The "Gospel" of Cultural Sustainability:

Missiological Insights

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Abstract

Christian missionaries were some of the earliest cross-cultural workers. The author, a former missionary and current student of cultural sustainability, notes a close correspondence between the passions of missionaries and cultural sustainability practitioners. Each field believes it has good news to share. Each desires to serve communities in ways that enhance their vitality—ideologically and pragmatically. Neither is satisfied simply to observe and document cultures; they have a desire to actively *engage* with people, helping to facilitate community-driven change that honors and sustains cherished cultural values. Both confront the powerful impulses of globalization.

The author contends that these commonalities warrant an examination of Christian missionaries' two millennia of cross-cultural experiences for insights which could benefit the emerging field of cultural sustainability. This research surveys the models employed by missionaries as they interacted with foreign cultures, both historically and in contemporary times. It describes three case studies which illustrate the application of cultural sustainability principles to work on the mission field. Finally, based on analysis of the historical survey and case studies, it offers a number of implications for the work of cultural sustainability and presents a set of recommended best practices.

Chapter One

The Conceptual Groundwork

My enrollment in the Cultural Sustainability program at Goucher College came soon after my return to the U.S. following two years as a Christian missionary in Ethiopia. "Missionary." My husband, son, and I did not fit the image that many people would associate with the title. We did not live in a hut in the bush, laboring to convert unsaved tribespeople to Christianity. Instead we lived in the capital city, in a modest house, and worked with the national Mennonite church leadership there, primarily in the arenas of leadership development and trauma healing. Our work took us to more remote parts of the country, but even there we focused on teaching workshops for church leaders. All of our contacts with other East Africans were an extension of that work.

Our time in Ethiopia was brief, but had a profound impact on my thinking and understandings. I could not have anticipated in advance how it would feel to live for two years as part of a small minority group, and to have my Caucasian skin stand out in every crowd. To compound my discomfort, despite my best efforts, I was unable to master the local language on more than a rudimentary level; every interaction, therefore, relied on others' English proficiencies and translation skills. Throughout our term, I struggled to understand the customs and expectations of that culture. Some of my most basic cultural assumptions were challenged as I learned about differences in communication styles, "telling the truth," and concepts of time. It was humbling to be so foreign, so dependent. The Ethiopians were gracious and patient, but my heart longed to be able to enter more fully into their worlds. The two years were simultaneously very short and very long.

This time in Africa offered many social and anthropological insights. Ethiopia is unique among its East African neighbors in some significant ways. Ethiopia was the earliest major empire to

officially adopt Christianity as a state religion, dating back to the 4th century.[1] Due to centuries of isolation from the rest of the Christian world,[2] the Ethiopian Orthodox Church developed as a unique, indigenous expression of Christianity which is a blend of Jewish/Hebrew, Christian, and primal religious beliefs and practices (C. Shenk 259-268). Contemporary Ethiopian cultural practices reflect a continuing commitment to this form of Christianity.

Ethiopia also retains a distinction as the only African nation which was not colonized.[3] This liberty impacted Ethiopian culture in ways which have distanced it from its previously-colonized neighbors. Ethiopia did not "benefit" economically and technologically as the other nations did. However, this isolation left it with traditions (such as music) and dynamics of power (including church structures) that are uniquely Ethiopian rather than adaptations of Western ideas. Ethiopia now finds itself, though, scrambling to catch up with the rest of the world, to integrate technological "progress" into a traditional culture. Missionaries, who span both worlds, often wrestle with how to introduce beneficial community development in ways that will respect existing cultural values and promote partnerships and community ownership.

Our time in Ethiopia left me with observations and questions that continued to dominate my thinking. Nearly all of these concerned the nature of change as it relates to existing culture. Although the extent and speed vary, every culture inevitably experiences change. Defining the acceptability of the initiators and parameters of change can be challenging, even divisive. Every innovation that is introduced into a culture—African or American—comes at some cost. It is essential, then, to grapple with issues of agency and to determine who is in the best position to decide what is an "improvement" and whether or not it is worth any corresponding trade-offs.

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[1] Some Ethiopian legends trace the introduction of Christianity back even farther, to New Testament times (C. Shenk 277).

[2] The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, related to the Egyptian Coptic Orthodox Church, has been a constant presence and unifying factor in Ethiopia for over 1600 years. In early centuries the empire, and Christianity, spread throughout the Horn of Africa and onto the Arabian Peninsula. But the birth of Islam in the 7th century and its subsequent penetration into East Africa cut Ethiopia off from the rest of the world (C. Shenk).

[3] Some assert that Liberia shares this distinction. (See Wikipedia.)

As my husband and I prepared for re-entry into U.S. culture, all of these experiences in Africa were fresh in our minds. Among our many new insights, we realized that two major principles we had gleaned could inform any subsequent endeavors: 1) when working with people, the only assumption we can make is that we can't make any assumptions; and 2) every group interaction usually has some cross-cultural components. As we returned to pastoral ministry, we resolved to regard our new congregational placements as cross-cultural assignments. We tried to assume the same type of cautious, learning posture in these new settings that we had adopted when we arrived in Ethiopia. As we attempted to do so, I became increasingly aware that even my impressions of the culture of this region of Pennsylvania were skewed by my own past experiences and understandings of life. Having no background in anthropology, I felt drawn to explore a more formal approach to comprehending and interacting with those from other cultures. When I discovered the Cultural Sustainability program, I knew I had found a helpful combination of *observation* of cultures and *interaction* with them.

I entered the Cultural Sustainability program with the expectation that the coursework and relationships I would experience there would help to improve our pastoral ministry and provide insights which would strengthen the viability of the two small churches we were serving—an expectation which was realized. I soon discovered, though, that my course assignments and class discussions brought additional insights and clarifications about my time in Ethiopia. I found explanations for behaviors and attitudes that had been mystifying at the time. I discovered why some of our initiatives had been more successful than others. I identified some of my own cultural blindspots.

In the midst of this self-discovery, I also noted a close correspondence between the passions of missionaries and cultural sustainability workers. Each believes they have a "gospel" (literally "good news") to share. Both groups desire to serve communities in ways that enhance its vitality—ideologically and pragmatically. Neither is satisfied simply to observe and document cultures; they have a desire to engage with people, helping to facilitate community-driven change that honors and sustains cherished cultural values. I began to wonder how the emerging field of cultural sustainability could benefit from missionaries' two millennia of

cross-cultural work experiences. To begin to explore this possible convergence, I had first to familiarize myself with the discipline of missiology—to learn more about missionary strategies of the past and in contemporary times—and to clarify my understandings of the field of cultural sustainability.

Definition—"Missiology"

Missionaries, whether or not they carried that label, have reached out to others since the time of Christ. Missiologists and missiology entered the scene centuries later. Missiology, defined most simply in *Collins English Dictionary*, is "the study of the *missionary function* of the Christian church" (emphasis added). Missiologists have not yet reached a consensus of understanding of the term. This is an interdisciplinary field whose parameters vary among its constituents. The issues are complex; those who seek to define it vary in their views concerning the convergences of its interdisciplinary components, their theological understandings and priorities, their approaches to doing mission, etc. A number of prominent missiologists have published definitions (see, for example Scherer's analysis of Anderson, Tippet, and Verkuyl— Scherer, "Missiology" 511-514)—all of which are more complex than is helpful for the purposes of this paper.

Alan Neely's definition, which would undoubtedly be considered overly simplistic by many missiologists, at least provides a point of connection for the layperson: "Missiology is the conscious, intentional, ongoing reflection on the doing of mission. It includes theory(ies) of mission, the study and teaching of mission, as well as the research, writing, and publication of works regarding mission" (Neely 633). A shortcoming of Neely's definition is its failure to articulate missiology's interdisciplinary nature.   Missiologists draw useful insights, theories, techniques, and skills from the disciplines/fields of theology, anthropology, sociology, linguistics, history, psychology, political science, communications, world religions, agriculture, medicine, education, and more. In fact, many missiologists hold degrees in these sister disciplines (Anderson 4; Tippet, *Introduction* xiv; Scherer, "Missiology" 514-518).

Missiology's disciplinary roots extend back to the 13th century. Missionary-scholar Ramón Lull is believed to be the first to publish critical reflections on missions and to propose

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"establishment of colleges for the linguistic and theological preparation of missionaries to Muslims and Jews" (Neely 633). In subsequent centuries various missionaries, and scholars, published treatises on missionary theology and methodology. Gradually, missions became a scholarly endeavor. In the latter half of the 19th century, professorships of missions were established in several universities and seminaries, at first as part of "the study of practical theology and/or church history, and later as a separate department or course of study….By the turn of the century the number of essays, books and journals dealing with mission issues had expanded significantly…and the number of courses, professors, and chairs of mission increased dramatically" (*Ibid.*, 634). In 1973 The American Society of Missiology (ASM) was formed as an ecumenical professional organization of missions scholars, soon followed by the inauguration of the professional journal *Missiology* (preceded by *Practical Anthropology*) (Glasser, "Missiology" 4; Anderson 4). The January 1976 issue of *Missiology* proudly announced "a historic landmark": the *Council on the Study of Religion* had "voted to accept the American Society of Missiology as one of its constituent member societies." Missiology had thus become "a fully recognized academic discipline in North America" (Luzbetak, "Missiology" 11). It should be noted, however, that missiology is not geographically limited; distinguished missiologists, missiology centers, and professional journals can be found throughout the world (Bevans and Schroeder 274-5).

Definition—"Cultural Sustainability"

The emerging field of cultural sustainability also eludes precise definition. Like missiology, it is interdisciplinary, actually drawing from many of the same sister disciplines. As such, its articulation emerges from the variety of experiences of those who practice it, and is in a perpetual state of being defined and redefined. The field has come to have (at least) two identifiable perspectives: 1) the "application of ideas of sustainability to cultural concerns;" and 2) the "role served by culture in planning for sustainable development" (Vermont Folklife Center website).

In 1998 the Sustainable Development Research Institute provided a simple definition of cultural sustainability: "the ability to retain cultural identity, and to allow change to be guided in ways

that are consistent with the cultural values of a people" (quoted in Duxbury & Gillette). This involves "ensuring the sustainability of cultural practices" (Vermont FC website). Cultural sustainability focuses on "actively identifying, protecting, and enhancing cultural traditions through activism, fieldwork, academic scholarship, and grassroots communications" (Goucher website).

In 2001, Jon Hawkes' *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability* firmly anchored cultural vitality and sustainability with other traditional components of sustainable development—economic viability, social equity, and environmental responsibility (Hawkes 25). In Hawkes' context, cultural sustainability can be framed as "the role served by culture in planning for sustainable development" (Vermont FC website). "Real global change for the environment,…economic wellbeing, and the good of society" can only be effected if they are built upon the "strong cultural foundations" already in place (Goucher website).

These two perspectives concerning the interactive roles of culture and sustainability are not so easily compartmentalized in actual practice. Current practitioners and scholars often find themselves working at intersections of the two. Those coming from "anthropology, ethnomusicology, folklore and oral history have begun to explore how the concept of sustainability fits in with their work." Simultaneously, professionals from other fields "such as arts administration, education, environmental studies, community and economic development, and community organizing have engaged increasingly with how the cultures of the communities with which they work can impact their professional efforts" (Vermont Folklife Center website). Cultural sustainability, then, "provides a framework for discussing tradition as a dynamic cultural process, one that empowers people to make intentional decisions about their communities" (*Ibid*.).

Cultural sustainability's roots can be found especially in the fields of cultural anthropology and public folklore. From the advent of modern anthropology in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, its emphasis was on fieldwork—observation and documentation of social and cultural practices, primarily among less-developed societies. Its focus was on building the knowledge base concerning the people of the world. In order to protect the purity of the

cultures being studied, anthropologists were expected to exert as little influence as possible upon those they were observing (Monaghan and Just 31). The field of public folklore, which coalesced as a subfield of folklore in the latter part of the 20th century, produced folklorists who *interacted* with those they studied. Their work focused primarily on documenting, preserving, and presenting the expressive traditions of cultures, including folk art, music, oral traditions, etc., and took place outside the academic setting, in the public sector of arts councils, museums, and festivals. Both fields—cultural anthropology and public folklore—have experienced philosophical shifts in recent years. Individuals within each field have begun to take more active roles in helping communities to conserve their cultures and have advocated on their behalf to address issues of inequity and injustice. Public folklorists continued to move down this path, and recognized the need for interdisciplinary cooperation and sensitivities, as well as grassroots priorities (T. Turner 15; Hufford 4-5). These sensitivities have postured public folklorists to inaugurate cultural sustainability initiatives—in academic institutions and in the field.

Rationale

As I studied and experienced the priorities and principles of the world of cultural sustainability, and learned more about the history of missions, I became increasingly convinced that missiology/missions could contribute valuable insights to this emerging field. My research focused on answering two questions: *How can the interactions missionaries had with unfamiliar cultures, historically and in contemporary times, inform and strengthen the work of cultural sustainability? How can a cross-cultural worker enter another culture, assess its belief systems, and collaborate with its people to introduce something which could be beneficial while simultaneously sustaining important parts of the culture?*

As the field of cultural sustainability continues to develop, it will face many of the same challenges that missionaries have encountered. Cultural sustainability workers will have to find sensitive and effective ways to share their gospel. They will have to discover how to interact with and advocate for communities and their values. While missiology cannot provide insights for every scenario, it does have a number of significant contributions to make.

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1) *Christian missionaries were some of the earliest cross-cultural workers.* Missiologists have had the benefit and opportunity of looking back over two millenia of action and intervention. They have studied these past experiences and have worked to improve the cross-cultural integrity of missions. Although not every missionary will adopt the most sensitive and informed modes of cross-cultural work, a body of literature exists which presents the possibilities.

   Missionaries were also some of the first ethnographers. Some accounts of their experiences remain from early centuries. In more recent times, formal ethnographies of the people with whom they worked increased in the early 19th century, especially from missionaries working in the Pacific islands. William Ellis's 1827 publication of his *Narrative of a Tour Through Hawaii, or Owhyhee: With Observations on the Natural History of the Sandwich Islands, and Remarks on the Manners Customs, Tradition, History, and Language of Their Inhabitants* was the "first of many examples of a genre of missionary writing that combined reporting on mission progress, careful ethnography, and what today we would call missiological comment" (Hitchen, 458). When anthropology entered the scene in the mid-19th century, "armchair social philosophers speculated on the origin of human beings, their religion, and their culture," searching for scientific explanations of the human and cultural diversity revealed through global exploration and colonization (Whiteman, "Anthropology" 398). These early anthropologists relied heavily on data collected by explorers, travelers, and missionaries to aid them in developing theories which would explain the diversities. Some even corresponded directly with missionaries, "inquiring about the people among whom they lived, and outlining areas of research for missionaries to pursue" (*Ibid.*). In the 1920's and 1930's firsthand anthropological fieldwork eventually augmented, but never fully discarded, these missionary sources.

2) *Missionaries have had a positive impact on many cultures.* A stereotype that missionaries destroyed the cultures they encountered continues to prevail. Some openly acknowledge that this stereotype was grounded in some measure in truth. Don Richardson summarized

the reality in this manner: "We missionaries have sometimes acted in a culture-destroying manner. Whether through misinterpreting the Great Commission, pride, culture shock or simple inability to comprehend the values of others, we have needlessly opposed customs we did not understand. Some, had we understood them, might have served as communication keys for the gospel!" (Richardson 486).

However, the presence of missionaries in many parts of the world was beneficial. In one study sociologist Robert Woodberry researched the social impact of Christian missions by compiling data on missionary activity from the early 19th century through the mid-20th century. He found overall trends that showed that missionaries developed written forms of oral languages; promoted mass education, literacy, and printing; mobilized colonial reform; and resisted the "scientific" racism which was prevalent during the period. He also examined key indicators that would demonstrate whether missionary activity in an area had improved or hurt it, especially in comparison to areas of little to no missionary involvement. In summary, he concluded a statistical association between the presence of missionaries in a society and that society's indicators of "human thriving," including levels of "literacy, educational enrollment, infant mortality, life expectancy, economic development," etc. (R. Woodberry 286-89).[4] If these indicators are considered desirable outcomes, then the methods of missionaries should be consulted to discover how such measures were accomplished.

3) *Missiology offers a unique set of experiences in cultural intervention from which cultural sustainability can derive its own strategies*. Others of the social sciences have focused on *documenting, assessing, and observing* in order to understand communities. Missionaries *actively engaged* the communities they served.

Although missionaries and anthropologists have often been concerned with the same populations, the relationship between the two has historically been fraught with animosity

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[4] This is an extremely brief summary of Woodberry's study. His report includes many more details about his methodology, statistical controls, and conclusions than can be addressed here.

and suspicion. Each had legitimate reasons for their distrust of the other. Anthropologists cited traditional missions practices which they believed interfered with and destroyed cultures. Missionaries pointed to cultural relativism which refused to criticize any aspect of culture and often ignored or minimized a community's spirituality. Anthropologists remained aloof, even as participant observers, fearing any influence upon those they studied. Missionaries who immersed themselves in the communities they served were in direct conflict with this ideal that cultures should remain undisturbed. "Since anthropologists have preached the integrity of each culture, change (unless it has been internally motivated)" could be seen as "upsetting a delicate machine, a functioning organism, or an intricate symbolic or communication system" (Stipe 42). By introducing a new religious paradigm (and its outward trappings), not only were missionaries being unethical by anthropological standards, they were altering an existing culture in ways that then made it impossible for it to be studied in its "pure" form. The belief system missionaries disseminated was one which most anthropologists did not personally embrace, magnifying the offense (D. Arnold 267). Additionally, some missionaries demonstrated insensitivities toward the cultures in which they worked, which could have been remedied if they had been more willing to appreciate the insights that anthropologists could offer them (Hitchen 466).

The past century witnessed a number of gradual convergences between the two fields. Anthropological training became a more integral part of missiology and training for missionaries. Anthropologists recognized that cultures were not static and should not be preserved in an idealized state. Activist anthropologists in recent decades have even raised the question "whether anthropologists can remain uninvolved in helping others when they have the knowledge and power to do so" and asserted that noninvolvement actually depersonalized people and preserved oppression and colonialism (Hiebert, "Missions" 174; see also Lamphere). Perhaps with more time, anthropologists will come to recognize more fully the potential of the resources missiology has to offer. In the meantime, though, the field of cultural sustainability is opening up a theoretical and physical space where

interdisciplinary collaboration, active engagement, and ethical interventions are not only possible but desirable. Cultural sustainability can embrace some missiological principles.

4) *The fields of missiology and cultural sustainability have many commonalities.* In addition to the orientation toward catalytic action and intervention addressed above, there are several other key parallels: both are interdisciplinary, drawing from many of the same disciplines; both work across cultural boundaries; both are motivated by an implicit sacrificial attitude which places the betterment of humanity above personal comfort and gain; and both have a passion to partner with communities in ways that give them hope and empower them to be sustained into the future.

Both fields recognize that culture change is inevitable and ongoing, and that they must be prepared to walk with communities in different types of circumstances. Both grapple with internal and external forces that threaten the survival of cultural values. At times, one field or the other may partner with a community to combat undesirable change that is being thrust upon them from the outside. At other times, when outsiders enforce change in ways that make it impossible to resist, people may need help dealing with its ramifications for their culture and their environment. Some communities voluntarily implement changes which they perceive to be beneficial and may need help to incorporate the new ideas into their traditions in the least disruptive manner. Other communities face physical displacement and need ways of sustaining their traditions in another locale. Finally, some groups face attrition and the gradual demise of their cultural traditions, and want help to preserve some kind of cultural legacy. Missionaries and cultural sustainability workers are those who can have a positive, hopeful impact in any of these scenarios.

Methodology

In order to investigate the cross-cultural insights which missionary experiences might provide the field of cultural sustainability, I conducted a survey of a portion of the literature which

described the history of missionary interaction with foreign cultures. I focused primarily on published secondary sources but also interviewed a small number of professionals currently working in the fields of missiology or cultural sustainability. In addition I chose three case studies which illustrate the application of cultural sustainability principles to work on the mission field. Finally, I analyzed the historical survey, as well as the case studies, and compiled a number of implications for the work of cultural sustainability and produced a set of recommended best practices.

Review of Literature—Cultural Sustainability

A comprehensive literature for the field of cultural sustainability is still in the process of emerging.

Most books and journal articles which address the intersection of culture and sustainability have focused on cultural sustainability as it relates to culture's impact on sustainable development. Jon Hawkes is widely credited with opening up this dialog in his 2001 *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: Culture's Essential Role in Public Planning*. Others such as Keith Nurse have continued to elaborate on Hawkes' ideas, using his framework to address a variety of issues related to sustainable development. Bill McKibben's *Deep Economy* has quickly become a popular manifesto which challenges the cultural assumptions that led to the current state of unsustainability and provides specific ideas for how individuals and communities can make intentional choices which will re-posture them for a more promising future. A number of editors and authors address culture's role in sustainable community development: Marie Hoff's collection of case studies in *Sustainable Community Development: Studies in Economic, Environmental, and Cultural Revitalization* provides examples of rural, urban and regional initiatives; Wendy Arkissian (*et al.*), in *Kitchen Table Sustainability: Practical Recipes for Community Engagement with Sustainability*, specifically includes cultural sustainability in a methodology for community engagement with sustainability processes; Arlene Goldbard's *New Creative Community: The Art of Cultural Development* provides the historical context, the theoretical underpinnings, and the practical application of the arts to community development.

An additional aspect of culture's role is explored at the intersection of religion/spirituality with sustainability. Among others, John Carroll's *Sustainability and Spirituality*, de Pater and Dankelman's *Religion and Sustainable Development*, and an assortment of articles in Worldwatch Institute's *2010 State of the World: Transforming Cultures from Consumerism to Sustainability* examine religious beliefs which offer predispositions toward sustainable practices, making some communities of faith potent allies. Gary Holthaus, in *Learning Native Wisdom: What Traditional Cultures Teach Us about Subsistence, Sustainability, and Spirituality*, discusses the historicity and interconnectedness of these cultural components for Native peoples and suggests ways traditional understandings of subsistence and spirituality can lead toward global sustainability. Ross Langmead, drawing from the current focus on ecotheology in Christian education and practice, applies some of ecotheology's principles to the mission field in "Ecomissiology."

The literature which is concerned with *ensuring the sustainability of cultural practices*, the aspect of cultural sustainability which this research explores, is more limited and comes primarily from the past three decades. Ormond Loomis's *Cultural Conservation: The Protection of Cultural Heritage in the United States,* Mary Hufford's anthology *Conserving Culture: A New Discourse on Heritage*, Baron and Spitzer's anthology *Public Folklore*, James Bau Graves' *Cultural Democracy*, and Debora Kodish's "Envisioning Folklore Activism" all propelled the field of public folklore in the direction of working with communities toward conserving their cultures. Sherry Ortner's "Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties," Louise Lamphere's "The Convergence of Applied, Practicing, and Public Anthropology in the 21st Century," and Terry Turner's "Anthropology as Reality Show and as Co-production: Internal Relations between Theory and Activism" are three among those who prodded their fellow anthropologists toward action/activism which would empower communities to challenge and transform structures. Many of the works cited above focused on the rationale for these types of involvements in sustaining cultures rather than on practical tools for implementation. These authors— academics and practitioners pushing out the edges of their disciplines—have paved the way for cultural sustainability's focus on sustaining communities and expressive culture, collaborative community research, and public policy initiatives that accomplish these missions.

Review of Literature—Missiology

Books and articles concerning cross-cultural contact, Christianity and culture, the anthropology of religion, and cultural anthropology from a Christian perspective abound. However, most of these are oriented toward present day cultures and awareness rather than historical perspectives on cross-cultural work.

There is also a plethora of resources around the topic of missionary anthropology. Many missiologists also have degrees in anthropology or other related fields, providing them with unique perspectives which span both worlds. Paul Hiebert—missionary, anthropologist, and missiologist—was one among many who published prolifically. Hiebert's legacy includes books such as *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, and *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*; articles like "Missions and Anthropology: A love/Hate Relationship" and "Critical Contextualization;" and collaborative volumes such as *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* and *Incarnational Ministry: Planting Churches in Band, Tribal, Peasant, and Urban Societies*. Hiebert's works, as well as those of other missiological anthropologists, were helpful for specific research topics and informed my thinking about culture and culture change.

