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## **It Takes a Church**

The need for a visible, audible, understandable, and corporate Gospel witness to  
unreached British Asian communities

By  
Baz Moore

A Dissertation Submitted to  
the Faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Ministry

Saint Louis, Missouri

May 2014



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Graduation Date May 16, 2014

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## **Abstract**

Within the last sixty years, large numbers of South Asian Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs have immigrated to the United Kingdom. While British Christians have embraced a variety of ways to reach them with the gospel, very few church planting efforts have been made. With the literature on evangelism to South Asians in general focusing on personal evangelism, a need exists to explore how a local church should witness to its immigrant neighbors.

The purpose of this study was to explore how converted British Asian Christians evaluate the role of the local church in its witness to the British Asian community. This study used the techniques of qualitative research with semi-structured interviews as the primary source of data gathering. Seven mature converts, all actively involved in witness through their local churches, were selected for participation. The following research questions guided the qualitative research:

1. Which aspects of the local church's witness show appropriate cultural sensitivity towards the British Asian community, such that it is beneficial towards conversion?
2. What aspects of the local church's witness show inappropriate cultural sensitivity towards the British Asian community, such that it is harmful towards conversion?
3. Which aspects of the local church's witness show appropriate counter-cultural engagement with the British Asian community, that it is beneficial towards conversion?
4. Which aspects of the local church's witness show inappropriate counter-cultural engagement in relation to the British Asian community, such that it is harmful towards conversion?

The interview research found that the corporate witness of a local church was extremely important in outreach to British Asians. The research participants viewed the

witness of the local church to include what it is as a contrast community, what it says in evangelism, and what it does through its worship and deeds of love. They also emphasized that the church must be aware and respectful of British Asian cultures as it interacts with people of other religions, while seeking to avoid the extremes of extractionism and syncretism. The church should appropriately embrace Asian culture, displaying that it is possible to be both Asian and Christian.

This study concluded that C-3 or C-4 contextualized church planting or church revitalization efforts should be the primary strategy for witness to the unbelieving South Asian immigrant populations of the United Kingdom. It takes a church empowered by God's Spirit to reach an unbelieving community. These churches should embrace an equally ultimate view of word and deed ministry, so that its witness is discernible and distinct. And for their witness to be most faithful and fruitful, the gospel message should be told and gospel love should be seen in the language and cultural categories of its neighbors.

To Amy - whose love and support has been invaluable towards the completion of this project. Without your encouragement, I would most certainly have been ABD.

“We are God's demonstration community of the rule of Christ in the city. On a tract of earth's land purchased with the blood of Christ, Jesus the kingdom developer has begun building new housing. As a sample of what will be, he has erected a model home of what will eventually fill the urban neighborhood. Now he invites the urban world into that model home to take a look at what will be.”

— Harvey Conn, *Planting and Growing Urban Churches: From Dream to Reality*

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## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my wife, Amy, for her ongoing support and encouragement, especially during my time on campus and while this dissertation was written. Her embrace of this effort came at the cost of often being a single parent to our three young children. She played this role bravely and gracefully. I am also indebted to Greg Perry, my faculty advisor, who through his wisdom and friendship pushed me further in my reading and reflection on ministering cross-culturally. I want to thank Matt who continued to recruit us to London, ignoring our disinterest and his wife's protests. He invited us into the world of Asian immigrants, through which we have been blessed and forever changed. I also want to thank the seven research participants who shared their stories of faith. Hearing of God's grace in your life was a rich blessing. Finally, I want to thank the leaders at my church in London: Bob who taught me the kingdom story, Sunny who taught me Asian brotherhood, and Dale who taught me Asian hospitality.

Scripture taken from THE HOLY BIBLE, ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

The Islamic countries of Asia and Africa, along with the Hindu and Sikh countries of India and Nepal, remain as the last great missionary frontier for the church in the twenty-first century. These countries are located in the 10/40 window and are among the least evangelized countries in the world.<sup>1</sup> Also called the “resistance belt,” this geographical window is home to one billion and six hundred million Muslims,<sup>2</sup> as well as one billion Hindus.<sup>3</sup> This window contains the second and third largest religions in the world after Christianity, containing nearly forty percent of the world’s population worshipping Allah or the many Hindu gods.

Prior to the 1950’s, the church’s witness to Islam, Sikhism, and Hinduism was largely done through vocational missionaries moving to and living in Asia or Africa. But starting in the period after the Second World War, large numbers of Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus began to immigrate to Europe and the United States. This immigration came about by rapid technological changes in air travel and communications,<sup>4</sup> economic

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<sup>1</sup> Luis Bush, "The 10/40 Window, Getting to the Core of the Core," <http://www.ad2000.org/1040broc.htm> (accessed July 5, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> "Islam," U.S. Center for World Mission, <http://joshuaproject.net/religions.php?rlg3=6> (accessed July 5, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> "Hinduism," U.S. Center for World Mission, <http://joshuaproject.net/religions.php?rlg3=5> (accessed July 5, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Raymond Brady Williams, "South Asian Christians," in *The South Asian Religious Diaspora in Britain, Canada, and the United States*, ed. Harold Coward, John R. Hinnells, and Raymond Brady Williams (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 9.

changes in Europe creating a need for skilled and unskilled workers,<sup>5</sup> and political changes allowing for increased immigration from Asia and Africa to Europe.<sup>6</sup> Within sixty years, the nations which were once far away and difficult to reach with the gospel, now live as neighbors to Christians in the same or nearby school districts and cities.

### *Problem Statement*

Although contact with the Hindu, Sikh, and Islamic world was made much easier through increased immigration, Islamic, Sikh, and Hindu resistance to the gospel exhibited little change. Throughout the history of Christianity, there has been a small but present witness to people from these three religions. Hindus were first exposed to the gospel by the Apostle Thomas in his missionary travels to India, while Islam was born out of a mix of Jewish and Christian teachings. All three religions know of Christianity, but they remain resistant to conversion, even after immigration to the West and an increased exposure to the gospel. The Evangelical Alliance estimated in 2011 that there were between three thousand and five thousand Muslims living in the United Kingdom who converted to Christianity.<sup>7</sup> There are two million and seven hundred thousand Muslims in the United Kingdom,<sup>8</sup> meaning that the gospel has penetrated only 0.1-0.2

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<sup>5</sup> John R. Hinnells, "South Asians in Britain: Introduction," in *The South Asian Religious Diaspora in Britain, Canada, and the United States*, ed. Harold G. Coward, John R. Hinnells, and Raymond Brady Williams (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 79.

<sup>6</sup> Yasmin Ali, 2006. "An Outline of the Immigration Pattern of the Pakistani Community in Britain," <http://www.hweb.org.uk/content/view/26/4/> (accessed September 6, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Claire Musters, 2011. "Bravery, Belonging, and Believing: The Reality of Muslim Conversion," Evangelical Alliance, <http://www.eauk.org/idea/the-reality-of-muslim-conversion.cfm> (accessed July 5, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> "Religion in England and Wales 2011," Office for National Statistics, <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/key-statistics-for-local-authorities-in-england-and-wales/rpt-religion.html> (accessed July 5, 2013).

percent of the Muslim population living in the United Kingdom. Statistics on the number of conversions from Hinduism and Sikhism were unavailable but can be considered equally small because of their long-standing resistance to the gospel.

The reasons cited for the resistance to the gospel within Islam, Sikhism, and Hinduism are most often loss of culture due to Western imperialism, theological disagreements, family pressure, and lack of evangelism. Timothy Tennent, professor of world missions at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, commented that the church was viewed as a foreign and Western entity, seeking to subject others, explaining, “In these contexts the very word ‘Christian’ carries strong connotations of Western culture or foreignness. For many, the words ‘Christian’ and ‘church’ call to mind Western imperialism or colonialism or worse.”<sup>9</sup> Within British Asian religions, to change one’s theological beliefs about God and religious practices would be viewed as betrayal and a change of one’s culture from Asian to Western.

In addition to loss of culture, further resistance to conversion comes from differing theological beliefs. Some Christian beliefs seem irrational to the Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu mind. For example, Richard Shumack, research fellow with the Centre for Public Christianity in Sydney, commented that “Muslims value incredibly highly the idea that Islam is sensible because its theology of God is clear and simple (God is one)....They see that most of the central Christian beliefs are unexplainable: how God can be three and one.”<sup>10</sup> Hindus likewise disagree with basic Christian belief. Margaret Wardell,

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<sup>9</sup> Timothy C. Tennent, "The Challenge of Churchless Christianity: An Evangelical Assessment," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 29, (October 2005): 171.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Shumack, *Witnessing to Western Muslims: A Worldview Approach to Sharing Faith* (London: The Latimer Trust, 2011), 10.

missionary and member of the Interserve Committee Ministry Among Asians in Britain, and Ram Gidoomal, the Chairman of the United Kingdom based South Asian Concern, write in their book *Chapatis for Tea*, “When we first meet a Hindu he will object if we say that Jesus is the only way and accuse us of being narrow-minded and arrogant.”<sup>11</sup>

Another reason for resistance to the gospel is familial pressure to maintain honor and loyalty. Don McCurry, former missionary to Muslims and founder of the Zwemer Institute of Muslim Studies, commented that for Asians, family is everything. He explained, “The idea of hyper-individualism, as we know it in the West, is utterly foreign...it is almost unheard of for a Muslim to contemplate leaving his or her family and community.”<sup>12</sup> The pressure to conform to family expectations, coupled with the fear of losing family relations, is a significant barrier to conversion. Martin Goldsmith, professor at All Nations Christian College and former missionary amongst Muslims, agreed and explained the pressure on Muslims to conform to social expectations by remaining Muslim:

Islam is within the whole warp and woof of society - in the family, in politics, in social relationships. To leave the Muslim faith is to break with one's whole society. Many a modern educated Muslim is not all that religiously minded; but he must, nevertheless, remain a Muslim for social reasons, and also because it is the basis for his political beliefs. This makes it almost unthinkable for most Muslims even to consider the possibility of becoming a follower of some other religion.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ram Gidoomal and Margaret Wardell, *Chapatis for Tea : Reaching Your Hindu Neighbour : A Practical Guide* (Guildford, Surrey, UK: Highland Books, 1994), 137.

<sup>12</sup> Don McCurry, *Healing the Broken Family of Abraham: New Life for Muslims* (Colorado Springs, CO: Ministries to Muslims, 2001), 297.

<sup>13</sup> Martin Goldsmith, "Community and Controversy: Key Causes of Muslim Resistance," *Missiology* 4, (June 1976): 318.

A final reason for resistance suggested by Wardell and Gidoomal was ignorance of the gospel due to lack of witness. They note, "Some have ignored them [Hindus]. Sadly most [Christians] have chosen this way. Some because they fear the unknown. Some because they resent the changes which have been forced upon the area where they live. Others because they are racially prejudiced."<sup>14</sup>

In this environment of a slow response to the gospel, fresh expressions of church have been developed and suggested as models for mission to overcome the resistance of Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus. Unfortunately, some of these expressions have essentially made the church invisible and the gospel inaudible to the local community. On one end of the spectrum, it seems that some of these new expressions of church have resulted in syncretism with the local culture and its religious beliefs. On the other end of the continuum, Christians have rejected and disengaged from local society and culture. How can the church maintain its distinct identity, yet build strong relationships with Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu communities? On the one end, this "insider movement" has been accused of syncretism as some of its proponents have advocated for the abandonment of corporate worship as a church altogether, with new believers encouraged to remain in the mosque or mandir.<sup>15</sup> When the church follows this approach, it seems that God's people become invisible to its local community. On the other hand are approaches to ministry that reject local culture, resulting in the isolation of new believers from their families and community. These churches have embraced the Western culture of the founding

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<sup>14</sup> Gidoomal and Wardell, 9.

<sup>15</sup> John and Anna Travis, "Contextualization among Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists: A Focus on the Insider Movements," *Mission Frontiers* September-October, 2005, (September-October, 2005): 12.

missionaries, along with its prosperity and affluence. Further, they adopt a spirituality of the church view towards mission, which provides theological reasons to disengage from local society, as well as from social responsibilities to the poor and oppressed. When the church follows this approach, the gospel becomes inaudible to the local community because the church lives in isolation. Between these two extremes are a continuum of approaches to contextualization which have been cataloged by John Travis, a missionary with fifteen years of experience in a Muslim country. Building on Travis' C1 to C6 continuum of contextualized approaches to Muslims,<sup>16</sup> H.L. Richard, a missionary and member of the Rethinking Forum on Hinduism, developed the H1 to H7 continuum of contextualized approaches to Hindus.<sup>17</sup> Both contextualization continuums reflect differences based on the language of worship, the cultural and/or religious forms used in public life and worship, and the self-identification as Muslim, Hindu, or Christian.<sup>18</sup>

Instead of syncretism and isolation, a more faithful and fruitful witness for the church would be one which understands its cultural context and has solidarity with it, while at the same time seeking to be a contrast community. Michael Goheen, the Geneva Professor of Worldview and Religious Studies at Trinity Western University, commented, "The more deeply this tension between syncretism and isolation is felt, the more faithful and healthy the church will be, and better prepared for its missionary

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<sup>16</sup> John Travis, "The C1 to C6 Spectrum," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (October 1998): 407-408.

<sup>17</sup> H. L. Richard, "New Paradigms for Understanding Hinduism and Contextualization," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 40, (July 2004): 316-320.

<sup>18</sup> Timothy C. Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity : How the Global Church Is Influencing the Way We Think About and Discuss Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2007), 196.



encounter.”<sup>19</sup> Andrew Walls, the Professor of the History of Missions at Liverpool Hope University, highlighted this tension as being between the “indigenizing principle”<sup>20</sup> which associates believers with the particulars of their culture and the “pilgrim principle”<sup>21</sup> which focuses on the transcultural character traits that God calls believers to put on in Christ. For the church in a British Asian community, a solidarity with its surrounding community, but also a distinction from it, are both equally necessary for having a faithful and fruitful witness. This study will explore the tension found in the middle of these contextualization continuums to evaluate the importance of the local church in its witness as an intelligible but unique expression of culture.

### *Purpose Statement*

The purpose of this study was to explore how converted British Asian Christians evaluate the role of the local church in its witness to the British Asian community. Three main areas that are central to this concern have been identified: what is the witness of the church, how do churches in the United Kingdom witness to the British Asian community, and how do converts as cultural insiders evaluate the witness of the church. To that end, the following research questions guided the qualitative research:

1. Which aspects of the local church’s witness show appropriate cultural sensitivity towards the British Asian community, such that it is beneficial towards conversion?

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<sup>19</sup> Michael W. Goheen, *A Light to the Nations : The Missional Church and the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 212.

<sup>20</sup> Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), 7-8.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

2. What aspects of the local church's witness show inappropriate cultural sensitivity towards the British Asian community, such that it is harmful towards conversion?
3. Which aspects of the local church's witness show appropriate counter-cultural engagement with the British Asian community, that it is beneficial towards conversion?
4. Which aspects of the local church's witness show inappropriate counter-cultural engagement in relation to the British Asian community, such that it is harmful towards conversion?

### *Significance of the Study*

This study has significance for three audiences. These include missionaries called to evangelize South Asians, the leaders of churches located in South Asian communities, and seminary professors and teachers of missionary training programs seeking to equip the next generation of missionary and church leadership.

First, there is significance for missionaries called to plant churches and evangelize South Asians. Often, missionaries to Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus operate independently from a visible and local church. These findings could help missionaries start church planting work through new, creative, and more fruitful ways to connect more directly to South Asians. Other missionaries who serve on the field through mercy and diaconal work could benefit by ensuring that their witness is connected to the full witness of the local church.

Second, there is significance for pastors and leaders of churches located in South Asian communities, especially those which have formed in the cities of Western Europe and North America. This research could enable church leaders to develop a stronger witness for their churches; one that ensures the gospel message is heard by recent immigrants more clearly and gospel obedience is embodied in all aspects of the life of the

church. In so doing, the church becomes the apologetic and hermeneutic for the gospel,<sup>22</sup> being God's new humanity on display for the world to hear and see.

Finally, this study has significance for seminary professors and others who train and equip missionaries and church leaders called to reach South Asian communities, both in the West and in the 10/40 window. Graduates of seminary often go into ministry believing that their only role in ministry is only to preach and administer the sacraments. These research findings could help seminaries to train church leaders towards developing a stronger contextualized witness for their churches.

### *Definition of Terms*

**British Asian** - someone from a South Asian background living in the United Kingdom, either as a British citizen or a resident. Typically, the religion of a British Asian person is Hinduism, Islam, or Sikhism.

**Contextualization** – Contextualization is the process by which the Bible, gospel, and Christian life and witness becomes understandable to another culture. It is the “process whereby Christians adapt the forms, content, and praxis of Christian faith so as to communicate it to the minds and hearts of people within other cultural backgrounds. The goal is to make the Christian faith as a whole - not only the message but also the means of living out of our faith in the local setting - understandable.”<sup>23</sup>

**Conversion** – a change of life that is caused by God such that a repentant sinner, brought to life by regeneration, turns away from sin and towards God and living faith in Christ.

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<sup>22</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1989), 227.

<sup>23</sup> A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions : Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Models* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2012), 36.

Conversion is the active work of God's Spirit by which a person's thoughts, desires, volitions, identity, and behavior are redirected away from autonomy to submit in loyal love to the lordship of Christ.

