for their final exam. They cannot write the entire message word-for-word. Instead, they write the thesis statement, their major points, and some relevant points that they wish to make. The students deliver their sermons extemporaneously with the aid of these written notes to guide them. In so doing, they use a practice of contemporary storytellers in West Africa.

Conclusion

Indigenization is a worthwhile endeavor in formal and informal theological training. missiologists, theological educators, and local ministry leadership must develop a learning theory by which to articulate indigenization across

multiple ministry contexts. This learning theory should help safeguard the universal aspects of the gospel message for all people everywhere. It should also encourage local educational practices, teaching strategies, and lesson planning. Multiple cognitive orientations, as a proposed learning theory, strives to hold both important elements, the global and the local, in tension. Further work, including how this learning theory applies outside of sub-Saharan Africa, is needed. Moreover, a learning theory is merely one piece in a larger philosophy of education. This short article aims to spur discussion for the present.

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Ecclesial Indigeneity and the Semantics of 'Self':

Assessing Critiques of Rufus Anderson's Indigenous Church Principles

C. S. Barefoot

Rufus Anderson's indigenous church principles constituted a major shift in missiology in the mid-nineteenth century and continue to influence missionary methods.¹ Anderson served as the general secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), a Protestant missionary society in the United States. During the course of his duties as leader of the ABCFM, he began to recognize that American missionary activity often proceeded by means of cultivating Western civilization among native populations in ways that left local churches dependent on outside resources

1 Anderson's principles of self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation have become known almost ubiquitously as "indigenous" church principles, though Anderson primarily employed the term "native" to describe components of his ecclesiology (e.g., native pastorate, native ministry, etc.). Considering the pervasive use of the moniker *indigenous* within missiological discussions of Anderson's argument, however, this essay will continue to use that term to describe Anderson's principles, even though the term did not feature prominently in his writing.

for their ongoing maintenance.² In response to this issue, Anderson argued that missionaries, rather than pursue civilizing endeavors as the means of missions, should instead focus their primary attention on establishing local churches that are self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating. Anderson's principles—which were also espoused in Europe by fellow missionary statesman Henry Venn³—proliferated widely in the missions community and have remained a formative influence on missionary church planting methodologies through the present day.⁴

These principles, though embraced by many, have met with criticism from others who have been leery of semantic implications associated with Anderson's indigenous church theory. Indeed, as missiologist Hans Kasdorf observes, "The problem of semantics is not easily overcome in a study of literature on the indigenous church principles. What seems to be positive in the terminology for one, is full of aberrations for another."⁵ Terms like *self*, *indigenous*, *autonomy*, and *independence*—all of which feature heavily in missiological discussions of Anderson's indigenous church principles—assume different meanings for different interlocutors. On the critical side, negative connotations of these terms have led some to either dismiss or diminish the

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- 2 Rufus Anderson, *Memorial Volume of the First Fifty Years of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions* (Boston: ABCFM, 1862), 250; Regarding the issue of local reliance on foreign resources, Melvin L. Hodges, "Why Indigenous Church Principles?," in *Readings in Dynamic Indigeneity*, ed. Charles H. Kraft and Tom N. Wisley (Pasadena, CA: William Carey, 1979), 9, notes, "In some places missionaries have labored for fifty years and still the local congregation is unable to carry on alone. Why is it that after ten, fifteen, or twenty years of missionary effort in a given area, we must still appeal to home churches for additional funds and workers?"
 - 3 Henry Venn, "The Native Pastorate and Organization of Native Churches. Second Paper, Issued July, 1861," in *Memoir of Henry Venn, B.D.: Prebendary of St. Paul's, and Honorary Secretary of the Church Missionary Society*, by William Knight (London: Seeley, Jackson, and Halliday, 1882), 414–420. Venn and Anderson arrived at these principles independently of one another. The present essay delimits its scope to Anderson, whose ecclesiological and missiological sentiments, as a Congregationalist, more nearly align with Baptist conviction than do the sentiments of Venn, who wrote from an Anglican background.
 - 4 See, for example, J. D. Payne, *Discovering Church Planting: An Introduction to the Whats, Whys, and Hows of Global Church Planting* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 18–25; Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting: Biblical Principles and Best Practices for Multiplication* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 68–70; Indigenous church principles also continue to play a formative role in the missiology of the International Mission Board. See International Mission Board, "Foundations" (2022), 55–59, <https://store.imb.org/imb-foundations-digital-download/>.
 - 5 Hans Kasdorf, "Indigenous Church Principles: A Survey of Origin and Development," in *Readings in Dynamic Indigeneity*, ed. Charles H. Kraft and Tom N. Wisley (Pasadena, CA: William Carey, 1979), 86.

value of Anderson's principles of self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation for missionary church planting.

Yet semantic critiques do not provide sufficient grounds for dismissing the substance and value of Anderson's indigenous church principles for missionary practice. Such critiques—which have remained largely unchallenged in missiological literature—often betray a misguided view of the prefix *self*, interpreting it in ways Anderson did not intend. This underlying misunderstanding becomes evident when viewing such critiques in light of the specifics of Anderson's argument. Ultimately, while semantics have contributed to both the misinterpretation and misapplication of those principles,⁶ a recovery of Anderson's view of *self* can help reaffirm an enduring value for the three-self principles within missionary church planting today.⁷

Semantic Critiques

Semantic critiques of Anderson's principles derive from an apprehension toward the notion of *self* in those principles as stated. That is, some critics believe the prefix *self* carries unfitting implications. At least four such critiques have surfaced since Anderson began advocating for self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation. Various critics, one of the most prominent of whom was German missiologist Peter Beyerhaus,⁸ have expressed misgivings with what, allegedly, the prefix *self* connotes, what it conceals, what it threatens, and what it projects.

First, some have critiqued what the term *self* connotes—namely an unhealthy sense of autonomy, independence, and even isolation from others. For example, a report delivered at the 1952 World Missionary Conference at Willingen contended, “The accepted definition of an independent church, which has all too often been confused with a definition of an indigenous church, as a ‘self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating’ community, needs to be reconsidered.... [I]f self-sufficiency and autonomy are isolated ends in

6 Kasdorf, “Indigenous Church Principles,” 86.

7 Over the past century, missiologists have added yet other “selves” to these initial principles. See, for example, Alan R. Tippett, *Verdict Theology in Missionary Theory* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey, 1973), 148–63; Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 193–224. Yet because this essay delimits its scope to Anderson's missiological thought, it will focus strictly on his three principles of self-support, self-governance, and self-propagation.

8 Peter Beyerhaus, “The Three Selves Formula: Is It Built on Biblical Foundations?,” *International Review of Mission* 53.212 (1964): 393–407.

themselves, they lead to a dangerous narrowness of view.”⁹ This report thus associates the three-self principles with autonomy and independence and sees these connotations as harmful. Beyerhaus believes that the autonomy implied in Anderson’s principles is incompatible with biblical ecclesiology.¹⁰ He maintains, “An understanding of the three selves formula that would render a church completely independent and cut it off from the stream of spiritual life and mutual responsibility circulating through the whole body of Christ, could never be supported from the New Testament.”¹¹

A close association between the drive for ecclesial autonomy and national political independence movements of the mid-twentieth century did little to quell concerns related to connotations of *self* in Anderson’s principles.¹² Some worried that anti-Western political sentiment among developing nations would inculcate among Majority World churches a desire for isolation over ecumenicity.¹³ China’s promotion of a national Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) appeared to confirm such suspicion concerning national assertiveness within the church against outside influence.¹⁴ The TSPM was a Chinese Protestant initiative of the mid-twentieth century that aimed to rid the Chinese church of its foreign character.¹⁵ Daniel H. Bays claims that it was “created explicitly to sever ties with the Western churches.”¹⁶ Under Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party, the TSPM became an arm of

9 “The Indigenous Church—The Universal Church in Its Local Setting,” in *Missions under the Cross: Addresses Delivered at the Enlarged Meeting of the Committee of the International Missionary Council at Willingen, in Germany, 1952; With Statements Issued by the Meeting*, ed. Norman Goodall (New York: Friendship, 1953), 195–200.

10 Beyerhaus, “Three Selves Formula,” 399, 403–4.

11 Beyerhaus, “Three Selves Formula,” 406.

12 On the parallel movements of ecclesial indigeneity and national political independence among Majority World nations, see Bengt Sundkler, *The World of Missions*, trans. Eric J. Sharpe (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 42.

13 See, for example, James H. Taylor, “Principles of the Indigenous Church,” *Christianity Today* 6.13 (1962): 10–11; Beyerhaus, “Three Selves Formula,” 405–7.

14 Beyerhaus, “Three Selves Formula,” 396, maintains that communists of China “used the formula evolved by Anderson and Venn to inaugurate the ‘Three Selves Movement,’ demanding that the Chinese churches sever entirely and forever any connection with missions and churches overseas.”

15 Philip L. Wickeri, “Selfhood as Gift and Task: The Example of Self-Propagation in Chinese Christianity,” *Missiology: An International Review* 13.3 (1985): 261–73.