A handful of books about mission became my constant companions. Alan Tippet's seminal *Introduction to Missiology* presents, among other things, the anthropological, historical, and practical dimensions of mission; it is also liberally sprinkled with case studies and helpful advice. David Bosch's *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* is also considered a seminal work in the field. Bosch traces the history of mission from biblical times up almost to the end of the 20th century, noting the paradigm which informed the understandings of each era. Bevans and Schroeder's *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* in many ways builds upon Bosch's foundation and was the most helpful of all the resources I found. Their contribution to the treatment of the history of mission includes an examination of six "constants" as they manifested in each historical period. One of the constants they consider throughout was the prevailing view of missionaries toward culture. In addition, at the end of each historical period, they include a section of "implications for the theology of mission today"

drawn from that period. Paul Pierson's *The Dynamics of Christian Mission: History through a Missiological Perspective* was helpful in providing an uncomplicated summary of various topics related to mission history, presented chronologically. I turned to Pierson's book when I needed a less scholarly explanation of topics I encountered in the denser sources, and when I wanted a quick glimpse of how various people and events fit into the grand scheme. Finally, *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader* (edited by Winter and Hawthorne) provided many (many!) essays on specific topics which related to my research, some of them reprinted classics, collated into one handy 800-page volume.

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None of the rich resources I found were able to provide direct answers to my research questions. I discovered that I would have to piece together the bits of information I could glean from a great variety of books and journal articles. I would have to assemble my own complete picture of the cultural experiences of missionaries and the wisdom they have to offer cultural sustainability workers.

The following description of my findings is organized into four additional chapters. Chapter two takes an extended look at patterns which emerged as I examined the accounts of missionary ventures into foreign cultures from the time of Christ until the mid-20th century. Chapter three describes contemporary models of mission which emerged in the latter part of the 20th century and continued into the current century. Chapter four presents three case studies of missionaries who exemplified principles of cultural sustainability in their work. Chapter five then takes analysis of the previous three chapters and uses it to delineate implications for the field of cultural sustainability, including a set of recommended best practices.

I invite you, the reader, to join me in this journey of discovery. I encourage you, for the time being, to set aside any feelings you might have about Christianity, religion, or spirituality in general, and to consider these Christian missionaries in light of their cross-cultural work. Even if you cannot condone their underlying motivation, perhaps you might respect their deep devotion to a cause for which they were willing to sacrifice their lives, and discover the many things the world can learn from their passionate endeavors to share good news.

Chapter Two

Historical Models of Cross-Cultural Mission Initiatives

Before he ascended into heaven, the resurrected Jesus told his disciples: "I have been given complete authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20, *Holy Bible NLT*).

Christians have grappled with this mandate—to share the "gospel," or "good news"—for two millennia. Jesus himself had not provided specific instructions for cross-cultural work, other than his personal example of love and acceptance of anyone who desired to join him. During his time on earth, his outreach included social outcasts such as fishermen, prostitutes, tax collectors, and traditional enemies of Israel. The apostles subsequently defined some of the parameters, providing written precedent. The Apostle Paul eventually wrote, "You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have been made like him. There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. For you are one in Christ Jesus. And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and now all the promises God gave to him belong to you" (Galatians 3:26-29, *Holy Bible NLT*).

This bold statement does not adequately reveal the series of challenging events which led to such a radical embracement. One of first tests of the inclusiveness of Christ's invitation arose with the conversion of some non-Jewish Greeks in a region some distance away from Israel. Those who shared the message of salvation there did so in a contextualized manner, using local pagan terminology to identify Jesus as Messiah in a way that would be understood in that culture (Walls, *Missionary* 35). As this group of converts grew in number, their lack of Jewish roots became a concern for some within the ranks of the Hebrew Christians. The question was

essentially a cultural one: should these Gentile Greeks be required first to become Jewish, as evidenced by the rite of circumcision and compliance with other aspects of Jewish culture, before they could be considered Christians? A council of Hebrew Christian leaders in Jerusalem reached the conclusion that, with some relatively minor conditions, the Gentile Christians were free from observing Jewish customs (see Acts 15). This was a major development in Christianity; not only had the message been contextualized by the use of another culture's vocabulary, it had also been released from its Jewish cultural accoutrements. These changes paved the way for the Apostle Paul's bold assertion of the equality and unity of humankind.

Since biblical times, Christian missionaries have relied on their knowledge of the scriptures, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the edicts of their superiors, and their cultural and historical contexts to shape their strategies for missionizing. A variety of models has emerged over the centuries, each with its own cultural limitations. Some converts were made by conquest; others were gently coaxed by culturally-sensitive methods. This chapter addresses some of the models which have been employed throughout the centuries, considering their guiding philosophies and goals, as well as their impacts on the cultures in which they were introduced. The historical period addressed extends from apostolic times through the middle of the 20th century, ending just before some significant shifts in Protestant missions and drastic changes Vatican Council II introduced in the Catholic world.

It is clearly impossible to compress 2000 years of history into these few pages. For the sake of brevity, and of simplicity, this overview will include only the major patterns which emerged from an extensive study of the topic and will provide only a few examples of each.

As a novice to missiological history and theory, my initial expectation was that I would discover that the history of missionary encounters would reflect a progressive improvement of cultural sensitivities. I thought these encounters would start at a point where destruction of existing cultures dominated and end at a point of enlightened embracing of cultural differences. I discovered otherwise. This study yielded several unanticipated revelations:

- The models did not develop in a linear, chronological manner, with each replacing a successor; history is punctuated with examples of each model as its implementation has occurred and recurred.
- The models/strategies employed were not mutually exclusive; often more than one operated concurrently.
- While some models proved to be more culturally sensitive than others, each was, in its own way, an attempt to be sensitive toward those the missionaries served.
- The models (as presented here) are *not* a spectrum that demonstrates an evolution in missiological thinking which has *culminated* in enlightened self-reflexivity and cultural awareness.

The current chapter begins with a brief examination of ethnocentrism and worldview. It then challenges the prevalence of the "cross and sword" stereotype of Christian missions, especially as a strategy for mission. It proceeds to present four models of mission which are firmly rooted in the historical record, then closes with a discussion of the political advocacy undertaken by some missionaries on behalf of those they served.

Ethnocentrism and Worldview

Before delineating the historical mission models, a few words concerning ethnocentrism and worldview are in order (see Kraft, "Culture" 400-403; Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*; and Rodriguez 2-5; among others). Every individual and every collective on this planet are in some way guided and limited by their worldview and its accompanying ethnocentrism. One's worldview is essentially the totality of the assumptions one makes about the world and how it functions. It usually is not apparent at a conscious level; awareness of its existence most often arises when it comes into contact or conflict with another's worldview. Ethnocentrism is the extension of a worldview which supposes that one's own familiar cultural expressions are superior and which views other cultures in reference to one's own. Even the most culturally sensitive person cannot ever completely divest himself of the influences of his worldview and his ethnocentrism. Awareness and intentionality can temper their effects, but nothing can fully remove their impact.

Both missionaries and anthropologists "came from a society that was dazzled by the success of science and technology, and that saw itself as the end point of an ascending cultural and religious evolution" (Hiebert, "Missions" 166). This Western ethnocentrism informed their work as they attempted to introduce "superior" cultural expressions or evaluated native technologies and ideologies (*Ibid.*), effectively dehumanizing those they cared about. They were products of Enlightenment thinking which compartmentalized and dichotomized people "into supernatural and natural beings," giving little "credence to indigenous sciences, social organizations and religious beliefs" or their explanations of their own activities (*Ibid.*, 167, 169). Few viewed their subjects/converts from a holistic perspective (*Ibid.*, 167). Anthony Gittins summarized the binary thinking which characterized that of many cross-cultural workers:

> In a binary universe there is...right and wrong, light and darkness, truth and falsehood, wisdom and foolishness, and of course, us and them. It is virtually impossible in such a universe to imagine that anything different from our perceptions and judgments could have much, or any, value. Add that some of "us" are specially trained, mandated, and sent to "them," and it follows that "we" will take ourselves very seriously indeed. That might in practice mean that we take "them" rather lightly. We will consider ourselves, quite understandably, as entrusted with riches, insights, and solutions; by comparison, "they" will appear, through no fault of their own, as rather impoverished, dull, and incompetent (Gittins, *Bread* 17).

It is essential, then, to remember that every person is a product of their own cultural and historical contexts. Missionaries, church fathers, colonialists, anthropologists, missiologists, indigenous peoples, and even 21st century post-modern Westerners, *all* reflect these contextual understandings and limitations.

Missionary accounts that demonstrated a clear bias toward Western superiority must be considered in a context when everyone else in their culture shared such convictions. Questions of whether or not an American Indian or an African possessed a soul elicit mortification when considered from a modern vantage point; however, it is essential to imagine what it must have been like to encounter, for the very first time, creatures so different from anything previously known, and to wonder whether they were human, animal, or something in between. It is also important to remember that terms such as "heathen" and "savage" were not originally pejorative, but simply descriptive in nature. Even definitions of "indigenous" people have

shifted over the centuries; 7th century Germans and Britons (who would eventually become colonial forces themselves) were among the indigenous people Pope Gregory the Great hoped to reach via his missionaries. None of this explanation is offered in justification of the actions of the missionaries whose stories follow; it is simply a reminder that even 21st century enlightenment is also ethnocentric in ways which have not yet been illuminated. It is an appeal for self-reflection and charity toward those who were products of different times and places.

Mission as "Coercion"

Stereotypes of culturally insensitive, imperialistic mission initiatives are commonplace. "It is popularly thought that…cross not only accompanied sword, but actively aided and abetted the wielders of sword in their various enterprises of pacification, exploitation, enslavement, and genocide" (Presler 480). Because this association is so widespread, it is essential to address these perceptions before proceeding to examine other types of initiatives. Three segments of history serve as examples of the *apparent* coercion of unconverted peoples toward Christianity: the Christianization of Europe, the Crusades, and the conquest of the Americas. The *caveat* must be, however, that "certain things may be true without *always* being true, motivations and interactions are complex rather than simple, effects are difficult to assess as well as difficult to predict, and things are not always as they seem" (*Ibid.,* 481, emphasis original).

Emperor Constantine played a pivotal role in the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity. He ascended to power around 312 AD, converted to Christianity—ending the previous persecution of Christians and granting them freedom of conscience in religion. The next emperor, Theodosius, not only supported Christianity but eventually enforced it as the state religion (Moreau *et al*. 99). Christendom was birthed—the Church was supported by the state and all citizens were technically members of the Church. As the Empire expanded, political domination and religious conversion were virtually inseparable. In this context, it became challenging to differentiate between socio-political motivations and actual concern for the spiritual well-being of the subdued.

During this period of military conquest, individuals emerged who introduced European tribes to Christ without the use of force. One important example was Ulfilas, a 4th century missionary

who worked beyond the frontiers of the Roman Empire. Ulfilas devoted forty years of his life to evangelizing the Goths, transcribing their language, and translating the Bible into their vernacular. In addition, in the Goths' raids of Roman territory, they captured and enslaved women who happened to be Christians; the influence of these slaves quietly converted those around them (Pierson 59). Interestingly, as Roman forces expanded their Empire, they sometimes encountered pockets of Christianity in places such as Gaul and Britain where Celtic missionaries had preceded them (*Ibid.,* 70).

Mass conversions to Christianity were customary in subsequent centuries. "The common pattern…involved a converted king or prince making the choice for Christianity on behalf of his people," followed by the baptisms of masses of people (Bevans and Schroeder 125). In England (597 AD) the King of Kent was voluntarily baptized by a missionary and more than ten thousand of his subjects also became Christians (Scherer, *Go* 28). For those who live in modern times, whose religion is individualistic and a matter of personal conscience, this concept can seem manipulative. Undoubtedly in some settings conversion was coercive. But in communal societies—where the family, tribe, or nation is the basic social unit, rather than the individual— different procedures for making group decisions exist. This may be "by consensus, by the head of the family or by a group of elders," or by a king. Conversions which followed the discernment of trusted leaders were often sincere, socially-valid, collective conversions (Lausanne 519).

Unfortunately, in some settings initiatives were undeniably coercive as various forms of external pressure were applied. As early as 400, [Saint] Augustine, who had originally "regarded coercive measures inadmissible, or…inappropriate" endorsed the use of "fines, confiscation of property, exile and the like," but killing or maiming of dissidents remained out of the question (Bosch 228). This pressure was rationalized by the belief that providing individuals "with the opportunity to flee eternal damnation could not be wrong and certainly justified the use of pressure" (*Ibid.*). As a Christian ruler defending and expanding Christendom, Charlemagne used military force throughout a thirty year period (772-804) to subdue the Germanic tribes, forcing them to be baptized (Bevans and Schroeder 126). "They had to be

baptized, even against their will if they refused, *because* they had been conquered. Subjection to the stronger God followed subjection to the victorious ruler as a matter of course" (Bosch 229, emphasis original). If they returned to their traditional faith, they faced execution; in the eyes of their conquerors "it was inconceivable that they could be politically loyal if their religious loyalty was doubted" (*Ibid.*).

The Crusades offer the next opportunity to examine the coercion of medieval Christendom. In some ways this interjection is hardly warranted. Few scholars believe that the Crusades were intended to serve a missionary purpose.[5] However, the image of the Crusades as missionary wars persists in popular thought, so it is necessary to briefly address this misconception. The socio-political context for the Crusades was the militaristic expansion of Islam throughout the Middle East, North Africa, the Far East, and parts of Europe. Political and religious leaders from the Eastern Roman Empire requested military assistance from those in the Western Roman Empire. This resulted in a number of waves of military conquest whose aim was not to spread the Christian faith, or even to regain the populations who had become Muslim, but to "rescue the holy places in Palestine, to defend the Byzantine Christians from the Muslims and to turn back the tide of Muslim conquest" (Bevans and Schroeder 138). Unfortunately, the crusaders marched under the Christian flag, and behaved "both toward fellow Christians and Muslims" in ways that "often contradicted the very Christian values they came to defend" (*Ibid.,* 139). With time and experience, church leaders "differentiated less and less between pagans on the one hand and heretics or apostates on the other. Anybody belonging to any of these categories could be killed with impunity… [and] the one who killed such a person would incur no guilt but rather deserved praise and honor" (Bosch 230) and received penance from their own sins (Pierson 103). The Crusades, then, were not evangelistic in nature—individual conversions were not an aim or a result—but they did serve political and religious purposes. (As will be seen in the later section on "Missionaries as Advocates," even these purposes were strongly opposed by some prominent Christian leaders of the time.) A few of the outcomes were the capitulation of the Eastern (Byzantine) Church to Roman control, subsequent loss of the Eastern

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[5] Some individual missionaries were exceptions to this characterization. See "Missionaries as Advocates" for examples.

Empire to the Muslim Turks, and permanent damage to Christian-Muslim relations (Pierson 104).

A final example of coercion focuses on the conquest of the Americas. Christopher Columbus's explorations of unknown territories and peoples seemed to indicate that wealth and power were available to those who captured it first. A whole new sequence of coercive measures was set in motion. The invasive norms which had been employed to establish some segments of Christendom were carried to the Americas (and Africa and Asia) as European powers expanded their empires. The gospel and the sword arrived simultaneously (Bivin 72). "Brutal measures comparable to those of Charlemagne" brought about conversion of the indigenous people, as well as their decimation (Scherer, *Go* 29). Violence was not always employed, but various Catholics and Protestants practiced mass conversions; Dutch East India Company chaplains were even alleged to have "received bounties for administering mass baptisms among the island peoples" (*Ibid.*). In 1494 when the pope "divided the non-Christian lands of the earth (both those already discovered and those yet to be discovered) between the crowns of Portugal and Spain, he laid upon the monarchs the obligation to evangelize the people of those lands, to establish the church and to maintain it. Mission was thus made a function of government" (Beaver 229). Portugal chose to focus primarily on building a trade empire. In contrast, Spain attempted to introduce the Spanish model of Christianity and civilization to peoples whose "humanity" was not yet a foregone conclusion. Ruthless exploitation followed in many places.

The impact of the Spanish on indigenous peoples was extensive and well documented. Pulling down Aztecan, Mayan, and Incan temples, Spaniards "built churches on top of them so as to demonstrate the Christian God's power over the indigenous gods," defeating, controlling, and dominating the Indians to free them from "their lives of pagan idolatry" (Bivin 72-3). Even before the defeat of these major indigenous empires was complete, in 1503 an organized model of evangelization and civilization was conceived and implemented. The Spanish crown established the *encomienda* legal system. Its stated purpose was to "further the spiritual education of the Indians," concentrating them into communities where they could be evangelized and taught (*Ibid.,* 73). The receiver of an *encomienda,* often a conquistador, was

responsible for the protection, education, and evangelization of a specified number of natives and, in return, was allowed to benefit from their labor, gold, or other products. What was intended to be, in theory, a system of indentured labor, became outright slavery, supported by both church and state. Despite the protests of some missionaries, the suffering and misery of millions of indigenous people brought huge profits to the colonizers (*Ibid.*). Other permutations of this model would develop subsequently (such as the *convento*, the mission, the reduction, etc., which will be discussed in "Mission as Protection"). Given the greed which drove imperialistic endeavors, it is difficult to discern to what degree religious zeal actually influenced the crown and the conquistadors. Potential wealth seems to have made concern for indigenous souls a pressing matter.

In summary, coercive measures primarily reflected not a *missionary* agenda but the *political* and *economic* agendas of nations whose state religion was Christianity. Conversions were expedient to solidify dominion over conquered peoples. But such domination and supremacy were not demonstrated in the life of Christ, nor were they scriptural principles. Coercion was not motivated by Christ-like love and concern. Although the stereotype of coercive missionaries endures, this was not considered a desirable model of mission and was definitely not embraced by missionaries who devoted their lives to sharing the good news of the love of Jesus.

Mission as Protection

The work of missionaries in the Americas during colonialism was characterized by a measure of ambiguity. Many had been sent in some type of protective role for the indigenous people. Their mandate was to civilize and to Christianize (W. Shenk 136). In order to accomplish this, the indigenous people had to be protected. At issue, though, was from whom or from what they were to be protected. Since indigenous peoples' sophistication of thought and religious understanding was still unresolved, many missionaries adopted a paternalistic posture, believing that the childlike natives needed their guardianship. In Spanish law, the Franciscan missionaries' relationship "to their Indian converts was that of parent to child or custodian to ward" (Sandos 1254). Converts had to live according to the church's precepts; disobedience or

backsliding might bring corporal punishment—including whipping, shackles, or imprisonment in stocks (*Ibid.*). How far, then, should guardianship or protection extend and how capable were the natives of making wise, informed decisions about their own lives?

More than one missionary expressed frustration at the "ease with which the Indians could abandon their villages and move to another location" (Shapiro 128). "The strategy of itinerant preaching and mass baptism seemed to be producing little in the way of enduring results" (*Ibid.*). If they were to be converted and be made to give up their "heathen customs— cannibalism, polygamy, improper marriages between cousins and between uncles and nieces— the missionaries had to be in a position to exercise more control over the native population" (*Ibid.*). One missionary went so far as to demand that the governor of Brazil "make laws that prohibit them from eating human flesh and going to war without the permission of the governor; that permit them only one wife; that oblige them to wear clothing;...that make them live in one place without moving around (in Shapiro 128). He stressed that "Indians could not be converted until they had first been subjected to colonial authority" (Shapiro 128). Other missionaries expressed the desire to "protect the Indians from the local colonists, who sought to enslave them and who set such a deplorable example of what so-called civilized Christians were like" (*Ibid.*). This sentiment—to centralize the natives for greater ease in civilizing/converting and to protect them from negative influences—resulted in several different forms of collectives, controlled by missionaries.

Conventos first appeared in the 1520's. In this model four or five missionaries, several Spanish families, and hundreds of indigenous people would live together in "Christian villages." These villages often "eventually included a church, school, hospital and orphanage" (Bevans and Schroeder 177). At the inception of the *conventos*, the early missionaries attempted to distance themselves and their converts from activities related to the Spanish conquest, with some measure of success. The concept attracted such a flow of missionaries that it nearly emptied monasteries in Spain (*Ibid.*). However, the dreams of some, that the *conventos* could return the indigenous people to a pristine utopian society, were quickly overwhelmed by a dominant culture which "sought to destroy and replace such cultures" (Hunt 17). As the church

hierarchy lost its zeal for the defense of the natives, the structure became more authoritarian and rigid. The *convento* model survived for more than two centuries, but was so compromised by the ideologies of conquest that it lost its original utopian vision and protective functions. Its legacy became the protection of "the Indians from total extermination and [their preparation] to participate in a Europeanized society" (Bevans and Schroeder 179).

The "reduction" model was conceived, mid-16th century, to free indigenous people from the abusive *encomienda* system. Introduced by the Franciscans and Jesuits in South and Central America, reductions were similar in some ways to the *conventos.* Reductions were laid out as towns, with a church, school, workshops, and housing for the natives. Most also had a missionary's residence, "storerooms, a music school, hospital, cemetery, an inn for visitors, and a house set aside for widows and orphans" (Bevans and Schroeder 181). Daily communal routines were regulated by a bell or drums. Children received religious instruction and elementary education (including Latin and their vernacular language); sons of indigenous leaders also learned spoken and written Spanish. Everyone in the reduction had responsibility for individual and collective agricultural work. Growing hostilities from outside colonists led to the installation of high defensive walls and the arming of inhabitants. While the strict isolation guaranteed more safety, it provided little opportunity for adapting to the changes taking place in the wider society. Additionally, the Jesuits' efforts to protect their charges from the influences of the conquest perpetuated prevailing paternalism; little was done to prepare the indigenous peoples "for leadership and full participation in shaping their future" (*Ibid.*).

The Spanish mission system which developed along the California coast a century later reflected many of the same concepts as the reductions, but also demonstrated less tolerance of indigenous values. The primary goal in assembling the natives into the missions was to isolate them from their families and pre-Christian customs and practices. A secondary goal was to protect them from the "harmful influences of the Spanish soldiers" (Dries 11). Because the indigenous population appeared to lack in diligence, the Franciscans who operated the missions failed to accept them as "adults" and often disagreed about whether they could even receive the Eucharist. By this time the missionaries had tired of trying to learn all the tribal languages

which were represented in their locales and insisted that the natives instead learn Spanish. Those who lived at the mission were kept in relative poverty, a reflection of the Franciscan value of self-denial through intentional privation, and were reprimanded for a variety of offenses through use of corporal punishment (reflection of another Franciscan monastic value—self-flagellation). When the U.S. government decided that the missionaries had "civilized the Indians, the missions were 'secularized,'" with missionaries replaced by government officers who did not share the missionaries' love for the people. Lands were then distributed among Spanish settlers and the "Indians were gradually reduced to the level of landless day-laborers" (Beaver 229).

English Protestant missionaries applied some of the same principles as their Spanish Catholic counterparts. Believing that it was essential that the Indians learn a "civilized language," mission stations were transformed into educational systems. To regularize the children's sporadic attendance, mission schools became boarding schools. Boarding schools were sometimes then transformed into work camps ("with education trimmings"), "rationalized on the grounds that the Indians required instruction in the moral virtues, especially those of honest toil" (Jennings 58).   Protestant missionaries also gathered converts into churches and established Christian towns of "Praying Indians" (Beaver 231). They believed, as did the Catholics, that segregation and isolation were essential for the growth and protection of the new converts—protection from their "pagan relatives and bad white men" (*Ibid.*). A significant variance from the Catholic models was that the "Praying Towns" reflected a Puritan model of governance, with the Indians living "together under a covenant between them and the Lord" and with personal and community life "regulated by laws of a biblical flavor" (Beaver 231). Most of the towns did not survive "the devastation of King Philip's War in 1674" (*Ibid.,* 232). However, these ideals of "guarding the purity of new converts' faith and conduct by segregating them into Christian villages" (*Ibid.*) would accompany 19th and 20th century missionaries as they reached into Africa and beyond.

These missionary efforts throughout the centuries had a significant impact on the cultures of those they attempted to protect. While their loving paternalism might be admired on one

level, the outcome of their unwillingness to trust the converts to retain their commitment to their new faith isolated natives from their families, ancestral lands, and cultures. They essentially had to give up everything and become something new and foreign to themselves. In addition, sequestered in the towns, they had no evangelistic opportunities to impact their own peoples with their newfound faith. They were never fully accepted into European culture, nor did they still belong to indigenous culture. Their alienation created a "mongrel" society that was "neither native nor European" (Beaver 232).