**Church Planting** – Church planting is the process by which a new visible church is established in a given location. Church planting reminds “missiologists that the church plays a pivotal role in mission.”<sup>24</sup> Church planting also reminds ecclesiologists that “mission is the primary task of the church.”<sup>25</sup>

**Diaspora** – A community of people with a common origin who are living in a small geographical area away from their place of origin. It originates from the Greek word meaning “scattering” or “dispersion.”

**Insider Movement** – A group of people who have begun to follow Jesus but remain within the cultural, social, and religious community of their birth.

**Local Church** – A visible church established in a given location which is marked by the preaching of God's word, administration of the sacraments, public worship, loving fellowship and service among believers, evangelistic witness in both word and deed to its neighbors including acts of mercy and the defense of justice on behalf of the weak and marginalized, and submission to ordained leadership. For the purpose of this dissertation, the local church may include full time vocational missionaries who are cultural outsiders to British Asians, who seek to witness to British Asian communities by establishing new local churches. These missionaries would partner with converted British Asians, serving alongside of and co-leading the church with them.

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<sup>24</sup> Stuart Murray, *Church Planting : Laying Foundations* (London: Paternoster Press, 1998), 48.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 49.

**Unreached People** – “An ethnolinguistic people among whom there is no viable indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to evangelize their own people without outside (cross-cultural) assistance.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk, *Operation World* (Carlisle, Cumbria UK: Paternoster Lifestyle, 2001), 759.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

With the arrival of unreached communities to the United Kingdom, the British church has an unprecedented opportunity in its gospel witness to people from the 10/40 window. While contact with the church is now easier than ever before, conversion rates remain low due to resistance to the gospel within the British Asian community. These results raise the question of how should the church witness to the British Asian community? How understandable is the gospel witness of the British church to the British Asian community? The purpose of this study is to explore how converted British Asian Christians evaluate the role of the local church in its witness to the British Asian community. In order to understand the role of the local church in sharing the gospel to British Asians, three areas of literature will be reviewed: those biblical and theological works that describe the witness of the church in the world, those works which describe contextualization for witness to South Asian religions, and those works which describe evangelistic approaches to Islam, Hinduism, and Sikhism.

#### *Biblical and Theological Works on the Witness of the Church*

In order to understand how the church is to witness to British Asians, it is important first to establish the role and purpose of the church in the Bible. What has God called his people to be and to do? How does the church witness to the world?

## **Biblical Foundation for the Witness of the Church**

Throughout the Bible, one can find a unifying theme on the role of God's people in the world. They exist for God's glory and for the sake of the world. The Bible presents a consistent pattern of God electing his people to serve him in the cause of his kingdom expansion in the world.

### The Purpose of God in the World

To understand the Bible on the witness of the church, first priority is to examine God's purposes and activity in the world. Christopher Wright, director of international ministries for the Langham Partnership International and former principal of All Nations College, explained the reason for this priority: "The church's mission flows from the identity of God and his Christ. When you know who God is, when you know who Jesus is, witnessing mission is the unavoidable outcome."<sup>27</sup>

The Bible describes God's role in the world as its king. The biblical story is one of God's kingdom being established over the world. Graeme Goldsworthy, pastor and lecturer at Moore Theological College in Sydney, suggests that "the Kingdom of God is a more central issue in the Old Testament than is the redemptive process of bringing people into that Kingdom."<sup>28</sup> Wright agreed with this emphasis: "Wherever you look in the canon of the Old Testament, there are texts to be found that declare that YHWH, the Lord God of Israel, is the one and only universal God of all the earth or of all the nations or of

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<sup>27</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God : Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2006), 66-67.

<sup>28</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, *The Goldsworthy Trilogy: Gospel & Kingdom, Gospel & Wisdom, the Gospel in Revelation* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Press, 2000), 47.

all humanity. YHWH made all, owns all, rules all.”<sup>29</sup> The prophet Isaiah's vision in the temple had the seraphs praising God with the call “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”<sup>30</sup> God is king, not just of Israel, but of the whole earth and its nations. David, King of Israel, agreed, “All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you. For the kingship belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.”<sup>31</sup> And because God is king of the earth, the psalmist urges the nations to recognize him as their sovereign and worship him: “Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.”<sup>32</sup>

God as creator and king reigns over the earth, but his rule is no less in the heavenly realm. Moses, prophet and leader of Israel for the Exodus, wrote, “Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it.”<sup>33</sup> The psalmist also saw God’s rule as supreme in both heaven and earth: “For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also.”<sup>34</sup> Heaven and earth are both equally under his authority and control. Jesus, as God’s messiah, also saw his rule as being over

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<sup>29</sup> Wright, 71.

<sup>30</sup> Isaiah 6:3.

<sup>31</sup> Psalm 22:27-28.

<sup>32</sup> Psalm 96:7.

<sup>33</sup> Deuteronomy 10:14.

<sup>34</sup> Psalm 95:3-5.



heaven and earth, as recorded by the Apostle Matthew: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”<sup>35</sup>

Since God’s reign as king is both in heaven and earth, God cares about both the spiritual and physical realms and all aspects therein. The Exodus narrative demonstrated the comprehensive extent of God’s reign by redeeming his people from oppression.

God's redemptive rule extended into the political sphere of Egypt, redeeming for himself a slave people who had no political freedom or voice within the political state.<sup>36</sup>

According to Goldsworthy, God’s superior might over Pharaoh and his gods was on display.<sup>37</sup> Later in the Exodus story, God made a mockery of Pharaoh's political rule, showing him to be powerless against the plagues. God's redemptive rule also extended into the economic sphere. The Israelites were without land and their labor was being exploited by Egypt.<sup>38</sup> But, God reversed these circumstances at their departure from Egypt, allowing them to leave with their only remaining economic resource in Egypt, their livestock. God's actions also resulted in geographic change for the Israelites, their change of physical location from Egypt to the land of Canaan. In addition, God's rule affected the social system because the Israelites’ social status changed from slaves to free citizens. Pharaoh's terrorizing intrusion into their family life, through the murder of their firstborn, was turned back on him. And finally, God’s rule affected the spiritual life of

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<sup>35</sup> Matthew 28:18.

<sup>36</sup> Wright, 268.

<sup>37</sup> Goldsworthy, 72.

<sup>38</sup> Wright, 269.

Israel, allowing them freedom to worship God.<sup>39</sup> God was in complete control of all aspects of life on earth: its creation, judgment, and redemption.

God's kingdom extends from shore to shore, and he rules over all aspects of it. The Exodus was just one example which demonstrated his involvement in the political, social, economic, and spiritual life of humanity. But the fullness of God's reign is not present in history because of human rebellion and sin. According to Stephen Charles Mott, the former Professor of Christian Social Ethics at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, "Suffering and disobedience were undeniable facts, and the people of God looked forward to a time when God would enter history in a much more powerful and certain way. Their hope was compounded of the appeal of the ethical consciousness against things as they are and the incontrovertible assurance that God will act."<sup>40</sup>

Throughout the Old Testament, God promised that he would act in a more powerful way to remove sin and overturn its effects. First, God would give his people a new heart and spirit through a new covenant.<sup>41</sup> The relationship between God and his people would no longer be marred by sin and rebellion, but instead be defined by love and obedience. Second, social relationships broken by sin, suffering, and ethnic division would be restored as God reconciled humanity to each other.<sup>42</sup> Third, political structures would be marked by justice and righteousness.<sup>43</sup> Fourth, economic prosperity would be

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<sup>39</sup> Exodus 4:22.

<sup>40</sup> Stephen Charles Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 85.

<sup>41</sup> Jer 31:31-34, Eze 11:19-20, Deut 30:6.

<sup>42</sup> Micah 4, Isa 11:10-16.

<sup>43</sup> Isa 1:26.

experienced because of “an agricultural utopia with no frost, no night, no drought, no mountains, no curse, and no danger (Zech 14:6-11).”<sup>44</sup> And finally, humanity would be reconciled to nature.<sup>45</sup> The effects of sin and the fall, as far as they may be found on earth, would be overturned when the kingdom of God comes in fullness. And the kingdom would come when the king, the seed of the woman,<sup>46</sup> the offspring of Abraham,<sup>47</sup> Israel's Messiah,<sup>48</sup> the Davidic son, the son of God and ,<sup>49</sup> the Son of Man<sup>50</sup> arrived.

Jesus and John, in announcing that the kingdom of God had come now to earth, indicated that the eschatological hope of Israel had arrived. In the New Testament, the good news of God, as announced by Jesus and John, is nothing less than this long-desired hope of God's king and kingdom arriving in that time. Though it was only the beginning, the kingdom inaugurated by Jesus was “truly revolutionary.”<sup>51</sup> As David Bosch, the professor of missiology at the University of South Africa, elaborates, “Something totally new is happening: the irruption of a new era, of a new order of life. The hope of

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<sup>44</sup> Mott, 87.

<sup>45</sup> Isa. 11:6-9.

<sup>46</sup> Gen 3:15.

<sup>47</sup> Gen 22:18.

<sup>48</sup> Psalm 72:17.

<sup>49</sup> Isa. 9:6.

<sup>50</sup> Dan 7:13-14.

<sup>51</sup> David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission : Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), 32.

deliverance is not a distant song about a far-away future. The future has invaded the present.”<sup>52</sup>

In his inaugural sermon in Nazareth, Jesus announced his program and ministry objectives, quoting from Isaiah 61 with its jubilee language.<sup>53</sup> The jubilee, according to Wright, “had two main points of concern: the family and the land. It was rooted, therefore, in the social structure of Israelite kinship and the economic system of land tenure.”<sup>54</sup> But, Wright also added that the jubilee had a theological dimension in that both the land and the people were God's: “If all Israel share this same status before God, then the impoverished or indebted brother is to be regarded and treated in the same way as God regards and treats all Israel, that is, with compassion, justice and generosity.”<sup>55</sup>

Upon announcing his program, Jesus went about its business. Bosch comments that a fundamental characteristic of his kingdom ministry was its “all-out attack on evil in all of its manifestations.”<sup>56</sup> The gospel was preached, the sick healed, sins forgiven, the lame made to walk, nature was put in submission to humanity, and the blind given sight. Mott reasoned that this literal fulfillment of Jesus' program “should warn us against spiritualizing the references to justice in his ministry.... [H]is actual deeds of compassion for physical suffering are the evidence that he is the agent of God's Reign.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Luke 4:18-27.

<sup>54</sup> Wright, 290.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 293.

<sup>56</sup> Bosch, 32.

<sup>57</sup> Mott, 91.

Further evidence that God's reign had come in Jesus was his creation of a new social reality with his disciples. Yoder comments:

...a movement, extending his personality in both time and space, presenting an alternative to the structures that were there before, challenges the system as no mere words ever could. Cognate as the functioning of this inner circle may have been to the way any other rabbi would live with his favored disciples, there is more to its formation than that. Their number, the night of prayer, and the following ceremonial proclamation of woes and blessings all serve to dramatize a new stage of publicness.<sup>58</sup>

The creation of this community continued political and social dimensions of God's kingdom purposes on earth, and it would be through this community that the ethnic healing of the nations would occur through the inclusion of the Gentiles into the people of God.

The Gentile inclusion into God's people would come about after Pentecost, but it would only do so because of Christ's final kingdom work on the cross and resurrection. According to Jesus, his work on the cross and resurrection was a necessary part of his ushering in the kingdom.<sup>59</sup> Yoder comments that the cross itself could be seen as fulfilling the kingdom promise: "Here at the cross is the man who loves his enemies, the man whose righteousness is greater than the Pharisees, who being rich became poor.... [The cross] is the kingdom come."<sup>60</sup> Christ's work on the cross and resurrection was central to God's mission to redeem and renew his creation. N.T. Wright, the Research Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at the University of St. Andrews,

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<sup>58</sup> Yoder, 33.

<sup>59</sup> Luke 24:26,46.

<sup>60</sup> Yoder, 51.

explained that Christ's resurrection had inaugurated the re-creation of earth: "Jesus' resurrection is the beginning of God's new project not to snatch people away from earth to heaven but to colonize earth with the life of heaven."<sup>61</sup> It was through Christ's work that all things in heaven and earth would be reconciled to him.<sup>62</sup> It was through the cross and resurrection that the dominion of darkness was defeated.<sup>63</sup> It was through the cross that God's wrath for sin was satisfied, sinners would find forgiveness, and the guilt of sin removed.<sup>64</sup> It was on the cross and in Christ's resurrection that death and the devil were defeated.<sup>65</sup> And finally, it was on the cross that the barriers between Jew and Gentile were removed.<sup>66</sup> According to N.T. Wright, "[A]ll of these together constitute the mission of God. And all of these led to the cross of Christ. The cross was the unavoidable cost of God's total mission."<sup>67</sup>

With the king having fulfilled his mission by inaugurating his eschatological kingdom on earth, he in turn commissioned his people for kingdom service. The creation of a new community by Jesus was part of his kingdom agenda.<sup>68</sup> And, it is this community, his church made up of people from all nations redeemed by his blood, who

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<sup>61</sup> N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope : Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 1st ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 293.

<sup>62</sup> Col. 1:20.

<sup>63</sup> Col. 2:15.

<sup>64</sup> 1 Pet 2:24, Col. 1:22.

<sup>65</sup> Heb. 2:14.

<sup>66</sup> Eph. 2:12-18.

<sup>67</sup> Wright, 314.

<sup>68</sup> Matt. 16:18.

are subjects of the king and called to loyalty and obedience to his mission for them. This mission stands in continuity with his own mission and the mission of his people in the Old Testament. This continuity between the mission of Christ and his people can best be seen in John's gospel: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you"<sup>69</sup> and "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing."<sup>70</sup> But, continuity can also be seen in the book of Matthew: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.... [T]each them to obey everything I have commanded you."<sup>71</sup> As Christ's ambassadors and subjects of his kingdom, the church is to pray for and actively carry on his work of seeing his kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. This commission was not just for a select few, but is instead for the entire community of believers. Jack Miller comments that "the popular understanding of the Lord's missionary mandate is simply that it calls the church to send out missionaries to distant places. Clearly, that is inherent in the task given us, but this is not all that is implied. What is expressed in Jesus' words is really a commissioning of the whole new people of God."<sup>72</sup> The whole church, then, is the community in which God's kingdom is proclaimed and becomes visible in the world.

If God's people know God's purposes in the world, the gospel message they are called to preach, and the gospel ethic they are called to embody, their purpose can be discerned since its very essence can be found in God's mission to rule over and heal the earth.

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<sup>69</sup> John 20:21.

<sup>70</sup> John 14:12.

<sup>71</sup> Matt. 28:18-20.

<sup>72</sup> C. John Miller, *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 53.

### Purpose of God's People in the Primordial Period

The Bible introduces humanity as a people created with purpose. God explained to Adam his role on earth this way: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”<sup>73</sup> Christopher Wright comments that “[t]he care of keeping creation is our human mission. The human race exists on this planet with a purpose from the creative purpose of God himself.”<sup>74</sup> William Dumbrell, Old Testament scholar and former faculty member at Regent College and Moore College, agrees with Christopher Wright that humanity has a “mandate from God to rule and hence possesses divine power but is not himself/herself divine.”<sup>75</sup> This role is a priestly/kingly role exercised by worship and service in the divine presence. Dumbrell summarizes, “Service, which is divine service, is thus the role of human beings, firstly in submission of the Creator himself and then to the world.”<sup>76</sup>

But with the fall, humanity's purpose in the world was negatively affected. God judged man, and instead of knowing life, humanity now tasted death because of Adam's disobedience. Because of the fall, man is now isolated from God, childbirth is painful, work is toilsome, human relations experience alienation, the human relationship with creation is disharmonious, and death entered the world.<sup>77</sup> Kevin DeYoung and Greg

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<sup>73</sup> Genesis 1:28.

<sup>74</sup> Wright, 65.

<sup>75</sup> William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation : An Old Testament Covenantal Theology* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Press 2013), 30.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>77</sup> See Genesis 3:15-24.



Gilbert, both pastors of churches in North America, comment that “every command included in [the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:28] is subjected to severe frustration by the curse God pronounces in Genesis 3.”<sup>78</sup> Additionally, not only was humanity’s relations with God, other people, and creation affected, but humanity itself changed. Christopher Wright explained that since Adam and Eve sinned physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually, “sin goes on to permanently corrupt all these same four dimensions of human life and experience.”<sup>79</sup> All of creation and all of man was depraved as a result of the fall.

#### Purpose of God’s People in the Patriarchal Period

With the splintering of the nations in Genesis 11 and the continuing wickedness of humanity, God called Abram for the sake of the nations and the healing of humanity: “And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”<sup>80</sup> Goheen explains the significance of this calling: “The role of God’s people is here: they are chosen for the sake of the world.”<sup>81</sup> Christopher Wright agrees: “Israel came into existence as a people with a mission entrusted to them from God for the sake of God’s wider purpose of blessing the nations. Election was not a rejection of other nations but was explicitly for the sake of the nations.”<sup>82</sup> This calling of Abram was, according to

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<sup>78</sup> Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church? : Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2011), 210.

<sup>79</sup> Wright, 430.

<sup>80</sup> Genesis 12:2-3.

<sup>81</sup> Goheen, 30.

<sup>82</sup> Wright, 65.