16 Daniel H. Bays, “Chinese Protestant Christianity Today,” *The China Quarterly* 174 (2003): 493.

the central government which sought to eliminate foreign influence.¹⁷ Thus the notion of *self* in Anderson's principles became linked in various ways to notions of autonomy, independence, and even isolation.

A second semantic critique comes from Beyerhaus, who contends that the term *self* conceals prideful opposition to God. He notes that the human self has become corrupted by sin and that the New Testament thus calls for the denial and crucifixion of self.¹⁸ This human situation finds an analogous situation in the life of the Church, according to Beyerhaus.¹⁹ He contends, "It is possible for a church to manage its own affairs, maintain its own economy and win quite a number of new members, without any of these activities meeting with God's approval. They could be nothing more than collective self-assertion for the sake of power, self-satisfaction, self-sufficiency and self-extension, and this is the very opposite of what Christ meant the Church to be."²⁰ Beyerhaus thus maintains, "The Church should therefore hesitate to apply to itself an ideal that stresses the affirmation of the self."²¹

Third, Beyerhaus also claims that the *self* in Anderson's principles threatens world mission. He argues that the Great Commission was given to the church as a whole, not to isolated apostles who would each focus on their own geographic areas.²² Beyerhaus thus asserts, "The church which bears responsibility for missionary work in a certain area is not only the indigenous church on the spot, but—as was stated at Willingen—every Christian group in the whole world."²³ In other words, no singular church bears exclusive responsibility for missions in a given geographical area. The local church in that area should labor together on mission with the wider church. The implied autonomy of Anderson's principles appears, according to Beyerhaus, to imperil such relationships between local and foreign churches, and thus

17 Karrie Koesel, Hu Yizhi, and Joshua Pine, "Official Protestantism in China," *Review of Religion and Chinese Society* 6.1 (2019): 73; Jieren Li, "Postcolonial Analysis of the State-Church Relationship in China," *Swedish Missiological Themes* 94.2 (2006): 191–92.

18 Beyerhaus, "Three Selves Formula," 403.

19 Beyerhaus, "Three Selves Formula," 403.

20 Beyerhaus, "Three Selves Formula," 404.

21 Beyerhaus, "Three Selves Formula," 403.

22 Beyerhaus, "Three Selves Formula," 406.

23 Beyerhaus, "Three Selves Formula," 407.

threatens the Church's mission by potentially cutting off local churches from vital assistance from abroad.

Finally, anthropologist William Smalley has claimed that the notion of *self* in indigenous church principles simply projects American individualism. He asserts, "I strongly suspect that the three 'selves' are really projections of our American value systems into the idealization of the church, that they are in their very nature Western concepts based upon Western ideas of individualism and power. By forcing them on other people we may at times have been making it impossible for a truly indigenous pattern to develop. We have been Westernizing with all our talk about indigenizing."²⁴ In other words, the principles of self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation derive more from Western cultural sentiment than they do from either Scriptural precedent or sound missiological reflection, according to Smalley.

These critiques all reflect misgivings with the notion of *self* in Anderson's indigenous church principles and, per Beyerhaus, justify a dismissal of the three-self formula, at least as it has been classically stated. For one, Beyerhaus and Henry Lefever maintain that the notion of *self*—if unqualified—remains at odds with a New Testament view of the church. They contend, "The concepts of self-government, autonomy, or independence, are, by their literal meaning and their political, social, and ethical analogy, unsuited to describe the nature of the Church unless they are given an entirely new content. Taken literally, they presuppose that the Church as a social entity can exist by itself, an impossible thing according to the Bible."²⁵ Moreover, the practical outworking of that notion of *self* warrants a dismissal of Anderson's principles, according to Beyerhaus. While he recognizes merit in such principles, he nevertheless concludes, "[A]lthough the formula once served as an excellent strategical challenge, we can hardly continue to use it, in view of the fact that it has already been found to lead to an attitude of self-sufficiency and jealousy, incompatible with the ecumenical age in which we now live."²⁶

24 William A. Smalley, "Cultural Implications of an Indigenous Church," in *Readings in Dynamic Indigeneity*, ed. Charles H. Kraft and Tom N. Wisley (Pasadena, CA: William Carey, 1979), 35.

25 Peter Beyerhaus and Henry Lefever, *The Responsible Church and the Foreign Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 112. This point of contention leads Beyerhaus and Lefever to affirm not the autonomy of local churches, but their "Christonomy"—that is, the rule of Christ in and over them. They assert, "[T]he church cannot but be 'Christonomous,' acknowledging Christ's rule of love as the principle of its life" (p. 113).

26 Beyerhaus, "Three Selves Formula," 407.

Anderson's Argument

These semantic critiques warrant an exploration of Anderson's promotion of indigenous church principles and a consideration of how he understood the prefix *self*. The historical and literary context of Anderson's advocacy of self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation centers around the issue of civilization and its place in the missionary enterprise. A long precedent had existed in which Christian missionaries weaved together endeavors to evangelize with other endeavors that sought to build up social institutions which missionaries considered proper for a flourishing Christian society. Anderson noted, "Our idea of the Christian religion from our childhood has been identified with education, social order, and a certain correctness of morals and manners; in other words, with civilization."²⁷

Anderson saw that the work of civilizing local populations thus often accompanied the propagation of Christianity. Anderson cited an example from the work of the ABCFM among the Native American population. According to an 1816 report, the aim of the mission to Native Americans was "to make them English in their language, civilized in their habits, and Christian in their religion."²⁸ One finds similar sentiments among missionaries to the Hawaiian Islands. Anderson noted that pioneer missionaries to the archipelago "were instructed 'to aim at nothing short of covering those Islands with fruitful fields and pleasant dwellings, and schools and churches, and of raising the whole people to an elevated state of Christian civilization.'"²⁹

Yet Anderson questioned the place of such civilizing work among missionary endeavors. He pointed out, "A question often mooted at the outset of modern Christian missions, and sometimes mooted now, is, whether savages must be civilized before they can be Christianized."³⁰ In other words, Anderson sought to clarify the relationship between the work of civilizing and that of

27 Rufus Anderson, *Foreign Missions: Their Relations and Claims* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1869), 94–95; See also Anderson, *Memorial Volume*, 250.

28 Quoted in Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, 97.

29 Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, 97.

30 Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, 96. While this essay seeks, in part, to underscore the ongoing value of Anderson's indigenous church principles, Anderson yet does not stand above critique. For example, his use of the disparaging term "savages" here in reference to foreign peoples unfortunately betrays anthropological views that were then popular, but have since been debunked.

evangelizing, and his conclusion went against grain of common missiology at that time.³¹

In his view, the work of cultivating civilization should not serve as a precursor or requisite accompaniment to evangelism. For one, such civilizing processes were ineffective for church growth. Highlighting the ineffectiveness of cultivating civilization to achieve spiritual ends, Anderson noted that one ABCFM mission gradually scaled back the incorporation of American mechanics and farmers in its work. He explained, "The honest aim in sending these secular helpers was to aid the preaching missionaries. But the means were found to be inappropriate. A simpler, cheaper, more effectual means of civilizing the savage, was the gospel alone."³² Moreover, those locals who became most "civilized"—according to social and material standards—often remained closed to the gospel.³³

Not only were civilizing processes ineffective in leading locals to embrace the gospel, but they also portrayed Christianity as foreign to local contexts. In reference to an ABCFM mission in Beirut, Anderson noted how this foreignness materialized in a local high school established by the mission. He explained, "The literature of Western civilization was taught through the English language, and the boarding, lodging, and clothing had a Western type. The pupils were faithfully instructed in the Scriptures; but it was found, that the tendency of their training, on the whole, was to make them foreign in their manners, foreign in their habits, foreign in their sympathies; in other words, to denationalize them."³⁴

Moreover, Anderson claimed that emphasizing such civilizing processes did not reflect the biblical—particularly the Pauline—precedent of church planting. He claimed, "In our undue estimate of the influence of civilization, as an auxiliary to the gospel in sustaining the higher Christian life among the heathen ... the apostle's example has by no means had its proper influence. We have been slow to believe, that native churches, or native pastors, with forms of civilization so inferior to our own, or so very unlike it, could stand

31 Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, ix.

32 Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, 97–98.

33 Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, 98–99.

34 Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, 99.

without foreign aid.”³⁵ In other words, Anderson believed missionary methods that fronted civilizing processes rather than focusing on evangelism and church planting were at odds with biblical patterns of missions.

This civilizing approach to missions ultimately undermined the maturation of local churches, according to Anderson. He contended that a failure to follow the apostle Paul’s pattern led to “the prolonged existence of mission churches with their centre and seat at the residence of the missionary.... They often had native preachers, indeed, stationed at some of the more important points in the district, but no native pastors; the whole church membership being long retained under the pastoral supervision of the missionary himself.”³⁶ In such scenarios, local churches and believers lacked opportunities to grow in responsible leadership, for all such responsibility resided with the missionaries. Anderson yet argued, “The child will never stand and walk firmly, if always in leading-strings.”³⁷ That is, younger churches will not mature if they never assume responsibility for their own lives.