Mission as Assimilation[6]

Assimilation, bringing a group's customs into conformity with those of the dominant culture, has functioned as a model of mission in two distinct ways: 1) indigenous people assimilated into the culture and customs of the missionaries; and 2) missionaries sometimes chose to assimilate into indigenous culture and customs.

As has been demonstrated, a basic assumption common among most missionaries was the inherent superiority of their own religion and culture. Little debate took place over the "legitimacy of the civilizing function of missions" (Beaver 233). Questions centered instead on "which had priority—Christianization or civilization," with some believing "that a certain degree of civilization was first necessary to enable people to understand and accept the faith" and others maintaining that "one should begin with Christianization since the gospel had a civilizing effect on society. Most missionaries believed that the two mutually interacted and should be stressed equally and simultaneously" (*Ibid.,* 233-4). For this two-fold purpose to be accomplished, and ultimately for survival, indigenous peoples had to be assimilated into the civilized, Christian culture of the missionaries. This was especially true for North American Indians.

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[6] Assimilation and other vocabulary which follow are terms that are used in varying ways within and among different disciplines. It is not the purpose of this paper to compare and contrast their content and usage. The author will provide her own working definitions, supposing them to represent a *concept* rather than a convergence of thought about the terminology.

The first societal step toward assimilating the Native Americans was to ignore the cultural pluralism that tribes represented and to lump these diverse peoples into a single category called "Indians" (Jennings 59). Although ignorance might be excused, the intentionality of some efforts toward homogenization and detribalization are more difficult to dismiss. For instance, a secular source which reflected a prevailing philosophy of the day was an 1868 U.S. Indian Peace Commission report which advocated the following:

> The object of greatest solicitude should be to break down the prejudices of tribe among the Indians; to blot out the boundary lines which divide them into distinct nations, and fuse them into one homogeneous mass. Uniformity of language will do this—nothing else will. As this work advances each head of a family should be encouraged to select and improve a homestead. Let the women be taught to weave, to sew, and to knit. Let polygamy be punished. Encourage the building of dwellings and the gathering there of those comforts which endear the home (Tinker 106).

Missionaries were often complicit in this extermination of Indian identity, as they imposed their own cultural values and expressions. European gender roles, nuclear family units, private ownership of property, standards of cleanliness and industriousness were at odds with those of the natives. So missionaries actively worked to transform them "into Whites of darker hue" (Jennings 57-8), increasingly assimilated into the "melting pot" of American culture. The social isolation of the reservation and other collectives mentioned previously served as tools of assimilation. However, the result was a failure to actually fully integrate natives into Euro-American culture, while simultaneously distancing them from their own cultures.

> To "traditional Indians, they appeared as weak, ungenerous, and denying the obligations of tribal membership; they were "Whites," or as some have scornfully stated, "apple Indians"—red on the surface but "white" within. To the White community, they remained Indians and, hence, socially inferior, no matter how Christian were their confessions of faith and moral practice. Indians who assimilated found that they were not allowed the privileges of citizenship; they could not vote, bring suit, testify in court and other matters accepted as matter of course among Whites (Jennings 59).

Assimilation, then, as a model for mission did little to sustain indigenous cultures. Nor did it effectively bridge natives into the dominant culture.

A reverse direction of assimilation took place as missionaries inserted themselves into the cultures and customs of those they wanted to serve. Some integration resulted through the prevalence of intermarriage with indigenous populations, especially in Latin American colonies (Bivin 75). Other assimilation was more intentional, especially among French missionaries to Canada who "lived with the Indians in their villages, adapting to conditions as well as they could. They preached, taught, baptized individuals, performed the rites of the church and allowed the converts still to be Indians" (Beaver 229).

Several specific missionaries are well known for their experiments in assimilation in other parts of the world. Francis Xavier served in 16th century Japan, Matteo Ricci in 16th century China and Roberto deNobili in 17th century India. As they assimiliated into the cultures they served, they became part of a new mission philosophy which adapted to and accommodated local cultural practices into Christianity. Each will be discussed in greater depth in the following section on adaptation and accommodation, but their efforts at assimilation are introduced here.

Francis Xavier (Spanish by birth and educated in France) was sent to Asia as a missionary representing the Portuguese court and the Catholic pope. His journeys took him first to India and eventually to Japan (in 1549). The extent of his assimilation into Japanese culture was limited, especially in comparison with those who would follow later. He went to Japan hoping to influence the king toward Christianity, ensuring conversion of the "whole population by virtue of Imperial decree" (Skoglund 456). When he arrived, he discovered a politically and religiously divided Japan. He came to realize that he would need to align himself with the local feudal-like lords. He dressed the part, trading his plain cotton for fine silk clothing, and acted on behalf of the Portuguese crown, forging trade relations (Bevans and Schroeder 185).

Lest Xavier's intentions seem solely pecuniary, the radical nature of his views of the Japanese must be elaborated. His most notable assimilation reflected a significant change in worldview. The majority of his European contemporaries viewed the entire non-European world as idolaters, vastly inferior to Europe (Skoglund 453). Missionary efforts toward those who were "not-like-us" (*Ibid.,* 452) usually depended on the "power of miracles and concepts of fealty and

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social solidarity to engage non-Christians with the gospel (Hunt 18). Xavier found in the Japanese a people "like us" (*Ibid.,* 465)—people of great intelligence, ambition, and cleverness who were eager for knowledge (*Ibid.,* 458). This ability and willingness "to be convinced by reasoning…was the mark of civilization" (Hunt 18). In his estimation, the Japanese characterized the same virtues and vices found throughout Europe and their philosophy revealed the presence of "natural law and reason" (*Ibid.,* 459). The logical extension of his thinking was that people with such intelligence would "very likely accept the *reasonableness* of his Catholic faith" (*Ibid.,* 458, emphasis added). In so commending the Japanese, Xavier departed radically from the prevailing worldview of "inferior" Asians. Instead, here was a people with a "high concept of themselves,…worthy of the respect of Europeans" (*Ibid.,* 462) who should be dealt with as equals (*Ibid.,* 466). His respect for their culture and his incorporation of their language and customs into Japanese Christianity led to "the emergence of a new type of missionary approach which would eventually become the hallmark of the Jesuits," (*Ibid.*) in Asia and elsewhere—accommodation. "The total rejection of the non-European culture was replaced by a search for parallelism in concept and form, and a new way of comprehending world culture was introduced" (*Ibid.,* 466). During his brief two years with the Japanese, over 1000 were baptized (Bevans and Schroeder 185).

Three decades after Xavier's experiences in Japan, Jesuit Matteo Ricci joined the missionary efforts in China. Ricci and his co-workers not only observed Chinese social etiquette but also adopted the "dress and lifestyle of a Buddhist monk," hoping that this would "reflect the religious nature of their presence" (Bevans and Schroeder 187). Ricci focused on learning Mandarin Chinese, studying Confucian classical literature, and discussing various religious and scientific topics with Chinese scholars. This identification with the scholars prompted a shift from religious dress and lifestyle to those of the scholars. During his frequent interactions he was able to demonstrate his "Western scientific knowledge of sundials, clocks, mapmaking and mathematics" (*Ibid.*) and his understandings of different interpretations of Confucianism (*Ibid.*). His discussions afforded him the opportunity to develop a synthesis of "philosophy, Confucianism, and the Christian faith" (*Ibid.*). His time in China was not without its controversies, as will be shown in the next section on accommodation. But his assimilation into

Chinese scholastic culture earned him a place of honor unprecedented among foreigners. He spent a total of 27 years in China; upon his death in 1610, the emperor even donated a site for his burial (*Ibid.*).

Italian Jesuit Robert de Nobili arrived in India in 1606. Following in the philosophical footsteps of Ricci and others, he was convinced that "being Indian and being Christian were not incompatible," (Bevans and Schroeder 189) and that he needed to assimilate into Indian society" (*Ibid.*). He "believed that the Brahmin caste must be won if Christianity were to succeed…[so] he became a Christian Brahmin" (Beaver 230). He mastered the state and local languages and was the first European to learn Sanskrit, "the language of the sacred Hindu writings" (Bevans and Schroeder 189, 190). He dressed like a religious teacher, "observed the caste laws and customs," (Beaver 189), lived on alms, and devoted himself to a life of meditation and prayer (Bevans and Schroeder 189). As he studied the major schools of Hindu philosophy, he presented Christian doctrine "as much as possible in Hindu terms" (Beaver 230). He remains one of the few who won many Brahmin converts (*Ibid.*).

Some collectives also assimilated to local cultures. Among these were the German Moravians. This group defies tidy categorization among the mission models which are addressed; their immersion in local cultures represented a relatively comprehensive approach to mission. Beginning in the early 18th century, the Moravians set out to serve populations throughout the world who were despised or neglected by church and state alike. For instance, in 1732 they arrived in the West Indies to minister to African slaves, resulting in imprisonment of Moravians by Dutch plantation owners, and the loss of half of their numbers to disease. Although the missionaries eventually formed communal settlements (such as Bethlehem, PA), these served primarily as home bases for reaching out to those around them; many lived among the indigenous people for extended periods, embracing their lifestyles and cultures. Because missionaries were expected to be self-supporting, they created industries which funded their settlements, financed their mission endeavors, and brought them into contact with people from outside their communities. They had specific instructions from their German leadership not to apply German home-base standards to other people, but to "be alert in recognizing the

God-given distinctive traits, characteristics and strengths of those people" (Beaver 233). The work of the Moravians quickly spread throughout the world, southward to South Africa and Suriname, northward to Alaska and Greenland, etc. It was reported that "in a period of twenty-eight years the Moravians sent missionaries to twenty-eight countries" (Pierson 190-191). Their methods, their attitudes toward other cultures, and their sacrificial service became a major example for and catalyst of Protestant missions in subsequent decades (*Ibid.,* 192).

Mission as Adaptation/Accommodation[7]

Missionaries who assimiliated into the cultures they served clearly demonstrated a respect for and appreciation of those cultures. Although assimilation as a model of cultural encounter was never widespread nor generally accepted, there were eventually a significant number of missionaries who built upon the example of the Jesuits and Moravians and were able to conceive of the possibility of "accommodating themselves and the Christian message to the host society and culture" (Bevans and Schroeder 204). They creatively adapted their own religious practices and incorporated the cultural and religious worldviews of the indigenous people (Oborji 18, 99).

The concept of adapting the message to the culture into which it was being introduced, and accommodating cultural practices, predates even Xavier and de Nobili. This can be found as early as the example which launched this chapter: the Gentile Christians were introduced to the message via their vernacular and were freed to follow some of their own cultural understandings in living out their newfound faith. Although this model of mission was not always embraced (and at times was actively opposed), evidence of its practice is sprinkled throughout the historical record. Two important Roman Catholic statements bear this out.

Near the end of the 6th century, Pope Gregory the Great "fostered a missionary spirit of adaptation and persuasion rather than rejection and coercion" (Bevans and Schroeder 123)

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[7] Although in the most technical sense adaptation and accommodation can be differentiated and nuanced, for the purposes of conveying the concept examined in this section, the terms will be used interchangeably.

when providing instruction to Benedictine monk Augustine of Canterbury as he attempted to Christianize the resistant Anglo-Saxons.

> The temples of the idols in that nation ought not to be destroyed; but let the idols that are in them be destroyed; let holy water be made and sprinkled in the said temples, let altars be erected, and relics placed. For if those temples are well built, it is requisite that they be converted from the worship of devils to the service of the true God; that the nation, seeing that their temples are not destroyed, may remove error from their hearts, and knowing and adoring the true God, may the more familiarly resort to the places to which they have been accustomed. And because they have been used to slaughter many oxen in the sacrifices to devils, some solemnity must be exchanged for them of this account, as that on the day of the dedication, or the nativities of the holy martyrs, whose relics are deposited there…. For there is no doubt that it is impossible to efface every thing (*sic*) at once from their obdurate minds; because he who endeavors to ascend to the highest place, rises by degrees or steps, and not by leaps (in Bevans and Schroeder 123-4).

By 21st century standards Gregory's directives sound ethnocentric and insensitive. But when contrasted with the total destruction of anything related to a culture's pagan practices, his policies demonstrate a radical departure. Gregory may have primarily regarded this as temporary accommodation, allowing certain practices "until the newly baptized would arrive at the point of abandoning their traditional beliefs and practices completely" (Bevans and Schroeder 124). But "this shift in missionary approach provided the opportunity for the Anglo-Saxons, and later other Germanic people on the continent, to appropriate more openly their new Christian faith within their traditional world view" (*Ibid.*).

More than a thousand years later, in 1659, a directive for Catholic missionaries demonstrated a sensitivity toward the cultures they would encounter, as well as concern that Christianity not be associated with foreign political powers and cultures (Bevans and Schroeder 192).

> Do not regard it as your task, and do not bring any pressure to bear on the peoples, to change their manners, customs, and uses, unless they are evidently contrary to religion and sound morals. What could be more absurd than to carry France, Spain, or Italy, or some other European country to China? Do not introduce all that to them, but only the faith, which does not despise or destroy the manners and customs of any people, always supposing that they are not evil, but rather wishes to see them preserved unharmed…. Do not draw invidious contrasts between the customs of the peoples and those of Europe; do your utmost to adapt yourselves to them (in Bevans and Schroeder 192).

Although this policy would not remain in place for long, especially in China, it does reveal cultural sensitivity at a time when European nations were scrambling to colonize and civilize the rest of the world. The Jesuits were strong proponents of this model of mission—a break from the conquistador mentality—and carried it to Asia and the Americas (Bevans and Schroeder 186, Costello 31).

Of all the adaptations missionaries made, the most common was use of indigenous languages. Missionaries worked to master the local languages to be able to communicate effectively; many also did so in order to translate essential Christian documents, such as the scriptures and liturgy. In some cases missionaries were working with oral cultures, so transcription of languages into written form became a necessary step in the process.

The early spread of Christianity by missionaries into Africa and Asia[8] resulted in translation of the scriptures into new languages. As early as the 2nd century the Copts of Egypt and the Syrians of Asia had access to the gospels in their vernacular, predating even Jerome's translation from Greek to Latin in the latter 4th century (Moffett, "Earliest" 422; *Encyclopedia Coptica*). Syrian missionaries eventually developed alphabets for Mongol tribes such as the Uighurs so that the scriptures could be translated into their own tongue (Moffett, "Earliest" 423).

In later centuries the Jesuits placed great emphasis on the translation of scripture, on literacy, and conduction of the liturgy in the local language. In 16th century Japan, Francis Xavier and those who came after him translated not only the scriptures but also catechisms, creeds, and prayers (Bevans and Schroeder 186; Skoglund 466). In early 17th century Vietnam, Jesuits

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[8] The Asian Church of the East, differentiated from the Eastern Orthodox Church, has been neglected by Western scholarship, in part due to a paucity of surviving documents but also perhaps due to a Western bias. Church history has traditionally traced the westward transmission of Christianity from the Middle East. There is an increasing literature, though, that demonstrates that Christianity was also transmitted eastward along the Old Silk Roads to Asia soon after the time of Christ. According to Samuel Hugh Moffett, evidence shows that it had reached Edessa (in present day Turkey) by the end of the first century, Bactria (now northern Afghanistan) by the end of the second, Central Asia by the fifth, and China by the seventh. Edessa had the earliest known Christian church building, the first New Testament translation, and the first Christian king and state. For more about the Church of the East see Moffett's two-volume *A History of Christianity in Asia* (publ. 1998 & 2005) or his 1975 article, "The Earliest Asian Christianity." For a simplified account, see Pierson's summary in *The Dynamics of Christian Mission*.

developed a system for writing Vietnamese with Roman alphabetization and produced a French-Vietnamese dictionary, a Vietnamese grammar, and catechism (Bevans and Schroeder 190). In the Americas not all missionaries were successful in their attempts to learn indigenous languages, but the Jesuits prevailed. For instance, the early Jesuits who worked with the Lakota "learned Lakota and made it the standard for Catholic life. Lakota language was used in preaching, prayer books, and scripture" (Costello 28). In the European context from which many early Jesuits came, the Latin mass was standard until the 1960's and many laypeople were illiterate and did not have access to Bibles. According to Lamin Sanneh, well-known scholar of biblical translation, use of the vernacular did more than communicate and educate: "Employing mother tongues in their Scriptural translation [was] a tacit surrender to indigenous primacy," and subverted arguments of Western cultural superiority (Sanneh, *Encountering* 16-17). Their use of "indigenous language implicitly legitimated the indigenous cultural framework as an idiom of equal value" and preserved other aspects of their political, economic, social, and religious culture (Costello 29).

Other types of accommodation centered on permitting "manners, customs, and uses, unless they are evidently contrary to religion and sound morals," as mentioned in the 1659 directive (Bevans and Schroeder 192), and on adapting practices which had non-Christian origins, as addressed by Pope Gregory. Some external forms were relatively easy to accommodate. Indigenous Christians were permitted to continue their traditional social formalities, dietary practices, folk medicine, dress and adornment, art, and architectural styles; many missionaries, particularly the Jesuits, even joined them in these practices (Bevans and Schroeder 185-190; Beaver 230; Shapiro 129).   The Jesuits also participated in Lakota naming ceremonies and ceremonies "in which people are made relatives of the Lakota" and accepted their funeral customs (Costello 35). Other parts of foreign cultures required a transition from their pagan origins to Christian purposes, such as temples which were "cleansed" and festivals which were transformed into Christian feast days (McCullouch 330). Other indigenous practices caused considerably more consternation as missionaries (and their superiors) wrestled with what could be accommodated and what should be rejected. What was to be done with the Indian caste system, the Native American Sacred Pipe and the Sun Dance? (Costello 33-35; Beaver 230;

Bevans and Schroeder 189). Music and dance also created controversies, as did ancestor veneration. At issue was whether these expressions were secular or religious in nature—a distinction which could be made by scientific Europeans but not by those whose spirituality was incorporated into all aspects of their culture (Shapiro 129; Duignan 729; Bevans and Schroeder 189-191; Hunt 18). As will be discussed shortly, these unresolved issues would eventually seal the fate of the Jesuits' ministry—worldwide.

A final significant level of adaptation/accommodation—the philosophical level—was accomplished by only the most sensitive and dedicated of missionaries. Although some missionaries attempted to present Christianity using indigenous concepts, few actually penetrated the mindsets of a local culture in ways that allowed them to use its "philosophical categories, symbols, and symbolisms to present Christ," which would permit Christ to speak to a people "through the media of their sociocultural experience" (Oborji 101). Robert de Nobili's work in India manifested this type of commitment and understanding; his mastery of Sanskrit and his study and discussion of the sacred Hindu texts permitted him to "begin to understand the depths of the Hindu world of thought" and to teach "Christian dogma based on certain principles of Hindu philosophy" (Bevans and Schroeder 190). He succeeded in witnessing to Brahmins "in a way that has not been duplicated" (*Ibid.*).

Although the model of adaptation/accommodation was widely used, it also attracted criticism. While the Jesuits thought that other Catholic missionary orders "had no regard for non-Western cultures," the others accused the Jesuits of having "sold out" and compromised Christianity (Bevans and Schroeder 192).   Excesses and abuses in accommodation elicited accusations from Protestant quarters of its being "whitewashed paganism" (Luzbetak, *New Perspectives* 68). Tensions, especially among missionary orders, eventually erupted into a major dispute, ostensibly centered on ancestor veneration in China and the caste system in India but rooted in a variety of political and religious rivalries.

In a nutshell the "Rites Controversy" was a series of appeals presented to successive popes, challenging various aspects of the Jesuits' model of mission.   The debate spanned seven decades, beginning in 1645. One of the primary issues was Matteo's Ricci's policy toward

Chinese ancestor veneration. Their system of ancestral rites demonstrated filial respect and was considered foundational to Chinese morality and identity. After long and serious study with the Confucian scholars, Ricci had "judged the rites to be cultural and social rather than religious, and therefore not idolatrous" and had decided that Chinese Christians "could participate in the majority of these rites with some slight modifications" (Bevans and Schroeder 189). The earliest papal rulings came down in favor of the Jesuits, the various missionary orders came to a working agreement, and the church in China prospered. However, in 1676 opponents launched a new series of charges. In response to an appeal from the Jesuits, in 1700 the emperor of China declared that "the ancestral rituals were civil, not religious" (*Ibid.,* 193), but to no avail. In 1704 missionary accommodation in India and in China was condemned by the current pope. The Chinese emperor responded by declaring that missionaries must follow Ricci's methods if they were to remain in China (Hunt 18). In 1717, two years after the pope officially forbade the methods of Ricci (and de Nobili and their successors), China outlawed Christianity, closed the churches, and expelled all missionaries (*Ibid.*). In 1744 another papal decree imposed an oath upon all missionaries headed to Asia in which they agreed to abide by the ruling against almost all forms of accommodation. This oath was not rescinded until 1938 (Bosch 460).

> European Christianity had met a society that was amenable to reason, but that also possessed sufficient unity and power to reject the imposition of European judgments on the meaning of its cultural forms. In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century China there was no room for two empires. And in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Rome there was no room for rival claims to know and interpret the social and religious setting of any land. Catholic Christianity and China parted company (Hunt 18).

In 1773, for a variety of reasons, a papal decree dissolved the Jesuit order, a final major blow to cultural sensitivity and to mission efforts. Bevans and Schroeder estimate that by the end of the 18th century only about 300 Roman Catholic missionaries remained active in the world (Bevans and Schroeder 194).

Mission through adaptation/accommodation never entirely disappeared, and was revived in later decades and centuries. However, even at its best, it failed to accomplish a number of

important purposes. According to prominent missiologist David Bosch, its shortcomings were significant:

> First, accommodation never included modifying the "prefabricated" Western theology. Second, it was actually understood as a *concession* that Third-World Christians would now be allowed to use some elements of their culture in order to give expression to their new faith. Third, only those cultural elements which were manifestly "neutral" and naturally good, that is not "contaminated" by pagan religious values, could be employed. Fourth, the word "elements" further implied that cultures were not regarded as indivisible wholes….Last, often the initiative in respect of indigenization did not come from the newly converted but from missionaries (*Bosch* 459-60).

Mission as Indigenization[9]

Accommodation and adaptation represented a different paradigm of mission thinking, which differed from the practice of attempting to fully replace a people's cultural understandings and expressions with foreign Christian ones. However, the results of accommodation and adaptation were often superficial and did not fully reflect or sustain the cultures in which they were practiced. Even those with the best intentions toward indigenous populations were still hindered by the limitations of their own worldviews. The 19th century saw a rise in Protestant involvement in mission work, as well as a shift in its emphasis from "individual conversion to the planting of distinctly confessional churches" (Bevans and Schroeder 213). The idea of indigenized churches, *led and perpetuated by indigenous people*, became a popular goal of mission.

Two of the most prominent mission theorists and strategists of the 19th century independently conceived of and then collaborated on a model of mission which became the "recognized strategic goal of Protestant missions from the middle of the 19th century until World War II" (Beaver 235). Briton Henry Venn and American Rufus Anderson developed the "three-selves" formula whose aim was to plant and develop indigenous churches which would be self-

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[9] Indigenization is yet another term which has been used in a variety of ways. The term's usage throughout this paper will conform with the definition provided in the paragraph which follows.

governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating (Beaver 235; Pierson 272). Underlying this goal was an assumption of respect and trust of indigenous peoples, and confidence that it was possible, at least in theory, for missionaries to serve as tutors, to foster independent churches, and then to move on to other work (Bevans and Schroeder 213; Hunt 22). This was the "first attempt to define a genuinely 'indigenous' church," which would eventually lead to fuller understandings of indigeneity (Pierson 272). Along the way, however, many missionaries and indigenous people discovered that "a church may be very Western in its forms and still meet those criteria" (Pierson 272).

"'Indigenization' was official missionary policy in virtually every Protestant mission organization, even if it was usually taken for granted that it was the missionaries, not the members of the young churches, who would determine the limits of indigenization" (Bosch 301).   This applied particularly to the question of indigenous leadership. When numbers of people were converted, missionaries had to consider the possibility of indigenous leadership. Protestant missionaries were not the first to deal with this problem. In 16th century Asia the Jesuits had initiated the appointment of local deacons, instructors, monks, priests, and even a few bishops (Beaver 230; Bevans and Schroeder 186). In 17th and 18th century New England, a fundamental part of the Puritan mission strategy was recruitment and training of native pastors and teachers (Beaver 232; Calhoun 37). They realized that "only native agents could effectively evangelize and give pastoral care to their own people" (Beaver 232).   But these understandings and initiatives were not the norm. During the same time periods, the Catholic Church did not allow indigenous Americans to be ordained; for two centuries the clergy were all European (Bevans and Schroeder 179; Pierson 165). "It was not until 1794, three centuries after the arrival of the Spanish, that the first man who had no European blood was ordained as a priest" (Pierson 165). When 19th century Protestant missionaries were defining what constituted indigenous leadership, there were few precedents already established.