Dumbrell, a “response to human need, and the nature of that need had appeared very clearly in the post-flood history of the human race.”<sup>83</sup> God’s promised blessing, which accompanied Abram’s call, was his response to human need resulting from the fall and had as its goal a healed and renewed cosmos, the “final emergence of a populated new world.”<sup>84</sup>

### Purpose of God’s People after the Exodus

Standing in continuity with the Abrahamic Covenant, the purpose of God’s people after the Exodus is developed further with its themes of redemption, law, and tabernacle. Upon redeeming Israel out of Egypt at Sinai, God explained to Moses Israel’s purpose for his people:

Thus you are to say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.<sup>85</sup>

As God’s redeemed people, who are now a nation among the nations, they have been set apart for him. Goheen explains that the significance of redemption was more than spiritual or political but religious: “Thus the redemption of God’s people in the exodus is fundamentally religious. The people of Israel are freed from service and loyalty to other gods so that they might serve the Lord in every area of their lives: social, economic, and political. God establishes an alternative community to idolatrous Egypt.”<sup>86</sup> And their

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<sup>83</sup> Dumbrell, 66.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>85</sup> Exodus 19:3b-6a.

<sup>86</sup> Goheen, 34.

purpose in God's mission, according to Christopher Wright, was to be his priesthood in the world: "As the people of YHWH they would have the historical task of bringing the knowledge of God to the nations, and bringing the nations to the means of atonement with God. The Abrahamic task of being a means of blessing to the nations also put them in the role of priests in the midst of the nations."<sup>87</sup> J. H. Bavink, former missionary and Professor of Missions at Kampen Theological Seminary, agrees that Israel was God's people on display before the nations: "Israel lived its own history as something enacted before the eyes of the surrounding peoples, ever conscious that the glory of God was at issue."<sup>88</sup>

In addition to being a royal priesthood, their identity and purpose was also to be a "holy nation." Goheen explains that this meant that Israel was to "withdraw, as it were, from the nations. The lives of Israel's people are to be markedly different from those of the peoples around them."<sup>89</sup> They were to live attractive lives as a contrast people by obeying the law, which was "the way of life, the way God means human life to be lived."<sup>90</sup> Not all agree, however, that the mission of God's people was to act as priests in the midst of the nations. Gilbert and DeYoung, for example, disagree that Israel's calling had a missional nature but instead viewed it pietistically: "Kingdom of priests is an overlapping term with (though not identical to) holy nation. The image of a royal

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<sup>87</sup> Wright, 331.

<sup>88</sup> J. H. Bavink, *An Introduction to the Science of Mission*, trans., David Hugh Freeman (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1960), 14.

<sup>89</sup> Goheen, 39.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

priesthood in the Old Testament and in the New Testament suggests holiness and privilege, not incarnational national presence.”<sup>91</sup>

The third theme which defined Israel’s purpose was the presence of a God who tabernacled amongst them. Christopher Wright explains that God’s presence with Israel distinguished Israel from the nations: “And only by Israel being distinct from the nations was there any purpose in being Israel at all, or any hope for the nations themselves eventually.”<sup>92</sup> According to Christopher Wright, the presence of God in the tabernacle distinguished Israel from the nations, reminding them not only of their holy purpose but also of God’s kingdom agenda: “The presence of God in Israel’s tabernacle and temple looked back to his presence in Eden, and forward to his ultimate presence among the nations in a renewed creation.”<sup>93</sup> Goheen explained that God’s “activity, or mission, is to work in Israel - but he will continue that mission to work through Israel, bringing salvation of creation and all nations.”<sup>94</sup>

As God’s redeemed people, bound to himself with the Mosaic covenant and with him living in their midst, they were on display to the world as a contrast community. During the period of the judges leading up to the monarchy, Israel was a contrast community to that of the surrounding nations as a tribal confederation. Dumbrell explained the significance of this form of government: “There is no doubt, moreover, that the type of rule which characterized the period (the hero figures of chapters 3-16) is

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<sup>91</sup> DeYoung and Gilbert, 35.

<sup>92</sup> Wright, 335.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 334.

<sup>94</sup> Goheen, 47.

curious, and extraordinary in the sense that it ran counter to the natural progression from a patriarchal to a monarchical state which was occurring elsewhere.”<sup>95</sup> Goheen agreed and added that Israel’s tribal confederation “manifests equality and freedom among its constituent tribes” meaning they “lived by consensus, not coercion, as the people of God.”<sup>96</sup> While this form of government would change under the monarchy, Dumbrell showed that the Judges period comes to an end with Israel preserved: “Despite the lack of human support which might have preserved a religious or a political ideal, in spite of the fact that there was no king in Israel and everyone did what was right in their own eyes, Yahweh, by direct intervention through the saviour figures of the age, had preserved the covenant with Israel.”<sup>97</sup> God had redeemed Israel from Egypt and had preserved his people as a nation, even as they compromised their mission through idolatry and living like the surrounding nations.

#### Purpose of God’s People After the Establishment of the Kingdom

With the establishment of the kingdom, God’s purposes for his people as a contrast community on display for the nations remained the same as the period before without a king. While Israel’s desire for a king reflected their apostasy so that they would be like the other nations,<sup>98</sup> God provided them with David who, according to Goheen, would be the “kind of king he knows they need if they are to be covenantally faithful

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<sup>95</sup> Dumbrell, 200.

<sup>96</sup> Goheen, 53.

<sup>97</sup> Dumbrell, 203.

<sup>98</sup> 1 Samuel 8:5.

people.”<sup>99</sup> Goheen explained that “[t]he new institution of the monarchy was to allow Israel the independence and space to fashion itself into a people that reflect God’s social order, to live as a united nation with all areas of its life submitted to God’s torah.”<sup>100</sup> Not only was a king helpful to God’s people to live God’s way, but the king, according to Dumbrell, was representative of the people: “David’s line is thus to reflect, in the person of the occupant of the throne of Israel, the values of kingship and priesthood which the Sinai covenant had required of the nation as a whole.” David represented the people to God, but he also, according to Christopher Wright, represented God to the people:

David as human king of Israel will carry out the purposes of YHWH, their covenant great King. Thus the primary focus of the covenant with the house of David, as recorded in 2 Samuel 7, is on the role of David and his successors in earthing that role of YHWH in Israel through these new royal arrangements. The king would rule over the people, but only as the representative of the ultimate rule of YHWH - in a more stable way, though no different in principle, than the leadership of the judges in an earlier era, who had also earthed God’s authority among his people.<sup>101</sup>

That David would embody the reign of God for Israel is, as explained by Goheen, symbolic then “of the universal gracious rule of God in the future over all nations, the ultimate horizon of Israel’s mission.”<sup>102</sup> This universal aspect of the Davidic kingdom can also be seen in the establishment of the temple under Solomon. Like the tabernacle, the temple was, according to Goheen, “the symbol of God’s presence in the midst of Israel”<sup>103</sup> and this presence set Israel apart as God’s people. In addition, the temple itself

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<sup>99</sup> Goheen, 55.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Wright, 334-335.

<sup>102</sup> Goheen, 56.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

was a house of prayer for all nations<sup>104</sup> which, according to Christopher Wright, would link the Davidic covenant with the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant: “It would be the place of blessing for representatives of the nations.”<sup>105</sup> Indeed, the Abrahamic blessings for God’s people and all nations can be found in the Davidic king.<sup>106</sup>

### Purpose of God’s People in the Exilic Period

With the failure of God’s kings and people to live as light to the nations but instead living like the nations in disobedience, God removed his people from the land and allowed his temple to be destroyed. During this exile and the subsequent return, God’s people remained scattered amongst the nations and were ruled over by foreign powers. Their purpose in the world would remain the same but now, heightened by the exile, the challenge to God’s people would be to maintain itself as an alternative identity and vocation. Goheen observed these two dangers of withdrawal and assimilation to Israel’s mission in the exile: “On the one hand, withdrawal into a closed society might help keep the purity of faith, but it makes the message irrelevant; on the other hand, identifying and participating in the life of pagan nations may take away the distinctiveness of the people of God. The literature of the exile speaks against both threats.”<sup>107</sup>

The danger of withdrawal was addressed by the prophet Jeremiah in his call to “seek the welfare of the city.”<sup>108</sup> Christopher Wright explained that God’s people “were

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<sup>104</sup> 1 Kings 8:41-43.

<sup>105</sup> Wright, 347.

<sup>106</sup> Psalm 72:17.

<sup>107</sup> Goheen, 61.

<sup>108</sup> Jeremiah 29:7.

not only to be the beneficiaries of God's promise to Abraham (in that they would not die but increase), they were also to be agents of God's promise to Abraham that through his descendants the nations would be blessed."<sup>109</sup> DeYoung and Gilbert, however, disagree that Jeremiah was defining Israel's mission in Babylon as a continuation of the Abrahamic covenant, which was to be a blessing to the nations. Instead, they argue that in light of Babylon's coming judgment as predicted in Jeremiah 50, Israel was to "settle in and seek the welfare of their captors - not even primarily for Babylon's sake, but for their own sakes."<sup>110</sup>

James Davison Hunter, professor of Religion, Culture, and Social Theory at the University of Virginia, disagrees with DeYoung and Gilbert, who ironically quoted him favorably: "The people of Israel were being called to enter a culture in which they were placed as God's people - reflecting in their daily practices their distinct identity as those chosen by God. He was calling them to maintain their distinctiveness as a community but in ways that served the common good."<sup>111</sup> The danger of assimilation in the exile was expressed by the prophet Daniel in his support of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's stand against Nebuchadnezzar: "[W]e will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."<sup>112</sup> Goheen observed that in this defiance, the young Israelites are "standing against an entire pagan worldview."<sup>113</sup> By avoiding the two

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<sup>109</sup> Wright, 100.

<sup>110</sup> DeYoung and Gilbert, 203.

<sup>111</sup> James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World : The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 278.

<sup>112</sup> Daniel 3:18.

<sup>113</sup> Goheen, 64.



pitfalls of assimilation and withdrawal during the exile, the purpose of God's people as a contrast community on display for the sake of the world remained consistent with the previous generations.

### Purpose of God's People During the Time of Christ

With the arrival of God's messianic king, the long-awaited kingdom had arrived and with it additions to how God's people would achieve his purposes in and through them. Goheen explains that "Jesus' own mission is to restore an eschatological community that takes up that missional role and identity again."<sup>114</sup> With the hope of the eschaton including the blessing of and healing of the nations, the particular restoration of Israel was to send them into the world so that the nations could receive salvation which was offered universally to them. Christopher Wright explains how the mission of God's people now included being sent to the nations:

Jesus' earthly ministry was launched by a movement that aimed at the restoration of Israel. But he himself launched a movement that aimed at the ingathering of the nations to the new messianic people of God. The initial impetus for his ministry was to call Israel back to their God. The subsequent impact of his ministry was a new community that called the nations to faith in the God of Israel.<sup>115</sup>

In the gospel accounts, Jesus can be observed gathering together a new Israel through the calling of his twelve disciples.<sup>116</sup> Goheen commented on the significance of this calling: "Jesus' appointment of the twelve is a symbolic prophetic action of the beginning of a renewed and restored Israel."<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>115</sup> Wright, 506.

<sup>116</sup> Mark 3:13-19.

<sup>117</sup> Goheen, 84.

Without, however, a change within the community, Jesus' renewed Israel would be no different than its predecessors. George Ladd, the former professor of New Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary, explained how God's gift of the kingdom in Jesus was the difference: "The Kingdom of God gives to us that which it demands; otherwise, we could not attain it. The righteousness which God requires is the righteousness of God's Kingdom which God imparts as He comes to rule within our lives."<sup>118</sup> Goheen identified these four kingdom blessings which would empower God's people to be a light to the nations: a restored relationship with God in Christ Jesus, the forgiveness of sin, the gift of the Spirit, and regeneration.<sup>119</sup>

As a regenerated, forgiven people under a new covenant and empowered by the Holy Spirit, God's people could go about their vocation to witness to and gather the nations to God. Donald English, the former general secretary of the Division of Home Mission for the Methodist Church in England, wrote in his commentary on Mark that, with Jesus' calling of the disciples in Mark 3, he gave them a threefold task: "to be with Jesus, to preach and to cast out evil spirits; witnessing, proclaiming, and setting people free. That word and deed, proclamation and action, are both seen as emerging from being with Jesus, and both are authentic witness to him."<sup>120</sup> Goheen agreed with English on a threefold emphasis in gathering but modified being with Jesus to instead have prayer

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<sup>118</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959), 79.

<sup>119</sup> Goheen, 87.

<sup>120</sup> Donald English, *The Message of Mark : The Mystery of Faith*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 84.

alongside of word and deed.<sup>121</sup> Harvie Conn, the former professor of missions at Westminster Theological Seminary, had a more expansive list of five gathering tasks which Jesus gave to his followers: proclamation, fellowship, worship, service, and justice.<sup>122</sup> But for Goheen, fellowship and worship would be included in Jesus' ethic on love as the way of life: "These three aspects on the way of life that Jesus commands - pointing to God's creational design for human life, taking on contextual form in various cultural settings, and setting itself against the idols of the dominant culture - come together in a model of what it means to be a contrast community."<sup>123</sup> DeYoung and Gilbert, however, would disagree that Jesus included justice and deed ministries as gathering tasks of the church. In their exegesis of the Luke 4 passage of Jesus' mission statement, they argue that "If Luke 4 sets the tone for the mission of the church, then the center of the church's mission should be preaching of the gospel."<sup>124</sup>

#### Purpose of God's People After Pentecost

After Pentecost, God's people can be observed carrying out the mission entrusted to them to gather in the nations. This purpose stands in contrast to the mission of Israel according to Goheen: "Although there is continuity between the Acts passage and the Old Testament view of mission, there is also discontinuity; in both cases witness begins in the holy city of Jerusalem, but in Acts it moves out to the 'ends of the earth.'"<sup>125</sup> Christopher

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<sup>121</sup> Goheen, 99.

<sup>122</sup> Harvie M. Conn, *Evangelism : Doing Justice and Preaching Grace* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub. House, 1982), 41.

<sup>123</sup> Goheen, 90.

<sup>124</sup> DeYoung and Gilbert, 38.

<sup>125</sup> Goheen, 130.

Wright agreed, “When the centrifugal dynamic of the early Christian missionary movement finally got under way, it was indeed something remarkably new in practice if not in concept.”<sup>126</sup> Bosch provided the link between Israel’s centripetal mission of being a contrast community and the centrifugal mission of Acts, “Evangelism is only possible when the community that evangelizes - the church - is a radiant manifestation of the Christian faith and exhibits an attractive lifestyle.”<sup>127</sup> Like Israel, Peter explained that the church is to be “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”<sup>128</sup> The church is God’s multiethnic contrast community which offered blessing in the gospel it proclaimed and in how it lived, but unlike Israel, the church was to go to the nations and proclaim the salvation of God.

This ingathering of the nations into the people of God was part of the Old Testament hope of the eschaton. Just before his ascension, Jesus explained to his disciples how the whole of the Old Testament looked forward to his mission and to the gathering of the nations by the church.<sup>129</sup> Christopher Wright commented on the significance of this passage: “Through the Messiah, therefore, the God of Israel would also bring about all that he intended for the nations. The eschatological redemption and restoration of Israel would issue in the ingathering of the nations.”<sup>130</sup> It would be the

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<sup>126</sup> Wright, 501-502.

<sup>127</sup> Bosch, 414.

<sup>128</sup> 1 Peter 2:9.

<sup>129</sup> Luke 24:46-49.

<sup>130</sup> Wright, 31.

church, according to Goheen, which would continue his ingathering mission, “Mission is a work of God: Jesus working by the Spirit. His people are taken up into that mission: they prolong the mission that Jesus began. Continuing the mission of Jesus is not just one more task given to his discipleship community. Rather it defines its very identity and function in God’s ongoing story.”<sup>131</sup>

However, not all agree with Goheen that it is helpful to equate the mission of Jesus to that of the church or see the church prolonging his mission. For example, DeYoung and Gilbert warned, “It is unwise to assume that because we are sent as Jesus was sent, we have the exact same mission he had. We must protect the absolute uniqueness of what Jesus came to do.”<sup>132</sup> D.A. Carson, the research professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, in commenting on John 17:18, also issued this warning that the disciples could not do everything Jesus did on his mission, such as the incarnation. Carson, however, provided an interpretation of John 17:18 which would agree with Goheen’s view of the mission of God’s people, “In the immediate context, all the emphasis is on the points of comparison, especially the invasion of the wicked world from a stance that owes everything to God and nothing to the world.”<sup>133</sup> For Goheen, the mission of God’s people in the time after Pentecost is marked by witness to the world for its salvation, “Witness is not one more task among others: Witness defines the role of this community in this era of God’s story and thus defines its very identity. Its eschatological role at this point in history is to make salvation known first to

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<sup>131</sup> Goheen, 122.

<sup>132</sup> DeYoung and Gilbert, 57.

<sup>133</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 566.