Anderson thus sought a return to what he saw as the biblical pattern of missions—to the spiritual work of evangelism and church planting as primary missionary tasks.³⁸ He concluded, “Education, schools, the press, and whatever else goes to make up the working system, are held in strict subordination to the planting and building up of effective working churches.”³⁹ He emphasized “the gospel as a converting agency,”⁴⁰ and sought to steer the ABCFM away from methods that sought to prop up the gospel by material means.

Against this backdrop Anderson began urging missionaries to focus their efforts on establishing churches—particularly ones that are self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating. He claimed, “As soon as the mission church has a native pastor, the responsibilities of self-government should be devolved upon it. Mistakes, perplexities, and sometimes scandals, there will be; but it is often thus that useful experience is gained, even in church-

35 Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, 101–2.

36 Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, 102.

37 Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, 104.

38 Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, 47, argues that the apostle Paul’s “grand means, as a missionary, was the gathering and forming of local churches.”

39 Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, 113. Anderson did not altogether reject such civilizing endeavors. He simply believed that they remain subordinate to the task of establishing churches.

40 Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, 95.

es here at home.... [A]nd the church should become self-supporting at the earliest possible day. It should also be self-propagating from the very first. Such churches, and only such, are the life, strength, and glory of missions."⁴¹ In other words, Anderson believed that missionaries should establish local churches that are able to lead themselves, financially support themselves, and also serve as agents of mission in their locations. Such is the "first duty of a missionary."⁴²

The notion of *self* in Anderson's three principles connotes freedom from undue reliance on foreign resources. Anderson was concerned that civilizing processes had undermined local initiative and caused local churches to rely on foreign subsistence for their ongoing life. He argued instead that local churches should be "self-reliant."⁴³ The implied polarity that frames this emphasis on ecclesial self-reliance is between local churches and the work and resources of foreign missionary societies. When Anderson emphasized self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation, he did so not in contradistinction to reliance on God—as if local churches were to trust in their own capabilities. Rather, Anderson's notion of *self* stood in contradistinction to excessive reliance on foreign funding, leadership, and evangelistic endeavors as they came from missionary organizations abroad.

Thus, one must understand Anderson's emphasis on *self* not as an endorsement of a church's spiritual self-sufficiency over the sustaining power of Christ, but as a reaction to what Anderson saw as an unhealthy missiological precedent. Anderson's notion of *self* served as a response to the civilizing focus of modern missions which tended, in his view, to denationalize converts, impede local church maturation, and stymie the advance of the gospel. It was part of his attempt to apply New Testament observations concerning the establishment of local churches to existing patterns of missionary work, by way of critique.

Semantic Clarity

What then can one say in reference to semantic criticisms of Anderson's indigenous church principles? The least forceful of the aforementioned

41 Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, 112.

42 Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, 110.

43 Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, 111, 113, 117.

critiques is Beyerhaus's claim that the notion of *self* conceals prideful opposition to God. Not only is Beyerhaus's analogy between the human self and the church questionable, nothing in Anderson's writing suggests that he espoused his principles as a means of buoying the church's sense of pride and self-accomplishment—as if the church could sustain itself apart from Christ. Rather, Anderson affirmed that local churches were to remain “under the supervising grace of God.”⁴⁴ While Beyerhaus points out the possibility of local churches operating for the sake of power and their own self-satisfaction, the term *self* does not automatically or necessarily conceal such a connotation, and it certainly does not in Anderson's writing.

The critique that the term *self* betrays an unhealthy sense of autonomy, independence, or isolation also appears wanting in reference to Anderson's argument. Beyerhaus and Lefever assert, “The concepts [of self-government, autonomy, and independence] can be used only in a particular and limited sense by which pre-fixes like ‘auto’-, ‘in’- and ‘self’- refer only to human authorities and are alien to the nature of the Church.”⁴⁵ In other words, they believe that the prefix *self* cannot refer to the church as it relates to Christ, but only as it relates to other human institutions—e.g., the foreign missionary organization. Beyerhaus and Lefever offer this critique as if Anderson and other proponents believe otherwise. Yet it is clear from Anderson's writing that his use of the prefix *self* stood in relation to foreign missionary stakeholders, not in relation to Christ and his reign. Thus, Beyerhaus and Lefever's contention here—at least as it relates to Anderson's case—amounts to a straw man fallacy; they reject the notion of *self* by claiming something with which Anderson would have readily agreed. Self-governing churches always remained, in his view, under the authority and direction of Christ.⁴⁶

Moreover, Anderson's use of *self* did not imply local churches cutting themselves off from the wider church. Contrary to this sentiment, he claimed that the business of the missionary “is to plant churches, in well-chosen parts of his field, committing them as soon as possible to the care of native pastors; himself *sustaining a common relation to all*, as their ecclesiastical father and adviser; having, in some sense, like the apostle, the daily care of the churches.”⁴⁷

44 Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, 49.

45 Beyerhaus and Lefever, *Responsible Church*, 112.

46 Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, 49.

47 Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, 112, emphasis added.

Anderson thus affirmed a sense of ongoing outside influence in the life of local churches (albeit an influence that does not undermine local responsibility).⁴⁸ That the Chinese TSPM coopted his indigenous church principles to insulate itself was, according to missions historian R. Pierce Beaver, a “travesty of the concept.”⁴⁹ Beaver concludes, “The three-self formula was originally devoid of many of the connotations later supposedly derived from it. A church which lived to itself would be abhorrent to Anderson.”⁵⁰

Moreover, while Beyerhaus saw the notion of *self* in Anderson’s principles as a threat to world mission, Anderson understood self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation as aids to that mission. In reference to self-governance, he claimed that “native pastors form an essential element in native churches, to make them healthful, vigorous, self-supporting, and aggressive.”⁵¹ The aggressiveness to which Anderson referred was a missional aggressiveness—a posture of actively advancing the gospel throughout the world. He held such native missionary activity in high regard, noting that due to evangelistic activity among local believers, “many a beautiful Christianized group in the broad Pacific is now manned solely by native missionaries and pastors.”⁵² Further, the planting of self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating churches across the world would, according to Anderson, hasten a situation in which “all men have it within their power to learn what they must do to be saved.”⁵³

Beyerhaus’s concern that Anderson’s principles would cut off local churches from missional assistance from abroad is understandable, yet not reflective of Anderson’s argument and use of the term *self*. Not only did Anderson affirm an ongoing relationship between native churches and missionary outsiders—a relationship which is itself a form of missional assistance—Anderson

48 Anderson, *Memorial Volume*, 252; Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, 120, notes that the promotion of self-reliance among local churches does not preclude “the aid of judicious advice from their missionary fathers.”

49 R. Pierce Beaver, “The Legacy of Rufus Anderson,” *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 3.3 (1979): 96.

50 R. Pierce Beaver, “Rufus Anderson, Grand Strategist of American Missions,” in *To Advance the Gospel: Selections from the Writings of Rufus Anderson*, ed. R. Pierce Beaver (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 31.

51 Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, x.

52 Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, 140.

53 Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, 117.

insinuated that the prevalence of financially burdensome civilizing endeavors by missionaries had actually become an impediment to the spread of the gospel and growth of the church.⁵⁴ The question of whether such financial assistance from abroad serves to help or hinder local churches from engaging in missionary activity is a separate matter. The point here is that, in light of Anderson's writing, the notion of *self* in his indigenous church principles does not necessarily threaten world mission, as Beyerhaus believes. Rather, as Wilbert Shenk notes, Anderson (as well as Venn) offered his principles "as pointers toward the missionary goal of founding churches that would themselves become the means of missionary advance in the world."⁵⁵

Finally, Smalley's suspicion that indigenous church principles serve merely as projections of American individualism likewise appears unwarranted in light of Anderson's argument. While Anderson was, in some ways, a product of his time, and while it is certainly plausible that Enlightenment tenets shaped Anderson's missiological vision, Smalley yet offers his critique without any corroborating support. If, as Smalley supposes, Anderson's notion of *self* was an illegitimate outgrowth of a Western value system that enfranchises individualism, then one would expect to find Anderson mishandling the text of Scripture accordingly. However, Smalley does not account for Anderson's appeal to Scripture or attempt to demonstrate how the *self* in Anderson's principles is rooted less in the biblical text and more in American individualistic thought.

A careful reading of Anderson reveals that he consistently rooted his advocacy of self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation in the New Testament—particularly the Pauline pattern of missionary church planting therein.⁵⁶ This pattern of missions served as the basis for his missiological agenda. For example, regarding the apostle Paul, Anderson observed,

His grand means, as a missionary, was the gathering and forming of local churches.... Such was the apostle's custom. He thus in each place put in requisition the power of association, organization, combination, of a self-governed Christian community; and the churches must necessarily have been self-supporting. They were formed for standing without foreign aid. And that

54 Anderson, *Memorial Volume*, 250–51; Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, 96–108, 118.

55 Wilbert R. Shenk, "Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn: A Special Relationship?," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 5.4 (1981): 171.