Although the Protestant conviction that "an indigenous church must be led by an indigenous pastor…became the chief cornerstone for the foundation of churches wherever missions went," (W. Shenk 137) this principle was not easily put into action. Concerns included, among other

things, questions about leadership qualifications, degree of spiritual maturity, and trustworthiness. Efforts were plagued by missionary ethnocentrism, increasingly so as colonialism became a driving societal force. European and American missionaries were reluctant to entrust natives with positions of responsibility in the emerging churches.   They were convinced that

> it would take decades or longer before indigenous church leaders were capable of working independently. A sense of [the missionaries'] own superiority, rising educational standards in their home countries, and increasing emphasis on doctrinal purity and fear of syncretism, and even the prospect of losing their own sense of purpose led most missions and missionaries to keep indigenous churches in a state of dependence (Hunt 22).

Where there were efforts made to raise up indigenous leadership, questions emerged about credentialing requirements and how closely these should mirror the theological education of Western clergy (Pierson 165). There was also concern about where oversight and authority resided, and what levels of office could be occupied by indigenous leaders. The gap between the ideal and practice left much to be criticized. "The Willowbank Report" (issued from a 1978 gathering of missionaries, pastors, theologians, anthropologists, and linguists) was blunt in its retrospection of these practices:

> Some missions…have accepted the need for indigenous leadership and have then gone on to recruit and train local leaders, indoctrinating them (the word is harsh but not unfair) in Western ways of thought and procedure. These Westernized local leaders have then preserved a very Western-looking church, and the foreign orientation has persisted, only lightly cloaked by the appearance of indigeneity (Lausanne 520).

If widespread training of indigenous leadership was challenging, developing autonomous indigenous churches proved even more difficult.[10] As part of the "three-selves" formula, Rufus Anderson conceived the task of the missionary to be that of an evangelist who preached the gospel and gathered converts into churches. These churches were to be immediately organized without waiting for converts to reach the standards of spiritual maturity expected of Western church members and were to be led by native pastors, as part of indigenously defined local and

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[10] There have been exceptions, especially in Africa, where churches have been indigenous almost since their inception. See, for example, Calvin Shenk's article concerning the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and Cephas Omenyo's article about the Africa Initiated Churches.

regional governing structures (Beaver 235). Despite avowed commitment to this formula, Western missionaries often found its enactment elusive. In some cases economic considerations stood in the way; missions often owned properties such as schools, plantations, and publishing houses "on which they depended financially and which they were reluctant to hand over to local church leaders" (Hunt 22). Other missions were "part of a national church structure back in Europe," making them part of an "ecclesial authority centered in a Western country" (*Ibid.*) from which they could not be easily extricated. But, as barriers to indigenous churches, these considerations paled in comparison to the ethnocentrism of missionaries.

It must be remembered that late-19th century missionaries were products of their social and cultural environments. Many adopted the paternalistic, colonialist views of their countrymen, regarding natives as inferior and, therefore, incapable of providing ministerial leadership. The indigenous churches were "of a lesser order than those in the West" which required "benevolent control and guidance, like children not yet come of age" (Bosch 301). These "wards [were] dependent upon the wise guidance of their white patrons who would gradually educate them to maturity" (*Ibid.,* 314). This paternalism served to stunt the development of the native churches; missionaries controlled all activity and assumed that preparing indigenous leadership would involve years of effort (Beaver 236). This "reduced the native church to a colony of the foreign planting church" (*Ibid.*). Additionally, fearful of the syncretism which could result from nominal adherents, Henry Venn set high standards for the admission of converts, pressing for full commitment to the church. At times this meant that "the church set higher standards of personal piety and moral conduct overseas than were maintained at home," with the missionary becoming "arbiter of right and wrong in ethical matters in a foreign culture" (W. Shenk 138). Given these limitations, it is amazing that any indigenous churches were birthed. Yet they were.

Several scenarios presented opportunities for native leaders to develop and to form and sustain indigenous churches. The first arose whenever a government, for political or religious reasons, expelled Western missionaries and closed all Christian churches. Missionary evacuations compelled indigenous Christians to rise to the occasion (usually in secret) and to evangelize and

lead their compatriots.   Instead of disappearing, the churches grew significantly during these times of suppression (Pierson 274-5; Glasser, *Timeless* 455; Hege). A second scenario involved "breakaway movements" in countries such as China and some African nations. These developed when national Christians felt that the church remained too Western and did not sufficiently represent their culture. "This resulted in hundreds of churches becoming completely independent of the West" (Glasser, *Timeless* 455). The third scenario was an event: part of the preparations for the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh [Scotland] in 1910 included study of the current state of missions. This research revealed "that the native church was really competent and restless under paternal domination" (Beaver 236). The conference produced a "tremendous drive for the transfer of power from the mission organization to the church. Practically all boards and [mission] societies support[ed] this ideal, at least in theory" (*Ibid.*). Out of this drive, a fourth scenario developed—intentional planning for transitions from missionary to indigenous leadership, in advance of missionary placement. Twentieth century missiologists and missions conceived strategies for phasing missionaries into a culture while simultaneously designing plans which would intentionally migrate responsibility to indigenous leaders and allow missionaries to phase out (Tippet, *Introduction* 387-389).

Although many examples of indigenous churches exist worldwide, for the sake of brevity only one will be cited. Missionary and missiologist Alan Tippet served in mid-20th century Fiji. Writing in 1987 he described the Methodist churches in Fiji as being comprised of 200,000 members.

> The process whereby these strong indigenous churches have emerged is clearly evolutionary rather than revolutionary or rebellious [in contrast with the small number of revolutionary nativistic Cargo Cults]. These churches conduct their own business, social and religious affairs on the village, national and international level; and where they still have white workers (fraternal workers rather than missionaries) they are under the authority and discipline of the island churches. These island churches manage their own property, administer their own finances, pastor their own churches, train their own leaders,…and integrate their own evangelistic efforts, publication programs, social service projects, and in every way represent the voice of the Church in the community….They interact with the representatives of other churches in international conferences….The attitude of the white missionaries undoubtedly was one of the crucial factors….They recognized that the traditional missionary churches had to change with

the changing times: that the church was a dynamic organism and could not be treated as a static organization. They accepted the notion of change as appropriate. The task was not always easy. It was like navigating a banana raft on a flooded river and trying to keep in the current without upsetting the craft. The missionaries recognized this and let the current carry the raft, working themselves with their poling, not to increase momentum but to keep them facing in the right direction (Tipet 277-280).

Missionaries as Advocates

Throughout the centuries, missionaries have played a significant role in protecting indigenous people from exploitation or persecution by other outsiders. This advocacy was not a model of mission *per se*; it was a response to injustices missionaries encountered as they worked within foreign cultures. Their advocacy often took them out of their mission settings as they addressed their grievances in the political arena and pursued changes in policy. Missionary advocacy was never universally practiced nor condoned—by their churches, their religious orders, their governments; however, a significant number of individual missionaries witnessed unjust practices and dedicated themselves to reform.

During the Crusades of the 12th and 13th centuries, several prominent mission-minded monks provided voices of dissent against the military and political agendas toward Muslims. Peter the Venerable, abbot over six hundred European monasteries, openly criticized military dominance and worked instead to reach Muslims through "peaceful missionary encounter" (Huff 143). He studied Islam, had the Qur'an translated into Latin, and reached out to the Muslims of Spain. Nearly a century later Francis of Assisi was convinced that Muslims should be presented with a gospel of love and peace, rather than the atrocities committed in the name of Christendom. He created and trained a missionary force and personally took the message even to the Sultan of Egypt (Beaver 229). Several generations later, a Spanish noble, Ramón Lull, gave up his social status to become a Franciscan monk, "the first great European missionary to Muslims" (Huff 144). Like Francis before him, he believed that the conquest of the Holy Land ought not to be attempted by force of arms but "by love and prayers, and the pouring out of tears" (*Ibid.*). He learned Arabic, wrote books about Muslim evangelism, and established missionary training schools. He also "convinced many of the universities of Europe to include the learning of the

Arabic language in their curriculum" (*Ibid.*). Lull was martyred while preaching in Algiers, at the age of eighty (*Ibid.*). While none of these three voices of dissent defended Islam against Christianity, all of them did advocate against death and destruction, a theme which recurred in later centuries.

Missionaries during colonial times often were witness to unethical treatment of indigenous peoples. When Francis Xavier arrived in India in 1542, he despised the brutality and immorality he discovered there among the Portuguese and Spanish colonizers. He wrote against their "scandalous behavior, greed and failure to protect innocent victims" (Bevans and Schroeder 184). Missionaries to the Americas would find even more to protest and to protect.

Against a backdrop of widespread exploitation and extermination of Native Americans, a significant number of missionaries found their life's calling and struggled heroically for the rights of those who remained. Bartolomé de Las Casas, widely known as the "Defender of the Indians" (Bevans and Schroeder 176) remains one of the greatest examples of this type of advocacy. Las Casas began his career in the Americas as a priest/chaplain in the Spanish conquest of Cuba. This service brought him the ownership of an *encomienda* and its Indian indentured laborers. During the next several years he witnessed countless "scenes of diabolical cruelty which he later chronicled with exacting detail"—massacres of entire villages, punishment involving cutting off limbs, and other atrocities (Ellsberg 14). Haunted by these images, in 1514, at the age of 30, he "gave up his lands and the Indians in his possession and declared that he would refuse absolution to any Christian who would not do the same" (*Ibid.*). He joined the Dominican order and spent the next fifty years traveling between the Americas and the court of Spain, "attempting through his books, letters and preaching to expose the cruelties of the conquest, whose very legitimacy, and not merely excesses, he disavowed" (*Ibid.*). He played influential roles in the issuance of a papal bull in 1537 which is considered "the most important papal statement on the fundamental human dignity of indigenous people" (Ellsberg 14) and in passage of laws that combatted the "major abuses and dangers of the *encomienda* system" (Bevans and Schroeder 177). It has been estimated that "approximately

one-third of the bishops in the Americas until 1620 likewise defended the human rights and freedom of the indigenous people" (*Ibid.*).[11]

Later missionaries followed in the footsteps of Las Casas. Many fought to reform Indian policies, particularly Indian removal (Tinker 96). Against the wishes of their denominational leadership, some missionaries in Georgia tried various forms of civil disobedience to prevent the removal of the Cherokee, landing themselves in prison on multiple occasions (McLoughlin 44). When legal maneuvers failed to block the government's plan for relocation, some even marched the "Trail of Tears" alongside their Cherokee brothers and sisters (*Ibid.,* 63).

Still other missionaries focused on the plight of African slaves. Some actively combatted the slave trade. One of the goals of missionary doctor David Livingstone's explorations of the interior of Africa was to open it to commerce that would supplant the slave trade by offering Africans new economic possibilities; others followed suit (Pierson 291; W. Shenk 138). In Britain William Wilberforce, Henry Venn, and others were part of a move to exert Christian influence on public policy as they labored through the British government to enact legislation to abolish the slave trade. Like Livingstone, Venn tried to initiate alternative economic endeavors that would undermine the slavery business (Bevans and Schroeder 213). Missionary John Philip, serving in Britain's Cape Colony (South Africa) believed that "blacks and whites were equal" and was appalled at the mistreatment of the indigenous population there. He pressed not only for emancipation of all slaves in the British Empire, but went an enormous step further and campaigned for "equal civil rights to all persons of color" (Pierard 475). Amazingly, he prevailed and in 1828 "all Natives of South Africa" were guaranteed "the same freedom and protection as [were] enjoyed by other free people of that Colony" (*Ibid.,* 476).

A slightly different sort of advocacy was demonstrated when missionaries encountered cultural practices they considered immoral. In the early 19th century missionaries to India continued to

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[11] It should be noted that Las Casas, with all of his nobility of thought, still had his own blind spot. For many years he supported African slavery. Later in his life he recognized his "blindness" and realized "that the situation of injustice and prejudice was the same for the indigenous peoples of both the Americas and Africa, therefore making him the first of his time to do so" (Bevans and Schroeder 177).

try to overcome the caste system. Although their success was limited, they were able to

establish some schools which included girls and pupils from a variety of castes. The

missionaries questioned the caste system, pointed out its negative components, and taught

that these could be eliminated. Historian Richard Pierard asserted that this critical approach

"prepared the way for the indigenous movement in social progress that was to develop later

and which played such an integral role in modern Indian nationalism" (Pierard 472). Other

objectionable traditions were also addressed. The Indian practice of *sati* (widow burning) and

the Chinese custom of footbinding (which caused excruciating pain and permanent crippling)

were combatted through reason. Missionaries proved that "Hindu law did not require sati" and

then developed arguments for its abolition; others demonstrated that footbinding was "not

mandated by classical Confucianism," established girls' schools where it was not allowed,

worked to influence public opinion against the practice, and persuaded young men "to give up

the idea of bound feet as a condition for marriage" (*Ibid.,* 473-74).

Conclusion

Even missionaries who went out with the most altruistic of motives were products of their

historical and cultural environments, carrying with them their own worldview and its

concomitant ethnocentrism. However, many managed to arise in some measure above these

confinements and were on the leading edges of societal change. In summarizing two millennia

of Christian missions, a pattern emerges. In many centuries and generations a voice or voices

directed attention to the need for cultural sensitivity when encountering indigenous peoples.

Unfortunately these clarion calls were heeded only in limited ways; the approaches they

advocated were not sustained and were often actively suppressed. Numerous examples exist;

a select few follow:

In attempting to reach 6th century Anglo-Saxons, Pope Gregory the Great at first instructed

Augustine (of Canterbury) to follow the conventional practice of suppressing any traditional

religious practices and beliefs. Gregory eventually realized that this would not be an effective

method against such a resistant people and instead "fostered a missionary spirit of adaptation

and persuasion rather than rejection and coercion" (Bevans and Schroeder 123); the monks

who followed in his spiritual footsteps in the next century "supported the preservation of vernacular languages" and "encouraged the incorporation of traditionally sacred places and actions into Christian practice" (*Ibid.,* 125) on the continent. However, Charlemagne's 8th century attempts to reunite western Europe under his Christian rule involved three decades of "cross-and-sword" conquest and forced mass baptisms. Gregory's spirit of adaptation and persuasion lay dormant.

Centuries later Jesuits Matteo Ricci and Robert de Nobili modeled radical concepts of assimilation and accommodation in their work in China and India. The outcomes of the Rites Controversy effectively suppressed this type of mission work, eventually resulting in a period of dissolution of the Jesuit order in most parts of the world.

In the New World various models were offered as alternatives to conquest ideology. Mission communities such as *conventos* and Jesuit reductions were originally intended as places of safety, where the abuses of the *encomienda* system and colonizers could not penetrate. However, even these began to lose their "counter-conquest" character as colonialism gained a firmer grip (Bevans and Schroeder 182). These conditions were further exacerbated after Rome dissolved the Jesuit order. Puritan towns of "Praying Indians" served a similar protective function; but after these were destroyed in King Philip's War, strained relations between the Indians and their New England neighbors made it impossible for missionaries to restore what was lost, and the Christian Indians were "mistreated and corrupted by both sides" (Calhoun 37).

Native Americans could not have asked for a more devoted advocate than Bartolomé de Las Casas. The papal bull which affirmed their human dignity, and laws that protected them from the major abuses and dangers of the *encomienda* system, were some of his successes. However, Emperor Charles V "very quickly bent under the pressure from the [*encomienda* owners] and revoked the primary thrust of this legislation" (Bevans and Schroeder 177). The advocacy work of other missionaries which focused on Indian policies was similarly ignored or overturned as Manifest Destiny seized the dominant culture, asserting the necessity of such oppressive policies (Tinker 16; McLoughlin 51).

Missionary John Philip's successful lobbying on behalf of blacks in the Cape Colony—which gained them emancipation as well as equal civil rights in 1828—continued to bear fruit for a season. In 1853 the colony's new constitution provided it with a non-racial legal structure. However, all of this lasted only "until the Cape was absorbed in the Union of South Africa in the early 20th century and the rights of non-whites were soon extinguished" (Pierard 476).

Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson were the voices which presented a model by which indigenous churches could develop. Even they found their efforts eroded by imperialistic attitudes which impacted missionary thought. Racism and Western superiority, which were so pervasive in earlier times, re-emerged and convinced many that "non-Western peoples were inferior, incapable and untrustworthy" (Bevans and Schroeder 214, 216). Although most missionaries remained sympathetic to the needs of those they served, they did not feel confident relying upon indigenous leadership to sustain their work.

None of this is intended as an indictment of Christian missionaries' efforts or an evaluation of their competency. Many were very effective and loving in their work among peoples and cultures that were totally foreign to them. The selfless sacrifices they made on behalf of strangers were admirable. The mistakes they made were not usually intentional and are now defined primarily in retrospection. The social sciences and missiology have attempted to introduce new perspectives which offer potential for greater sensitivities toward sustaining cultural values while simultaneously introducing beneficial change. Every generation and each individual, however, interprets for themselves the parameters and priority of cultural sensitivity, not fully anticipating what future generations will judge as "mistakes."

Chapter Three

Contemporary Models of Cross-Cultural Mission Initiatives

An unprecedented advance of Christianity around the world during the 19th century earned it the historical distinction as the "Great Century" in Christian mission (Moreau *et al*. 124). By the end of the century Christian missionaries "had set foot in almost every part of the world" (Bevans and Schroeder 228). The 1910 ecumenical World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh [Scotland] marked its culmination (*Ibid.,* 206).   Twelve hundred participants, representing 160 mission boards or societies, "focused on consultation, cooperation and strategy for the sake of world mission" (*Ibid.,* 220). The conference "represented the height of missionary optimism, pragmatism and enthusiasm for the speedy Christianization of the world" (*Ibid.,* 220). This optimistic mood was shattered a brief four years later with the outbreak of World War I in 1914, marking the end of the "Great Century." The war "broke the heart of Europe and the United States—diminishing the high hopes placed on the ability of science, 'progress' and the Enlightenment to create the world the way it was meant to be" (*Ibid.,* 239).

World War I was only the first of many events which permanently altered the face of missions. The Russian and Chinese revolutions, the Great Depression, World War II, Marxist Communism, and the Cold War were among the many events and movements which impacted the world at large. Western colonial empires collapsed as initiatives toward political independence permeated Asia and Africa.

An unanticipated implication of the end of colonialism was a break between indigenous churches and their colonial founders. As the spirit of independence and equality gained momentum, "churches of the Third World did not just stand by but joined in the fray, condemning what they felt were injustices and cultural imperialism in their churches" (Luzbetak, *New Perspectives* 107). Some eventually went beyond "decrying what they considered paternalism and ecclesiastical bondage and demanded nothing less than a

moratorium on all foreign church aid, both in personnel and money," desiring an opportunity to be released from foreign pressures so they could plan their own futures (*Ibid.*). There was clearly a desire, around the world, for faith to be an expression of local cultures and circumstances.

In the midst of all of this foment three significant events signaled the emergence of a new "World Christianity" (Bevans and Schroeder 239) and ushered in a new era of mission initiatives: the formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948, the convocation of the Second Vatican Council, 1962-1965, and the birth of the Lausanne Movement in 1974.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) was the culmination of a series of ecumenical (inter-church) initiatives, some which were conceived as early as 1910 in Edinburgh. Three streams of concern eventually merged—emphasis on social concerns, on theology, and on mission (Pierson 264-5). Delayed by World War II, the WCC was formally inaugurated in Amsterdam in 1948. At its inception it consisted of 147 different Protestant denominations from 44 countries. Its stated goal was not to be a "super-church" but to be instead a "council of churches that would speak to each other and to the world" (*Ibid.,* 265). Although the organization faced many internal and external challenges to its unity, it continues to thrive. The WCC website reports that it currently represents over 500 million Protestant and Orthodox Christians from churches all over the world. Its assemblies and various commissions and teams work to address issues of mutual concern among its member denominations, including youth, education, the environment, peace and social justice, etc.

The Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), convoked by Pope John XXIII in 1962, was intended to be a time of updating for the Catholic Church. The council itself was historic in its inclusion of a global constituency rather than just a Western one. Reflecting this diversity, representatives struggled for three years to draft decrees which would incorporate worldwide thinking about missions and other theological issues. The documents approved during the final session of the council in 1965 demonstrated a significant departure from traditional viewpoints (Bosch 380-1; Bevans and Schroeder 249). These reflected "a convergence in Catholic and Protestant views

on the missionary nature of the church" (Bosch 381). They also included a number of changes which had direct implications for those working cross-culturally:

> 1) the charge to affirm all that is good and true in the non-Christian religions; 2) an imperative for Catholic missionaries to engage in earnest dialogue with adherents of other religious traditions; 3) an insistence on the energetic application of the social sciences to the work of evangelism, citing in particular ethnology, linguistics, the history and sciences of religions, and sociology; and 4) a call to integrally assume, in imitation of the Incarnation and insofar as it is possible and appropriate, the cultures of those being evangelized (Clatterbuck 208).

Vatican II also authorized the use of the vernacular in the Catholic liturgy and administration of the sacraments. Within a decade "the vernacular became the norm…and the use of Latin the exception," making the Christian message considerably more accessible to Catholics worldwide (Hardon).

The term "inculturation" did not follow until the early 1970's (to be discussed later in this chapter). However, the groundwork for preaching an inculturated gospel "was already in place through the principles prescribed" by Vatican II (Clatterbuck 209).

The Lausanne Movement, birthed in 1974, was representative of a broad collaborative trend among mission-focused churches (a trend which also included the World Evangelical Alliance). The Movement was in part a reaction to a perceived failure of the World Council of Churches to have mission sufficiently central to its agenda. Some conservative missions believed that the WCC was drifting too far away from a "focus on world evangelization toward social, political, and economic concerns" (Pierson 265). While these other priorities were important, they believed that the biblical mandate to introduce faith in Christ throughout the world should remain paramount. Following a series of smaller gatherings and publications, an International Congress on World Evangelization convened in Lausanne, Switzerland, attracting 2700 participants and guests from over 150 countries. They assembled to discuss, promote, and collaborate in worldwide evangelism. A major accomplishment of this conference was the Lausanne Covenant, a theological statement "which affirmed the authority of the Bible and the uniqueness and universality of Christ" (Bevans and Schroeder 261). The Congress also established an organization to "carry on the mandate of the covenant"—the Lausanne

Committee for World Evangelization (*Ibid.*). Subsequent gatherings in Willowbank, Bermuda (1978), Manilla (1989) and Cape Town (2010) produced statements which reflected the continuing refinement and expansion of mission thinking and concerns.

All three of these post-World War II initiatives influenced the models of mission which were initiated or reintroduced during the last quarter of the 20th century. Before introducing these models, though, a brief digression is necessary to place them in the context of contemporary developments in the fields of cultural anthropology and missiology.

Chapter one summarized the history of the fields of anthropology and missiology, and reflected on the contentious divide which characterized the early relationship between the two. This gap narrowed during recent decades. Although most anthropologists still did not embrace the Christian faith on a personal level (D. Arnold 267), some began to view spirituality and religion as integral parts of the cultures they studied; religious beliefs and values were "no longer considered meaningless superstitions, but charters validating their respective cultures and paradigms that help people resolve the paradoxical questions of life" (Hiebert, "Missions" 173). They also came to realize that true objectivity was an elusive ideal when studying other cultures. Additionally, their principle of non-intervention in other cultures began to give way as anthropologists grappled with the concept of culture change and what their role was to be in resisting, mitigating, or directing it (Whiteman, "Anthropology" 400-401).

Missionaries (and missiologists) increasingly realized the limitations of their cultural understandings. As early as 1910 Edinburgh the call for anthropological training of missionaries was sounded (Whiteman "Anthropology" 401). In 1953 missiological anthropologists launched their own journal which focused on "applications of anthropology in Christian thought and practice;" *Practical Anthropology* was "full of stories and examples of how anthropology [could] illuminate the complexities of effective cross-cultural mission work" (*Ibid.,* 404). In 1961 Father Louis Luzbetak published an essay entitled "Toward an Applied Missionary Anthropology" in *Anthropological Quarterly*. His purpose was to "emphasize the need for the development of another subfield of Applied Anthropology"—Applied Missionary Anthropology. (Luzbetak, "Toward" 165-6). In brief, he envisioned missionaries who conceived of cultures as integrated

wholes, who could identify components of worldviews (their own and those of others), and who could deftly establish strong connections between the essentials of Christianity and existing cultural patterns which were consistent with those essentials.