Israel and then to the Gentiles.”<sup>134</sup> N.T. Wright agreed that God’s people were passionate to witness to what God had done in Christ and through his Spirit:

Though of course the gospels reflect the life of the early church, in which the four evangelists lived, prayed, and wrote - how could they not reflect that life? - the whole point for each of them, and for any sources they had, was that something had happened in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus through which the world had changed, Israel had changed, humankind had changed, their vision and knowledge of God had changed, and they themselves had changed. They were reflecting the changed world, to be sure. But they were talking about the change itself, how it had come about, and what it all meant.<sup>135</sup>

The church was to be a witness of the work of God whose salvation was given by grace and was not of their own doing. But, according to Christopher Wright, the church, as a renewed kingdom of priests, is not only to witness but also follow in the example of the perfect priest and king:

It is a quintessentially biblical combination that we find perfectly modeled in a rich range of meaning in Christ, as our perfect priest and king. But it is also the picture that we see of our restored role in the new creation. Revelation pointedly says that because of the redeeming work of the Lamb of God on the cross, human beings are not only saved but are restored to their kingly and priestly function on earth under God. “You have made them to be a kingdom of priests to serve our God, / and they will reign on the earth” (Rev 5:10).<sup>136</sup>

The role that the church plays in its gathering mission in God’s kingdom is its witness to the nations through its words and deeds to Jesus, the king who has saved and who rules over her.

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<sup>134</sup> Goheen, 127.

<sup>135</sup> Tom Wright, *How God Became King: Getting to the Heart of the Gospels* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2012), 105-106.

<sup>136</sup> Wright, 415.

## Contemporary Concern on the Witness of the Church

Many contemporary authors have written on the mission and witness of the church in the world. While all generally agree on the need for the church to witness, great disagreement exists as to the nature of its witness. Lesslie Newbigin, a missionary to India and author of several books on the mission of the church, summarizes the most polarizing view: “The missionary movement at the present time suffers from the running battle between those who make this emphasis on the primacy of evangelism, of the declaratory function of the Church, and those who insist that the first priority must be given to action for challenging injustice, prejudice, and oppression, action for justice and peace.”<sup>137</sup>

On the one hand are those who advocate the spirituality of the church and its declarative mission. They argue that the institutional, or gathered, church must consider its witness to the world as limited to a ministry of word and sacrament. DeYoung and Gilbert, in arguing this view, differentiate between the church’s mission and acts of obedience, “The mission of the church is to go into the world and make disciples by declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit and gathering these disciples into churches, that they might worship and obey Jesus Christ now and in eternity to the glory of God the Father.”<sup>138</sup> For DeYoung and Gilbert, the church’s mission does not include a witness of love and good deeds, which they considered to be an indirect witness through acts of obedience, such as the “making friends and breaking

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<sup>137</sup> Newbigin, 131.

<sup>138</sup> DeYoung and Gilbert, 241.

down barriers.”<sup>139</sup> Michael Horton, professor of systematic theology and apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary in California, agrees and argues that since “[t]he Kingdom of God in this present phase is primarily audible, not visible” that “our works cannot fill up this gap between Christ’s two advents.”<sup>140</sup> For Horton, the “church’s mission is accomplished through the three marks: the preaching of the gospel, the administration of the sacraments, and discipline.”<sup>141</sup>

On the other hand are those who advocate that the organized church must maintain a witness to the world, consisting of its word and deed. Jack Miller, seminary professor at Westminster Theological Seminary, pastor, and founder of World Harvest Mission, argues, “The church must still have a corporate witness to her neighbors. It is our deeds of love that show forth the glory of God who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. And the deacons of the local church can become the pacesetters for a congregational witness by word and works.”<sup>142</sup> While arguing that the deacons of the church would lead the congregation in deeds of mercy, he in no way claimed that the mission of the church would be fulfilled by a few gifted leaders. Rather, Miller argues, “The entire church is a ‘sent church,’ a commissioned body that is itself involved in the harvesting task.”<sup>143</sup> Chris Sicks, pastor of mercy at Alexandria Presbyterian Church,

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>140</sup> Michael Scott Horton, *The Gospel Commission : Recovering God's Strategy for Making Disciples* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2011), 69.

<sup>141</sup> Michael Scott Horton, *People and Place : A Covenant Ecclesiology*, 1st ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 243.

<sup>142</sup> Miller, 152.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 53.



agrees with Miller, that the witness of the church must include an apologetic of mercy, “The church must both demonstrate and declare God’s compassion for bodies and souls. That’s what the early church did, following Jesus’ example.”<sup>144</sup> Newbigin agrees that the mission of the church in the world is more than a preaching ministry for the gifted few whose aim was to win souls.<sup>145</sup> Rather, for Newbigin, the whole church is a witness to the gospel in how they live, what they say, and what they do. Newbigin explains that for the world to understand the gospel, a church is needed: “I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it.”<sup>146</sup>

The church, as God’s chosen and blessed community, exists not for itself but to proclaim and embody God’s blessing for the world. Newbigin touches on this blessing when he explains that for the gospel to challenge others to faith in Christ, local congregations would need to “renounce an introverted concern for their own life, and recognize they exist for the sake of those who are not members, as sign, instrument, and foretaste of God’s redeeming grace for the whole life of society.”<sup>147</sup> Christine Pohl, the professor of Christian social ethics at Asbury Theological Seminary warns, however, that churches are more than God’s instruments of blessing in the world: “In my experience, confident assertions that Christian community is or can be the new apologetic are as troubling as they are hope-filled. The winsome and life-giving character of Christian

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<sup>144</sup> Chris Sicks, *Tangible : Making God Known through Deeds of Mercy and Words of Truth* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2013), 18.

<sup>145</sup> Newbigin, 222.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 233.

community is often accompanied by profound difficulties arising from disagreements and betrayals.”<sup>148</sup> For churches to fruitfully share God’s blessing with others, they need to be enjoying God’s blessing as a sign and foretaste of God’s kingdom of grace. Pohl suggests that churches practice gratitude, promise-keeping, truthfulness, and hospitality<sup>149</sup> as ways in which God’s blessings can be celebrated and enjoyed.

Of these practices, Pohl identified hospitality as having virtually disappeared as an important part of Christian faith and life. Hospitality addresses physical, social, and spiritual dimensions of human existence and relationships and is “a response to the physical needs of strangers for food, shelter, and protection.”<sup>150</sup> She explains that Christian hospitality developed, in continuity with Hebrew understandings associated with God, covenant, and blessing, with an outward focus “towards the weakest, those least likely to be able to reciprocate.”<sup>151</sup> She goes on to say that hospitality for Christians in relationship with strangers “was a basic category for dealing with the importance of transcending social differences and breaking down social boundaries that excluded certain categories or kinds of persons.”<sup>152</sup> According to Pohl, hospitality almost always includes sharing a meal together, because in “most cultures, eating together expresses

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<sup>148</sup> Christine D. Pohl, *Living into Community : Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2012), 9.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room : Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 6.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 62.

mutuality, recognition, acceptance, and equal regard.”<sup>153</sup> Hospitality and especially through shared meals, according to Pohl, binds people together, “When strangers and hosts are from different backgrounds, the intimacy of a shared meal can forge relationships which cross significant social boundaries.”<sup>154</sup> Meals shared together by people from different social and cultural backgrounds who share faith in Christ is both a sign of God’s kingdom of people from every nationality and a foretaste of God’s kingdom healing among the nations.

### **Summary of the Witness of the Church**

The literature generally agreed on the need for the church to witness to the nations in word. The gospel message is clearly one to be told. Difference in the literature, however, existed over the importance of a visual witness to the gospel through deed ministries of justice, service, and fellowship. In light of this tension in the literature, further study is needed to determine the role that these play in the witness to British Asians.

#### *Contextualization for Witness to South Asian Religions*

Another source of literature pertinent to how converted British Asian Christians evaluate the role of the local church in its witness to the British Asian community is that of contextualization. Contextualization is the process by which the Bible, gospel, and Christian life and witness become understandable to another culture. Paul Hiebert, the professor of mission and anthropology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, explains the dual challenge in communicating across a cultural divide: “It is increasingly clear that

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

we must master the skill of human exegesis as well as biblical exegesis to meaningfully communicate the gospel in human contexts.”<sup>155</sup> Pete Ward, lecturer at Kings College London, expresses concern that the church has generally fallen short in its efforts to understand the culture in which it ministers, “The result has been that empirical research - generally referred to as ‘ethnography’ - has often been discussed by theologians as a theoretical move or indeed even as a theoretical or theological necessity, but strangely this is very divorced from any real or sustained engagement with actual churches and communities.”<sup>156</sup> A. Scott Moreau, the Professor of Intercultural Studies at Wheaton College, agrees with Hiebert and Ward that communication must be adapted for another culture, and he describes contextualization as “the process whereby Christians adapt the forms, content, and praxis of Christian faith so as to communicate it to the minds and hearts of people within other cultural backgrounds. The goal is to make the Christian faith as a whole - not only the message but also the means of living out of our faith in the local setting - understandable.”<sup>157</sup>

In order to contextualize the gospel so that it is understandable to the British Asian audience, an exegesis of Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, and British Asian culture is required. Hiebert suggests that an exegesis of human contexts for gospel witness should

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<sup>155</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts : Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2009), 12.

<sup>156</sup> Pete Ward, *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, Studies in Ecclesiology and Ethnography (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2012), 1-2.

<sup>157</sup> A. Scott Moreau, "Contextualization: From an Adapted Message to an Adapted Life," in *The Changing Face of World Missions*, ed. Gailyn Van Rheenen Michael Pocock, and Douglas McConnell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 323.

involve a systems approach with particular focus on the social and cultural systems.<sup>158</sup> A systems approach to the exegesis of people is best because it sees causality as multidirectional<sup>159</sup> between the different systems of a people group, such as the spiritual, cultural, technological, physical, personal, and social systems. Change in one system affects the others and vice versa. Timothy Keller, author and pastor at Redeemer Presbyterian Church, agrees that contextualization is needed to address all aspects of culture, moving beyond superficial behavior to worldview:

Culture affects every part of human life. It determines how decisions are made, how emotions are expressed, what is considered private and public, how the individual relates to the group, how social power is used, and how relationships, particularly between genders, generations, classes, and races, are conducted. Our culture gives distinct understandings of time, conflict resolution, problem solving, and even the way in which we reason. All these factors must be addressed when we seek to do gospel ministry.<sup>160</sup>

Like Hiebert, Keller also suggests that contextualization must begin with cultural exegesis, with the first step being to understand and “immerse yourself in the questions, hopes, and beliefs of the culture so that you can give a biblical, gospel-centered response to its questions.”<sup>161</sup>

### **Exegesis of Islam**

To fully understand and exegete Islam would be beyond the scope of this study, but a limited examination of the significant spiritual beliefs and social practices would be

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<sup>158</sup> Hiebert, 137.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>160</sup> Timothy J. Keller, *Center Church : Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 90.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 121.

appropriate. For the purpose of this literature review, the Islamic doctrine of God and the role of honor and shame in Islamic social settings will be examined for one point of continuity and one discontinuity with Christian beliefs and practices.

The central religious belief in Islam is that Allah alone is the one and only God. The Qur'an clearly emphasizes that Allah is unique: "God: there is no god but Him, the Ever Living, the Ever Watchful. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. All that is in the heavens and in the earth belongs to Him."<sup>162</sup> Muslims are adamant about the oneness of God, because, according to Derek Cooper, the assistant professor of Biblical Studies and Historical Theology at Biblical Seminary, the literal translation of Allah in Arabic is "the God."<sup>163</sup> This belief that God is one and rules over creation is a point of continuity with Christianity,<sup>164</sup> according to Gerald McDermott, professor of religion at Roanoke College. McDermott further argues that not only is it a point of continuity but that evangelicals can be challenged by the Islamic submission to the God who rules with absolute control over the cosmos: "Attention to Islamic awe before the majesty of God may help us better appreciate the reverent fear of God with which Isaiah, Daniel and Cornelius served God."<sup>165</sup>

Discontinuity with the Islamic belief in God can be found in its view of the incarnation of Jesus and the Trinity. Cooper explains, "to ascribe divinity to Jesus is a

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<sup>162</sup> Surah 2:255.

<sup>163</sup> Derek Cooper, *Christianity & World Religions : An Introduction to the World's Major Faiths* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Pub., 2013), 119.

<sup>164</sup> Gerald R. McDermott, *Can Evangelicals Learn from World Religions? : Jesus, Revelation & Religious Traditions* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 194.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 197.

major and unforgivable sin in Islam known as shirk, or ‘sharing’.”<sup>166</sup> Further, the Qur’an rejects any notion that God would have wives or children,<sup>167</sup> since, according to J. Dudley Woodberry who is the professor of missions at Fuller Theological Seminary, “the Qur’anic understanding of divine unity rejects God begetting or being begotten (112:3).”<sup>168</sup> According to McDermott, Muslims assigned blame for the Christian belief that Jesus is fully man and God to the early Christians “who made the mistake of turning Jesus into a god and therefore reverting to the polytheism that Allah forbids.”<sup>169</sup>

Socially, Islamic culture is controlled by the concept of honor and shame. Bill Musk, Anglican bishop to Egypt and former missionary with Operation Mobilisation, explains, “Loyalty to family and kin is fundamental to Middle Eastern societies. In cultures in which bonds between persons count for so much, it is not primarily law which channels and corrects human behavior. Rather, it is the connected concepts of honour and shame.”<sup>170</sup> Because Islamic society values a good reputation, individuals seek to obtain and maintain this reputation for themselves and their family. According to Steve Bell, the United Kingdom National Director of Interserve with over thirty years of experience in evangelism to Muslims, honour is a form of social currency and can be achieved through a variety of sources: “family lineage, religious piety, running of a moral household,

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<sup>166</sup> Cooper, 119.

<sup>167</sup> Surah 72:3.

<sup>168</sup> J. Dudley Woodberry, "The Christian Response to Islam," in *Christian Witness in Pluralistic Contexts in the 21st Century*, ed. Enoch Wan, Evangelical Missiological Society Series (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2004), 35.

<sup>169</sup> McDermott, 189.

<sup>170</sup> Bill Musk, *Touching the Soul of Islam* (Oxford, UK: Monarch Books, 2004), 85.

educational achievement, professional qualification, wealth, or even heroic deeds.”<sup>171</sup>

Achieving honour is important within Islamic society while the converse is equally important according to Musk, “Shame is a social phenomenon. It is equivalent to disgrace or humiliation. It operates as a form of control on behavior. ‘What people say’ or ‘What people might say’ is a strong constraint on actions.”<sup>172</sup>

While differing from Western culture, which operates on the values of guilt and innocence, Islamic culture can find continuity with Christianity. The Bible was written in an honour and shame culture similar to Islamic culture.<sup>173</sup> This point of continuity can help Christians from Western culture better understand the Bible, correcting what Keller calls “ways in which we misread the Bible through the lens of our own cultural assumptions.”<sup>174</sup> Bell provides three examples of responses to shame in the Bible, showing that shame can be escaped by hiding the matter (Matt. 1:19), denying it happened (Gen. 18:10-15), or transferring the blame (Gen. 3:12).<sup>175</sup> Readers of the Bible from cultures which do not understand honour and shame may misinterpret these interactions through their ignorance of shaming practices. Discontinuity, however, can be found with the Islamic acceptance of shaming behavior. According to Musk, “Gossip becomes the public expression of the shaming mechanism. Saving face - preventing

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<sup>171</sup> Steve Bell, *Gospel for Muslims: Learning to Read the Bible through Eastern Eyes* (Milton Keynes, UK: Authentic Media Limited, 2012), 137.

<sup>172</sup> Musk, 96.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>174</sup> Keller, 102.

<sup>175</sup> Bell, 138.



gossip - is all-important within such a culture.”<sup>176</sup> Bell explains further, “The only way to diminish the damage done by ‘shame’ is for the individual to take action in order to retain their ‘honour.’ This can take the form of either shifting the blame to someone else or externalizing it in an ‘honour punishment’ meted out on the offender.”<sup>177</sup> The cultural acceptance of this practice would stand in discontinuity with the teachings on gossip in the torah,<sup>178</sup> wisdom literature,<sup>179</sup> the prophets,<sup>180</sup> and the New Testament.<sup>181</sup>

### **Exegesis of Hinduism**

As with the exegesis of Islam, an exegesis which seeks to fully understand Hinduism is beyond the scope of this study. However, for the purpose of this study, an examination of the significant spiritual beliefs is appropriate. The Hindu doctrine of God of the two major schools of thought in the non-duality stream of Hinduism will be examined for one point of continuity and one discontinuity with Christian beliefs and practices.

Within Hinduism, the first school chronologically in the non-duality stream of Hinduism is called *advaita*. It was championed by Sakara in the early ninth century A.D. through his commentaries on the Upanishads. According to Gidoomal and Robin Thompson, director of South Asian concern and former missionary to India, *advaita*

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<sup>176</sup> Musk, 93-94.

<sup>177</sup> Bell, 140.

<sup>178</sup> Leviticus 19:16.

<sup>179</sup> Proverbs 11:13.

<sup>180</sup> Jeremiah 9:4.