56 Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, 44–61.

they possessed a singular vitality, that they were self-propagating, as well as self-governing and self-supporting, is evident from the tenor of the Epistles addressed to them by their founder.⁵⁷

This pattern, moreover, “ought to be regarded as substantially the model for Christian missions to the heathen in all subsequent ages.”⁵⁸ While scholars continue to debate the normative value of Pauline methods for today,⁵⁹ it is clear that Anderson derived his notion of *self* from his reading of the NT. This fact undermines Smalley’s unsubstantiated claim that the prefix *self* betrays a Western ideology at odds with indigenization.

Thus semantic critiques of Anderson’s indigenous church principles do not cohere with the way Anderson himself understood the term *self*. Contrary to such concerns, Anderson’s notion of *self* did not entail prideful opposition to God, ecclesial isolation, or a retreat from world mission. Neither does Anderson’s explication of his principles reveal an excessive influence of Western individualistic philosophy. Rather, Anderson employed the prefix *self* to describe what he perceived as characteristic of churches documented in the New Testament. According to him, such churches took responsibility for their own governance, finances, and propagation, rather than outsource that work to foreign agents. This observation served for Anderson and the ABCFM as a critique of existing patterns of missions and a call to return to the New Testament as the formative basis of missionary practice.

Moreover, by misconstruing the notion of *self* in Anderson’s indigenous church principles, semantic critiques tend to overlook the substance of Anderson’s argument. He was not advocating a sense of self-sufficiency that

57 Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, 47–48.

58 Anderson, *Foreign Missions*, 29.

59 See, for example, Dean S. Gilliland, *Pauline Theology & Mission Practice* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1998); Christopher R. Little, *Mission in the Way of Paul: Biblical Mission for the Church in the Twenty-First Century*, Studies in Biblical Literature 80 (New York: Peter Lang, 2005); Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies and Methods* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008); Robert L. Plummer and John Mark Terry, eds., *Paul’s Missionary Methods: In His Time and Ours* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012); Robert L. Gallagher, “Missionary Methods: St. Paul’s, St. Roland’s, or Ours?,” in *Missionary Methods: Research, Reflection, and Realities*, ed. Craig Ott and J. D. Payne, Evangelical Missiological Society Series 21 (Pasadena, CA: William Carey, 2013), 3–22; Ross Frierson, “The Dynamic Nature of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God: How Acts Lays a Sure Foundation for the Mission of the Church,” *Great Commission Baptist Journal of Missions* 2.1 (2023): 1–9; David Paul, “Validating Pauline Emulation as a Missiological Hermeneutic in Second Timothy,” *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 22.2 (2023): 61–79; J. Snodgrass, “The Work Missionaries Do: Itinerant Church-Planting,” *Great Commission Baptist Journal of Missions* 3.2 (2024): 1–10.

would undermine the church's reliance on Christ or isolate local churches from a wider fellowship; he was simply urging missionaries to establish churches that would take responsibility for their ongoing life. As Robert Reese notes, "The word 'self' was not meant to indicate self-centeredness or absolute autonomy, but rather responsibility and maturity. It did not mean to exclude reliance on God, but indicated that these churches had no need to remain dependent on outsiders."⁶⁰ By quibbling over semantic associations unintended by Anderson, however, some critics dismiss the contemporary missiological value of Anderson's principles. Yet, as this essay has sought to demonstrate, semantic critiques—which have heretofore gone largely unchallenged—do not provide sufficient grounds for such a dismissal.

Conclusion

Whether one rejects the term *self* or opts to employ other terminology,⁶¹ the substance and value of Anderson's argument remain the same: local churches should assume responsibility to govern themselves, financially support themselves, and bear witness to the gospel in their contexts. These principles are as relevant today as they were in Anderson's day. Issues related to self-support, for example, still beset the missionary enterprise. Some local church pastors in various areas of the world continue to receive salary stipends from foreign churches and mission agencies—a precedent that finds ongoing

60 Robert Reese, "The Surprising Relevance of the Three-Self Formula," *Mission Frontiers* 29.4 (2007): 26. Reese only briefly addresses the semantics of self. The present essay has sought to further explore this issue of semantics in reference to Anderson's indigenous church principles.

61 Charles Brock, *Indigenous Church Planting: A Practical Journey* (Neosho, MO: Church Growth International, 1994), 89, for example, affirms indigenous church principles and asserts that one might refer to them as "Christ-sustained" activities.

support in some circles despite compelling arguments against the practice.⁶² Moreover, that precedent can undermine local church governance, as those who control the funding typically retain a measure of power and control over the affairs of those churches. Such realities warrant a fresh consideration of the value of Anderson's principles for contemporary missions practice.

In fact, despite Beyerhaus's dismissal of the formula as classically stated, he himself recognizes value in Anderson's claims. He acknowledges that Anderson and Venn's principles contain "essential truth in that, according to the New Testament, the church that results from missionary work should take over such ecclesiastical authority as is vital to it, that it should promote the Church's mission in its own environment and even in the regions beyond, and that it is expected to carry out these duties without financial support from outside, though the acceptance of such help is not excluded."⁶³ That Beyerhaus nevertheless dismisses Anderson's stated principles underscores the unnecessary confusion that semantics have sown in this missiological conversation. While one could argue, as Beyerhaus does, that it would be better to affirm not the church's "self" but its "responsibility,"⁶⁴ such a change in terminology does not impinge upon Anderson's basic argument; if anything, it reaffirms the enduring value of his claims.

62 For example, GFA World (formerly called Gospel for Asia) raises tens of millions of dollars each year from Western countries, in part, to fund national Christian workers in various Majority World countries. GFA World is hardly alone in this endeavor; many Western organizations exist to financially support national ministers overseas. Although such workers are sometimes labeled "missionaries," they often function more truly as pastors of local churches, and the support they receive serves as de facto support for the churches they lead. For a rationale behind such ongoing financial support, see Bob Finley, "Send Dollars and Sense: Why Giving Is Often Better than Going," *Christianity Today* 43.11 (1999): 73–75; For compelling, though dated, critiques of this precedent, see John Ritchie, *Indigenous Church Principles in Theory and Practice* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1946), 26–30; Roland Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church: And the Causes Which Hinder It*, 2nd. Ed. (London: World Dominion, 1949), 14–15; Following similar reasoning of such critiques, the International Mission Board, "Foundations," 59, has stated, "We strongly encourage the use of local resources to meet local church needs in order that those churches might learn good stewardship, experience the joy of sacrificial giving, and present a more credible witness in their locations. Many missionaries and local leaders have witnessed the harmful effects of dependency on planting and multiplying churches. Dependency occurs when a local church requires resources from outside of its own members in order to carry out the core biblical functions of a church under normal conditions. Funding from foreign sources often comes from the best of motives and from very generous hearts, but the unintended consequences can be harmful to church health and multiplication. Therefore, we as an organization will not use foreign funds to pay the salaries of pastors or to build church buildings, and we will not be conduits of such funds from well-meaning churches and Christians in North America."

63 Beyerhaus, "Three Selves Formula," 402.

64 Beyerhaus, "Three Selves Formula," 404.

Those missiological claims of Anderson, moreover, stand squarely in line with Paul's encouragement to the Thessalonian church. Paul urged the church "to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be *dependent* on no one" (1 Thess 4:11–12, emphasis added). Dependence here for Paul referred not to dependence on Christ, but an undue dependence on others.⁶⁵ Similarly, the kind of independence Anderson advocated through his three-self principles stood not in contradistinction to reliance on Christ, but rather an overreliance on foreign resources which, in Anderson's view, tended to denationalize converts, inhibit local church maturation, and undermine the advance of the gospel. Thus, while indigenous church advocates are not above critique,⁶⁶ and while Anderson's theory certainly does not embody the fullness of biblical ecclesiology or missiology, the substance of Anderson's indigenous church principles remains valuable today, even in the face of semantic critiques that claim otherwise.

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65 Leon Morris, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1984), 86, notes regarding these verses, "Paul's words may mean 'that you may have need of nothing' or 'that you may have need of no one'; either gives a good sense. Those living on the charity of others needed to be told not to depend on men. But Paul may mean that anyone who works constantly will find ample provision for all his needs; he will have no lack of anything. Either way, he insists on the importance of being independent."

66 For a helpful critique of indigenous church theory, see E. Luther Copeland, "Indigenous and More: Toward Authentic Selfhood," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 11.3 (1974): 501–13; Regarding an apparent lack of cultural perspective in the three-self formula, Reese, "The Surprising Relevance of the Three-Self Formula," 26, notes, "Cultural anthropologists objected that the Three-Self Formula describes 'indigenous' churches in terms of church policies rather than in terms of the culture itself. As missionaries became more aware of anthropology, this appeared to be a major deficiency in the formula." Further, when proponents of ecclesial indigeneity did consider the issue of culture, they often did so from the perspective of structural functionalist anthropology, with its emphasis on traditional cultures as static and monolithic. This precedent gave rise to an emphasis on "contextualization" within the World Council of Churches, which sought to move beyond prior understandings of indigenization by recognizing the dynamic and contested nature of cultures. See, for example, Theological Education Fund, "A Working Policy for the Implementation of the Third Mandate of the Theological Education Fund," in *Contextualization of Theology: An Evangelical Assessment*, by Bruce C. E. Fleming (Pasadena, CA: William Carey, 1980), 86.