The time was ripe for a new paradigm of mission.

Much could be said about the various types of initiatives to be found in contemporary missions. Many of these parallel similar thrusts by secular organizations. Relief and development focuses on fighting hunger, poverty, and disease by improving food supplies, creating educational and economic opportunities, providing healthcare, etc. Others are involved in advocacy work toward social justice and human rights issues. Still others promote earth care and deal with issues of environmental sustainability. The list goes on. These initiatives, as important as they are, will not be further explored as models of mission. Each has its counterpart in secular society, and these types of work are familiar to most, if not all, readers. Each certainly has cultural components, both affecting and being affected by cultural settings and values. However, there are two mission models that have developed in recent decades which have significant cultural ramifications for missions and which are more exclusively the purview of missiology. These two—mission as contextualization/inculturation and mission as insider movement—are explored here.

Mission as Contextualization/Inculturation

According to popular usage of the term contextualize, "to put (a linguistic element, an action, etc.) in a context, especially one that is characteristic or appropriate" (dictionary.com), most of the models of mission delineated in the previous chapter were already attempts to contextualize the Christian message. Over the centuries missionaries have made adjustments, predicated by the need to be understood in a culture, which included local languages, customs, and expressions. In contrast with this broad sense of the term, in the latter part of the 20th century "contextualization" took on a more specific meaning in Protestant missiology, paralleled by adoption of the Catholic terminology "inculturation." Contextualization, used in this new interpretation, first appeared in the literature in 1972 (Haleblian 95); inculturation came into popular usage in Catholic literature in 1974 (Aleaz 233). Each originally had its own

definition, but with time the terms have come to be used synonymously by many. Nuances remain, but for the purposes of this study the two will be used interchangeably. Azevedo's definition of inculturation describes its components: "the dynamic relation between the Christian message and culture or cultures; an insertion of the Christian life into a culture; an ongoing process of reciprocal and critical interaction and assimilation between them" (quoted in Arbuckle, "Inculturation" 193-94). Whiteman's definition of contextualization expounds further on the concept: "Contextualization attempts to communicate the Gospel in word and deed and to establish the church in ways that make sense to people within their local cultural context, presenting Christianity in such a way that it meets people's deepest needs and penetrates their worldview, thus allowing them to follow Christ and remain within their own culture" (Whiteman, "Contextualization" 2).

Some of the most challenging questions missionaries have faced in the past are these: "Must all of a people's past culture change when they become Christians? If not, what must change and who should make the decisions? How should a missionary or church leader respond to traditional rituals, songs, myths, proverbs and other cultural customs? Answers cannot be delayed, for children are born, young people want to be married, the aged die and crops must be planted." (Hiebert, "Critical" 287). In attempting to answer these questions, Western missionaries were "unconscious of the fact that their theology was culturally conditioned; they simply assumed that it was supracultural and universally valid" (Bosch 459). "The Christian faith was based on eternal, unalterable truth, which had already been stated in its final form"— in dominant Western theology— "valid in all times and settings" (*Ibid.,* 437).

As the world continued to change in the last quarter of the 20th century, so, too, did Western missiological understandings. There was increased recognition that

> Christians can only read the scriptures and interpret tradition from a particular "place," and scripture and tradition, while absolutely normative, are nevertheless at bottom the products of particular experiences of Israel, the early Christian community and the church in various contexts throughout history….The realization dawned in both First and Third Worlds that what had pretended to be a *universal* theology was in fact one that *universalized* theological expression according to what amounted to a local theology developed in Europe (Bevans and Schroeder 386, emphasis original).

Those who had been "objects" of the church's mission sometimes struggled "painfully to recover and reclaim identities that were wrongly taken from them in the name of the gospel" (Bevans and Schroeder 388). "It was finally recognized that a plurality of cultures presupposes a plurality of theologies and, therefore, for Third-World churches, a farewell to a Eurocentric approach. The Christian faith must be rethought, reformulated and lived anew in each human culture, and this must be done in a *vital* way, in depth and right to the cultures' roots" (Bosch 463 emphasis original). Contextualization and inculturation became, for many, a theological and missiological imperative.

This new imperative required a sobering assessment of past models of mission. Past assumptions came under scrutiny. In 2011 Professor K.P. Aleaz, also quoting theologian A.P. Nirmal, assessed previous understandings of indigenization:

> According to A.P. Nirmal, there is no such word as 'indigenize' in the verbal form and therefore the usual expression 'indigenization' is linguistically untenable. "Someone or something either is indigenous or not. 'Indigenization' therefore, is a contradiction in terms. It is an attempt—an artificial attempt—to make indigenous that which is not indigenous." 'Indigenization' of the Gospel implies the wrong notions that the Gospel is something foreign, Christian theology is translation of the Christian faith into a given situation and the Gospel as well as history are static. Further, theologically indigenization would be a denial of the basic Christian theological affirmation that God is the Creator of the whole universe. "'Indigenization' really means first of all the branding of God as a 'foreigner' in his own home and then having branded him a 'foreigner,' seeking to make him 'indigenous' in our own country, nation, culture and so on." But we should understand God as always indigenous to India as to any other country and his indigeneity has a salvific purpose. Hence "the task of indigenous theology is not to seek to indigenize a god who is a foreigner, but rather to seek to understand God who is indigenous to any given situation and is savingly active in the dynamics of a given history." Indigenous God has to be interpreted in an indigenous history in all its totality with its religious, cultural, philosophical and socio-political aspects in order to arrive at an indigenous theology" (Aleaz 240-241).

In the 1980's missiologist Paul Hiebert had already proposed that a fourth "self" was necessary —self-theologizing (Bosch 462). This radical idea—a plurality of theologies—helped pave the way for inculturation and contextualization in missiological thinking and represented the first arena which would be affected. As might be imagined, Western church leadership at first only reluctantly embraced this new development. Concerns about the unity of the Church universal,

the ability of local leaders to develop theologies, and the great potential for widespread syncretism (incorporation of unbiblical cultural beliefs and practices) tempered optimism about any potential benefits. However, as different visions developed of how cultures might be impacted—in fresh ways with unique outcomes—the model gained proponents and energy.

The theology, theory, and practice of inculturation and contextualization have produced a profusion of academic books and articles which expound on these themes in varied manners. To summarize some of the commonalities among the many voices, excerpts from missiologist David Bosch's observations serve as a framework to which other comments are added (Bosch 463-465; Haleblian 98; Bevans and Schroeder 387; Moreau 325-328).

1. The local faith community and the Holy Spirit, rather than Western missionaries, become the agents of inculturation. Missionaries and theologians continue to share their knowledge and to function as resources, but do not exercise control over the local church or its theology. Authority is not transferred to the national church at some future time; instead, local autonomy is fostered from the outset.

2. "The emphasis is truly on the *local* situation" (Bosch 464 emphasis original). Those who would inculturate the gospel must "be in *dialogue* with the context in which the gospel is to be preached or the Christian life interpreted." They must "*listen* and *discern* how best to connect the unchanging aspects of Christian faith with the changing and challenging aspects of a particular experience, culture, social location or social changes in a specific place or within a specific people" (Bevans and Schroeder 387 emphasis original).

3. Because culture is an "all-embracing reality," inculturation must also be (Bosch 465). Cultural elements and customs cannot be extricated and "Christianized." For a meaningful encounter to take place between the gospel and culture, the culture must be viewed in its entirety, not just as the aggregation of its individual components.

4. Inculturation must be comprehensive, being affected by and, in turn, affecting all aspects of a culture. This includes not just traditional missionary foci, such as language and literature, social customs, lifestyle, arts, and theology; inculturation also embraces

local development of liturgy, structures, ministries, discipleship, and leadership formation (Aleaz 231). A cultural context must also be comprehensively understood as a convergence of history, anthropology, sociology, linguistics, psychology, economics, and politics—which makes each cultural setting unique (Moreau 326).

5. Local expressions of inculturation are themselves part of regional and macrocontextual manifestations. An infinite number of local theologies is not the goal; Christianity must still be centered on a universal message, expressed in varied local ways. Vital contact with the wider church must be nurtured, resulting in a kind of "universal hermeneutical community, in which Christians and theologians from different lands check one another's cultural biases" (Hiebert, in Bosch 468).

6. "Inculturation consciously follows the model of the incarnation" (Bosch 464). This involves the gospel being "em-bodied" in a people and its culture. "In this paradigm, it is not so much a case of the church being *expanded*, but of the church being *born anew* in each new context and culture" (*Ibid.,* 465 emphasis original). As the faith starts a history of its own in each culture, a double movement takes place: simultaneously there is an "inculturation of Christianity and Christianization of culture" (*Ibid.*).

7. Western theology was usually considered fully inculturated, a finished product. But "Western theologies (plural!)—just as much as all the others—were theologies in the making, theologies in the process of being contextualized and indigenized." Inculturation "can never be a *fait accompli*." It remains a tentative and ongoing process, "not only because cultures are not static but also because the church may be led to discover previously unknown mysteries of faith. The relationship between the Christian message and culture is a creative and dynamic one, and full of surprises" (Bosch 466-67).

When inculturation and contextualization are actualized, mutuality flourishes. Missionaries "no longer participate as the ones with all the answers but are learners like everybody else. The *padre* becomes a *compadre*" (Bosch 464). When missionaries are genuinely teachable, everyone is blessed by simultaneously giving and receiving. Exposure to other understandings of Christianity can function as a "form of mission in reverse, where we will learn from other

cultures how to be more Christian in our own context" (Whiteman, "Contextualization" 4). "All theologies, including those in the West, need one another; they influence, challenge, enrich, and invigorate each other" (Bosch 467). The result is a more complete comprehension of God, and of the role of the church. "From Asia we can learn more about the mystery and transcendence of God; from Oceania we can recover the notion of the body of Christ as community; from Africa we can discover the nature of celebration and the healing power of the church; and from Latin America we are learning about the role of the church in the work for justice" (Whiteman, "Contextualization" 4).

Inculturation and contextualization have great potential to transform the way mission is done, as well as the lives of individual missionaries and new converts. But not everyone has embraced this model. At the heart of the objections of many skeptics is a fear of syncretism. Although syncretism in its most general sense refers only to a blending of ideas and practices, its use among Christians negatively connotes an incorporation of unbiblical beliefs or practices into traditional, orthodox Christianity. This is a legitimate concern, especially since Christians believe that there are biblical standards which must not be diluted nor violated. The question remains, though, what constitutes syncretism and whether it can be avoided. Missionary-theologian Carl Starkloff contended that syncretism was not an "aberration" but "a natural historical occurrence" (in Clatterbuck 217). He insisted that Christianity has always been syncretistic, stating, "The point, I believe, is not *whether* syncretism, but *how*?" (*Ibid.* emphasis original). Western Christianity in particular has incorporated cultural elements which are unbiblical. No "pure" theology exists, anywhere. Starkloff appealed to the church to embrace a period of "theological messiness" so that all may "seek the truth wherever it may be found" (*Ibid.*).

Since the potential for syncretism exists everywhere, Paul Hiebert asserted that it is imperative, then, to teach all believers "to discern right and wrong in their own lives, to encourage one another in leaving old ways they have corporately rejected, and to check the errors of the leaders" (Hiebert, "Critical" 289). Hiebert believed that critical contextualization was possible due to three theological foundations underlying the process: 1) "the Bible is taken as the final

and definitive authority;" 2) "the priesthood of believers assumes that all believers have the Holy Spirit, who guides them in the understanding and application of the Scriptures to their own lives;" 3) the church is intended to serve as a "discerning community" as the gospel is contextualized (*Ibid.,* 293).

Based on these assumptions, in 1984 Hiebert developed a four step model to guide leaders and converts through a process of critical contextualization—a model which remains, three decades later, widely respected and influential. In this process a cultural custom is "neither rejected or accepted uncritically. It is explicitly examined with regard to its meanings and functions in the society, and then evaluated in the light of biblical norms" (Hiebert, "Critical" 290). The four steps, briefly summarized, include:

1. An issue/practice comes to light, via the church, a leader, or an individual.
2. The missionary or local pastor leads the congregation in identification and analysis of "the various practices that make up the custom," helping them to list each element and to discuss the meaning and function of each within the overall ritual.
3. The missionary or local pastor then leads the group in a Bible study related to the issue at hand, encouraging the members to actively study and interpret the scriptures.
4. The people are then encouraged "to evaluate critically their own past customs in the light of their new biblical understandings, and to reach a decision regarding their use" (Hiebert, "Critical" 290-291).

The congregation may conclude that a practice is not unbiblical and can be retained, that it is unbiblical and must be rejected, or that it can be modified.[12]

Although missionaries still figured prominently in the discernment process, Hiebert's proposed involvement of the people in evaluating their own culture was a departure from the past when missionaries, mission societies, and denominations presumed to know what was best.   Hiebert

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[12] Others have also developed models which can be used to critically examine cultural and worldview assumptions and their relationship to scripture. See for example Gittins and Bergant's seminar "Form and Meaning in Bible and Culture" (Gittins, "Give").

asserted that the people "know the meanings of their own customs better than the missionary;" "discernment also builds their maturity;" and "the people themselves will enforce decisions arrived at corporately" (Hiebert, "Critical" 291). He recognized, though, that missionaries would not always agree with the decisions made. Yet he maintained that "the missionary and leader must allow the people the greatest privilege we all allow ourselves, namely the right to make mistakes," adding, "much of what we all know theologically we have learned through failure and forgiveness" (*Ibid.,* 294). To this assessment, Heideman would add, "There is no heresy so bad that it contains no truth at all; there is no orthodoxy so complete that it is totally lacking the seeds of error" (Heideman 47-48). Despite its limitations, Hiebert's model provided impetus for additional movement toward self-contextualization and self-determination—and learning what constitutes a "mistake." Contextualization should ultimately not be imposed by missionaries or other cultural outsiders but should emerge from within a culture.

In this model of mission—inculturation and contextualization—the spiritual role of missionaries becomes more nebulous. No longer the sole possessors of the truth, the only arbiters of orthodoxy, they find their roles redefined. But Bosch contends that the mutuality and the empowerment of indigenous churches which characterize inculturation do not make missionaries "redundant or unimportant" (Bosch 467). Not only will they continue to exercise important functions as teachers, facilitators, and resources as the gospel is introduced, they "will remain…living symbols of the universality of the church as a body that transcends all boundaries, cultures, and languages" (*Ibid.*). They will discover, though, that their "main spiritual task in the inculturation process is letting go—of superiority, of power, of illusions that they understand a culture, of illusions that theirs is the true understanding of Christianity" (Bevans and Schroeder 388). They will more frequently discover the messiness of surrendering control of local theology and expression. Aspects of this surrender were lightheartedly captured in 1973 by Arthur Glasser, a missionary in Asia speaking to other missionaries:

> You must have confidence, not only in the Holy Spirit within you, but also in the lives of those you win to Christ. Encourage converts to take early responsibility for their congregational life and witness. If you do not smother them they will do three

unexpected things. First, they will develop new forms of music and new patterns of worship that you may not like. Second, they will handle the Bible in a way that will cause you a measure of concern….Third, the new churches will develop lay movements that missionaries will not be able to control. If these three expressions of independency are not manifesting themselves in the new churches resulting from your ministry, the probability is that you are seeking to control God's work too rigorously….

Recently I asked a missionary laboring in East Asia whether or not a certain national church (of about 400 congregations) was indigenous. "Of course!" was his impatient reply. "Have they developed their own hymns?" "No, they sing the ones we translated for them." "Have they any heresies?" "No, they believe exactly the way we do." "Have they developed their own lay movements?" "They tried, but we put a stop to that!" (Glasser, *Timeless* 456-57).

Missionaries letting go. Missionaries trusting the people and the Holy Spirit. In 1991 Bosch predicted that, even more than in the past, missionaries from nations all around the world would be "ambassadors sent from one church to the other, a living embodiment of mutual solidarity and partnership" (Bosch 467). The burgeoning numbers of indigenous missionaries, sent beyond the borders of their own countries to other nations in the Global South, Asia, and even the West, confirm this prediction (see Tzan; Omenyo; Bevans and Schroeder 232, 255). "Perhaps one of the most important functions of contextualization in mission is to remind us that we do not have a privileged position when it comes to understanding and practicing Christianity. It cannot be the exclusive property of any one culture, for it refuses to be culture bound; it continually bursts free from the chains of bondage to cultural tradition" (Whiteman, "Contextualization" 4).

Mission as Insider Movement

The Christian message *is* bursting free from its bondage to Western cultural tradition. A significantly different form of contextualization has found its way into the literature in the past two decades. The questions it raises represent a radical departure from past assumptions. "Can people from other religious traditions genuinely follow Jesus without becoming 'Christians'?" (Daniels). The answer appears to be "yes." Commonly called an "insider movement," this contextualized phenomenon has been defined in the following manner by Rebecca Lewis (collaboratively with others also involved in the movement):

An "insider movement" is any movement to faith in Christ where a) the gospel flows through pre-existing communities and social networks, and where b) believing families, as valid expressions of the Body of Christ, remain inside their socioreligious communities, retaining their identity as members of that community while living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Bible (R. Lewis, "Promoting" 75).

Lewis further clarified that insider movements result when no new communities (no "aggregate church") are created "to *extract* believers from their pre-existing families and networks, so that they naturally retain their former identity" (emphasis added). This means that such movements "can take place within any socioreligious context,...such as Russian Orthodox, Mormon, Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, Chinese Communist, etc." (R. Lewis, "Promoting" 76). Alternatively known also as "Jesus movements," "Messianic movements," or "Christ-centered movements," the movements' adherents identify themselves not as "Christians" but as "Jesus/Isa Muslims," "Jewish followers of Jeshua," and Hindu "Jesu bhaktas" ("devotees of Jesus") (Travis, in Corwin 7; Hoefer, in Corwin 21).

"Insider movement" identification is "new" in the sense that it represents a shift in missiological history. The first two millennia of church history primarily involved "reaching peoples from animistic or pagan backgrounds," with few from "the major religious traditions such as Islam and Judaism" ever embracing Jesus. Today, however, significant numbers from the world's major religions are turning to Jesus, with many of these remaining within the religious community of their birth (Travis and Woodberry 25).

The movement is simultaneously *not* "new." Insiders, such as Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles, served essential roles as Jesus attracted followers in New Testament times (Ridgway). In more recent times many generations of Islamic, Hindu, and other insiders have quietly and faithfully followed Christ, hidden from view in their cultures (Tennent, "Hidden").

Much of the perception of the novelty of this movement is a result of the expanding literature on the topic, focused particularly on developments in Muslim communities. Interestingly, as early as 1938 a report, in summarizing the experiences of "dozens of field workers among Muslims in the Middle East," (Henry Riggs in *Isa 4 All*) shared observations which would resonate with 21st century insider movement proponents. This report advocated "the

development of groups of [Muslim] followers of Jesus who are active in making Him known to others while remaining loyally a part of the social and political groups to which they belong in Islam," who would "go forward in the Christian life without publicly professing themselves as Christians in the sense of separation from the fellowship of their own people" (*Ibid.*). The justifications offered closely mirror much of today's literature.

The preponderance of literature and debate about Muslim insider movements, as well as Islam's common heritage with Christianity,[13] make them a logical focus for describing this model of mission.

Although there are various interpretations of what constitutes an "insider" or a "movement" and how contextualization is to be assessed, a tool developed by missionary John Travis[14] in 1998 has provided a common focus and vocabulary as interested parties have attempted to articulate the priority, nature, and limitations of insider movements among Muslims. His scale, The C1-C6 Spectrum, describes six types of Christ-centered communities found in Muslim contexts. Each designation represents a particular combination of language usage, culture identity, religious forms, and religious identity. Other than C-6, which describes Muslims who follow Jesus secretly (from fear of threats, imprisonment, or death), all of the classifications assume participation in some type of gathered community.   C-1 believers worship in a traditional Christian church where worship is not in their mother tongue; they identify themselves as "Christians," as do other Muslims. C-2 believers are similar to C-1, but worship is conducted in their mother tongue. C-3 believers are "Christians" who worship in culturally indigenous Christian fellowships but avoid Islamic religious forms. C-4 gather in "culturally indigenous fellowships that retain biblically permissible Islamic forms;" they self-identify as followers of Jesus/Isa the Messiah (or something similar). C-5 believers remain socially and legally Muslim, often participating in corporate Islamic worship (making adjustments in some

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[13] In addition to sharing common historical roots, according to J. Dudley Woodberry, the pillars, vocabulary, and holy books of Islam are "all adaptations of previous Jewish and Christian forms." He asserts that "if this fact were better understood, some of the current Muslim and Christian reaction to contextualization should be alleviated, for it would not seem artificial." For a fascinating explanation of these connections, see Woodberry's 1996 article, "Contextualization Among Muslims Reusing Common Pillars."

[14] pseudonym

parts); they are viewed as Muslims by the community and think of themselves as Muslims (Travis, "C-Spectrum" 664-665; Travis and Woodberry 30).   C-5 believers are those most commonly referred to as "insiders." This spectrum was not designed as a continuum along which every community should pass. Instead it was intended to describe the "enormous diversity that exists throughout the Muslim world" and the "myriad approaches...needed to successfully share the gospel" (Travis, "C-Spectrum" 664), as well as the individual choices Muslim believers make (Corwin 13).

Some believers are introduced to Christ by missionaries or other Jesus Muslims. Others, especially C-5 believers, sometimes come to faith in isolation—through reading a Bible, hearing a radio broadcast, experiencing a dream or vision, having a prayer answered, or receiving some kind of miracle—which they then share with their relatives and friends (Travis, "Messianic" 54; Travis and Woodberry 28).

Given what the term "Christian" means in Muslim history and culture, it is understandable why many would prefer not to be associated with it. In the West, especially for evangelical Christians, it has a spiritual meaning and is based on individual belief, a relationship with God, and doctrinal correctness (Hoefer 30-31). However, in the Muslim world it is rooted in historic animosities; it connotes colonialism and imperialism, war, and the Crusades; it is inextricably associated with immoral Western culture, including "immodest dress, sexual promiscuity, disrespect of elders, indulgence in alcohol,...narcotics and pornography" (Travis, "Messianic" 54). Furthermore, some traditional missionaries and/or churches have insisted "that Muslims who come to faith in Christ should renounce Islam and change their official religious identity" (Brown in Corwin 9), a rejection of "religion, language, culture, politics, nationality, ethnicity, and family" (J. Woodberry, "To" 25). According to this standard, becoming a Christian signifies not only apostasy but also total betrayal of one's family and community (Travis, "Messianic" 54). In some Muslim countries, "one's religious identity is determined by law, and often laws specify that people born of Muslim parents are legally Muslims and cannot change their religious identity" (Travis and Woodberry 27). Those who have the option, but choose not to

legally or publically take steps to remove themselves from Islam, retain their official Muslim identity (*Ibid.*).

The question comes again, "Can people from other religious traditions genuinely follow Jesus without becoming 'Christians'?" (Daniels). Is it necessary for people with a non-Christian heritage to "go through" Christian identity and culture in order to become disciples of Christ? (R. Lewis, "Insider" 675). Few would argue that the label "Christian" is necessary to be considered a follower of Jesus. The earliest New Testament believers identified themselves as belonging to "the Way." It is even likely that the label "Christian" was originally a derogatory term used by those who opposed the movement. So, there is "no scriptural mandate which insists that those who follow Jesus must be called by a particular or common communal name" (Tennent, "Followers" 104). The primary issue remains whether or not Muslims "may accept Jesus as Savior and Lord while remaining socially and legally Muslim" (J. Woodberry, "To" 25), whether or not the two are incompatible. Travis and Woodberry report:

> If asked whether they are Christians, Jesus-following Muslims rightly say no: they are Muslims, not Christians. If asked, however, whether they follow Jesus as Lord and Savior, they say yes, and give an appropriate explanation. Though they retain an official, social and/or cultural identity as Muslims and do not identify with "Christianity" as a socio-religious institution, they do identify with Jesus (Travis and Woodberry 27).