<sup>181</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:20 and 2 Timothy 3:1-5.

teachings state that the soul of all living things, called *atman*, is the same as God, called Brahman.<sup>182</sup> Brahman is one God but also many. The reason humans do not recognize that their souls are Brahman is due to *maya*, the superimposing false impressions on what is real. Brahman, according to Tennent, exists on two levels, “On the highest level, Brahman cannot be spoken of as having any qualities or relationships. Brahman is, to use Sankara’s language, ‘non-connected with the world and is devoid of all qualities.’”<sup>183</sup> This higher level is called *nirguna* Brahman, but Brahman also exists on a lower level of reality, called *saguna*, through the multitude of different gods which have attributes and qualities. This distinction, according to Tennent, developed by Sakara reconciles “the monotheistic and polytheistic statements of the Upanishads into a consistent, unified system of thought” and it also “serves as a firewall to protect the great mystery of God’s nature.”<sup>184</sup>

When comparing *advaita* Hinduism with biblical teachings, continuity can be found in its commitment to the absolute freedom of God. Tennent commented, “One cannot spend time with Sankara without being deeply moved by his willingness to risk everything to safeguard the absolute freedom of God.”<sup>185</sup> Discontinuity with *advaita* Hinduism, according to Tennent, can be found in its view of divine revelation and its pessimistic view of the adequacy of human knowledge to speak about God: “Sankara’s

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<sup>182</sup> Ram Gidoomal and Robin Thompson, *A Way of Life: Introducing Hinduism* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1997), 23.

<sup>183</sup> Timothy C. Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable : Evangelicalism in Conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 41.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 47.

theology does not permit divine revelation that can be spoken of with assurance and confidence. It is one thing to defend the absolute freedom and independence of God; it is entirely another to do so at the expense of revelation.”<sup>186</sup>

The second school of thought regarding the doctrine of God in Hinduism is *vishishtadvaita* or modified non-duality. This school was taught in the eleventh century by Ramanuja who denounced the teachings of Sankara. Ramanuja, according to Tennent, rejected Sankara’s *nirguna-saguna* distinction and instead argued that Brahman did possess qualities and personality, so that “[t]he ‘It’ of Sankara has become the ‘Thou’ of Ramanuja.”<sup>187</sup> Ramanuja’s view of the soul also differed from Sankara in that it was like God but would enter into union with God upon liberation from the world.<sup>188</sup>

A similarity between *vishishtadvaita* Hinduism and biblical teachings can be found in the emphasis on the knowability of God. Tennent commends Ramanuja for seeking “to promote true religious devotion to a God who is knowable.”<sup>189</sup> In addition, Tennent appreciates Ramanuja’s emphasis on humanity’s utter dependence upon God, “Western Christianity, with its emphasis on individuality, could benefit from a reminder of our dependence on God for our existence and of our connectedness to one another.”<sup>190</sup> Tennent, however, finds discontinuity between Ramanuja’s teachings and Christianity in its relativism, which he argues blurred the boundaries between faiths. Tennent argues that

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>188</sup> Gidoomal and Thompson, 73.

<sup>189</sup> Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable : Evangelicalism in Conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam*, 55.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

Ramanuja would not be able to “critically distinguish between a zealous bhakti follower of Krishna, a devoted evangelical, and a member of the Sufi sect of Islam.... The historic death of Jesus Christ on the cross is no longer necessary for salvation but is merely one of many culturally conditioned responses to the Ultimate which inspires devotion among his followers.”<sup>191</sup>

### **Exegesis of Sikhism**

As with the exegesis of Islam and Hinduism, an exegesis which seeks to fully understand Sikhism is beyond the scope of this study. However, for the purpose of this study, an examination of the Sikh belief in God and its view of humanity is appropriate, along with a comparison of the corresponding Christian beliefs.

Sikhism was founded by Guru Nanak who was born into a Hindu family in 1469 A.D. At thirty years of age, Nanak was bathing when he was taken into God’s presence and was told to spend the rest of his life practicing *nam jagna*, or meditation on God’s name.<sup>192</sup> According to Sewa Singh Kalsi, a lecturer in Sikh studies at the University of Leeds, “He reappeared after three days declaring: ‘There is no Hindu and there is no Muslim.’ His declaration was focused on the unity and equality of humankind transcending the sectarian boundaries of caste and religious bigotry.”<sup>193</sup> Sabu Mathai Kathettu, former lecturer of missiology at South Asia Leadership Training and

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>192</sup> Joy Barrow, *Sikhism*, World Religions (North Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada: Whitecap Books, 2004), 10.

<sup>193</sup> Sewa Singh Kalsi, *Simple Guide to Sikhism* (Kolkata, India: Alchemy, 2004), 17.

Development Centre, places Sikhism within the Bhakti stream of Hinduism<sup>194</sup> which was a religious reformation movement developed in South India as early as the thirteenth century A.D.<sup>195</sup> Bhakti emphasizes that *moksha*, or salvation from reincarnation, can be achieved through the third of three ways or *margas*: the way of devotion. According to Kathettu, *Bhakti marga* is “developed only through having strong faith in God, following absolute truth, unselfishness, self-control over thought, deed, desire, and association with a spiritual guru and complete submission of self to the will of God.”<sup>196</sup>

That Sikhism can be viewed as being derived from Hinduism is problematic for some Sikhs, according to W. Owen Cole, the late head of religious studies at Chichester University, and Piara Singh Sambhi, a Sikhi Giani, author, and scholar on Sikhism. They write, “Behind the apparent fact seeking question, ‘Was Guru Nanak a Hindu?’ lies the anxiety that yet again a westerner is going to diminish Sikh distinctiveness and threaten its identity.”<sup>197</sup> So while Cole and Sambhi admit that “there is scarcely a teaching of Guru Nanak’s which is not found somewhere in the Hindu tradition,”<sup>198</sup> his teachings departed, according to Kalsi, from Hinduism in that he disapproved of the practice of idols<sup>199</sup> and took steps to eradicate the caste system.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Sabu Mathai Kathettu, *The Sikh Community and the Gospel : An Assessment of Christian Ministry in Punjab* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2009), 13.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> W. Owen Cole and P.S. Sambhi, *Sikhism and Christianity: A Comparative Study* (Basingstoke, UK: The MacMillan Press LTD, 1993), 10.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>199</sup> Kalsi, 23.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 31.

Sikhism is a monotheistic religion, with a strong emphasis on the belief in one God. Sikh teaching about God is summarized in the *Mul Mantra*, the first words of the Guru Granth Sahib: “There is one God, eternal truth is his name, creator of all things and the all-pervading spirit, he is without fear, he is without enmity, he is timeless and formless, he is beyond birth and death, he is self-existent, he is known by the grace of the guru.”<sup>201</sup> Kalsi underlines the importance of monotheism to Sikhism, “The opening phrase ‘Ek Onkar’ summarizes the fundamental belief in Sikhism. The word Ek means one and Onkar denotes God, thus the emphasis is on the notion of the oneness of God.”<sup>202</sup> The *Mul Mantra* is repeated more than one hundred times throughout the Guru Granth Sahib, which “signifies the centrality of the belief.”<sup>203</sup> Kathettu notes, “In contrast to the existing polytheistic belief, Nanak imparted a monotheistic belief among the people.”<sup>204</sup>

Sikhism and Christianity find agreement on the nature of God. In both religions, God is viewed, according to Cole and Sambhi, as ineffable and formless, and believers of both faiths “affirm that it is only as a result of divine volition that God’s nature may be known.”<sup>205</sup> Both religions thus avoid idolatry, because “[o]therwise human beings will create God in their own image, making a portrait which corresponds with their changing moods or their own personality rather than with reality.”<sup>206</sup> Kathettu agrees and

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Kathettu, 15.

<sup>205</sup> Cole and Sambhi, 34.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

recommends that God and Jesus be called the *Sat Guru* because of similar understandings of God, “As we use these terms the biblical meaning is not changed.”<sup>207</sup>

Sikhism and Christianity differ significantly, however, on incarnation. Guru Nanak was familiar with the Hindu belief in *avatar*, which is the “idea that God enters history by taking a physical form which may be animal or human. The best known and most worshipped *avatars* are Rama and Krishna, manifestations of Vishnu.”<sup>208</sup> But Sikhism denies *avatar*, because, as explained by Cole and Sambhi, “God is *nirguna*, without qualities including physical form.”<sup>209</sup> The Christian belief in the incarnation of God in Jesus who is fully God and fully man would be one in which “Sikhs would demur.”<sup>210</sup> Kathettu agrees that Sikhism denies the biblical concept of incarnation, and he goes further to show that it also denies the Trinity to protect the oneness of God, “The Sikh doctrine of *Ek Onkar*, the Absolute Oneness, rejects the biblical concept of Triune God.”<sup>211</sup>

In addition to strongly emphasizing monotheism, Nanak and Sikhism also emphasized the equality of all humanity. After his divine call, Nanak traveled for twenty years to Mecca and to the religious centers of Hinduism and Buddhism. Kalsi explained that he finally returned to Kartarpur in the Punjab, where he gave practical shape to his

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<sup>207</sup> Kathettu, 112.

<sup>208</sup> Cole and Sambhi, 50.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>211</sup> Kathettu, 113.

idea by launching “a crusade against caste divisions.”<sup>212</sup> Kathettu points out that Nanak went one step further than other *Bhakti* Hindu movements, which preached against the caste system by actually establishing a casteless society.<sup>213</sup> Kathettu explains that Nanak’s reason for doing so was because “God loves all humankind” and because he rejected “the discrimination on the basis of race, colour, creed, and sect.”<sup>214</sup> According to Kathettu, Nanak “innovated the traditions of *sangat* (communal worship) and *langar* (communal meal) for transmitting the message of God’s oneness.”<sup>215</sup>

Cole and Sambhi stress the equality of Sikh worship, “No one of whatever rank should be seated in a way which suggests some kind of honour or distinction.”<sup>216</sup> They explain that not only did everyone worship together in the *gurdwara*, but the significance of the *langar* was where “all people gather to eat food together.”<sup>217</sup> Nanak also opposed the caste system through his condemnation of Hindu ritualism governed by Brahmins. Kathettu explains that he “vehemently opposed the formalities of religions, such as fasts, superstitions, pilgrimages, and worship of the dead”<sup>218</sup> and his opposition challenged high caste Brahmin control of religious life. In addition to the equality found in the activities of the *gurdwara*, equality was also emphasized in the titles created by Guru Gobind Singh to eliminate caste distinctions, “Men use the title ‘Singh’ with their name

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<sup>212</sup> Kalsi, 19.

<sup>213</sup> Kathettu, 17.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Kalsi, 19.

<sup>216</sup> Cole and Sambhi, 120.

<sup>217</sup> Kathettu, 18.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 17.



and women use ‘Kaur.’ The logic behind using this title was, according to Kathettu, to demolish the caste identity and consider everyone equal in Sikhism.”<sup>219</sup>

Christians and Sikhs find agreement in the dignity and equality of all humanity resulting in the need for social justice, but their reasons for why humans have dignity differ. This shared understanding is expressed through common views of the importance of generosity, hard work, and community service. Sikhs are encouraged to be generous through the practice of *wand chhakna*, or sharing of one’s earnings, and *daswandh*, or giving ten percent of one’s earnings to the *gurdwara*.<sup>220</sup> Similar encouragement towards financial generosity can be found in Christianity.<sup>221</sup> In addition to generosity, Sikhs also have a similar understanding of earning one’s living through hard work. The *kirat karma* teaching, similar to Paul’s exhortation in 2 Thessalonians 3:10, is a “cardinal rule of Sikh behavior” and was, according to Kalsi, a reaction to those, especially *jogis*, who “lived on other people’s earnings and exploited them for self-gratification.”<sup>222</sup>

Finally, Sikhs, like Christians, place a high value on serving others equally in and through their *gurdwara*. The Sikh practice of *sewa* “literally means voluntary/selfless service performed for the community.”<sup>223</sup> Sikhs, according to Cole and Sambhi, desire *sewa* to be selfless and consider it the antidote for feelings of self-importance, “The hands of the gurmukh are blessed, for they toil in the service of the Guru and the sangat.

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>220</sup> Kalsi, 41.

<sup>221</sup> 2 Corinthians 8.

<sup>222</sup> Kalsi, 40.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 38.

They fetch water, grind corn, fan the people, and perform any service that is required of them... Ego and pride have been lost through serving others.”<sup>224</sup> The similarities between Christianity and Sikhism in this area of sharing and service are such that Kathettu believes that Christians in the Punjab should adopt the Sikh practice of *langar*, “The church in the Punjab has failed to see the similarity in the gurdwara and langar system with that of the early church and hence has neglected this important practice in its functioning. This has led to an individualistic church pattern that is in contrast to the communal pattern of the gurdwara.”<sup>225</sup>

So while Sikhs and Christians share a similar belief regarding the dignity and equality of humanity and how that can be expressed, their reasons for why humans are bestowed with dignity differ. The Sikhs view of humanity is in keeping with Indian tradition that human beings are born unenlightened but capable of enlightenment.<sup>226</sup> Human beings are the most privileged creatures of God among his creation,<sup>227</sup> but this privilege is “bedeviled by wrong attachments.”<sup>228</sup> Humans become *manmukha*, or self-centered, and are governed by the five thieves or evil passions: “*kama*, lust; *krodha*, anger; *lobha*, covetousness; *moha*, worldly attachments; and *ahankara*, pride.”<sup>229</sup> So while Sikhism shares a similar view of humanity with Hinduism, its high view of

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<sup>224</sup> Cole and Sambhi, 81.

<sup>225</sup> Kathettu, 108.

<sup>226</sup> Cole and Sambhi, 74.

<sup>227</sup> Kathettu, 33.

<sup>228</sup> Cole and Sambhi, 75.

<sup>229</sup> Kathettu, 33.

humanity, according to Kalsi, comes through differing views of *dharma*: “Nanak’s understanding of dharma, therefore, is based on universalism which is entirely contrary to the traditional Hindu view in which men follow their own dharma according to their social class/caste or stage of life.”<sup>230</sup> This view differs, according to Cole and Sambhi, significantly from the Christian view of the dignity of humanity because it does not teach that humans are created in the image of God, nor does it teach that humans are stewards, “far less those who have been given lordship over creation.”<sup>231</sup>

### **Exegesis of British Asian Culture**

Along with an understanding of Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism, a review of British Asian culture is pertinent to this study. This review will be limited due to the scope of this study but will include a brief history of Asian immigration to the United Kingdom and several of the important issues immigrants encounter, namely racism, pressures to conform, and issues of identity.

The history of when and how Asians came to the United Kingdom significantly influenced the development of British Asian culture. While Asian immigration to the United Kingdom dates from the eighteenth century,<sup>232</sup> it was not until after the second World War that immigration significantly increased. John Hinnells, the professor of theology at Liverpool Hope University, provided several reasons for this post-war increase: Indian independence, more ex-soldiers from India settling in Britain, Asian staff from the Medical Corps coming to work in the newly created National Health Service,

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<sup>230</sup> Kalsi, 32.

<sup>231</sup> Cole and Sambhi, 76.

<sup>232</sup> Hinnells, 77.

and huge losses of soldiers creating a serious shortage of young male workers.<sup>233</sup> Hinnells explained that workers to fill this shortage “came from the subcontinent, first from India, then from newly created Pakistan, mostly in the late 1950s and early 1960s.”<sup>234</sup> The men were employed, according to Hinnells, in heavy industry and “for the low paid work that the white Anglo-Saxons did not want,” while Asian women were in transport, nursing, and some service industries.<sup>235</sup> Alan Sharp, a community worker for Churches Together for Tooting, agreed that Asians were viewed as an “even cheaper source of labor” compared with other European immigrants to the United Kingdom and were employed in unskilled jobs while “indigenous white labour found its way into better jobs.”<sup>236</sup>

A second wave of immigration to the United Kingdom occurred in the 1960s and early 1970s with the arrival of East African Asians who, according to Hinnells, “felt increasingly compelled to leave Kenya, Zanzibar, and Tanzania, as their governments pursued policies of Africanization.”<sup>237</sup> The third and current wave of immigration started in the 1990s consisting mostly of students and highly skilled labor.<sup>238</sup>

The reception that Asians received from the white British population in the United Kingdom was mixed. Hinnells explained that for many immigrants in the first wave during the 1950s, they encountered racism, “[W]hite racism meant that they found it

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Alan Sharp, *Changing Generations: Challenging Power and Oppression in Britain Today* (London, UK: BIS Publishing Services, 2014), 78.

<sup>237</sup> Hinnells, 80.

<sup>238</sup> Dominic Casciani, 2011. “Q&A: Uk Immigration Cap,” BBC, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10436228> (accessed 27 June, 2014).

difficult to obtain accommodation and so funds were raised to buy the cheapest housing possible, inevitably in run-down inner-city areas, where Asians not only lived several to a room in dormitory-type accommodation, but even took turns sleeping in a bed as individuals worked different shifts.”<sup>239</sup> Sharp agreed with Hinnells that Asians faced difficulty upon arrival in the United Kingdom during this first wave, commenting that Asians “came to occupy some of the worst housing in overcrowded inner cities, where they were exploited by slum landlords, such as Peter Rachmann.”<sup>240</sup> Dhooleka Raj, anthropology lecturer at Yale University, wrote in her ethnographic study on South Asians in London that many of the first immigrants to London had difficulty finding housing, because many rental advertisements would explicitly state “No Blacks allowed.”<sup>241</sup> However, not every Asian experienced difficulty when coming to the United Kingdom. Raj shared the story of Aunty Krishna who migrated in 1965 and compared her initial experience in the United Kingdom to the racism she would encounter later:

When we first came, life was smooth; there wasn’t much racism as you see today. Then you could see a rare Asian face. Like I would take my son out for a walk and any English woman would say, “Ah isn’t he lovely,” just thinking he’s a different color and all that. And just stick a shilling in his hand or something, like some sweets. Now they just look at you and say, “Oh no, not another one.” Things are different.<sup>242</sup>

One reason for the racism, provided by Hinnells, was fear by the white population that their country was being overrun: “In the late 1950s and early 1960s the White population

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<sup>239</sup> Hinnells, 79.