What the Early Church Fathers Can Teach Us About Evangelism Today

Derrick Waters

Anyone would be hard-pressed to find a gospel minister who would not readily affirm that every Christian should be engaged in evangelism and that there is a great want of believer-priests who take that identity seriously. We can look directly at the Bible to show our disciples that the apostles were not the only ones preaching the good news,¹ but we ought not to stop there. Many will readily adhere to contemporary statements of faith² or popular books³ advocating for the right and duty of every Christian to share their faith. But can we go even deeper into our Christian tradition for help in understanding the biblical practice of evangelism? We can, and the Early Church Fathers, as windows into the Early Church's practice of evangelism, are among the best source material to help us do this.

These ancient Christian texts can enhance our understanding of evangelism and better instruct our contemporary practice in three particular ways. First, early Christians were convinced of the gospel and convicted to constantly speak about it. If we are likewise convinced, these writings challenge us to

1 Consider for example Luke's claim that everyone in Asia heard the Gospel in the two years that Paul resided there (Acts 19:10). If Paul and his companions were the only ones regularly preaching the Gospel, this would simply be a mathematical impossibility.

2 See *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, Article XI

3 Consider Robert Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1993).

be about constant gospel proclamation in everyday life. Second, early Christians did not only preach a gospel of words but one of deeds as well. Thus, the transforming work of the gospel was demonstrated by changed individuals gathering into a robust community of faith. These early Christians beckon us to refuse to accept any bifurcation dividing the dramatic effects of the good news on the lives (and communal *life*) of those preaching from the proclamation of the message. Third, early Christians expected persecution and hardship on account of their faith and, on the whole, did not shy away because of fear. The blood of the martyrs calls out to us to take heart and not to flee every threat of persecution as that which is to be feared above all, but to see persecution as a blessed indicator that we are doing God's work in a broken world (1 Pet 3:13-16).

Convinced of and Constantly Sharing the Gospel

One of the earliest defenders of the faith, Justin Martyr, described to Trypho, a fictitious Jew, that the Christians in the 2nd Century viewed evangelism as a responsibility given to God's people in the Hebrew Bible. He said, "For even until the present time gifts of prophecy exist among us, from which fact you yourselves ought to understand that what was of old in your nation has been transferred to us."⁴ Here, Justin was establishing the Christian claim to the Old Testament prophets while arguing that the Spirit which formerly empowered the Jewish nation now inspires Christians. He went on, "[E]veryone who can say what is true and saith it not shall be judged by God, as God solemnly testified by Ezekiel...So it is that out of fear we endeavour for our part to discourse in accordance with the Scriptures."⁵ On this, McKinion notes, "This community was responsible for presenting salvation to those outside of the church, or faced chastisement from God for not doing so. Therefore, it sought diligently to convince others of the validity of its message."⁶ In describing the ubiquity and common nature of every-believer evangelism,

4 Justin, *Justin Martyr: the Dialogue with Trypho*, trans. A. Lukyn Williams (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1930).

5 Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*. We should note here that the "Scriptures" which the Early Church were devoted to were contained in the Jewish Old Testament. For a fuller example from the Early Church on preaching the gospel from the Old Testament, see Irenaeus, *On the Apostolic Preaching*.

6 Steven A. McKinion, ed., *Life and Practice in the Early Church: A Documentary Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2001). McKinion's edited volume is a helpful introduction to writings of the Church Fathers on the life of the Early Church. For more on the content of the Early Church's gospel message, see Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*.

Michael Green says, “They went everywhere gossiping the gospel; they did it naturally, enthusiastically, and with the conviction of those who are not paid to say that sort of thing.”⁷ The early Church made its mark on the ancient world through multitudes of ordinary believers preaching the gospel of their Lord to everyone, everywhere, all the time. They evangelized with such vigor because, as Justin noted, they saw it as their God-given responsibility to the world.

Preaching the Gospel with Good Works

The early Christians knew that they could not merely speak the gospel, but if their message was to be winsome, they also had to live out the message that the world was dying to see. The 3rd Century Christian scholar, Origen, said of the power of the gospel to change lives, “What absurdity, therefore, is there, if Jesus, desiring to manifest to the human race the power which he possesses to heal souls, should have selected notorious and wicked men, and should have raised them to such a degree of moral excellence, that they, became a pattern of the purest virtue to all who were converted by their instrumentality to the Gospel of Christ?”⁸ Or we may consider an excerpt from the Epistle to Diognetus, “They live in countries of their own, but simply as sojourners...They marry like the rest of the world, they beget children, but they do not cast their offspring adrift. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They exist in the flesh, but they live not after the flesh. They spend their existence upon earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. They obey the established laws, but in their own lives they surpass the laws. They love all men, and are persecuted by all.”⁹ Notice that in both of these Early Church accounts, the truthfulness of the message is validated by the power that the message has to change individual lives and reform communities of people into what may rightly be described as the “Kingdom of God.”

Contemporary sociologist Rodney Stark described the effect of Christianity in the ancient Greco-Roman world saying, “Christianity revitalized life in Greco-Roman cities by providing new norms and new kinds of social rela-

7 Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 243.

8 Origen, “Book 1, Chapter 63,” in *Against Celsus = Contra Celsum: The Complete English Translation from the Fourth Volume of the Ante-Nicene Fathers*, A. Cleveland Coxe, ed., Frederick Crombie, trans. (Jackson, MI: Ex Fontibus Co, 2013).

9 L.B. Radford, ed. and trans., *The Epistle to Diognetus* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1908), 63-64.

tionships able to cope with many urgent urban problems. To cities filled with the homeless and impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachments. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity provided a new and expanded sense of family. To cities torn by violent ethnic strife, Christianity offered a new basis for social solidarity. And to cities faced with epidemics, fires, and earthquakes, Christianity offered effective nursing services.”¹⁰

Expecting and Enduring Through Persecution

Jesus promised his disciples that hardship would come to them (Jn 16:33), and the writings of the Church Fathers document how many early Christians responded to persecution. In the 3rd Century, Tertullian provocatively stated to Scapula, the Roman official overseeing the persecution of Christians in Carthage, “Your cruelty is our glory.”¹¹ In light of the upside-down structure of power and blessing preached in the gospel of Jesus (cf. Matt 5:3-12), whenever Rome persecuted Christians, it actually pushed the community to greater degrees of oneness with the glorified Christ. Tertullian went on to say, “[In spite of persecution] this community will be undying, for be assured that just in the time of its seeming overthrow it is built up into greater power.”¹² Rather than shrinking, many Christians bravely met persecution on account of their witness. The early Christians were strengthened in faith, seeing it as a means of growing closer to their Lord and of strengthening the witness of the whole Church.

Application to Contemporary Evangelism

In a brief survey of just a few Early Church Fathers, we see that the Early Church boldly proclaimed the message of salvation. Their transformed communal life was instrumental in validating the power of that message. Though persecution came, the Church weathered the various storms and were preserved as Christ’s Church. How, then, may the life and faith of these early Christians influence our practice of evangelism today?

10 Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 161.

11 McKinion, *Life and Practice in the Early Church*, 122.

12 McKinion, *Life and Practice in the Early Church*, 123.

First, like early Christians, we should pray for an all-consuming desire to see everyone around us come to a saving, loving relationship with the Lord Jesus. Such a disposition is thoroughly evangelical—our lives should primarily be about communicating the saving message of Christ. We will be standing in good company when we insist that all Christians should live each day asking, “With whom can I share the gospel today?” or “How can I ‘gossip the gospel’ at work, in the market, at the hospital, or in the village today?” This is not a fanatical response to the faith of the Bible or a modern, revivalistic practice that should be viewed with suspicion. Regular, broad gospel sharing is a biblical *and* historical Christian practice. The Church Fathers help us confidently make that claim.

Second, we must proclaim as winsomely with our lives as we do with our voices. Yes, this means that each person should live a life of excellent character, but we should notice the force of the argument from the Church Fathers; it is on the virtue of the community of Christ, not merely individuals. Whether we are in South Asia engaging Brahmin Hindus, in the Middle East engaging Muslims, or in the U.S. engaging “Nones¹³,” we need to show outsiders that our message will change their lives in two ways: the power of the Holy Spirit will enable them to live lives of obedience to the Law of God, and the community of like-minded Christians will welcome them into a family based on love, grace, and the godly order given in the Bible. We must call people out of wickedness into holiness and as we do this, we must show them that in leaving the communion of the wicked, they are entering the fellowship of the righteous, however imperfectly realized.