Many Muslims already follow cultural customs which are admirable and fully in accord with their new faith: "modesty, sobriety, chastity, hospitality, generosity, cleanliness, frequent mention of dependence on God, frequent thanks to God, frequent prayer, prostration in worship, memorization of Scripture, etc." (Brown in Corwin 7). But it should be noted that there is a great local variance in beliefs and practices throughout the Muslim world, and "Muslims do not have to perform all practices or believe all doctrines of Islam to be Muslims" (Travis and Woodberry 27). To remain socially and culturally a Muslim, then, is largely a matter of interpretation, depending on one's community.

Living out their faith, as Muslim followers of Jesus/Isa who are grounded on the authority of the Bible, also requires interpretation. Although outsiders "might be helpful in suggesting biblical guidelines,…those from a Muslim background are in a better position to understand the

meaning of labels and identity in their contexts" (J. Woodberry, "To" 27) and to do their own critical contextualization, following the scriptures and their consciences. "Muslim" is Arabic for "submitted to God" (Cumming). Most continue to demonstrate their submission, as members of the Muslim community, by giving alms, keeping the fast, praying daily, wearing local dress, and using their customary religious vocabulary and worship style (Travis, "Messianic" 56); however, they no longer interpret "the fast and daily prayers as a means of salvation and forgiveness of sin, but as a means to draw near to God" (Travis and Woodberry 26). Some attend prayers in the mosque; most are highly committed to meeting regularly in the homes of friends or family to study the Bible, pray, and periodically celebrate Communion or baptisms (Cumming; Yusuf in Corwin 9). Because of the inter-relatedness of Islamic holy books with the Old and New Testaments, followers of Isa can confidently claim, "I have submitted to God ultimately in His Word, Isa, and the Word of God in the Taurat [Old Testament], Zabur [Psalms], and Injil [New Testament Gospels] which the Quran confirms" (Higgins, "Identity" 121). Reciting of the credal *shahadah*, which includes affirmation of Muhammad as God's prophet, is a matter of conscience for each believer; some skip the recitation altogether while others qualify their personal understanding of Muhammad's role as "prophet" (Higgins, "Identity" 121). Clearly, individual Muslim followers of Isa must decide their degree of transparency within the Muslim community; while some choose to remain quiet in their devotion, many speak openly "about who they are and what they believe" (Cumming) and are "known as the ones whose prayers are answered" (Yusuf in Corwin). All "honestly see themselves as Muslims, not as Christians pretending to be Muslims" (Cumming).

As with other types of contextualization, the roles of missionaries are often nebulous and frequently non-traditional. The special circumstances which define the nature of insider movements also dictate the extent of outside involvement. There are some missionaries who work with insiders, but they have generally needed to protect the movements by not publicizing them and by limiting the circulation of research which has been conducted (J. Woodberry 24; Brown in Corwin 9). It is difficult, then to ascertain what roles foreign missionaries play in insider movements. Those on the ground in the Muslim world are quick to acknowledge that "biblically authentic Insider Movements are not primarily a missiological

strategy or a program. They are a spiritual phenomenon driven by the Sovereign Lord through the prayers of His people" (Higgins, "Key" 157). Rebecca Lewis wrote: "The earliest insider movements out there did not start because someone had a great missiological idea and said 'Let's try starting an insider movement.' As usual, theory is following observation. As in the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles in Acts, God is moving this way and we are trying to catch up by analyzing the phenomenon" (in Corwin 8).

There are certain principles recognized by everyone connected to the movements. For instance, none believe that outsiders should take on a Muslim identity for the purpose of proselytizing Muslims (Travis and Woodberry 28; Tennent, "Followers" 108); leading advocates of C-5 contextualization, including John Travis, "have restricted C-5 to those who were brought up in Islam and become followers of Christ, rather than a prescriptive missionary strategy for outsiders seeking to win Muslims for Christ" (Tennent, "Followers" 108). Beyond such absolutes there is much variation. Some outside missionaries initially introduce a few Muslims to Jesus, or provide resourcing, or teach leadership development (Travis, "Messianic" 53; Hoefer 34; Higgins, "Acts" 35). Most recognize, though, that "insider movements are led by the Muslim believers themselves" (Travis in Corwin 15) and that Muslim followers of Isa will themselves introduce their faith to their family units and social networks (Travis and Woodberry 25, 28). Rick Brown, who has more than thirty years' experience with outreach in the Muslim world, noted, "The most helpful thing that outsiders can do is to let Muslims know that [insider movements are] an option, that it is not necessary for them to become proselytes and hence apostates" (Brown in Corwin 18). Their social and cultural identities can be sustained.

Conclusion

Cultural and theological contextualization and inculturation, and contextualized insider movements, represent a heightened sensitivity among many mission thinkers and practitioners. From a perspective of sustaining cultures, it is encouraging to consider the changes which have taken place over the centuries as missionaries have learned to relate to cultures in different ways. But it also good to remember that these culturally-sensitive concepts are not

new in this generation. Missionaries have not arrived at the pinnacle of cultural enlightenment, having evolved beyond the "backward" practices of the past. Examples of today's models can be found in accounts of centuries past, especially among the New Testament apostles, the Jesuits, and others who followed their convictions in the face of misunderstanding and opposition. Undoubtedly additional understandings and models will emerge in future decades and centuries which may reconfigure or build on past or current models—in ways not yet anticipated.

It is also important to recognize that even today's expressions of cultural sensitivity vary. Assimilation and accommodation, as well as indigenization, continue to be primary mission priorities in many parts of the world. Not everyone espouses inculturation or insider movements; sincere concerns for orthodoxy and orthopraxy (correct biblical beliefs and practices) do not allow room for such divergences.

Finally, models of mission are also affected by the changing demographics of Christianity. The balance of the global Christian population is widely acknowledged to be moving southward and eastward. World Christianity is culturally and cognitively diverse from its Middle Eastern and European roots. The number of non-Western missionaries is increasing. For example, in 2003 there were over ten thousand Korean missionaries serving throughout the world. These missionaries "seldom if ever are introduced to insights of anthropology that would help them discover the nature of their cross-cultural interaction and ministry" (Whiteman, "Anthropology" 406). Given the degree of homogeneity of Korean culture,

> Korean missionaries easily confuse Christianity with their Korean cultural patterns of worship. So their converts are led to believe that to become a Christian one must also adopt Korean culture. If Americans are guilty of wrapping the gospel in the American flag, then Koreans metaphorically wrap the gospel in *kimchi* (a spicy fermented pickle serving as a potent symbol of Korean culture). This pattern of confusing the gospel with one's culture is being repeated throughout the non-Western world, and missionaries from these cultures are making the *same* mistakes that Western missionaries made in the age of colonialism, when the gospel was first brought to their cultures (Whiteman, "Anthropology" 406, emphasis original).

There is hope, though, that even those with little to no anthropological training can learn to be sensitive to the cultures of those they serve. For missionaries, this is possible through the insights provided by the Holy Spirit as he guides them in ministry. Whether the reader attributes these insights to divine intervention, or human instincts, the case studies which follow in the next chapter demonstrate how missionaries without backgrounds in anthropology or missiology actively sustained the cultures where they lived and served.

Chapter Four

Cultural Sustainability Case Studies

The previous two chapters presented a variety of encounters between missionaries and indigenous peoples, establishing a historical frame of reference for understanding the relationship between mission work and culture. Some missionaries sought to replace a culture's customs or alter its identity; others adopted strategies which perpetuated the cultures they encountered. To illustrate how intertwined cultural sustainability and mission practices can be, three case studies appear here. Each story contained many more examples of cultural sustainability in action than were possible to include, but even these few details describe missionaries' interactions and some of the ways their interventions served to sustain indigenous cultures.

These case studies have inherent limitations. Each scenario is based on the account(s) of a sole person or small group of people. Additional voices could certainly provide different vantage points which would result in a more comprehensive understanding of the people and events described here. The historical veracity of the published accounts appears to be accepted by others who have also studied and cited them; no rebuttals were located, but it is always possible that further research could uncover challenges to their accounts. However, the purpose of these case studies in this context was to accept at face value what people said took place, then to analyze their accounts for examples of cultures being sustained through the work of missionaries. The analysis was predicated upon this premise: "If *this* (what they've said) is what happened, then *this* is what we can learn from it." Its purpose is not to generalize from these specific cases, but to stimulate the reader's thinking about what might be possible when working within other cultures.

The first two case studies are brief, followed by a more comprehensive third one. Case study number one presents a story which began in late 19th century northeast India, when British

colonialism completely changed the legalities of a culture's spiritual expressions. The second case focuses on the experiences of a missionary couple as they grappled with the practice of female circumcision among the Maasai of Kenya. The final case presents the story of a young man who helped a "stone age" South American tribe deal with the inevitable encroachment of modernity into their territory and culture. Navigating cultural change, while sustaining the most crucial parts of the groups' identities and values, is clearly illustrated in each circumstance.

Case Study #1—Various Missionaries, with the Mizos in India[15]

The Mizos inhabit a hilly area in northeast India. Mizoram, and six other Indian states, comprise a region that is almost completely detached geographically from the rest of India. Mizoram itself is nearly surrounded by Bangladesh and Myanmar (Burma). It was colonized by the British in the 1890's (as part of Britain's overall conquest of the subcontinent). The handful of Christian missionaries who ventured into the region introduced Christianity at a time that would prove to be strategic for effectively sustaining significant parts of Mizo culture.

Chhangte Lal Hminga, born in Mizoram in 1927, was the son of first generation Mizo Christians. His father was a village pastor. Hminga followed in his father's footsteps, and beyond, eventually completing doctoral work in missiology in 1975. His dissertation focused on his own people—their history, their introduction to Christianity, and their churches and leadership.[16] His dissertation research included extensive field work—interviews with retired missionaries and church leaders and some of the oldest church members in remote villages—as well as archival research which accessed missionaries' personal files, mission reports, and other publications (Hminga xv-xviii). In *The Life and Witness of the Churches in Mizoram*, he painstakingly documented each decade's historical and missiological events, from the 1890's to

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[15] In the past the Mizos were called by a variety of names. Current conventions will be used here—"Mizos" to refer to the tribespeople and "Mizoram" to refer to their region/state.

[16] Hminga is not the only one to have researched Mizoram history and culture for a dissertation. Lalsangkima Pachuau's *Ethnic Identity and Christianity* and Lal Dena's *Christian Missions and Colonialism* are two other examples. Also noteworthy, though written for different purposes, is an extensive ethnography (236 pages) of the region published in 1912 by Lt.-Colonel J. Shakespear, British superintendent 1905-1914, *The Lushei Kuki Clans*.

1974 (updated in 1984). Hminga provides a unique perspective, then, on Mizo culture—as a Mizo insider and as a missiologist. This case study is based primarily on his accounts.

Before the 19th century British colonization of India, the Mizos lived in relative isolation. Each village was autonomous, ruled by a hereditary chief, a priest, and a council of elders. The chief, who owned the land, annually apportioned the fields to families (Strom 308). Among the chief's other roles, he was responsible for the slaves within his household—the criminals, the destitute, and the vanquished who had taken refuge there and entered into perpetual servitude (Hminga 68; Lal 71).

The Mizos' cultural traditions were inextricably linked to their spirituality. They were animists whose belief system incorporated a high, but impersonal, creator god, other good spirits, and evil spirits which lived everywhere—causing disease and suffering and requiring constant sacrifices of appeasement (Hminga 33-34). They relied heavily upon sorcerers to know which demons were the cause of their problems and what forms of sacrifice were required to propitiate the spirits. "Perpetual fear oppressed Mizo life" (Strom 309).

Many of their cultural practices were expressions of their fears. When a woman died in childbirth, her infant was smothered and buried along with her, to prevent its spirit from haunting anyone (Strom 309). Twins were dreaded; since one of them was believed to be the incarnation of an evil spirit, one twin had to be abandoned in the jungle (Hminga 292). If a disease was suspected to be the result of another's sorcery, the sorcerer would be killed and some of his body parts eaten to neutralize the sorcery (Strom 307).

Mizos' belief in an afterlife also influenced many of their rituals. For instance, when a chief died, his sons "went on a raid to collect heads to bury with him and thus provide bodyguards and servants for his journey" (Strom 307) as well as slaves in the next world (Hminga 36). However, the main impact the afterlife had on Mizo customs was the set of prerequisites for reaching *Pialral* (paradise/heaven). Anyone who did not meet the requirements was doomed to *Mitthikhua*, a dark shadowy place. Access to *Pialral* was gained in one of two ways: 1) by giving a series of expensive, elaborate feasts to the public, which few people could afford to do;

or 2) by killing a series of prescribed animals, including "elephant, bear, wild bison, stag, barking deer, wild boar, and *man*" (*Ibid.* emphasis added).

When the British arrived in the 1890's, they exercised their rule of the region indirectly. Although the existing village chiefs continued to administer their villages on behalf of the new colonial rulers, they were limited in some of their traditional rights (Hminga 8; Pachuau 71). The British aim was to "secure peace, law and order…backed by a policy of upholding the social customs of the people" (Hminga 8). However, there were a number of traditional practices which could not be tolerated by a "civilized" empire. The British outlawed headhunting and ritual murder, infanticide, slavery, sorcery, as well as the hunting of animals such as elephants. These changes represented a significant disruption to Mizo cultural practices and wellbeing. One of the only roads to *Pialral* was destroyed. Without sorcery and infanticide, protection from evil spirits was severely limited. Without slavery, the "poor, orphans, outcastes and criminals" faced uncertain futures. When chiefs were no longer the final authority, land disputes threatened village unity (Strom 311). The purported British policy of upholding "the social customs of the people" clearly did not serve to protect Mizo culture from serious challenges to their physical and spiritual wellbeing.

The British permitted a few intrepid English missionaries to enter the region, at their own risk. Two of the earliest spent four years learning the language, transcribing it to written form, doing Bible translation work, and preparing a grammar-dictionary and other books. Sunday Schools— for reading, writing, and singing—eventually produced converts. Later missionaries "started a school in the village of every convert, with a Mizo teacher-evangelist in charge" (Strom 311). Mizos were quick learners and thrived in the educational system. Although their numbers were small, the Mizo Christians were known for their zeal, for their initiative in evangelizing among their own people, and for their financial support of their own church leaders (Pachuau 76). They spread their faith rapidly, and by 1960 almost all of the 300,000 Mizos had become Christians (Strom 311).

It might be easy to conclude that the British missionaries were simply tools of colonialism. The British government certainly welcomed the pacification of the tribes which resulted from the

spread of Christianity. In addition, the British administrators were so impressed by the mission schools that they eventually closed their government schools and entrusted all the education of Mizoram to the missionaries, knowing the Mizos would be further "civilized" by these interactions (Hminga 96). But the purposes served by the missionary presence exceeded these limited functions.

Hminga notes a number of positive impacts of the missionaries and Christianity upon Mizo culture. One of these was the missionaries' arrival just in time to preserve the Mizo tribal language. The British intended to "impose the Bengali language on the Mizos as a court language," which probably would have "meant the dying out of the Mizo language" (Hminga 49). The Mizos still view their written language and literature, especially the grammar-dictionary, as a "supreme gift" from the missionaries which helped to sustain their culture and identity (*Ibid.,*50).

A second impact was a concern for Mizos' spiritual wellbeing and the hopelessness they were facing. With all of the restrictions the British had imposed, Mizo culture was in danger of collapsing. But the missionaries introduced Jesus as the one who could protect them from the evil spirits. Prayer "enabled every believer—not just the sorcerer—to communicate with God" (Strom 312). Mizos no longer had to make frequent blood sacrifices because Jesus had made the supreme sacrifice (*Ibid.*). Christianity offered all of them "a new and better way to get to paradise. Not only for the skillful, the mighty and the rich, but for everyone, male or female, who put their trust in Jesus, the way to heaven [was] opened" (Hminga 295).

The missionaries also encouraged Mizo Christianity and church governance to develop in indigenous forms. Worship style and content reflected Mizo culture, incorporating drums as well as Mizo poetry and music. At first the missionaries shouldered all responsibility, but they soon realized that they needed to entrust leadership to the Mizos. Churches elected their own pastors and elders who provided oversight to the functions of the local churches. Mizo teacher-evangelists led the village mission schools. The Mizos themselves became missionaries who shared their new beliefs with their own people; head-hunters became soul-hunters. The Western missionaries were careful to ensure that financial support for the work of the churches

came from Mizo contributions, avoiding dependency on outside resources and encouraging independence. The church was, therefore, self-propagating and self-supporting; self-governance was fully realized when the Mizos inaugurated councils and other bodies which had specific responsibilities and authority for all the churches in Mizoram (Hminga 59, 97, 100-103).

Finally, the outreach of indigenous missionaries among the various Mizo villages united them in ways that had not existed historically. Before Christianity was introduced, the only connection among the sub-tribes had been their language (with slight dialectical variance) and some of their customs. There had been no need for overarching governance, policies, or structures. But in the face of colonialism and of modernization, a new, united sense of identity and purpose was required—to bind them together in ways that would help to sustain them as a society (Hminga 11, 291). Their common faith and witness helped to provide that unity.

India's 1947 independence from the British Empire brought many additional changes. But, by then, Christianity had already helped the Mizos retain their tribal identity. "Mizos are proud of being Mizos….While they have become Christians, they are quick to point out that this does not in any way diminish the fact that they are also Mizos" (Hminga xiii). They inculturated the new religion, adapting it "to suit their mode of thinking, temperament, and customs. Thus, the people themselves became the major defining factor of the emerging church" (Pachuau 173). "In the new identity that emerged out of the interaction between modernity and the Mizo traditional culture and world view, Christianity played an integrative role. On the one hand, Christianity modernized the Mizo society in a significant manner. The role of the mission agencies in providing formal education to the society was particularly consequential with regard to modernization. On the other hand, Christianity helped the Mizo society to maintain a sense of identity in its transition to modern life" (*Ibid.,* 173).

The 2001 Census of India reported that 90% of Mizoram's 840,000 people are Christians (*Census of India 2001*, 4). Mizoram stands distinguished. Literacy rates are the highest in India. "Grandchildren of illiterate headhunters are now graduating from colleges and universities, and hold high positions in the government and the military" (Strom 315). The stature of women has been raised, and they now serve in church leadership and in "professions, business and political

administration" (*Ibid.,* 314-15). The Mizos remain united in identity and culture; a groundswell eventually clamored for full independence from India. Although these efforts were not successful, in 1987 Mizoram was granted "full-fledged" statehood in the Indian union (Pachuau 59).

Case Study #2—Clair Good, with the Maasai in Kenya[17]

Clair and Beth Good, along with their four daughters, lived and worked among the Maasai of Kenya from 1989 to 2001. As they immersed themselves, learning the Maasai language and culture, one of the cultural practices they found most challenging was the ritual of female circumcision.

Female circumcision, or genital mutilation, is still practiced in many parts of the world, despite being illegal in many places (including Kenya). Its severity ranges, from a clitoridectomy, where only the clitoris is removed; to excision, where part or all of the labia are removed; or infibulation, where the clitoris and most of the labia are excised and the two sides of the vulva are stitched together, leaving a small opening for urination and menstruation (Gachiri 33).[18] Reasons given for this ritual vary among those who practice it. The Maasai in the villages where the Goods lived practiced excision, believing that it would eliminate sexual pleasure and reduce promiscuity, and that it would make childbirth easier. The Goods found instead that the procedure was contributing to the spread of AIDS, that infections often resulted in sterility, that promiscuity was generally not reduced, and that scarification actually exacerbated problems during childbirth.

The Goods' language helper prepared them to attend their first circumcision ceremony. A brother and sister in their early teens were to be operated on that day. Their circumcisions were rites of passage—into manhood and womanhood. The language helper explained that children went through several stages of preparation for this ceremony, starting when they were younger, all to help them to develop their capacity not to respond to pain. The first step

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[17] All information for this case study came from an interview with Clair Good, February 2013, unless otherwise cited.

[18] Those who have been infibulated have their fused wound opened for intercourse and childbirth.

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involved burning a hole in the upper ear with a hot awl; later the earlobes were sliced and stretched with wads of grass, followed by weights, to gradually lengthen the lobes; finally, burning sticks were thrust against their arms and legs in rows, teaching them not to react to the pain. The goal of the male circumcision ceremony was to go through the operation without anesthesia and not to flinch. Although it seldom happened, those who flinched, even an eyelid, were branded as cowards for the rest of their lives.

During the ceremony which Clair observed, the young man flinched—his leg jumped. Bedlam ensued. The crowd of men screamed; knives and sticks were thrown; the young man's father ran around crying, and wailing, "If only it was me; if only it was me!" The women heard all the commotion and thrust Beth, for her own safety, into the calf pen inside a nearby hut. As Beth's eyes adjusted to the dark, she realized she was actually standing in front of the girl that was going to be circumcised. There on the floor of the manure-covered calf pen, surrounded by manure walls, flies and other insects, and smoke, a woman with dirty hands and razor blade cut the girl. The flies immediately swarmed, and the dust settled. Beth, an emergency medical technician, was horrified and traumatized by what she had just witnessed.

The Goods spent ten years waiting for an appropriate time and way to address this cultural practice. They had tried, in a nonjudgmental way, to explain the medical reasons for abandoning the practice. But the ritual was a foundational part of the culture. Without that rite of passage, a girl did not become a woman and would not be able to find a husband. It was also the only day in a young woman's life that she was honored and celebrated. The rite of passage itself was essential, even desirable, but the Goods wondered if there was another way.

When their oldest daughter, Rebekah, was about 14 years old, the villagers kept asking when she would be circumcized. Knowing that they could not consent to this, Clair and Beth worked with the Maasai leaders of the church where they served to develop an alternative. Their goal was to design a ceremony which would include the concepts and honor the intention of the culture's rite of passage. Its focus would be a spiritual "circumcision of the heart" (found in Romans 2:29), referring to having a pure heart and being separated unto God. Rebekah would covenant with God and her parents to remain chaste/pure.

Clair and Beth spared no expense, wanting to make sure that they did the celebration justice. They started out the day with the Maasai warriors butchering a cow and at least one goat for them. They had ordered hundreds of bottles of soda (no alcohol), bags and bags of cornmeal, rice, potatoes. The community came in full regalia, and sang, danced, did skits, and generally "carried on." When it was time for Rebekah's part of the ceremony, the Goods opened the door to their home and seated her in public view. They talked with her about purity, and circumcision of her heart, and she made her covenant with them and with God. Prayers of blessing were offered—for her and for her future husband—by a Maasai elder, then a Maasai woman, then Beth, and finally Clair. The village women came and stacked her with beads and brought her gifts. Everyone sang, danced, and rejoiced. People left saying, "This is the best ceremony we have had in years and years and years." It was also a very meaningful day for Rebekah (and later for her younger sisters when their turns came). The ceremony provided her with a rite of passage not experienced in American culture.

Soon afterwards people starting copying the Goods' example. They did the whole party and ceremony, but did not do the cutting. In Clair's earlier conversations with the Maasai leaders about circumcision, the leaders had predicted, "This is never going to leave—maybe in 50 years." But, following Rebekah's ceremony, Clair reported, "Amazingly, people stopped! If I understand correctly, most of the girls in Olepolos today are not being circumcised but are going through alternative ceremonies."

Because the Goods were simultaneously foreign and Maasai, because they collaborated with the Maasai leadership, and because they honored the intent of the cultural expression, they were able to introduce a significant change. The Maasai found a new way to express traditional values. And present and future generations have been blessed.

Case Study #3—Bruce Olson, with the Motilone Indians in Colombia [19]

In 1961, at age 19, American Bruce Olson had already learned Greek, Hebrew, Sanskrit, and Latin. But he left behind his desire to become a professor of linguistics to follow an urge—a leading from God—to become a missionary in South America. With no mission agency sponsorship, no money, no contacts, and no Spanish, he boarded a plane for Caracas, Venezuela, hoping to serve among the Indians. Little did he dream that he would someday become a well-known advocate for indigenous rights and wellbeing, speak before the United Nations, be a close friend of four Colombian presidents, and receive numerous honors for his lifetime's work. His linguistic talents would serve in other ways; he would eventually speak fourteen languages and help pioneer computer translation of tribal languages (Walker in Olson xiv). This naïve teenager ended up devoting a half-century to loving, living, and serving among the Motilone[20] Indians of Colombia.