<sup>240</sup> Sharp, 78.

<sup>241</sup> Dhooleka Sarhadi Raj, *Where Are You From? : Middle-Class Migrants in the Modern World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 143.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 142.

increasingly feared that they would lose their jobs and houses, and that their country would be ‘swamped’ so that the ‘purity of the island race’ was under threat.”<sup>243</sup> This fear, according to Hinnells, resulted in race riots, political candidates talking “tough on immigration,”<sup>244</sup> and the 1962 passage of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, which restricted immigration only to those who had received employment vouchers.<sup>245</sup> And, according to Hinnells, the xenophobic fears had not disappeared as of the 1990s.<sup>246</sup> For these reasons, Hinnells concluded that the United Kingdom could not be termed a “host country” to Asian immigrants, because “[m]ost recent immigrants find the wider White society anything but a host, it is often alien, prejudiced, and vocal extremists call for repatriation.”<sup>247</sup>

The difficulty for Asians as an immigrant community in the United Kingdom created a unique British Asian culture. In the 1960s and 1970s, Hinnells observed that most outside commentators assumed that the second and third generation of Asians would fully assimilate.<sup>248</sup> Instead, he noted that did not happen, “The visible evidence of South Asian religions in the West is far greater in the late 1990s than it was before, not only in the form of splendid new temples and mosques, but also in the more common

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<sup>243</sup> Hinnells, 79-80.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>245</sup> Sharp, 79.

<sup>246</sup> Hinnells, 80.

<sup>247</sup> Hinnells, "South Asians Religions in Migration," 3.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 2.

wearing of turbans and the hijab.”<sup>249</sup> One factor in maintaining and promoting Asian culture and religion in the United Kingdom was the arrival of the East African Asians in the 1970s. The East Africa Asians were labeled as “twice migrants” who had, according to Hinnells, “evolved a more portable form of diaspora religion.”<sup>250</sup> Hinnells explains that they were able to inject “a strong measure of orthodoxy into what had been a growing liberalizing, if not reforming, tendency among their coreligionists in Britain.”<sup>251</sup>

So while the assumption of total assimilation of Asians into British culture proved to be false, equally false is the assumption that Asians did not adapt at all to Western culture. Hinnells explains how Asian religions were “Protestantized” through religious education in schools: “[T]hey all too often approach the subject from a typically Protestant perspective, emphasizing doctrines and texts, thus giving an image of the religion that many of the young people find does not accord with what they experience at home.”<sup>252</sup> Kim Knott, professor at Lancaster University, writes on British Hinduism that it is dynamic with a desire for materials to be in English, for beliefs and practices to be explained, for greater ethical engagement, and for more public responsibilities for women.<sup>253</sup> Further, she finds that few second generation British Hindus express personal belief in “caste traditions, the efficacy of fasts, malevolent spirits, and magical

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> Hinnells, “South Asians in Britain: Introduction,” 81.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>253</sup> Kim Knott, “Hinduism in Britain,” in *The South Asian Religious Diaspora in Britain, Canada, and the United States*, ed. Harold G. Coward, John R. Hinnells, and Raymond Brady Williams (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 97-98.

practices.”<sup>254</sup> Jorgen Nielsen, the professor of Islamic studies at the University of Copenhagen, observes a similar Westernizing influence on British Islam that comes through young, British-educated Muslims. Nielsen observes that the wide mix of Muslim backgrounds in the United Kingdom forces Muslim minorities to defend their “Muslimness” against cultural practices, “The mix in Britain, in other words, forces Muslims to determine what is centrally Islamic and what is a culturally relative expression of Islam.”<sup>255</sup> As these examples demonstrate, British culture and religion have had an influence on how Asian religions are practiced and understood by British Asians.

British Asians recognize that they have a different identity from that of their white British friends and also from Asians in India. Raj described British Asians as “double outsiders” because “they were seen as ‘outsiders’ when they became migrants to the United Kingdom. At the same time, they were marked as outsiders from the places they left behind.”<sup>256</sup> The white British public differentiates them as “Asian,” while Indians refer to those who have left India as “Vilayati.” Sam George, the executive director of Parivar International, described Asians living in the West as “Coconuts - brown on the outside and white on the inside.”<sup>257</sup> According to George, both Eastern and Western culture forge a unique identity for British Asians, “They somehow cannot deny either part of their existence. There is a tension between the dual natures of their inner wiring. Their

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>255</sup> Jorgen Nielsen, “Muslims in Britain,” in *The South Asian Religious Diaspora in Britain, Canada, and the United States*, ed. Harold G. Coward, John R. Hinnells, and Raymond Brady Williams (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 121.

<sup>256</sup> Raj, 27.

<sup>257</sup> Sam George, *Understanding the Coconut Generation* (Niles, Illinois: Mall Publishing, Co, 2006), 72.



lives seem to be bifurcated between the land of their parents and the land of their birth or adoption. Like most second generation immigrants, they are pulled in one direction at home and another at school.”<sup>258</sup> Gidoomal and Wardell also recognize that for most British Asians their identity is a combination, but then describe how, for some, the clash of East and West can polarize them to either side:

On the other hand some young Sikhs become more ardent in their faith than their elders. They are keen to maintain and live up to their cultural heritage and to prove that the Sikh way of life is superior to all others. Others are in rebellion against what they consider the outmoded standards of behavior to which the older generation would like them to conform.<sup>259</sup>

This blending of Asian and Western culture is also occurring among the youth in India through globalization. Nebu Mathson, pastor of a church in Mumbai, India, wrote that in the rush towards globalization taking place in India, the Indian value system is being lost and instead replaced by one which is Western. This change, according to Mathson, has created an identity struggle for Indian youth.<sup>260</sup> Keller agrees with Mathson, noting that “[m]any young people, even those living in remote places, are becoming globalized semi-Westerners, while their parents remain rooted in traditional ways of thinking.”<sup>261</sup>

One of the Western values that is often absorbed by British Asians is individualism. Wardell and Gidoomal comment that parents of British Asians worry for their children, “[T]he fact that their young people are absorbing the principle of

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 66-67.

<sup>259</sup> Ram Gidoomal and Margaret Wardell, *Lions, Princesses, Gurus : Reaching Your Sikh Neighbor* (Godalming, Surrey, UK: Highland Books, 1996), 123.

<sup>260</sup> Nebu Mathson, *Impact of Globalisation on the Indian Youth: A Review of the Response of Ncci* (Dehli, India: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (ISPCCK), 2008), 67.

<sup>261</sup> Keller, 162.

individualism, prized in Western culture but alien to Eastern thought. As already pointed out, traditional Asian culture values the welfare of the family and community more highly than that of the individual.”<sup>262</sup> George also recognizes individualism at work in the lives of Asians living in the West, “The brown side of Coconuts embraces family/community, structure, emotional restraint, respect for authority etc; while the white side of Coconut prefers individuality, autonomy, expressiveness and creativity.”<sup>263</sup> Hinnells, agreeing with George on the cultural blend among British Asians, finds a limit to how far Western cultural conformity at marriage, “However Westernized South Asians, young or old, may be, when the time of marriage approaches the force of traditions becomes potent.”<sup>264</sup>

Clearly, Asians in Britain demonstrate a blend of two cultures, with limits to each, that have produced their own unique complex culture. Through this blend, they are able to bridge together two entirely different worlds and be comfortable in both at the same time. Raymond Brady Williams, professor of humanities at Wabash College, explains that a transnational approach is needed to understand Asians living in the West:

These relations emerging among migrants at the close of the twentieth century generate a new transnational approach to the study of migration and migrants who develop and maintain multiple relations - familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political that span borders and take actions, make decisions, feel concerns, and develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Gidoomal and Wardell, *Lions, Princesses, Gurus : Reaching Your Sikh Neighbor*, 126.

<sup>263</sup> George, 77.

<sup>264</sup> Hinnells, "South Asians Religions in Migration," 6.

<sup>265</sup> Williams, 14.

According to Williams, British Asians are “able to maintain several identities and to express these at times and in ways that are most advantageous to them in adapting to current circumstance and in preserving options for the future.”<sup>266</sup> Through the “myth of return” or the desire to eventually resettle in India, Raj showed how British Asians maintain transnationality: “The jostling of terms in the diaspora is a jostling of identifications and claims to their identity based on shifting notions of what it means to be an insider and an outsider: at first the migrants were simultaneously Vilayati and Asian, now they are British and NRI (Non-Resident Indian).”<sup>267</sup> Additionally, religion plays an important role in maintaining transnational relations. Williams explains that because of the transcendent character of religious claims, “It is increasingly evident that immigrants are maintaining translational ties in ways different from earlier immigrants, demanding new perspectives on the transnational vitality of religions and religious life.”<sup>268</sup>

### *Contextualization Applied*

Upon gathering cultural and religious data through learning and listening to others, the next step in contextualization is applying it when communicating cross-culturally. But the literature reveals a great debate in contextualization theory. This disagreement was summarized by A. Scott Moreau, the professor of intercultural studies at Wheaton College, in his book *Contextualization in World Missions*, where he outlined the divide within evangelical epistemology. On the one hand, according to Moreau, are

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Raj, 182.

<sup>268</sup> Williams, 14-15.

those who advocate a dynamic equivalence critical realism, which sees the central task of communicating across a cultural divide as generating “impact with truth.”<sup>269</sup> On the other hand would be those who advocate a correspondence critical realism, which sees the central task as conveying “truth with impact.”<sup>270</sup> Between these two poles stand a variety of contextualization approaches which can be mapped on various scales, such as the C Spectrum for Islam or the H Scale for Hindus that were mentioned above.

Those advocating a dynamic equivalence approach to contextualization argue that meaning and content are constructed by a receptor culture and should not be imposed by the cultural outsiders. Stephen Bevans, missionary and professor at Catholic Theological Union, in *Models of Contextual Theology*, catalogues this approach to contextualization as an anthropological model whose practitioners look “for God's revelation and self-manifestation as it is hidden within the values, relational patterns, and concerns of a context.”<sup>271</sup> This approach values freedom for each receptor culture to experiment and create new meanings and content found within its culture which are parallel to those in the Bible. Bevans explained that in this approach, a cultural outsider shares the gospel with the receptor culture, but it is a gospel which is naked and is a “stripped-down skeleton core of a gospel.”<sup>272</sup> Removed, per Bevans, are any parts of it which would be a burden to non-Christian people, since the message is “really Western, Eurocentric culture masquerading as religion.” In this model, Bevans explained that “[t]he task of the

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<sup>269</sup> Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions : Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Models*, 316.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Rev. and expanded ed., Faith and Cultures Series (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002), 56.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 65.

missionary is to present the gospel, and the task of the people who respond to it is to express that gospel and its meaning in their own language and within their own thought forms....the gospel alone is revelation; everything else is religion.”<sup>273</sup>

Charles Kraft, the professor of anthropology and intercultural communication at Fuller Theological Seminary, who is an advocate for dynamic equivalence, emphasizes the importance of removing foreign voices for determining scriptural meaning, “And here we are squarely into the problems of interpretation. ‘Scriptural by whose interpretation?,’ we may ask. ‘By the interpretation of the people themselves, not by that of outsiders,’ we should answer.”<sup>274</sup> The determination of whether a meaning is scriptural rests solely within the receptor culture, and cultural outsiders must be concerned primarily with whether the meanings in the minds of those of the receptor culture are scriptural or not.<sup>275</sup>

Missional “insider movements” sit within this model of contextualization. Moreau defined insider movements as “[m]ovements to obedient faith in Christ which remain integrated with or inside their natural community.”<sup>276</sup> Some advocates of insider movements hold to the view that mosques and mandirs are equivalent forms of worship to synagogues in the days of the early church. John Travis, in arguing for the “birth of a C5 movement,”<sup>277</sup> would allow for Muslims who follow Jesus to identify themselves as

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Charles H. Kraft, “Why Appropriate?,” in *Appropriate Christianity*, ed. Charles H. Kraft (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 2005), 8.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions : Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Models*, 170.

<sup>277</sup> Travis, “Contextualization among Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists: A Focus on the Insider Movements,” 12.

Muslim and remain in the mosque for worship, using Islamic forms and creeds. Another advocate of insider movements founded a mission agency with the goal to start new insider movements instead of church-planting movements, because, according to Travis, “the term ‘Church Planting’ implies inventing a new structure. No matter how contextualized the ‘church’ may be, it is still a new structure that is foreign to the people group.”<sup>278</sup> With the church being viewed as a foreign entity and the mosque or mandir seen as a biblical, cultural equivalent, some advocates of insider movements believe that this solution of converts not needing to change their religion will result in a great harvest amongst the mega-faiths of Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism. Travis comments on insider movements that “the process may be theologically messy, but we see no other alternative.”<sup>279</sup>

Not all would agree with Travis, however. Among many advocating a correspondence critical realism in translation and contextualization, alternatives arise through their emphasis on faithfulness in communicating biblical truth, rather than by an emphasis on achieving cultural impact and acceptance. Moreau states that this group also uses contextualization, but does so to convey content, which corresponds with truth. Structures and forms that correspond to false content, along with actions which correspond to false allegiances, are to be avoided.<sup>280</sup> Bevan classifies this model of contextualization as the “countercultural model,” since it seeks to communicate the truth of God’s word in ways which challenge a receptor culture. Bevan states that this group

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<sup>278</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions : Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Models*, 317.

takes “context with utmost seriousness,” but that it needs to be treated with a good deal of suspicion.<sup>281</sup> Newbigin suggested the following as a model for the communication of the gospel across a cultural frontier:

1) The communication has to be in the language of the receptor. It has to be such that it accepts, at least provisionally, the way of understanding things that is embodied in that language; if it does not do so, it will simply be an unmeaning sound that cannot change anything. 2) However, if it is truly the communication of the gospel, it will call radically into question that way of understanding embodied in the language it uses. If it is truly revelation, it will involve contradiction, and call for conversion, for a radical *metanoia*, a U-turn of the mind.<sup>282</sup>

David Talley, pastor and professor of biblical and theological studies at Biola University, would agree with Newbigin regarding the need to challenge receptor cultures with the claims of Christ. He states, “Idols, whether false worship, teachings, or practices, are not to be preserved or given a new name, painted with a new face, given an alternate meaning or justified as good. They are to be exposed and denounced. There is very little that is seeker friendly or culturally sensitive about this.”<sup>283</sup>

Within the group of those advocating for correspondence critical realism, a spectrum of approaches to contextualization can be found. For those reaching Muslims, these can be classified on Travis’s spectrum as C-2 to C-4 churches, and for those reaching Hindus, these can be classified on Richard’s spectrum as H-2 to H-5. C-1 and H-1 are similar in that they refer to traditional churches which use outsider language and

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<sup>281</sup> Bevens, 117.

<sup>282</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks : The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1986), 3-4.

<sup>283</sup> David Talley, "Pagan Religious Practices," in *Chrislam: How Missionaries Are Promoting an Islamized Gospel*, ed. Jeff Morton Joshua Lingel, and Bill Nikides (Garden Grove, CA: i2 Ministries Publishing, 2011), Kindle Location 2662.

seek a complete separation from all that is Hindu or Islamic. Properly speaking, they are not forms of contextualization and are separatist. C-2 and H-2 are also similar and refer to traditional churches which use insider language, for example Arabic in Arab countries or Hindi in India. Tennent, commenting on C-1 and C-2 churches, states that they have not been successful at reaching Muslims with the gospel because “these churches are, by definition, extractionistic in their attitude towards Islamic cultural forms.”<sup>284</sup> Instead, Tennent advocates C-3 and C-4 churches as being “more effectively positioned to reach Muslims in culturally appropriate ways such that the gospel of Jesus Christ is not overly tainted by foreign associations.”<sup>285</sup> C-3 and H-3 and H-4 churches not only use insider language but also adopt religiously-neutral cultural forms, such as food, dance, and dress. C-4 and H-5 churches go further in contextualization and include biblically permissible cultural and religious forms. For example, Tennent explains that “C-4 churches would use Islamic words for God (*Allah*), prayer (*salat*), and the Gospels (*injl*).”<sup>286</sup> Richard explains that H-5 churches would “develop Hindu patterns of discipleship in personal devotion, corporate worship, evangelism” and would “identify themselves as *bhaktas* (devotees) of Christ or Jesus-*bhaktas*.”<sup>287</sup>

Those holding to the view of correspondence critical realism would go no further in contextualization than C-4 or H-5 because C-5 and H-6 represent for them the other extreme to be avoided, syncretism, with a perceived loss of biblical faithfulness and

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<sup>284</sup> Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity : How the Global Church Is Influencing the Way We Think About and Discuss Theology*, 199.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>287</sup> Richard, "New Paradigms for Understanding Hinduism and Contextualization," 319.