Third, Christians should expect, and not shy away from, persecution in diverse forms. We have ample promises from Scripture and examples from Church history that those “who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim 3:12). While persecution in any form is a symptom of the Fall and something that should not be desired in and of itself, it may be a healing balm for churches’ health. We see this in the early church writings. Persecution caused Christians to reevaluate what they believed and practiced

13 What some sociologists call those who indicate that they have no particular religious beliefs; see Gregory A. Smith, “Religious ‘nones’ in America: Who They Are and What They Believe,” *Pew Research Center*, January 24, 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2024/01/24/religious-nones-in-america-who-they-are-and-what-they-believe/>.

in light of antagonism,¹⁴ thus clarifying the message to both the faithful and outsiders. Suffering often cleansed the Church of those who are following Christ under various pretenses,¹⁵ thus driving her closer to the heavenly ideal of a truly regenerate Church. Additionally, when Christians suffered well, they testified to the utter transcendence of the reign of King Jesus. Because we hope in a King whose kingdom is not of this world but is imminently coming, we do not fear what man can do to us or say about us. Such courage was an effective witness in the ancient world and is today as well.

Lastly, this brief survey should encourage contemporary Christians to consider the testimonies of the Early Church Fathers as hermeneutical tools for deriving our practice of obedience to the Great Commission. Nothing compares to the Bible in directing faith and practice—it is sufficient. This, however, does not mean that anyone can derive his biblical faith and practice simply by reading the Scriptures void of external influences. The Bible is a divinely inspired, human text. It must be read through various lenses because it is about God creating, entering, and redeeming our cultured world. Because its intended audience—mankind—is bound by time, space, and ability, we, therefore, always read the Bible through our own lenses. If we accept this reality, we may gladly take on the lens (or lenses) of the Early Church Fathers to help us understand our faith and our practice of seeing God’s kingdom come “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:10).

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14 Many early Church writings are defenses of the faith addressed to hostile actors in the ancient world. As one example among many, see Justin’s *First Apology*.

15 Many Christians left the Church during various persecutions, thus revealing who among those that professed Christ actually “loved not their lives even unto death” (Rev. 12:11 ESV).

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Living Documents

Interview with Carlton Walker, IMB missionary for 45 years.

Karen Pearce

Learning from Living Documents

It is a Sunday morning in September at Living Hope Baptist Church in Sappo, Japan, but not a normal Sunday morning. Today the walls are lined with rows and rows of shelves with pictures of people who have passed away. Today the members of Living Hope honor those who went before them, celebrating their lives and their faith. They have a roll call—160 names called out reverently to honor those who went before—their walk of faith and their contributions to the church. “We emphasized the faithfulness of the Lord to us through our families and acknowledged that we are building on the shoulders of giants,” said Carlton Walker, IMB missionary to Japan and founding member of Living Hope.¹

Other Christian churches in Japan do not do this ceremony. Living Hope developed this church tradition to make their church more indigenous and contextualized to the Japanese culture. In Japanese culture, honoring the aged and the dead is very important. In fact, they have two special days every

¹ Interview with Carlton Walker, Teams video call, October 22, 2024.

autumn for these remembrances. *Keirō no Hi*² is the “Respect for the Aged Day” and the day around which Living Hope plans its special ceremony. In August of each year the Japanese celebrate *Obon*,³ a festival centering on honoring the ancestors—visiting their graves and giving food offerings at house altars and temples. These two Buddhist-inspired events express a deep need for the Japanese to acknowledge their roots and seek the blessing of their family.

Walker and the leadership of Living Hope recognized this legitimate need and have worked to offer a way for congregants to express their love and appreciation for the god-given family they were born into without lapsing into pagan ancestor-worship. “We have taken some of the things Japanese long for and found a way to express it in a Christian context,” Walker said.

Living Hope is a good example of an indigenous church plant, the goal of all IMB missionaries globally. Indigenous churches, though helped in the initial stages by the missionary, learn to stand on their own in carrying out the key components of the missionary task, namely, entry, evangelism, discipleship, healthy church formation, and leadership development, so that the missionary can exit to partnership.

“Indigenization should go hand in hand with biblically appropriate contextualization, such that the evangelistic message, teaching, style, and worship of the church should be as much at home in the receptor culture as possible without compromising biblical standards,” said IMB Vice-President Zane Pratt. “This does not mean that the goal is to avoid all offense, but rather that any offense taken is the offense of the gospel rather than offense from biblically unnecessary foreignness.”⁴

Whereas Living Hope doesn’t worship ancestors-and they are clear about this-it has found a way to acknowledge the need to honor those that went before.

2 “Keiro No Hi – Celebrating and Recognizing Our Elders,” Keiro, accessed February 4, 2025, <https://www.keiro.org/features/keiro-no-hi-holiday>.

3 “Obon,” Japan-Guide.com, accessed February 4, 2025, <https://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2286.html>.

4 Zane Pratt, email to author, August 9, 2024.

A lifetime of experience

Carlton and Cornelia Walker began their missionary career with IMB 45 years ago. Forty-two of those have been spent in Japan. When they arrived in 1982, more than 100 years had passed since Baptists first planted churches in this island nation.

Shinto (a type of animism) and Buddhism are the traditional Japanese religions, having existed there since the 6th century C.E. However, Christianity had been welcomed during the Meiji Restoration beginning in 1868, when the Imperials ushered in an era of openness to anything Western. During this time, Christians saw that women were not educated and set about to bring change, especially influencing the next generation of imperial women. Because of Christians modeling family relationships and educating women, Christianity was seen as favorable and was readily accepted. “The church didn’t come in to dominate or push down, it worked itself into the warp and woof of society by serving,” Carlton said.

Carlton and Cornelia did their part to continue serving well by asking many questions and learning from their Japanese brothers and sisters. “When my generation landed, there was a degree of indigenous thought, but we were just so happy that there were churches already here to learn from that we took a position being students,” Carlton said. “How do we pray, do a home visit, what is appropriate to say in different situations?.... The churches looked a lot like our American churches outwardly because of the Baptist ancestors who had come before us, but there was a lot of really good stuff that they had developed too.”

Japanese are an adopting culture, having a genius for taking things from others and making it their own. “They are not the best at making things indigenous because they appreciate the foreign. The foreign face is compelling to them, but in the background they are working on making the faith indigenous,” Walker said. Outwardly and even functionally, many of the churches image a Western church, but the themes are different.

Carlton remembered when he first arrived and realized the church was preaching through Jeremiah. He wondered why they were spending so much time on this book and not focusing more on the gospel and the hope of Christ. When he asked, his Japanese brother said, “We understand suffering. We get it.” That conversation was eye-opening to Carlton as he began to appreciate

how Japan's history had shaped them differently, and yet the Christian faith was big enough for both cultures.

The god shelf and other cultural idols

Sometimes, in planting a healthy church, lines must be drawn narrowly. Walker told a story of another missionary who came before him named Annie Hoover. She was confronted with a common issue in Japan—the god shelf. This shelf is a household altar where daily food offerings are given to the gods and worship takes place. This shelf is such a part of culture that nearly every Japanese-style house has a place built in for this shelf as part of the basic architecture. This shelf is often passed down through generations through the elder son, and it is an offense to others if one does not honor the tradition.

For many believers, the choice is clear, and they do not have these altars in their homes. Instead, they display something prominently in the home to declare their Christian faith. However, the choice is never easy. Not having the shelf can be an offense to family and neighbors, and it rejects a deeply held cultural value of harmony and respect. For those who are new to the faith, the choice to part with this tradition is difficult.

When now-emeritus missionary Annie Hoover had the privilege of seeing a friend surrender her life to Christ many years ago, she walked with her through those early days of discipleship. The new believer recognized quickly that she needed to get rid of her god-shelf, but she didn't know what to do with it. She couldn't put it in the garbage, as that would offend the neighborhood. She couldn't take it back to the temple because it was costly. When Annie asked what she wanted to do with it, she said she wished she could burn it. Annie decided that was a brilliant idea. She brought the altar to her private, walled residence and organized a service with other church members and pastors where they burned the altar as an offering to the Lord.

Whereas the god shelf is literally a place for idols, other cultural idols are more hidden and woven into the fabric of the people. When missionaries are new to a culture, they have to learn to recognize these cultural idols and discern how to draw the line between indigeneity and confronting the idols. Two Japanese idols that stand out to Carlton are conformity and busyness. Though these may not sound like idols, they often compromise a strong walk with God.

The Japanese have a saying that the nail that sticks up gets knocked down. They do not want to stick up or stand out for any reason. In contrast, for many Americans, standing out is a positive thing and personal belief often trumps politeness. “Japanese aren’t purposefully deceitful, but getting along and harmony is so very important to them,” Carlton said.

The Japanese also have a term that means “death by overwork.” Their strong work ethic, while admirable, means that they are incredibly busy and inaccessible. “They are busy to the degree that key relations and families suffer,” Carlton said. Teaching them to take time for fellowship and spiritual growth is a challenge.

The ability to recognize and engage these hidden idols in culture is a learned practice. The Walkers’ 42 years in Japan have mined a wealth of wisdom. One nugget is that Americans have their hidden idols as well, and missionaries should be aware of these. “We all have a Bible within a Bible—the part that appeals to us, but the whole counsel of God works really well when we apply it to the holistic issues that other cultures are facing,” Carlton said.