Olson's first exposure to missionaries and their Venezuelan Indian converts left him convinced that there had to be a better way of introducing the gospel. Communicating in the broken Spanish he had acquired by that point, he invited some Indians to accompany him to the missionary church their converted tribesmen attended. When they adamantly refused to go, Olson pursued an explanation from the village chief:

> "Listen," [the chief] said, "those Christians don't care about us anymore. Why should we care about them?"
>
> "How do you know that they don't care about you? They're part of your tribe."
>
> "Why, they've rejected everything about us," he said. "They won't sing our songs now. They sing those weird, wailing songs that are all out of tune and don't make sense. And the construction that they call a church! Have you seen their church? It's square! How can God be in a square church? Round is perfect." He pointed to the wall of the hut in which we sat. "It has no ending, like God. But the Christians, their God has points all over, bristling at us. And how those Christians dress! Such foolish clothes…"

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[19] All information included in this case study, unless designated otherwise, is summarized from two of Olson's books: *Bruchko* and *Bruchko and the Motilone Miracle*. Direct quotes are attributed.

[20] *Motilone* comes from the Spanish word meaning "cut hair"—a name given by 17th century Spanish settlers. The tribes call themselves *Barì*, which means "we the people" (Olson and Lund xi). However, the term *Motilone* is widely used and is accepted by the tribes when used in reference to them.

I thought of the Indian Christians I had seen at the missionary compound. They had been taught how to dress in clothes with buttons, how to wear shoes, how to sing Western songs.

Is that what Jesus taught? I asked myself. *Is that what Christianity is all about? What does the good news of Jesus Christ have to do with North American culture?* (Olson 39-40 emphasis original).

Olson eventually heard of the existence of the Motilones who lived deep in the jungle, on the border between Venezuela and Colombia. They were a fierce people who met outsiders with arrows; no one had ever gotten close enough to describe their culture or to learn their language. American oil company representatives, interested in that area's rich oil reserves, had frequently been repulsed—wounded or killed. Despite these reports, Olson felt drawn to the Motilones and set out to find them. After a three-day bus trip, followed by days spent wandering alone in the jungle, he happened upon a tribe. He spent weeks, then months, struggling to learn their language and culture. But the more he learned, the more disheartened he became—nothing about this tribe matched what he had been told about the Motilones. These were the Yukos. It was yet another year before he finally met the Motilones.

Deathly fear kept the Yukos from complying with his repeated requests to be taken to the Motilones. Bribery eventually overcame their reluctance. Six days of travel through the jungle brought them to Motilone territory. Olson's companions sensed danger and ran toward home, leaving him alone; at the same instant a four-foot arrow penetrated his thigh. Surrounded by Motilone warriors, he found his language skills—even Yuko—useless. One yanked the arrow back out of his leg and the group forced him to march for three hours to their village. He remained a prisoner in a Motilone longhouse—enduring pain, infection, illness, and starvation—for days. Despite his desire to be with the Motilones, one night while everyone was sleeping he made his escape. After five days of wandering aimlessly through the jungle, he was surprised to discover that he was in Colombia. He found medical help and food, then found his way to Bogotá.

Despite an initial reluctance to return to the jungle, Olson found his way back. He established a base camp, then set out gifts at various places along the Motilone trails. For two months none were taken. Finally, the gifts disappeared, as did subsequent ones he left out. Soon, however,

warnings were left in their place—arrows standing in the ground, a shredded shirt, etc. Just when Olson was ready to give up, six Motilone warriors, including one he had met during his earlier captivity, surrounded him and took him to their village. Perceiving he meant them no harm, they allowed him to stay. He was given food and his own hammock in the communal longhouse, along with its 200 other inhabitants. The Motilones interacted with him, exploring his blond hair, blue eyes, and curiously tall height. Unable to pronounce "Bruce Olson," they called him "Bruchko." Weeks turned into months, then a year, as he labored to learn their language and culture.

It should be clear by this point how much risk and how much patience Olson expended in order to earn the privilege of "helping" the Motilones in any way. He was gradually accepted into their tribe, forming an especially close relationship with one of the young men, whom he nicknamed "Bobby." Bobby continued to help him with his language acquisition and bridged him into Motilone culture and relationships.

Olson desired to help. He had medicines he knew could cure many of the diseases which threatened their lives. But the Motilones depended on the witch doctor—"She knows our customs and our ways" (Olson 113). He waited patiently for an opportunity to introduce the medicines in a way that would respect the witch doctor as well as the culture. When an epidemic of pinkeye hit, he knew that his antibiotics could easily cure the condition. Although the witch doctor spent up to twenty hours daily singing her incantations to God, it was to no avail. However, she still refused Olson's offer of ointment. He realized he could not administer the medication without being in competition with her. So he took drastic measures; he intentionally infected his own eyes and then went to her for help. She sang her incantations, which improved nothing. He returned and requested that she put some of his potion in his eyes while she sang her incantations. Within three days his eyes were clear. He then went to her quietly, and again offered his potion for the others. She used it, along with her songs, and everyone was cured. Her status in the community increased, and she became his ally for other health measures.

One day he used his microscope to show the witch doctor the "evil spirits" which caused disease and death; she witnessed them dancing around and sang chants against them. He put disinfectant on them, and they stopped dancing. She realized that the potion, rather than her chants, had killed them. She gradually introduced disinfectants into routine tribal ceremonies, such as the cleansing of a new communal home, or the birth of a baby. The tribe's general health improved and its mortality rate declined. In just a few short years, eight health stations (one in each communal home) distributed antibiotics and other medicines. No foreigners provided the care—only Motilones trained by Olson. Everything was introduced by trusted witch doctors, as extensions of things they already knew (such as substituting needles with vaccines for the pain of traditional blood-letting). "And because the witch doctors had seen germs and understood their danger, correct sanitary procedures were followed" (Olson 117).

Olson followed the same process with changes to the agricultural system. He taught the chiefs about crops and livestock that would help sustain the people during the times when hunting was sparse. When the chiefs, "who traditionally were responsible for providing food," introduced a new idea, it was readily accepted, with a minimum of disruption (Olson 117).

Olson exhibited the same kind of patience and astuteness when it came to matters of spirituality, waiting five years for an opportunity for any sort of discussion. One day some Motilones initiated a conversation, asking how they could be restored to God. Their legends said that they had followed a false prophet who had deceived them and led them away from God. Using others of their legends, Olson answered their questions, explaining Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Within days his friend Bobby came to him and asked how he could walk on Jesus' trail. Olson responded: "No man can tell you how to walk His trail. Only Jesus can. But to find out you have to tie your hammock strings into Him and be suspended in God" (Olson 127). The next day Bobby reported that he had tied his hammock strings into Jesus, and described the new life that he was experiencing.

Olson fully expected that his friend would immediately tell the others about Jesus, and how to walk on his trail. But Bobby waited until he could do so in a *Motilone* way. During the next communal Festival of the Arrows, one of the old chiefs challenged Bobby to a traditional

contest of song. For fourteen hours Bobby sang and the old chief imitated—a song about

how the Motilone had been separated from God and how Jesus made it possible to know God

once again. Everyone received this news with joy and told Bobby of their desire to walk on

Jesus' trail. The song quickly spread to other Festivals of the Arrows, with similar results. Olson

summarized this movement: "God had spoken. He had spoken in the Motilone language and

through the Motilone culture. He had not even had to use me" (Olson 135). From that point

on the Motilone were interested to learn from Olson what his Bible said. He watched the

Motilone culture change—from a network of autonomous family units, who would throw

away excess food rather than share it with starving families near them, to a community that

cared about and nurtured one another (*Ibid.,* 142). Of their own initiative, a group of them

even chose to go and tell the Yuko Indians, their enemies, about Jesus—becoming the first

Motilone missionaries.

Eventually Bobby asked whether they could "make the Bible so that the Motilone people could

understand it for themselves" (Olson 148). Olson developed a written form of the language.

Then he and Bobby translated the New Testament book of Mark, with Bobby helping to provide

the idioms and knowledge of Motilone legends and customs which would help to communicate

abstract concepts for which there was no equivalent vocabulary. Once their translation was

complete, Bobby started to teach some of the children from it. But the older men soon

grumbled; it was culturally inappropriate for the children to know things that their elders did

not. Olson and Bobby focused their literacy efforts, instead, on the elders. "After a month or

so, they felt comfortable enough to have their children learning, too. Instead of living in totally

different worlds, as is so often the case between generations elsewhere, the older men and

women shared their new knowledge with their children. It added to the unity of the tribe

instead of destroying it. Before long, a number of Motilones could both read and write." (*Ibid.,*

150-51). They all taught each other, and quizzed one another, about the Bible.

Many changes took place in subsequent decades, which all helped to sustain Motilone culture

and values. Olson was always careful to ensure that the changes "took place gradually and in

consultation with tribal chieftains" and was "extremely pleased to see these advances improve

the quality of life for the Motilones…in ways that essentially preserved their traditional values" (Olson and Lund 17).

The stark reality was that change was inevitable for the Motilones. "Interaction with the outside world had already begun" (Olson and Lund 169). The lands they had inhabited for more than 400 years technically did not belong to them, as non-citizens of Colombia. The government had designated all their lands as homesteading territory. Settlers, outlaws, and prison escapees competed among themselves and increasingly encroached upon the Motilones, sometimes even killing them to take their land. Bobby was murdered by outlaws in 1972 after he repeatedly refused to cede any additional Motilone land. Oil companies wanted to tap the area's rich oil reserves. The Colombian drug cartels eventually also entered the scene, since these were prime areas for cultivating cocaine and heroin. The Motilones, and especially Olson, also found themselves at the mercy of leftist guerillas who tried to manipulate them to join their cause and wanted their territory for training bases. Olson and tribal leaders worked diligently to provide the Motilones with the tools they needed to sustain their people, their land, and their culture.

In addition to the health clinics and agricultural initiatives mentioned earlier, another part of a community development strategy involved education. All schools were led by Motilones and were bi-lingual, including not only their native language but also Spanish (taught by Colombians). As the number of schools increased, children of settlers were permitted to attend—with the condition that they learn the Motilone language alongside their classmates, so that they might begin to "respect the ways of the Indians" (Olson and Lund 42).

While the children were being educated, Olson worked with the adults to develop an economy that would allow them to "travel to and trade with the outside world" (Olson and Lund 42). Olson's research indicated that cocoa beans could serve as the foundation for this economy; eventually a series of cooperatives was developed, run by Motilones. Settlers were also later allowed to join, fostering more "respect and cooperation between them and the Indians" (*Ibid.,* 43). Profits from the cooperatives, as well as surpluses of agricultural goods, allowed the Motilones to purchase medicines, educational materials, and other commodities.

The investment in the education of the children had long term benefits for all of the Motilones. With Olson's help, the Motilones were able to provide scholarships for select graduates of the jungle education program to attend high school and college in Colombian cities. Every single one of these students returned "to the jungle to apply their newly developed talents on behalf of their tribes" (Olson and Lund 90). As of 2003, they had graduated "more than fifty professionals—attorneys, accountants, translators, Bible scholars, forest rangers, agronomists, teachers, linguists—and thirty-nine physicians," as well as more than four hundred students with technical apprentice degrees (*Ibid.,* 173). "They have learned to incorporate the advantages of the modern world into their traditions and culture without losing their identities as native peoples of Colombia" (*Ibid.,* 174).

One particular area of note concerned Motilone land rights. In 1974, "after years of struggle, negotiation, and coordination with the state and national legislatures, the president of Colombia signed an order" establishing a portion of traditional Motilone territory as an "Exclusive Motilone and Forest Reservation" (Olson and Lund 172). Although this was in many ways a tremendous victory—the first legal protection of their lands—it did not include "the vast and fertile lowlands traditionally maintained by the Motilones" which had been settled by outsiders (*Ibid.*). However, twenty-five years later, *Motilone* lawyers litigated their *own* claims on these lands—and won. In 1996 "most of the lowlands were legally returned to the Motilones" (*Ibid.*). One of these lawyers was later appointed to a cabinet level position as the first indigenous director of the Office of Indian Affairs (Olson 189). As the Motilones continued to take their place in key government circles, they also worked on behalf of the other "twenty-plus Indian tribes who lived in the jungle" who also had not been considered citizens (Olson xv).

One additional, but unplanned, outcome of Olson's work among the Motilones resulted from his 1988 abduction by one of the leftist guerilla groups. This group held him captive for nine months, hoping to persuade him to use his influence to sway the Indians toward their cause. As he endured months of torture, false accusations, and sham executions, little did he know that the Motilones were fighting for his release—in the media. Full-page statements in Colombian and U.S. newspapers denounced the lies circulated by his captors, and called for his release

(Olson and Lund 154). The media advanced the cause, prompting individuals, organizations, and statesmen to join the groundswell. This publicity, originating from a terrifying ordeal for Olson, did more to sensitize the public about the plight of the Motilones and other tribes, and to unite the Motilones with the surrounding Indians, than any other circumstance could have done. After Olson's release, the president of Colombia called him with a request: "We are forming a national peace commission that will attempt to work out non-violent solutions to our problems. Four of the guerrilla organizations have agreed to participate, and one—the group that abducted you—has requested your presence as well. You have a unique perspective on the guerrillas and on the Indian population. Will you come and be on the negotiating team?" (*Ibid.,* 157). "The result was a tentative but encouraging period of peace for northeastern Colombia, affecting the entire nation" (*Ibid.,* 158).

Bruce Olson, now age 71, continues to labor on behalf of the South American Indians. His work among the Motilones has become legendary, especially as new generations of missionaries are trained and sent out. His message continues to be taught:

> I knew that the Motilones did not have to become Westernized in order to become Christians….My focus was on respecting and being willing to preserve the culture of the people I was trying to reach for Christ. I was willing to help them find solutions to the challenges they faced within their own culture rather than assuming they needed to adopt my culture and values. Mission organizations often like to say they are sending missionaries to *serve*. While it is noble to serve others, it is much more important to give them the tools they need to forge their own future. I demonstrated this principle when, instead of challenging the authority of the traditional Indian leaders—the medicine men and women and the chieftains of the various tribes—I earned their trust and allowed them to introduce medical and agricultural advances to the rest of their people. The old maxim is true: If you *give* a man a fish, you feed him for one day; if you *teach* a man to fish, you feed him for a lifetime (Olson and Lund 206 emphasis original).

Chapter Five

Implications for the Work of Cultural Sustainability

"In this era of increasing homogeneity and globalization, local history, traditions, and ways of life are among our most endangered resources and precious assets. By strengthening and building on the foundations of these resources…we can begin to counter the powerful forces that endanger communities around the world" (Goucher website). This "calling" to the work of cultural sustainability is visionary, yet nebulous, lofty, yet earthbound. As cultural sustainability workers, we are sufficiently idealistic and naïve to believe that we *can* go forth, passionately share the gospel of cultural sustainability, and change the world. We want to serve communities in ways that enhance or sustain their vitality—ideologically and pragmatically. We desire to collaborate with people, helping to facilitate community-driven change that recognizes and sustains cherished cultural values and traditions.

Missionaries also face the powerful impulses of globalization and have embraced similar goals of sustaining cultural values. The historical and contemporary models described in previous chapters have provided windows into their experiences of sharing the Christian gospel, from a cultural vantage point. They were committed to action and intervention within communities. Given that cultural sustainability is similarly dedicated, missionaries' experiences can provide valuable insights. These questions remain: How can missionaries' experiences and interactions with unfamiliar cultures inform and strengthen our cultural sustainability endeavors? How can we, as cultural sustainability workers, engage with communities, assess their belief systems, and partner with them to introduce something beneficial while simultaneously sustaining the important parts of their culture? Hopefully many implications have already been self-evident in previous chapters. This chapter compiles, summarizes, and explicates some of these insights, then proposes a set of best practices for the emerging field.

The "gospel" of cultural sustainability may not always be perceived as "good news." In our zeal for sustaining cultures, we may be tempted to view ourselves as cultural saviors. We are the enlightened ones who can save the world, and of course people will want our help! We do have a hopeful message, but, as missionaries have learned, it cannot be imposed. We must learn to allow it to winsomely impact people. Whiteman's earlier description of Christian mission can easily apply also to cultural sustainability: "Perhaps one of the most important functions of contextualization in mission is to remind us that we do not have a privileged position when it comes to understanding and practicing Christianity [or sustainability]. It cannot be the exclusive property of any one culture, for it refuses to be culture bound….[It] demands to be 'translated' from one cultural context to another" (Whiteman, "Contextualization" 4). This in no way negates the training or expertise we have acquired. It simply means that our zeal and our message must be tempered by an understanding of those we are trying to reach, and must be strategically "translated" in each cultural context. Missionaries also found that they themselves were not the most effective champions of their message; when people's lives were changed in positive ways by their new faith, they were quick to share that news with others. A strategic, catalytic vision for sustainability which influences even a few can expand when its benefits are realized and shared, within the same culture and beyond. The gospel of sustainability can spread.

Cultural sustainability is cross-cultural work. Those who travel or work in foreign countries expect to encounter cultural differences, and there are many resources which prepare businessmen, students, and missionaries for such interactions. Even within our extended communities, we might be aware of language and cultural differences among those of different ethnicities from our own. But few of us are prepared to readily recognize cultural dissimilarities among those in our immediate surroundings who look and speak as we do. Each of us, though, is a unique blend of understandings—influenced by our own cultural heritage, families of origin, education, life experiences, etc. All of us unintentionally make assumptions about those around us—primarily because it does not occur to anyone that there might be different perspectives. We need to approach each setting as a cross-cultural encounter, adopting the

same cautious, learning posture we would take in a foreign country. We need to remember to assume that we can assume nothing.

We can also avail ourselves of the many resources which highlight cultural variations. It can be especially helpful to study our own cultural patterns so that we more easily recognize differences. A starting point for this type of elucidation could be Lanier's *Foreign to Familiar: A Guide to Understanding Hot- and Cold-Climate Cultures* or Stewart and Bennett's *American Cultural Patterns: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*; each can help us to be more cognizant of the arenas where differences tend to occur.

Lastly, we can be quick to embrace what our sister disciplines, such as cultural anthropology and sociology, offer us. Clair Good discovered that anthropological and sociological insights he gained from his missionary work among the Kenyan Maasai apply to his work in his home country. Good witnessed how a loss of Maasai cultural identity (due to a variety of events and circumstances) produced a town in which sexual promiscuity and alcoholism were rampant; he is now working in a U.S. town which has experienced a similar loss of cultural identity, with the same results. His initiatives to revive and sustain Maasai culture now inform his work in a Caucasian working-class town (Good, interview with author).

Our own worldview and ethnocentrism will influence our work*.* It is easy, from the outside and with the benefit of retrospection, to recognize how missionaries' worldviews and ethnocentrism impacted their cross-cultural encounters. Social customs were misunderstood as they were interpreted through a European worldview. The dowry systems of some African cultures appeared to be "the buying of women" and prompted missionaries to liberate these women from slavery; but the dowry system was "fundamental for a stable marriage in Africa since it engage[d] two families rather than two individuals in a new relationship" (van Butselaar). Some missionaries to India "rejected the red sariis (*sic*) used by Hindu brides, and substituted white ones, not realizing that in India red stands for fertility and life, and white for barrenness and death" (Hiebert, "Critical" 288). These examples, as well as others from earlier chapters, illustrate how judgment of customs was "based on the implicit assumption that the cultural forms of western Christians [were] themselves Christian. An uncritical rejection of

other cultures as pagan is generally tied to an uncritical acceptance of our own cultural expressions as biblical" (*Ibid.*).

We must resist the temptation to believe that we have moved beyond missionaries' myopia and are now culturally enlightened. We need periodic reminders that we also are influenced and limited by our worldview and ethnocentrism. Each of us has a unique frame of reference for evaluating what we encounter—but are not even aware that a mental evaluative function is occurring until there is sufficient divergence to cause us to take note. We expose our ethnocentrism if we claim to understand another's culture or believe that our good intentions toward a community are adequate to overcome any cultural gaps. When we assume that cultural values such as democratic processes, and even higher education, are universally beneficial, we have exposed the ethnocentrism of our worldview and have unintentionally perpetuated the hegemony of our dominant culture.

We may not sense that we are in danger of introducing ethnocentric ideals. But we need to recognize that cultural sustainability is now a part of our worldview, and that we may make assumptions about others' customs and values based on sustainability ideals. The issue is not trying to figure out whose worldview is *correct*; it is about being aware that these worldviews exist and how they impact one another. We need to embrace critical self-assessment—which will increase self-awareness and will help to minimize imposition of our own cultural ideas and limitations upon others.

Investment in communities takes patience and time. In many ways we have to *earn* the privilege of helping people. Missionaries have discovered that "the most effective crosscultural communication is the one accommodated to the sociocultural structure and the basic psychology of the people to whom one wishes to communicate. This requires immersion in the local culture of the people so as to direct social change from within and thus avoid serious disorganization" (Oborji 104). This usually necessitates some language study as well as cultural learning. As cultural sustainability workers, the extent of our immersion in communities will vary, according to our existing connection with them, the amount of time we have allotted, etc. Our sensitivities to a culture will be directly proportional to the time and patience we invest

there. We need to learn the local language; even if we all speak the same vernacular, their nuances, idioms, denotations, and connotations may differ from our understandings of the same vocabulary (even if we are from the same community). We should study the community's issues, tensions, and needs so that we can better understand "what kinds of problems will be raised and how they might be resolved most effectively" (Schreiter, "Culture" 262). Accomplishing this level of understanding goes beyond simple ethnography and requires time and emotional energy, what missiologist Carl Starkloff describes as "the painfully tedious art of tactful questioning, and the virtue of waiting, often in silence, with the hope that some new understanding of our partner's deeper religious [or cultural/social] consciousness will be revealed to us" (in Clatterbuck 213). No matter what the circumstance, we need to resist the temptation to charge in (again—as the "cultural saviors") and assume that we can quickly set in motion initiatives which will sustain cultural values.

As we explore areas which may need to be changed or sustained, the following framework, developed by comparative religious scholar Ninian Smart, can guide our study. According to his model, there are seven dimensions of religion: 1) philosophical; 2) narrative; 3) ethical/legal; 4) social/organizational; 5) ritual; 6) experiential; and 7) material/artistic (in Moreau 328-334). Although the investment required to grasp these dimensions of a culture is significant, awareness and study of them will enhance our sustainability endeavors.

Agency ultimately resides in the community. Cultures are not static; change is, therefore, inevitable and ongoing. How a community *responds* to change varies. Some changes are imposed from the outside, and the community resists or capitulates; other transitions are voluntary, initiated by the community itself. We cannot dictate to a community what they should resist and what they should embrace. We must also recognize that what we bring to the table may also involve initiating or mitigating change. We may have our own ideas about who the "most sympathetic persons" are who should "get there first" (Richardson, 490), but agency ultimately resides in the community. As professionals we may listen, dialog, and educate about potential responses and outcomes, but it is the community that decides what to sustain—and what the best strategy is for sustaining it.

We will always wrestle with this agency. Culture change that seems obvious and necessary to us may not, in fact, reflect the culture's own values. Or it may reflect the values of only a segment of the population. Missionaries who worked to eradicate the Indian caste system discovered that they could not overcome a cultural construct that was so widely embraced. A community may also be divided about what should receive focus—its history and traditions or its readiness to engage the future.

An essential cultural sustainability role is to ensure that a community realizes that it has *options* when it is facing culture change—that it does not have to uncritically accept every innovation. In the same manner that Paul Hiebert advocated intentionality with his model for critical contextualization, we can encourage communities to work together to intentionally evaluate the impact and desirability of innovations that come their way. We can encourage them to discern for themselves how changes and corresponding tradeoffs will affect the sustainability of their cultural values. Once they have collectively decided what is best, we can help them to discover principles and resources which will empower them to implement their plans.

We sometimes make paternalistic assumptions*.* When analyzing the actions of missionaries, it is easy to jump to conclusions about their paternalism toward indigenous people. Missionaries did assume that others needed what they had to offer, and did at times work to protect and isolate new believers from detrimental influences. But it also may appear that indigenous communities capitulated to the influence of these foreigners, unable to stand against them, or traded their religious identities for the material gain to be realized from conversion.