Christian identity. For Tennent, conversion involves the joining of a new community, “To the charge that Jesus’ use of the word ‘church’ is only spiritual and not referring necessarily to a visible community, I reply that the very word *ekklesia* means ‘public assembly.’ The choice of this word helped to launch the church as a visible, defined community in the world.”<sup>288</sup> Further, he argues that some insider movement advocates create straw man arguments in their caricature of Christianity, “India has tens of thousands of churches all across the country whose members do sing Christian bajans and not Westernized hymns, who do take their shoes off and sit on the floor rather than in pews, and who do not think twice about their women wearing bangles or participating in cultural festivals.”<sup>289</sup> David Garrison, the global strategist with the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, agrees with Tennent that contextual church-planting movements were preferable to insider movements:

What separates the two movements is how they respond to that outpouring. Insider Movements respond positively to Christ but refuse to identify themselves with public expressions of the Christian religion. Church Planting Movements, though opting for indigenous house church models rather than traditional church structures, nevertheless make a clean break with their former religion and redefine themselves with a distinctly Christian identity. The resulting movement is indigenously led and locally contextualized.<sup>290</sup>

David Garrison’s description of these two movements underlines the divide within the literature on how contextualization is to be done and the role and place of the church in witness.

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<sup>288</sup> Tennent, “The Challenge of Churchless Christianity: An Evangelical Assessment,” 174.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> David Garrison, “Church Planting Movements Vs Insider Movements: Missiological Realities Vs. Mythological Speculations,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 21, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 154.

*The Effects of Contextualization on the Church*

With the literature on contextualization showing that there are various views on how gospel witness should be contextualized, of equal importance to the evaluation of how converted British Asians evaluate the witness of the church is how the missionary encounter between two cultures changes the church. Contextualization is more than the transfer of information from one culture to another; it is the exchange of meaning which occurs in relationship. Newbigin points out that for gospel transmission to occur across a cultural divide, a community is needed which identifies through relationship with those to whom it is sharing, “True contextualization happens when there is a community which lives faithfully by the gospel and in that same costly identification with people in their real situations as we see in the earthly ministry of Jesus.”<sup>291</sup>

Walls gave the foundation for how gospel translation and incarnation are linked in Christ, “When God in Christ became man, Divinity was translated into humanity, as though humanity were a receptor language.”<sup>292</sup> The incarnation was particular in that Christ became a person in a particular place, people, and time. With the great commission, Christ “is re-translated from the Palestinian Jewish original.”<sup>293</sup> For Walls, the significance of these re-translations means that “national distinctives, the things that mark out each nation, the shared consciousness and shared traditions, and shared mental

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<sup>291</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 154.

<sup>292</sup> Walls, 27.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

processes and patterns of relationship, are within the scope of discipleship. Christ can become visible within the very things which constitute nationality.”<sup>294</sup>

But these “national distinctives” are not necessary neutral towards Christ. John Frame, the professor of systematic theology and philosophy at Reformed Theological Seminary, points out that these distinctives are in fact a mixture of sin and righteousness: “Culture is an ambiguity, a mixture of sin and righteousness, of good and bad, of love of Christ and hatred of Christ.”<sup>295</sup> Frame explains that culture, because it has been affected by sin, requires conversion. He notes, “Conversion is the turning, the re-orientation, of every aspect of humanity - culture-specific humanity, to God.”<sup>296</sup> However, conversion, according to Walls, does not create cultural uniformity but rather plurality of Christian expression, because translation brings “Christ to the heart of each culture where he finds acceptance; to the burning questions within that culture, to the points of reference within it by which people know themselves.”<sup>297</sup>

Lamin Sanneh, the professor of missions and world Christianity at Yale Divinity School, agreed with Walls that mission based on translation instead of “diffusion” results in a pluralism of Christian expression:

Thus the significant twist of perceiving Jesus as God’s exalted became the gravitational force of the new world of faith and devotion. It gave an otherworldly direction to Christian life and devotion, with faith in the absolute righteousness of God finding its corollary in the provisional, relative character of this world. This opens the way for pluralism by

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<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

<sup>295</sup> John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, A Theology of Lordship (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Pub., 2008), 862.

<sup>296</sup> Walls, 28.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., 23.

stressing the non-absolute character and co-equality of all earthly arrangements. What one authority calls “the Easter faith” of the believers exerted a broadening pressure on the inherited boundaries of Jewish ritual fellowship to furnish the principles of inclusion by faith. Such a principle made the Gentile breakthrough a permanent mark of the gospel without, of course, excluding the Jews as such.<sup>298</sup>

This “broadening pressure” to include others from another culture within one’s church community has several beneficial effects on the established church.

One benefit of the missionary encounter with another culture is the clarifying effect it brings to theology. Walls notes that because the indigenizing principle ensures that each community recognizes in scripture that God is speaking to its own situation, it means that each reader of scripture has “cultural blinkers” which prevent or render it difficult to understand scripture.<sup>299</sup> But a church which has several cultures in its membership can read scripture with “much potential for mutual enrichment and self-criticism”<sup>300</sup> because each culture can help the other identify their cultural blinkers and blind spots. An example of this was provided by Sanneh who reasoned that the Western church benefits from interaction with cultures not influenced by the Enlightenment because it could “gain insight into the culture that shaped the origins of the NT church.”<sup>301</sup>

Another benefit to a church which engages with other cultures would be purification from xenophobia and racism. Sanneh saw in Paul’s writings that “mission

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<sup>298</sup> Lamin O. Sanneh, *Translating the Message : The Missionary Impact on Culture*, American Society of Missiology Series (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1989), 15.

<sup>299</sup> Walls, 12.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>301</sup> Lamin O. Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity? : The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2003), 26.

was the solvent for cultural xenophobia.”<sup>302</sup> To keep cultural superiority at bay, Sanneh argues that Paul emphasized the reign of Christ, that Christianity was a pluralist religion, and that the gospel demands a plural frontier for its diffusion.<sup>303</sup> Believers who, like Paul, stand at cultural frontiers acquire a critical comparative perspective on their own cultural identity:

They were encouraged, as Paul was, to shed the restrictions of their own particular culture in order to face with unencumbered eyes the magnitude of God’s salvific work in another cultural milieu. Any cultural tradition that turns in on itself will necessarily harden into a defensive complex, with little relevance for the spontaneous improvement of others. Mission helps to burst the old wineskins with the pressure of cross-cultural interpretation, dissolving the barriers of cultural exclusiveness.<sup>304</sup>

And when xenophobia was removed from the church and Jewish and Gentile believers were together, it resulted in Paul’s vision of full-grown humanity in Ephesians 4.<sup>305</sup> Walls commented that it was not long before Christianity became Gentile, “but, for a few brief years, the one-made-out-of-two was visibly demonstrated, the middle wall of partition was down, the irreconcilables were reconciled.”<sup>306</sup> This reconciled humanity would be, according to Walls, a paradigmatic event for all believers living at cultural frontiers, for in Christ “all poor sinners meet, and in finding themselves reconciled with him, are reconciled to each other.”<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> Sanneh, *Translating the Message : The Missionary Impact on Culture*, 29.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

<sup>305</sup> Walls, 25.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

### **Summary of Contextualization for Witness**

The literature generally agreed on the need for the church to witness contextually so that its message was understood. However, a great division exists on how far contextualization is to proceed and where the line is between orthodoxy and syncretism. In light of this tension in the literature, further study is needed to determine what British Asian believers consider to be appropriate cultural and counter-cultural witness.

#### *Evangelistic Approaches to South Asian Religions*

Part of the wider discussion of the witness of the church to British Asian Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus is the important subsection of the evangelistic approaches to these religions. The literature, in general, agreed that the evangelistic approach must include a verbal proclamation of the gospel, holy living consistent with the gospel, and an understandable witness mindful of the audience. There was however, large disagreement on the relative importance placed on the corporate witness of the church as an approach to these religions.

### **An Audible Gospel Witness**

The literature agreed that South Asian unbelieving people need to hear a truthful presentation of the gospel. Wardell and Gidoomal write on the importance of a truthful and verbal gospel proclamation in witnessing, “Once those opportunities [to present the gospel to British Hindus] arise, don’t try to impress your Hindu friend with how much you’ve learnt about his or her religion. Instead, concentrate on talking about aspects of Christianity.”<sup>308</sup> Richard Shumack, a research fellow with the Centre for Public Christianity and minister among Muslim refugees in Melbourne, agrees that evangelism

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<sup>308</sup> Gidoomal and Wardell, *Chapatis for Tea : Reaching Your Hindu Neighbour : A Practical Guide*, 148.

to Muslims must involve verbal proclamation, “Our call is to be proclaimers and persuaders, not to be converters. This is evangelism.”<sup>309</sup> And Roy Oksnevad, the director of the Muslim Ministry Program at Wheaton College, adds that the goal of verbal proclamation must focus on the truth of salvation in Christ, “For the Christian, the heart of the gospel is to share the wonderful message of Christ’s gift of salvation through his birth, death, and resurrection.”<sup>310</sup>

These authors share a common concern on the need to protect the verbal proclamation of the gospel because South Asians often are quick to argue against the claims of the gospel or divert the conversation from it. Oksnevad comments that evangelistic conversations with Muslims can be “unending dialog” on the nature of Jesus and the authenticity of the Bible.<sup>311</sup> Shumack differentiates evangelism from apologetics, stating, “Apologetics uses arguments, rather than simple proclamation. Apologetic arguments can remove obstacles that are preventing faith in Christ, but no one is saved by an argument.”<sup>312</sup> He encourages the use of apologetics as a last resort, but unfortunately, with Muslims, “you will usually be using your last resort pretty quickly.”<sup>313</sup>

Wardell and Gidoomal warn against engaging Hindus in philosophical discussion on religion, something Hindus readily do, because it “leads nowhere as far as sharing the

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<sup>309</sup> Shumack, 49.

<sup>310</sup> Roy Oksnevad, “Christ the Victor,” in *The Gospel for Islam : Reaching Muslims in North America*, ed. Roy Oksnevad and Dotsey Welliver (Wheaton, IL: Evangelism and Missions Information Service, 2001), 89.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>312</sup> Shumack, 49.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

reality of Christ.”<sup>314</sup> And in their book on Sikhism, Wardell and Gidoomal warn against creating unnecessary hostility by emphasizing conversion and separation from the Sikh community, but instead encourage keeping the conversation focused on Christ, “Speak the truth when asked about your Christianity but do so in a non-threatening manner. Don’t try to impress Sikh acquaintances with your knowledge of Sikhism but concentrate on aspects of your own faith which are more likely to lead to fruitful conversation.”<sup>315</sup> These authors agree that because evangelism to South Asians can result quickly in argumentation and distraction, priority needs to be directed towards a clear, verbal, and truthful presentation of the gospel.

### **A Visible Gospel Witness**

In addition to the need for a clear verbal conversation, the literature is also consistent that witness to South Asian religions must include holy living consistent with the gospel claims. Shumack arguea that the Christian witness to Western Muslims must consist of more than belief in Jesus and should include God’s work of transforming us through the indwelling Holy Spirit, “We claim that He is changing us into people who live Godly lives.”<sup>316</sup> Shumack, however, outlined a cultural concern on what constitutes godly living because Muslims will view holiness similarly to the way the Pharisees did in the Bible, “A holy person will be someone who faithfully keeps all God’s rules and regulations.”<sup>317</sup> Instead of conforming to the Islamic view of holiness, Shumack argues

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<sup>314</sup> Gidoomal and Wardell, *Chapatis for Tea : Reaching Your Hindu Neighbour : A Practical Guide*, 125.

<sup>315</sup> Gidoomal and Wardell, *Lions, Princesses, Gurus : Reaching Your Sikh Neighbor*, 186.

<sup>316</sup> Shumack, 31.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid., 38.



that holy living consistent with the gospel is such that the believer is accused of what Jesus was accused of, “I want to be seen as someone who values love and service over rules, but I also want to be seen as someone who sets profoundly high moral standards.”<sup>318</sup> Wardell and Gidoomal have a similar view on the importance of Godly living as a part of the witness to Hindus, “Hindus are attracted to Christ by his life of unselfish love and sacrifice. The lives of Christians who profess to be his disciples should also show these virtues. The Christian who puts the welfare of other people before his own will win more Hindus to Christ than one who lives for his own personal ease and comfort.”<sup>319</sup>

### **An Understandable Gospel Witness**

The literature also displays a wide range of how the gospel can be explained to South Asians so that it is understandable. In general, the literature agrees about the importance of explaining the gospel in ways that a South Asian unbeliever would understand. The one exception to this was William Miller, a Presbyterian missionary to Iran for over forty years, who wrote, “the most important thing to do is to help him understand the Bible.”<sup>320</sup> The only concern Miller had regarding understandability in light of culture would be to ensure that women and men read the Bible separately.<sup>321</sup> Oksnevad highlights different gospel presentations to Muslims, noting that the biblical approach does not seek to be understandable but instead relies on the power of God to

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<sup>318</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>319</sup> Gidoomal and Wardell, *Chapatis for Tea : Reaching Your Hindu Neighbour : A Practical Guide*, 151.

<sup>320</sup> William M. Miller, *A Christian's Response to Islam* (Bromley, Kent: STL Books, 1976), 140.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

speak through the scriptures, “In the third approach the basic assumption is that God’s Word is truth and all we need to do is share the Word. It is understood that the Holy Spirit will take the words of Scripture and the word of witness and convict the person of sin, righteousness, and judgment.”<sup>322</sup>

Most other approaches in evangelism found in the literature try to be faithful to the gospel message and at the same time understandable to a South Asian audience. The other approaches cataloged by Oksnevad include: the apologetic approach which answers each objection a Muslim may have, the bridge approach in which the evangelist finds some aspect in Islam from which to build a bridge to a similar concept in the Bible and give it biblical meaning, the story-telling approach which uses cultural ways familiar to Muslims of passing along information, and a modified Western approach which uses Western evangelistic materials modified to an Islamic audience.<sup>323</sup> Oksnevad himself advocates a Christus Victor approach to Muslims which “stresses the sovereignty of God and the victorious aspects of God (familiar Islamic concepts), and broadens the scope of Christ’s work to include the devil and death, as well as sin.”<sup>324</sup> This approach appeals to the Asian worldview, which believes the universe to be full of unseen spirits.

Also desiring to be faithful and yet understandable to Muslims, Bell offers a different approach, one that sees the whole Bible as the gospel to be shared. He includes in his gospel presentation the creation purpose of God for humankind and the earth, the all-pervasive impact of sin, the all-inclusive scope of the cross and resurrection, and the

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<sup>322</sup> Oksnevad, 91.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., 90-91.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid.

hope of the glorious reign of God over all.<sup>325</sup> Bell's approach appeals to how Muslims view Christians as "people of the book," and he argues that "it is fitting for Muslims that the gospel should be told through story. But the story is more than just the Christ event; it is the entire flow of the Bible narrative."<sup>326</sup> Wardell and Gidoomal also value presenting the gospel in ways understandable to Hindus. They emphasize teaching union with Christ, Christ the guru, Christ the healer, Christ the liberator, Christ versus rituals, and Christ the ideal man<sup>327</sup> as ways to make the gospel understandable to Hindus in light of their various religious and cultural beliefs and desires.

### **A Corporate Gospel Witness**

The literature on evangelistic approaches to South Asian religion varies on the need for a corporate witness to the gospel. The views can be categorized by the relative importance placed on the witness of the church. The least corporate approach to evangelism found in the literature advocated individual friendship evangelism. Miller describes the friendship evangelism view by providing the steps: become acquainted with Muslims and Islam, love the people of Islam, pray, and finally teach inquirers the Bible.<sup>328</sup> The new believer would enter the church only after conversion because, according to Miller, "It is especially important that converts from Islam, cut off as they probably will be from their families and their Islamic community, be received as beloved

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<sup>325</sup> Bell, 169-170.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>327</sup> Gidoomal and Wardell, *Chapatis for Tea : Reaching Your Hindu Neighbour : A Practical Guide*, 165-168.

<sup>328</sup> Miller, 131-140.

members of a Christian church.”<sup>329</sup> For Miller, the church does not play a purpose in evangelism but only for discipleship after conversion, because witness was to be done by individuals in the context of friendship.

Wardell and Gidoomal present a similar evangelistic approach to Hindus in Britain by arguing that the best evangelistic approach would be through love of Hindus, respect of Hindus, prayer, individual witnessing, and dependence on the Holy Spirit.<sup>330</sup> But they go further than Miller by actually warning against inviting a Hindu to church: “You must be very careful how you do this [inviting a Hindu to church] - never invite her as an easy way out of talking to her personally about your Christian faith. You should first establish a real friendship in which she feels she can trust you before you issue such an invitation.”<sup>331</sup> Those who hold this view place the priority of evangelism on the individual above and before that of the church.

Other authors allow for a corporate witness to accompany friendship evangelism, but this corporate witness is distinct from that of a church. For example, Samuel Naaman, president of the South Asian Friendship Center in Chicago and professor at Moody Bible Institute, argues for the role of a friendship center as an evangelistic approach to reaching South Asians in Chicago. Through these centers, a community of believers would witness through literature distribution, practical service like ESL, youth events, and friendship

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<sup>329</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>330</sup> Gidoomal and Wardell, *Chapatis for Tea : Reaching Your Hindu Neighbour : A Practical Guide*, 12-16.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., 121-122.

evangelism.<sup>332</sup> Another approach advocated by Milton Clark, a missionary with World Relief working amongst international refugees in Chicago, is to reach out to new immigrants to North America through a refugee ministry, consisting of programs for children, activities for the elders, jobs and business development, ESL, and citizenship assistance.<sup>333</sup> These ministries would be staffed by volunteers and short-term teams from local churches. Bruce McDowell, missions pastor at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia and the director of International Students Christian Fellowship, and Anees Zaka, founder of Church Without Walls and president of the Biblical Institute for Islamic Studies, offers another corporate approach: "Meetings for better understanding...provide an opportunity for the Muslim and Christian communities to share their spiritual beliefs in an effort to understand one another better."<sup>334</sup> These approaches differ from individual friendship evangelism because they include elements of corporate witness.