These hard situations are ones that missionaries face regularly as they share Christ in foreign cultures. The Walkers have years of experience navigating these waters.

Leaving a legacy

As the Walkers reflect on 45 years of ministry, they marvel at how faithful God has been and how much he still has to do. They have no plans to retire and are being used right now in mentoring and leading newer missionaries to their region of Japan. They celebrate the strong indigenous church they planted and the years of discipleship and catalytic ministry they have enjoyed. Some things they did didn’t last as long as they would have liked, but others flourished.

In talking to Carlton, the thing that shines through is his deep respect for the Japanese and his patience and kindness in learning their culture and their ways. His words of advice center on listening to the people’s stories, learning what speaks to them and what issues they are facing. Carlton learned over the years to truly appreciate that church members are the living documents he could learn from. He recognized their experience and wisdom and the aspects of their culture that reflect biblical truth. He also recognized the need to fill some holes that their indigenous ways don’t fill. In bringing the gospel to

bear in that context, he learned to adapt some of his ideas that were more cultural than biblical while helping them be aware of their own cultural blind spots. Working side-by-side caused a synergy to occur. “Their experience can speak to us, and our desire to see church planted can help them,” he said.

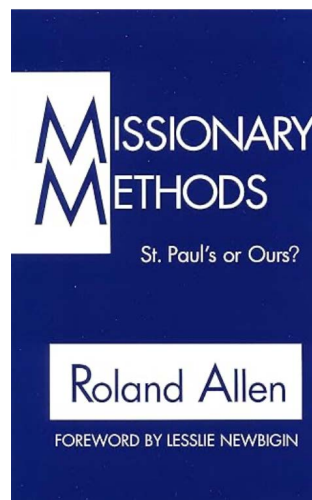
When asked what Carlton would tell new missionaries coming to Japan, his answer was poignant: “With the wisdom of Solomon, the evangelical fire of Paul, the patience of Job, the longevity of Methuselah, and the love of Jesus Christ, you stand a good chance of having an impact.”

RESOURCE REVIEWS

Allen, Roland. *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962.

Reviewed by Kyle Brosseau, IMB personnel, Europe

Missionary Methods was written by Anglican missionary Roland Allen in 1912. Serving as part of what was then called the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, Allen lived and worked mostly in China but also conducted research in India and Africa. This diversity of experiences led him to the firm conviction that churches in mission contexts should be thoroughly indigenous and functioning autonomously as early as possible. This principle shows up prominently in what has certainly come to be Allen's most enduring work. In *Missionary Methods*, the author insists that there is a certain "universality" to the apostle Paul's strategy for spreading the gospel, suggesting boldly that his methods are still "suitable to the circumstances of our day." The central feature of Paul's missionary methods, Allen argues in this classic work, is their laser focus on the goal of indigenous, autonomous churches.



A major strength of *Missionary Methods* is how consistently it directs its various points of practical advice at the central goal of nurturing indigenous, autonomous churches in mission contexts. Allen writes of Paul's tendency

to start his work in a given region from select urban centers. He explains that the apostle never brought financial aid to the peoples he aimed to evangelize. Perhaps most importantly, Allen emphasizes that Paul taught new converts to rely on the Holy Spirit rather than on him for their growth and direction. With all of these points of advice, Allen makes clear that Paul's aim was to make sure the new believers in a given region came to constitute truly indigenous churches that operated on their own. Allen's consistency on this argument is one of the book's strengths.

At the same time, as Allen shows readers how emulating Paul's missionary methods might optimize our work today, he runs the risk of communicating to some that each and every thing Paul did should be mimicked precisely by missionaries in our time. This repetition is a potential weakness of *Missionary Methods*. Paul's strategies may have a certain universality about them, and they are surely suitable to our present circumstances in a lot of ways. However, individual mission contexts today may call for some tools and processes not explicitly preceded in Paul's work.

In keeping with his tendency to show how Paul strove to develop indigenous, autonomous churches in mission contexts, Allen emphasizes that the apostle always seemed to have an eye on his "retirement." This point has tremendous significance for missionaries today. The final component of what we at the International Mission Board see as the core missionary task is a phase of the work we refer to as exit to partnership. The idea is that cross-cultural missionaries should always be working toward healthily removing themselves from the contexts in which they serve. Allen points out that Paul rejoiced when new believers could grow in their faith without him. He reminds today's readers that outside missionaries were never intended to be permanent features of the churches they labor to plant. A key significance of Allen's *Missionary Methods*, then, is that it reminds missionaries to always be working toward exit.

Overall, Roland Allen's *Missionary Methods* is a classic work of missiology. It is an indisputable keystone in the longstanding legacy of reflection that we now have on the importance of indigeneity and church autonomy in mission contexts.

To fully understand Roland Allen, and to situate his thinking within its own historical context, it is best to also examine the work of Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn from several decades prior. Anderson and Venn had called

for churches in mission contexts to be self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating. That is, they celebrated indigeneity and church autonomy in the mission field, and they too encouraged cross-cultural workers to always be working toward their own exit. The seminal teachings of Anderson and Venn are reflected well in select issues of the Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research from the late 1970s to early 80s.

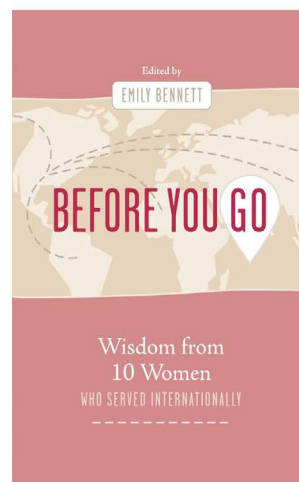
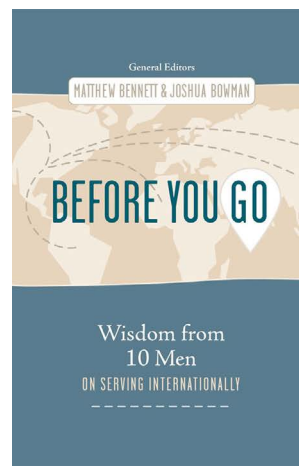
Bennett, Emily, ed. *Before You Go: Wisdom from Ten Women who Served Internationally*. Nashville: B&H Books, 2023.

Bennett, Matthew and Joshua Bowman, eds. *Before You Go: Wisdom from Ten Men on Serving Internationally*. Nashville: B&H Books, 2024.

Reviewed by Mark and Megan Street, IMB Personnel, NAME region

Before You Go: Wisdom from 10 Men Who Served Internationally edited by Matthew Bennett and Joshua Bowman and *Before You Go: Wisdom from 10 Women Who Served Internationally* edited by Emily Bennet are collections of essays that capture decades of experience in a personal and practical book. These works provide a succinct foundation for beginning and enduring in the missionary life. These books will help missionaries consider what needs to be surrendered before they go overseas and wrestle through the realities and challenges of life on the field. These books are also great resources for the local church, to understand how to better support and encourage the ones they send.

While there is no distinction in Scripture between men and women in obeying our Lord's command to make disciples of all nations, men and women experience missionary life differently. We share many of the same struggles but also face different kinds of challenges in our roles as wives, husbands, singles,



fathers, or mothers. It is refreshing to see this fleshed out in the books by intentionally giving opportunity for our sisters' perspectives and wisdom to benefit us all. Together the books provide a more accurate picture of missionary life and a more helpful resource for the body of Christ. The well-thought-out questions at the end of each chapter challenge the reader to process and interact with the content rather than just passively consume it. The editors and contributors have served in an international context, but most are now serving in other settings such as local U.S. churches, academic institutions, or leadership positions in mission organizations. Although these books address longevity in various ways, a chapter that offers some insight into the decision to stay on the field or to leave for another field of ministry would have been a welcome addition.

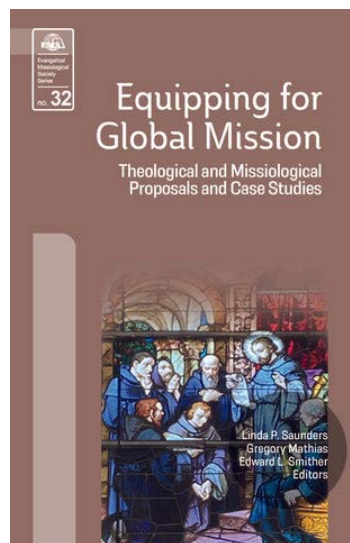
In reading through the *Before You Go* books, we found ourselves relating to much of their content and wishing that we would have had access to them when we began our journey more than 20 years ago. These brothers and sisters spoke truth into the fears and struggles that we still battle. They challenged us to once again lay down the assumptions and demands that we make of God on this journey. We like the honesty and transparency the authors show in how they dealt with struggles and suffering. The books normalize suffering from a Biblical perspective. Given that the Great Commission is not for a chosen few, we feel like there are certain chapters for every follower of Christ to read and understand. These include discerning one's calling, identity in Christ, suffering, prayer and evangelism, and the spiritual life. Taking the gospel across geographical, cultural, and linguistic barriers to spiritually dark and resistant peoples and places shapes the one carrying the gospel. While these topics may sound familiar to the local church, they are written from the mission field perspective.