The fallacy of this line of thinking is that it assumes that communities were passive and vulnerable, and that the fragility of their cultures caused them to disintegrate when faced with an influx of new ideas and customs.[21] Missiologist Titus Leonard Pressler summarizes this mindset well:

> The point must be made that this common misconception is not only condescending but probably racist as well, for it assumes that non-Western people are incapable of making

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[21] European contact did introduce disease, changes in how food was procured, etc., which affected the physical resistance indigenous peoples were able to exert. The assertion being made, though, is concerned with ideological assent.

religious decisions free of the motive of material gain and that they are mere puppets in the hands of misguided Western religious propagandizers. Obviously, this view is profoundly unjust to untold millions of people in the Two-Thirds World—the majority of the world's Christians, actually!—who have made mature Christian commitments and are now making their own unique contributions to world Christianity (Pressler 489).

The paternalistic assumptions we must guard against come, then, from two different directions. First, we should be cautious in judging the actions of others as paternalistic. Second, we need to resist the temptation to be paternalistic ourselves. We may see how communities can benefit from our insights and expertise, and work to convince them that they need what we have to offer. We may also, like the missionaries, desire to isolate and protect a culture—for survival's sake—because the more they interact with the world, the more they will change. But such isolation may very well "condemn them to stagnation and extinction" (Tippet, *Introduction* 146), rather than ensure their sustainability. Again, agency must always remain in the community and we must trust them to determine for themselves what is helpful and edifying.

Humility and mutuality should characterize our endeavors. Compelling ourselves to confront issues related to our own ethnocentrism and paternalism exposes our prejudices and weaknesses. It also begins to cultivate in us an essential heart attitude of humility. True humility requires not just respect for others and laying aside assumptions that we have all the answers; it also involves investing ourselves in others' lives in a way that nurtures mutual understanding. As we share in their "fears and frustrations, their pains and preoccupations, and their hunger, poverty, deprivation or oppression," we humbly become sensitive to beginning "our communication where people actually are and not where we would like them to be" (Lausanne 515).

Humility leads to mutuality. Sensitive missionaries quickly realized they needed to respect people enough to learn from them. They discovered that mutual dependence and dynamic cultural exchange expanded their own cultural understandings of God and Christianity. Contextualization offered the possibility of "a form of mission in reverse," where they could learn from other cultures how to be more Christian in their own context (Whiteman , "Contextualization" 4). Since God and his relationship with humanity are multifaceted beyond imagination, no one individual or one culture can claim to have a complete understanding of his

character; each one provides additional revelations which coalesce toward a more comprehensive picture.

Cultural sustainability work should also be characterized by mutuality. Reciprocity can expand our understandings of culture and of sustainability. Those we collaborate with will have much to teach us—if we are willing to learn. Our willingness to receive, as well as give, will also validate their cultural values and understandings. Our world is multifaceted beyond imagination; we need each other's insights to even begin to comprehend it.

Cultural sustainability must be culturally sensitive. Such a statement initially appears like the proverbial "preaching to the choir." However, it is possible that we are not as culturally sensitive as we perceive ourselves to be. Missionaries learned that they had to counteract the perception that theirs was a foreign religion that had no cultural relevance by finding ways to connect it with peoples' languages, cultures, and worldviews. When they contextualized their message and demonstrated that someone could be both Christian and Thai, or could follow Jesus and remain Chinese, the gospel became relevant (Whiteman, "Contextualization" 2, 6). This involved recognizing and embracing the infinite diversity of humankind as well as the patterns in human interaction which can be discerned. As we work with communities toward sustaining their cultures, we must also be aware that our gospel—our good news—can also seem foreign and/or irrelevant, and look for ways to contextualize it. Even as Bruce Olson framed his lesson on microbes as "evil spirits" under his microscope, we need to constantly look for points of contact that will gently lead communities to discover their own cultural insights, minimizing cultural disruption and maintaining continuity.

Missionaries have also learned that "what seems at a distance to be homogeneous" can be, the more it is understood, "various and uneven." Complicating matters, there may even be "more than one culture existing and…intermingling in the same locality" (Ingleby 183). Any cross-cultural work should be approached holistically, with the totality of a community as the focus. Clifford Geertz's "thick description" must be implemented sensitively, but thoroughly. Some missionaries have attempted to gather such information, but this was not always the case.

Based on extant manuals and writings of missionaries to China, Arthur Glasser summarized this omission:

> Missionaries tended to investigate very inadequately the manner in which the Chinese lived. Many basic questions remained unasked—how the land was cultivated and managed; how land ownership and tenancy operated and influenced family life; how village patterns of production, consumption, supplementary income operations, credit facilities, urban immigration, family division, popular religion, feasts and festivals, influenced an individual's reaction to Western missionary penetration; how the kinship system operated with its economic and social functions, its patterns for communicating ideas, both traditional and new; finally, how China's decentralized power structure functioned at the village level and was related to the decision-making of individual villagers" (Glasser, *Timeless* 450-451).

This level of inquiry is undoubtedly daunting; but if we are to be culturally sensitive, we must be prepared to learn as much as possible about the communities we serve. Our investigations must extend beyond what can be gleaned from demographic reports. Our ethnographies should propel us toward discovering who the people are at heart, what they value, why they behave as they do, etc. These revelations will shape our interactions and our strategies.

Finally, we need to remember that the diversity which is inherent in all individuals and cultures requires creativity as we interact with them. Terry LeBlanc, a Native American, was bold enough to challenge a seminary's traditional theological training of indigenous pastors, requesting changes in the seminary's educational patterns and content as well as its delivery system, resulting in creative, effective collaboration among various educational institutions (LeBlanc 87-88). Clearly, not every group has the same educational needs. Our work with communities must recognize this reality. Once we have strategized something that works well in one place, we may be tempted to assume that it will benefit the next community we serve. While it will not always be necessary to reinvent the wheel, it is essential to treat each setting as a brand new encounter, with its own discoveries to offer. Every community is unique, and has unique needs.

Spirituality matters. An entire volume could be written on this topic, but a brief summary of this specific cultural sensitivity follows. Missionaries have a history of acknowledging and assessing the spirituality of those they served. Spirituality (differentiated from organized

religion) is an integral part of every culture. It is inextricably embedded in cosmology and expectations of cosmic control; in views of nature and the environment; in morality; in understandings of leadership and authority; and in family life and social roles. It also profoundly influences communities' and individuals' sense of wellbeing (as was seen with the Mizos). Those of us from the scientific West have compartmentalized all of these concepts. We have relegated the significance of spirituality to the realm of seminarians and churches.

Despite their spiritual sensitivities, not all missionaries were able to accept the spiritualities they found. They assumed that the pagan customs they observed were all demonic, devoid of anything godly. However, some missionaries eventually realized that God could be found in aspects of others' cultural practices, that he had actually preceded their arrival.

As cultural sustainability workers and academics, we are postured to repeat the offense of the missionaries who rejected indigenous spiritualities. We must try to transcend our own personal belief systems and consider the spiritualities of those we serve. Any unwillingness to imagine the possibility that portions of another's beliefs might be "truth" is a blatant reflection of our own ethnocentrism—which we might quickly condemn in a missionary but excuse in ourselves. Our ethnocentrism may also be a barrier to working with those from organized religions, especially if some religions are more acceptable to us personally than others. We risk becoming arbiters of which communities deserve to be sustained, based on their beliefs.

It is essential, then, to suspend our tendency to judge and to try to understand and connect with a culture's spirituality before any kind of intervention is attempted. Given that spirituality is so intertwined with all aspects of culture, failure to make these connections may compromise our efforts, even cause them to be rejected. On the positive side, discovering spiritualities and communities of faith that are amenable to the goals of sustainability, due to mandates inherent in their belief systems, increases the likelihood of successful partnerships and outcomes.

Relationships and collaboration should be strategic*.* Every good ethnographer, missionary, or cross-cultural businessman knows the value of individuals who can act as bridges into or within a community. But *wise* cultural workers also recognize the challenge of choosing bridges whose

role or reputation in a community will not doom the enterprise before it even begins.
Partnerships are essential for any endeavor. Missionaries' astute local colleagues have
provided them with insights into the culture and have alerted missionaries about the positive
and negative effects of their undertakings—aiding their efforts and preventing social disasters.
But a challenge comes in knowing who is the best partner or ally to pursue.

Those who first approach us, who seem to be enthusiastic about our ideas, are not always the
most prudent choices as allies. Sometimes such a person will turn out to be a strong and
strategically placed individual, and our work will be enhanced by the relationship. But it may be
better to err on the side of caution, not making quick assumptions or judgments. We do not
want to find ourselves in the middle of a community power struggle. Nor do we want to end up
with a dependent that drains our organization's money and other resources.

Complicating matters further, it is not always evident which group we should engage.
Returning to Ingleby's concept of "more than one culture existing and…intermingling in the
same locality" (183), we note that a choice to work with one culture in a locale may
automatically eliminate the possibility of relationship or collaboration with others. When
Robert de Nobili arrived in India, he chose to live and minister within the Brahmin caste and
culture, inevitably precluding contact with the lower castes. Who we choose to *include*
automatically *excludes* others.

As a field, we have a predisposition toward the marginalized of society who fight for survival
against the dominant culture. We will always wrestle with the dilemma of knowing how best to
help them. Ingleby noted that, even though the culturally dominant have the means to effect
change, trickle-down relief and development seldom find their way to those who need them
most, nor does the message of the missionary (Ingleby 184-185). Dominant cultures can
collaborate, or they can render us ineffective by blocking our efforts. Those who most need our
help are often the most difficult to access and to aid. Additionally, when we ally ourselves with
the marginalized, we may surrender our access to those who are in positions to alter the
hegemony and systems which originally resulted in their marginalization. This does not mean

that we should not work for those who are at the fringes of society—but it does mean that we need to be aware of the implications of doing so.

As we cultivate relationships and implement strategies, we also need to be careful that we do not inadvertently upset a culture's social order. Missiologist Charles Kraft recorded the following abject failure of a well-intended initiative:

> In aboriginal Australia, among the Yir Yoront people, missionaries introduced steel axes to replace the traditional stone axes. This had a powerful disruptive effect simply because the axes were given to the women and younger men, who traditionally were required to borrow axes from the older men. This change, though providing the people with better technology, challenged their worldview assumptions. It lead to the destruction of the authority of the leaders, widespread social disruption and the near extinction of the people (Kraft, "Culture" 404).

Bruce Olson, however, deliberately worked at not disrupting the Motilones' social order. His collaboration with the village "witch doctor" to introduce medications and with the community elders to implement new agricultural concepts and literacy ensured that everyone retained their traditional place in Motilone society. Investment in understanding a culture, and consulting with appropriate leaders, will hopefully also help us to avoid cultural mistakes.

Empowering local leadership is essential. One of the ways we can best demonstrate humility and sensitivity to a culture is by listening to the people and recognizing our own limitations. "Even the most gifted, dedicated and experienced missionary can seldom communicate the gospel in another language or culture as effectively as a trained local Christian." "Whether we are translating the Bible or communicating the gospel, local Christians are indispensable. It is they who must assume the responsibility to contextualize the gospel in their own languages and cultures" (Lausanne 515). The missionary's goal is an indigenous, contextualized community of believers. Our goal should be indigenous cultural sustainability. Each community, if it is to experience authentic change and growth, must make its own decisions and collectively identify what is to be sustained and how. When the natural leaders for these initiatives become apparent, we need to focus on empowering those leaders. We should provide whatever training, mentoring, encouragement they need in order to rally the

community and implement the vision—and then allow them to lead. As early as possible, we should plan our strategy for migration of responsibility to others and then intentionally work toward gradual disengagement.

It can be challenging to entrust others with our ideas and dreams. But when we practice this surrender, we promote local ownership and increase the likelihood of long-term sustainability. We also avoid unnecessary dependencies on "experts"—on our leadership, our funds, our resources.

We can expect to face barriers to our work. These barriers may include differing visions, interdisciplinary challenges, suspicion of our motives, degree of community commitment, or hidden individual and/or collective wounds.

Unity of vision is not always guaranteed, and we may face challenges—from within the community, from outside the community, and even from our own sponsoring organizations. Those we serve will not always understand our vision, and may even resist our efforts. We must exercise care that we are not intruding where we are not wanted or welcomed. Where we have been invited in, and misunderstandings remain, taking time to ensure that all are moving forward together is a valuable investment. The reality, though, is that sometimes unity does not come, and we may face rejection of our ideas from those who have a limited vantage point, who may not recognize the overarching risks and dangers which seem ominous or inevitable to us. Outsiders may also resist our efforts, especially if we have aligned ourselves with a particular population; missionaries who focused on Native Americans found that this alienated "non-Indian businesspeople, administrators, and settlers" (Ingleby 184). Lastly, we may encounter resistance from within our own institutions or from grant-makers. The Jesuits were clearly misunderstood by the Catholic hierarchy, who put a halt to their work. Even now some missionary-sending agencies and financial supporters do not appreciate contextualized Christianity and expect more resemblance among foreign churches and their North American counterparts.

Working within an interdisciplinary field has benefits as well as challenges. We are not constrained by one discipline. We are trained specialists who can cast a wide vision, span multiple disciplinary worlds, and speak multiple languages and dialects. We network and bridge—not only among other professionals but also among communities. We are constantly asking ourselves (or at least we should be) what additional individuals or disciplines we can bring to the table to help us best serve a community's interests and needs. This is a space for collaboration and partnerships, for experiments. Creativity and outside-the-box thinking are not just tolerated but are encouraged and embraced. However, along the way we may encounter mystifying resistances in those from other disciplines. These can often be traced back to interdisciplinary historical tensions or conflicting theoretical underpinnings (such as those which exist between anthropologists and missionaries). We cannot possibly be cognizant of all these realities, so before we attempt to collaborate we need to investigate past relationships between fields and groups. Because the boundaries of the field of cultural sustainability are still porous, the space which it offers can perhaps provide an excuse for people to set aside their preconceptions, at least temporarily, to see what might be possible.

Our motives may be challenged. An old adage states, "We judge others by their actions but want them to judge us by our motives." The motives of some missionaries have been judged, based on historical "abuses." None of us, though, wants to be represented by the worst expression of our ideology. As cultural sustainability workers we must also be prepared to have our motives (and actions) questioned. We need to adopt a non-defensive posture, and to evaluate what we can learn from each criticism. We should practice extending grace and forgiveness wherever possible. We must believe the best about others' actions and motives. And, lastly, we need to learn when to walk away.

Lack of true community commitment may also serve as a barrier to successful collaboration. Some may tolerate our presence and our ideas, but not ever really embrace the vision. Others may associate themselves with our efforts simply to improve their social image. Many will look for personal or collective gain—such as funding, education, or aid—potentially fostering unhealthy dependencies. Anthropological and sociological insights can help us to avoid some

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pitfalls while strengthening the potentials for genuine collaboration. Unfortunately, there are also situations where mid-point changes in administration or personnel alter a community's commitment, and bring into question the fulfillment of mutually defined goals. In the end, then, each of us must decide what degree of commitment is an acceptable level to warrant our continuation.

Finally, *individual or collective wounds may bring unexpected resistance to collaboration*. Unintentional mistakes and outright manipulations have traumatized some people in ways that make trust difficult to establish. This reality stretches far beyond the obvious examples of the decimation of Native Americans and the enslavement of black Africans. Many cultures or communities carry hidden wounds that require sensitivity on the part of anyone who would want to help.

Outcomes may not be what we anticipated. Missionaries discovered that true ownership, true indigeneity, developed only after local believers transitioned from compliance to the missionaries' expectations to embracing personal convictions that prompted self-regulation. Personal convictions and discernment often led, though, to contextualized forms of expression and movements that the missionaries did not especially like or appreciate. Paul Hiebert reflected, however, that "the church grows more by consciously making decisions in the light of scriptures, even when it does not make the wisest judgment, than by simply obeying orders from others" (Hiebert, "Critical" 292). We, too, must hold lightly to our plans for a community, our vision for how their culture will be sustained. We do want true ownership to take place, so we must surrender our expectations of the final outcome. An indigenous church was not always self-supporting, self-governing, self-propagating, or even self-theologizing. Indigenous cultural sustainability may also take on unexpected characteristics.

Missionaries unintentionally, but invariably, made mistakes (especially when judged in light of future cultural understandings). We can expect to follow in their footsteps; even operating from the best of motives, we will make unintended mistakes, as will those in the communities we serve. We may not always agree with the decisions leaders make. But we must remember

Hiebert's admonition to allow people, including ourselves, the privilege of being human, of making mistakes—and strive to learn through failure and forgiveness (Hiebert, "Critical" 294).

Our focus must be sustainable cultural sustainability. Even as culture is not static, neither can be cultural sustainability. "The problems facing the encounter of cultures do not stand still, and new questions in need of new answers arise almost daily" (Clatterbuck 219). We cannot guarantee the future of our endeavors—populations transition; leaders are replaced; circumstances change. But we can do our best to set in motion a strategy that benefits a community in ways that will position it to withstand these challenges. For sustainability to be sustainable, it must be molded by local initiative, based on mutual dependence and dynamic cultural exchange and collaboration, and rooted in local priorities and values. From the inception of cultural sustainability initiatives, we must envision how they will be perpetuated after our departure, taking care that they develop as autonomously as possible. When missionaries died, or were expelled from a country, the indigenous believers who had contextualized the missionaries' message, had made it truly their own, successfully sustained themselves, growing numerically and spiritually (see, for example, Omenyo's account of the Ghanaian church). If we can provide communities the tools they need—to understand and appreciate their histories, their resources, their contribution to the world—they can contextualize the gospel of cultural sustainability and work indefinitely to sustain their cultural values—in our absence and even against great odds.

Best Practices

In light of the previous implications, the following best practices are recommended:

Approach each setting as a cross-cultural encounter, whether we are community insiders or outsiders. Each person and community is a unique blend of understandings, influenced by cultural heritage, families of origin, education, life experiences, etc.

Invest time and energy to learn as much as possible about a community. Long term commitment and immersion can lead to trust. Learn the nuances of the local language. Practice ethnography which goes deep, beyond demographics, and reveals community values, behaviors, issues, and needs.

Treat each setting as a brand new encounter, with its own discoveries to offer. Assumptions based on previous experiences with other communities overlook the unique qualities and needs of each community.

Exercise care not to intrude where we are not wanted or welcomed, no matter how passionately we believe a community can benefit from our insights and expertise.

Recognize that it is the community that decides what to sustain—and what the best strategy is for sustaining it. It decides what are "improvements" and whether or not these are worth any corresponding trade-offs.

Empower local leadership. They must assume the responsibility to work within their own community to contextualize sustainability principles. Provide any tools, training, or mentoring they need, and encourage them to lead.

Look for points of contact that will coax communities to discover their own cultural insights and strategies.

Ensure that a community realizes that it has *options* when facing culture change, that it does not have to uncritically accept every innovation.

Hold lightly to our plans for a community, our vision for how their culture will be sustained. For true ownership to take place, we must surrender our expectations of the process and the final outcome.

Respect a community's social order and work within its parameters.

Continually consider what additional individuals or disciplines we can bring to the table to help us best serve a community's interests and needs.

Discover and respect the spiritualities which impact a community's values and practices.

Connect with spiritualities and communities of faith that are amenable to the goals of sustainability due to mandates inherent in their belief systems.

Focus on sustainable cultural sustainability. From the inception of cultural sustainability initiatives, envision how they will be perpetuated after our departure.

Make intentional plans, as early as possible, for how our responsibilities will be transferred to community members and work toward gradual disengagement.

Cultivate personal humility and nurture mutuality. Be willing to receive as well as give, respecting people enough to learn from them.

Recognize that cultural sustainability is now a part of our worldview, and that we may make unwarranted assumptions about others' customs and values based on sustainability ideals.

Embrace critical self-assessment. Identify any personal mindsets of being cultural "saviors" who have all the answers to a community's challenges.

Adopt a non-defensive posture in the face of criticism and evaluate what we can learn from it. Practice extending grace and forgiveness wherever possible. Believe the best about others' actions and motives. Learn when to walk away.

Concluding Thoughts

There are many more resources to explore, and concepts to contemplate!

My thoughts return regularly to my experiences in Ethiopia, especially as I consider the challenges of sustaining Ethiopian culture. Modernization is quickly encroaching, particularly in urban areas.   Far from the *gradual* process many other parts of the world experienced, Ethiopia finds itself thrust into this new reality. Some of my Ethiopian friends grew up in grass huts out in the countryside but now live and work in a city of millions, surrounded by building

construction, traffic-jammed streets, communications technology, and huge crowds of people. The juxtaposition of modernity, tradition, and poverty seen throughout the city—exemplified by satellite dishes mounted atop corrugated metal shacks—leaves me wondering who will guide the Ethiopians through this transition.

Cognizant of the many negative consequences of modernization, I want desperately to protect my friends from heartache. Do they realize the immediate impact these changes may have on their family life, their levels of crime, their environment, or the long-term impact on their languages, their religious expressions, their village life? I have noticed that Ethiopian culture is not traditionally analytical, so will it even occur to them to ask questions about the desirability or consequences of these changes?

I remind myself that I enjoy many aspects of my own modern culture. I like having running water, reliable electrical power, and a hot shower; I'm glad for the mobility my car offers; I appreciate my access to the internet. Although many of us as Americans might wish our lives were a bit simpler, I doubt we would quickly volunteer to return to life as it was in pioneer days. Who am I, then, to begrudge my Ethiopian friends some modern comforts? The reality is that American culture and lives have changed with time. But how much was lost in the transition, discarded as irrelevant? Were cultural values sustained as the forms changed?

Ethiopian culture and lives will also continue to change. Agency ultimately resides in the community; Ethiopians—and communities everywhere—will decide for themselves what to incorporate and what to reject. What, then, are to be the roles of missionaries and cultural sustainability workers who have gospels to share? The good news that we attempt to communicate is that cultural values can be sustained—even in the face of change—and that communities can be prepared to encounter and embrace the future without sacrificing all of their traditions or their cultural identities.

To effectively walk with communities that are in transition, we need a wide assortment of tools and resources. Some valuable ones can be gathered from the experiences and principles found in the discipline of missiology. This current survey of mission models has only skimmed the

surface of the depths of insights missiology has to offer the field of cultural sustainability. There is an abundance of information yet unexamined.

There are also topics which warrant further exploration. Just a few of these are:

- For a more complete picture of the impact of mission models and their cultural sensitivities, indigenous perspectives should be more fully represented. Sources are limited, but a literature does exist and can be studied by those who are motivated to find it.
- The case studies included in chapter four can be expanded by inclusion of other perspectives of the same circumstances—the accounts of the indigenous people, other missionaries, secular observers, and study of societal trends beyond the immediate locale. Additional case studies can also be undertaken, representing other parts of the world and the experiences of non-Western missionaries.
- Many of the implications cited previously can be further explored. One in particular which could produce valuable insights is study of the impact of a community's spirituality—how it defines and perpetuates cultural values and provides structure and meaning to life. For effective, collaborative cultural sustainability to take place, it is essential to appreciate these realities.
- A number of resources explore the concept of spiritualities and communities of faith that are amenable to the goals of sustainability, due to mandates inherent in their belief systems. Their predispositions related to environmental concerns, consumerism, human rights, etc., make these communities potential allies.
- Some Christian academics have produced a literature on ecotheology (the intersection of theology and ecology) and, more recently, ecomissiology. Ecomissiology considers a community's ecology as an inseparable part of its overall culture (Langmead). Undoubtedly these sources would also yield insights for the work of cultural sustainability and sustainable development, especially in the context of the ideological mandates mentioned above.

- Missiologists with backgrounds in anthropology have written about anthropology without the presupposition that anthropological study should be culturally non-invasive. Because they represent a hybrid of anthropological insights and missiological intervention, their descriptions of anthropology have great potential for informing the action orientation of cultural sustainability.

The list could go on. The point, though, is that the field of missiology, which focuses on actively sharing the gospel of Christianity, has much to offer the emerging field of cultural sustainability as it develops its own methods for sharing its gospel. The content of the two gospels is different, but the passion and concern which motivate them are reflections of similar heart attitudes. Each wants to serve, to engage, to honor and sustain cherished cultural values. Each wants to empower communities to face the challenges of a transforming world. Each wants to catalyze beneficial change that will strengthen individual and collective wellbeing.

It seems fitting to conclude with a quote, taken from the top of Dr. Rory Turner's syllabus for the Cultural Sustainability program's introductory course (R. Turner, "Syllabus" 1). It reflects a common ambition of both cultural sustainability and missiology:

Go to the people

Live among them

Learn from them

Love them

Start with what they know

Build on what they have:

But of the best leaders

When their task is accomplished

Their work is done

The people all remark

"We have done it ourselves."

-Lao Tzu

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