The church continues to obediently pursue the vision of every nation, tribe, people and language. For the gospel to go to every people and place, missionaries and those that send them will need to be prepared for the growing challenges and uncertainty that await. We believe that the *Before You Go* books are resources God has given the church for such a time as this. We strongly recommend *Before You Go* to those who may be considering serving internationally, those early in their time of service, sending churches, or anyone interested in deepening their understanding of the task given to the church to make disciples of all nations.

Saunders, Linda P., Mathias, Gregory, Smither, Edward L. *Equipping for Global Mission: Theological and Missiological Proposals and Case Studies*. Littleton, CO: William Carey Publishing, 2024.

W. Mark Johnson, IMB Personnel, American Peoples Affinity Group

Equipping for Global Mission: Theological and Missiological Proposals and Case Studies is a work of great ambition. In 258 pages, it attempts to present the best practices for global leadership training for worldwide Gospel advancement. Linda Saunders, Gregory Mathias, and Edward Smither edit the book. Saunders holds an adjunct teaching position at Liberty University in intercultural communication and cultural anthropology. Smither serves as the Dean of Intercultural Studies at Columbia International University. Gregory Mathias is the leader of the Global Mission Center at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. These three have been significant contributors to the Evangelical Missiological Society.



The editors gathered twenty-four evangelical scholars and missiologists to examine the most effective practices for global missional leadership training. Taken together, the articles present a comprehensive overview of the current best practices for educating global mission leaders worldwide. Anyone involved in training missionary leaders

will be able to find something valuable in these chapters for their leadership training reality.

The book has sixteen chapters divided into three parts. Part 1 consists of reflections on education in missions. Part 2 focuses on proposals for leadership training. In Part 3, six case studies describe proposals that are being implemented in different mission contexts.

This book is valuable for anyone concerned about or directly involved in leadership training in a national or global mission context. The impact of any given article will vary depending on the reader. Most readers will find something practical that can be applied to their own ministry. As a first step, I recommend a general reading of the book's context. Find something that piques your interest before diving into the entire book.

I found Chapter 3's research results on the effectiveness of missionary training in formal teaching environments to be encouraging. This article encouraged me to press on with the training of Great Commission workers in my ministry context. Chapter 4 provided insights into the future challenges and opportunities in training the next generation of Great Commission servants.

I would, however, offer some critical observations. My first concern is the arrangement of the articles. The overall presentation of the book would be strengthened by placing articles 3 and 4 as the first two articles. Article 3 presents theological and missiological education as still having a positive impact on missionary advancements worldwide. Article 4 highlights challenges that will be faced when training the next generation of Great Commission workers. In my opinion, this arrangement would have been more effective in setting the overall tone of the book. The tone of articles 1 and 2 was somewhat like that of an evangelical jeremiad. While jeremiads can be necessary, I initially thought it was the thrust of the book. A different arrangement would have set a different tone of expectation for the reader.

Another area of critique comes from my missionary experience in Brazil. I observed that there were multiple references in the articles to the work of Paulo Freire, a widely recognized Brazilian educator. Freire is a respected authority in his field of expertise. Nonetheless, his work is consistently linked to the religious and political left in Brazil, specifically those with strong Marxist tendencies. I am fully committed to pursuing justice and economic well-being for those who are in poverty. I feel strongly that using an author known for Marxist-tinted social and religious analysis in a book that seeks to impact

and direct evangelical missions is ill-advised. To determine the best methods and practices for advancing evangelical theological education worldwide, evangelical mission practitioners require theologically informed evaluation, not ideologically driven critique.

The younger leaders I work with believe appealing to authors who adhere to Marxist analysis is not the most effective way to achieve genuine missionary contextualization. To the contrary, Marxist analysis is the evangelical church's path to the Babylonian Captivity of the cultural accommodation. While advising the utmost caution, I want to reiterate my utmost confidence in the theological integrity and missiological intentions of this volume's authors.¹

This book has provoked much within me to consider. If you are involved in leadership training, you will want to read this book as well. You will find much in this book to set your heart to dreaming, your mind to thinking, and your hands to working.

1 I am not aware of a robust evangelical missions-minded agency in the Americas that uses Marxist-tinted analysis to advance theological and missiological education. Among the young evangelical leaders with whom I work, Abraham Kuyper or Herman Bavinck are more favored than Freire or Gutierrez. It is a fundamental misreading of the cultures to think that genuine missionary contextualization passes only through the interpretive lens of some form of Critical Theory. For further study, see Will Brooks, "Allowing a Theology of Mission to Shape Theological Education in the Majority World" in *Equipping for Global Mission: Theological and Missiological Proposals and Case Studies*, Linda P. Saunders, Gregory Mathias, and Edward L. Smither, eds. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Publishing, 2024), 71-84.

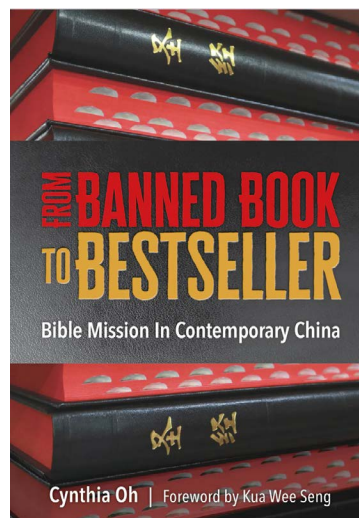
Oh, Cynthia. *From Banned Book to Bestseller: Bible Mission in Contemporary China*. Littleton Colorado: William Carey Publishing, 2024.

Reviewed by Lucy Witten, IMB Personnel, Asia Pacific

“The greatest missionary is the Bible in the mother tongue. It needs no furlough and is never considered a foreigner” (95). These words from William Cameron Townsend, founder of Wycliffe Bible Translators, emphasize the importance of Bible translation, printing, and distribution to make the gospel of Jesus Christ known.

From Banned Book to Bestseller describes the transformation of China from a spiritual desert into one of the largest Bible producing countries in the world. This book is the story of God’s Word spreading throughout China through Bible missions among registered churches. Cynthia Oh shares firsthand testimonies of Chinese Christians across the nation through her work with United Bible Societies China Partnership. Her book is a record of Chinese Christians’ deep love and hunger for the Bible and diligent effort to spread His Word to all the peoples of China.

From Banned Book to Bestseller is strengthened by its detailed history, frequent photos and testimonies, and emphasis on multiple peoples and situations in China. First, Oh helps the reader to understand the background of the Bible in China. She details the original missionary translation work of the Bible into Mandarin,



the spread of God's Word and the church in the ensuing years, and the dark days of Bible scarcity during the Cultural Revolution. This history sets the stage for the reader to better understand the miraculous nature of the first Bible printing press in China.

Second, the book also contains numerous photos and testimonies from Chinese believers. The reverent, smiling faces and joyful words from our brothers and sisters in the Lord as they receive a copy of the Bible in their hands stir the reader's heart to thanksgiving to God. Instead of mere bland statistics, these testimonies create an intimate picture of the life-change God brings to His people through the Bible. These individuals made difficult decisions, endured hardships, and trusted the Lord for the copy of God's Word they hold.

Third, Oh explains how multiple groups in Chinese received the Bible—Protestants, Catholics, ethnic minorities, and the Deaf. Bible portions were instrumental in sharing the good news for those suffering during COVID and helping families grow in Christ together. The chapter on Braille Bibles for blind Chinese is particularly moving. These Bibles are expensive and labor-intensive to print, yet the Chinese press (Amity Printing Company) and generous givers from around the world prioritized their production and distribution so all could read the Scriptures.

One weakness of the book is that the scope is limited to the registered churches in China. Oh acknowledges that her book is meant to be one story of the many of what God is doing in China. Future works need to be written as witness to God's work of the Bible distribution, gospel proclamation, and church expansion among the unregistered church.

This book is a valuable resource for any missionary. There is great joy in heaven over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:10). How much more can we rejoice that so many heard the gospel and were saved through God's Word going forth in China! The emphasis on the centrality and value of God's Word is imperative in all missionary work. What message do we have without the good news of the Bible? The poignant testimonies of believers who went without food, walked for days, or faced jail time to have a copy of God's Word call the missionary to honestly look at her own hunger for the Bible. How can we grow in our own love for the Word?

Oh also highlights the many partnerships that made the production and distribution of the Bible possible. This example of synergistic gospel ministry can encourage missionaries as they work with local and international

partners in their own contexts. How can we partner well, encouraging locals to grow and lead well in their own context?

I highly recommend this book to any missionary. *From Banned Book to Bestseller* encourages the missionary to see how God moved mightily through the proclamation and distribution of his Word. The book also challenges the missionary to hunger for the Bible in her own life and to participate in spreading the Bible message to all peoples. For more in-depth reading of the work of God in China, Paul's Hattaway's series *The China Chronicles* gives detailed accounts of the work in many areas of the country.