Finally, only a few authors advocate the final evangelistic approach to South Asian Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs, which views the church playing a central role in the witness to these unreached peoples. Daniel Sinclair, a field director for a major missions agency with over twenty years of experience church-planting amongst Muslims, emphasizes the priority of church-planting in evangelism:

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<sup>332</sup> Samuel Naaman, "Friendship Centers," in *The Gospel for Islam : Reaching Muslims in North America*, ed. Roy Oksnevad and Dotsey Welliver (Wheaton, IL: Evangelism and Missions Information Service, 2001), 125.

<sup>333</sup> Milton Clark, "Refugees," in *The Gospel for Islam : Reaching Muslims in North America*, ed. Roy Oksnevad and Dotsey Welliver (Wheaton, IL: Evangelism and Missions Information Service, 2001), 119-124.

<sup>334</sup> Bruce A. McDowell and Anees Zaka, *Muslims and Christians at the Table : Promoting Biblical Understanding among North American Muslims* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Pub., 1999), 217.

This chapter presupposes that the workers are committed to church planting among their unreached people group, as opposed to a variety of other field pursuits. I wholeheartedly agree with Trent and Vivian Rowland: “For the least evangelized peoples to be reached, the birth and growth of an indigenous self-propagating church needs to be the central goal and every ministry should be evaluated in light of its contribution towards this goal. People who do not have church planting as their stated goal probably will not do it.”<sup>335</sup>

For Daniel Sinclair, the goal of evangelism must be to “leave behind believers in community.”<sup>336</sup> But while Sinclair sees the priority of church-planting work with a church as its goal, he does not emphasize the witness of the church as a means towards that goal. Roland Allen, Anglican pastor and missionary to China, however does see the church as a means to the goal, since believers in community exist for witness, “Paul’s theory of evangelizing a province was not to preach in every place in it himself, but to establish centres of Christian life in two or three important places from which the knowledge might spread into the country round... [H]e intended his congregations to become at once a centre of light.”<sup>337</sup> These churches, according to Allen, teach and demonstrate the doctrine of charity and the doctrine of salvation.<sup>338</sup>

The doctrine of charity was taught, according to Allen, when “the early Church became renowned amongst the heathen for its organized charity, its support of widows and orphans, its tender care for the sick, the infirm and disabled, its gentle consideration

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<sup>335</sup> Daniel Sinclair, *A Vision of the Possible : Pioneer Church Planting in Teams* (Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media, 2005), 15.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>337</sup> Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods; St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids,: Eerdmans, 1962), 12.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 45.

for slaves, its constant help afforded to prisoners and those afflicted.”<sup>339</sup> And Allen also explained that the doctrine of salvation was also taught, standing apart in the world since it was the church which called in the sick and sinful: “In the world to which the apostles preached their new message, religion had not been the solace of the weary, the medicine of the sick, the strength of the sin-laden, the enlightenment of the ignorant: it was the privilege of the healthy and instructed.”<sup>340</sup>

### **Summary of the Evangelistic Approaches to South Asian Religions**

The literature agrees on the need for individuals to witness through friendship evangelism to their Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh friends. Some authors encourage a corporate witness through mercy and justice projects such as friendship centers and ministry to refugees. However, very little has been written on the place and priority of the church as central to reaching South Asians.

#### *Summary of Literature Review*

This literature review has addressed these three primary concerns which missionaries and pastors must be aware of in reaching British Asians: the role of the church in God’s missionary agenda, how the gospel is to be contextualized, and how evangelism to Muslim, Hindu, and Sikhs is to be done. While much has been written on these three areas, it is clear that little if any attention has been given to the need for contextual church-planting as a vital instrument in witness to British Asians. Therefore, in light of this deficiency, a need exists to explore how converted British Asian Christians evaluate the role of the local church in its witness to the British Asian community.

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<sup>339</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Project Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to explore how converted British Asian Christians evaluate the role of the local church in its witness to the British Asian community. The researcher identified three main areas that are central to this concern: What is the witness of the church? How do churches in the United Kingdom witness to the British Asian community? How do converts as cultural insiders evaluate the witness of the church? To that end, the following research questions guided the qualitative research:

1. Which aspects of the local church's witness show appropriate cultural sensitivity towards the British Asian community, such that it is beneficial towards conversion?
2. What aspects of the local church's witness show inappropriate cultural sensitivity towards the British Asian community, such that it is harmful towards conversion?
3. Which aspects of the local church's witness show appropriate counter-cultural engagement with the British Asian community, that it is beneficial towards conversion?
4. Which aspects of the local church's witness show inappropriate counter-cultural engagement in relation to the British Asian community, such that it is harmful towards conversion?



### *Design of the Study*

Because the purpose of this study was to explore how converted British Asian Christians evaluate the role of the local church in its witness to the British Asian community, a qualitative study was used in order to gain understanding of these concerns. Sharan B. Merriam, professor at the University of Georgia and author of *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, describes how qualitative research is “interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world.”<sup>341</sup> Merriam identified five characteristics of qualitative research, “the goal of eliciting understanding and meaning, the researcher as primary instrument of data collection and analysis, the use of fieldwork, an inductive orientation to analysis, and findings that are richly descriptive.”<sup>342</sup> The qualitative design, with semi-structured interviews as the primary source of data gathering, best allowed for analysis on how converted British Asian Christians evaluate the role of the local church in its witness to the British Asian community.

### *Participant Sample Selection*

For this study, the researcher collected data through interviewing a sample group of chosen participants. These participants were selected for the interview according to the principles of purposeful sampling, in which participants are intentionally chosen according to specific criteria determined by the researcher. According to Merriam,

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<sup>341</sup> Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 6.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

“Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned.”<sup>343</sup>

Seven participants were selected to be interviewed using the following criteria. First, each participant had to be a converted believer from the South Asian religions. Second, the participant had to be a believer of South Asian ethnicity. Third, all participants were believers who were baptized at least five years prior to the interview. Fourth, each interview subject had to participate actively as a church member involved in evangelistic witness. Fifth, the participants must be believers who attend a church with a cultural outsider involved in its leadership

These criteria could yield the best data pertinent to this study because it was important to have all participants be converts from South Asian religions. Converts would be able to provide rich, descriptive data of how influential the witness of a local church was in their conversion. It was also important to have all participants be of South Asian ethnicity. As cultural insiders, they would be able to provide a cultural evaluation of the witness of the church. In addition, it was important to have only baptized believers who had been baptized least five years prior to the study. Baptized converts have publically committed themselves to Christ and his church, and requiring five years of faith greatly increased the probability of Christian maturity and evangelistic expertise. Fourth, it was important to have participants who are active church members involved in on-going evangelistic witness to the South Asian community. These participants would be able to provide rich, descriptive data on how influential the witness

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<sup>343</sup> Ibid., 61.

of their own church and ministry was in reaching the British Asian community. Finally, all participants were selected from churches which have cross-cultural missionaries who are cultural outsiders involved in the leadership of the church. As cultural insiders, these participants could speak to the role cultural outsiders play in the witness to the British Asian community.

Within these parameters, diversity amongst participants was maximized in order to acquire the richest data. Participants of both sexes were selected to ensure equal representation. The place of participant birth was not taken into consideration, but all candidates lived within a one hour drive of London, United Kingdom at the time of the interviews. The place of conversion for participants was not taken into consideration, allowing for various types of church witness especially from other countries to be represented. Church denominational background was not taken into consideration, in order to allow for various denominational views on church to be represented.

Participants were identified in the researcher's current church and through his network of contacts. The researcher invited them all to participate via a personal phone call. All expressed interest and gave written, informed consent to participate and completed the demographic questionnaire before the interview. The questionnaire screened the participants for the selection criteria listed above.

### *Data Collection*

The researcher gathered data using the demographic questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with the seven participants. This approach allowed the researcher to interact freely with the participant, using protocol questions to gather comprehensive and descriptive data. Because the interviews were semi-structured, the researcher probed

beyond the protocol in order to discover richer perspectives of the participants. A pilot test of the interview protocol was performed to evaluate the questions for clarity and usefulness in eliciting relevant data. The researcher then refined the protocol questions as a result of the pilot test so that they would be more likely to increase the yield of useful data. The final interview protocol contained the following questions:

1. Share with me your testimony on how you became a Christian.
2. Tell me about your experiences with Christians before you became one.
3. Tell me what impressed you about Christians before you became one.
4. Describe your thoughts when you heard the gospel for the first time.
5. Describe the hesitations you had in becoming a Christian.
6. Tell me what barriers you faced in becoming a Christian.
7. Describe your interactions with the church community before you became a Christian.
8. Describe how the church community effectively explained and demonstrated the love of Christ to you.
9. Describe how the church was ineffective in explaining and demonstrating the love of Christ to you.
10. Describe aspects of the church that seemed foreign to you when you first visited a Sunday worship service.
11. Tell me how you go about sharing your faith to your unbelieving family and friends.
12. What do you emphasize in evangelism?

13. What role, if any, do you see your church playing in the witness to your unbelieving family and friends?
14. How would you advise church leaders to improve their outreach to the South Asian community?
15. Under what circumstances would you invite your unbelieving friends and family to your church?
16. What parts of a church service do you believe an unbelieving South Asian will have difficulty understanding when attending for the first time?
17. What have you heard South Asian unbelievers say about their experience, when they attended a Christian church for the first time?

Prior to each interview, participants received a letter explaining the purpose of the research, a demographic questionnaire concerning the proposed selection criteria, two consent forms, and the protocol questions to be asked during the interview. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was conducted in English. The interviews were conducted between December 2013 and January 2014. The interviews were recorded digitally and later transcribed for analysis. Also, after each interview, field notes with descriptive and reflective observations were written.

### *Data Analysis*

As soon as possible, and always within one week, the researcher personally transcribed each interview. A computer software program played the digital recording while the researcher typed each transcript. The transcript was double checked against the original recording to ensure accuracy. The researcher personally transcribed the interviews so as to be more familiar with the data and to identify recurring patterns within

it more readily. The data that was analyzed consisted of the interview transcripts, the demographic questionnaires, and the researcher's interview notes.

This study utilized the constant comparison method of routinely analyzing the data throughout the interview process. This method provided for the ongoing revision, clarification, and evaluation of the resultant data categories. Merriam explained the operation of the constant comparison method:

The basic strategy of the method is to do just what its name implies - constantly compare. The researcher begins with a particular incident from an interview, field notes, or document and compares it with another incident in the same set of data or in another set. These comparisons lead to tentative categories that are then compared to each other and to other instances. Comparisons are constantly made within and between levels of conceptualization until a theory can be formulated.<sup>344</sup>

By identifying patterns in the data, a researcher using this method can develop categories and draw conclusions pertinent to the research questions being explored.

When all the interviews, demographic questionnaires, and observation notes were fully transcribed into computer files, the researcher printed and analyzed them carefully. The analysis focused on discovering and identifying common themes and patterns across the variation of participants relating to the witness of the church to the British Asian community. In addition, differences between the participants were noted and evaluated. By examining the themes that emerged from the data, the researcher drew conclusions on what can be considered appropriate witness by the church to the British Asian community.

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<sup>344</sup> Ibid., 159.

### *Researcher Position*

In qualitative studies, “Since the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection, data have been filtered through his or her particular theoretical position and biases.”<sup>345</sup> Researchers need to be aware and clarify their “assumptions, worldview, and theoretical orientation at the outset of the study.”<sup>346</sup> The relation of the researcher to this study is that of insider-outsider. As an outsider, the researcher is not ethnically South Asian and is not a convert from Islam, Hinduism, or Sikhism. However, the researcher has more than twenty years of experience in mission work with people from these religions and is familiar with the challenges involved in conversion. Further, the researcher is currently a pastor at a church located in a South Asian immigrant community of London. The church consists of many converts from Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism, and it seeks to witness to its surrounding community.

Given this role, the researcher acknowledges bias toward the importance of the church in witnessing to South Asians, but does not believe this bias to be a problem in the research. Rather, if handled appropriately, this experience may be an asset. By being involved directly in church outreach to British Asians and having an understanding of the issues and concerns involved, the researcher is better positioned and equipped to gather rich, descriptive data for analysis.

### *Study Limitations*

As stated in the previous section, this study was limited to only seven South Asian converts from Sikhism, Hinduism, or Islam who are living within the greater London,

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<sup>345</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid., 205.

United Kingdom metropolitan area. The reason for this limitation was due to the economic and logistical resources of the researcher. This study did not attempt to be an exhaustive review of all literature and converts from these religions. Thus, the conclusions of this study do not necessarily have universal application to every situation. The researcher acknowledges important differences between his situation in the Western, global city of London and that of cross-cultural and indigenous Christians who are called to witness in non-Western, Islamic, Hindu or Sikh cultures. Not least among these differences is the cultural pressure on Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs to adopt many practices and values of Western urban culture. As mentioned above, any such household with children feels such pressure keenly as the ways of school are quite different from those of home. Therefore, though some of the study's findings may be generalized for the witness of the church operating in other parts of the world with the same religions, all of the findings of this study will be tested by the particularities of each different cultural context. As with all qualitative studies, the readers bear the responsibility to determine what can be appropriately applied to their context.<sup>347</sup> Nevertheless, the church, from its beginning within, and then separation from the synagogue, has represented the transcultural claim of Jesus' lordship over every people and place. His lordship, then, is both at home in and also calls into question every culture.

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 179.



## **Chapter Four**

### **Findings**

As stated in chapter one, the purpose of this study was to explore how converted British Asian Christians evaluate the role of the local church in its witness to the British Asian community. To that end, this chapter utilizes the findings of the seven interviews and reports on common themes and relevant insights pertaining to the research questions for this study. The researcher used qualitative research and interviewed seven converted British Asian Christian whose experience was considered likely to provide helpful insight into this topic. The interviews lasted from forty-five to seventy-five minutes and were conducted in a face-to-face format with an audio recording made of each interview. The researcher made written transcripts, then studied them to identify themes and patterns in relationship to the research questions. This chapter presents the results of these interviews by providing a description of the research participants, by analyzing their responses in relationship to the research questions, and by presenting a summary of the findings.

#### *Introduction to Participants*

Seven converted British Asian Christians were selected to participate in this study. These participants were united in their South Asian ethnicity, being a baptized believer for at least five years, being currently involved in evangelistic witness, and worshipping at a church whose leadership includes cultural outsiders. Parents who were not Christians reared all of the participants. One participant's mother is white British and was reared as a Christian, but she converted to Islam upon marrying the participant's

father. This participant was subsequently reared in an Islamic home and grew up Muslim. Only one participant became a Christian as a result of the conversion of his parents. The other six participants became Christians without the support of their family. In fact, two of the participants faced intense persecution and were shunned by their families upon conversion. The average length of time the participants had been baptized believers was nineteen years, with the range being nine to thirty-five years.

Within these parameters that defined the research sample, diversity among the participants was maximized for the acquisition of richest data. Four of the participants were male, and three were female. The religious background varied among the participants with two coming from a Hindu background, three coming from a Sikh background, and two coming from an Islamic background. The denominational backgrounds in which the participants came to faith varied from Assemblies of God, Baptist, Free Church, Presbyterian, and United Reformed Church. The current church denomination of the participants varied between Presbyterian and independent evangelical. The average length of time the participant had been involved at their current church was nearly eight years, with a range from three years to fifteen years.

All names and identifiable information of participants have been changed to protect their identity and in order to encourage open and honest responses from those interviewed. The names of the participants have been altered, and some of the details that would allow them to be identified has been omitted. In addition, the audio recordings and transcripts will be destroyed upon completion of this study. These descriptions below provide basic background information about each participant that is deemed pertinent to the study.

### **Participant One: Raj**

Of all the participants, Raj has been a baptized believer the longest at thirty-five years. He was born into a Muslim family in London, United Kingdom. His father is a Pakistani Muslim, and his mother is a white British lady who converted for their marriage. Raj was converted and baptized in Canada during his university years and upon his conversion, his father shunned him and had him leave the house. In 2010, Raj experienced a nearly fatal accident, and his father began to speak to him again. Raj currently serves the Methodist church in the London area as a regional evangelist, but on Sunday evenings, he attends a Presbyterian church that has many Asian believers.

### **Participant Two: Sonia**

Sonia was born in Pakistan but grew up in the United Kingdom after her family immigrated. She was baptized in 1993, and, like Raj, her Islamic family intensely persecuted her upon her conversion. Sonia's husband threatened to kill her, and her daughter ran away. Sonia's parents shunned her and forbid her and her children to live in their house any longer. Ultimately, her husband divorced her and now has little contact with her. Sonia's biological family relationships have been restored after ten years, having been precipitated by her hospitalization due to cancer. Until recently, she served in her church as a community worker and evangelist, running programs out of her church's community centre.

### **Participant Three: Mick**

Mick was born in India to a Sikh family but grew up in Southall, United Kingdom after his family immigrated. Southall is a predominately Asian community of London, but Mick was exposed to Christianity during his teenage years through the witness of a

local church youth group. Mick's uncle stopped him from attending this group out of fear that he might convert. Mick was baptized as an adult in 2001 and currently worships at a Presbyterian church near where he grew up. He regularly shares his faith in his workplace and invites unbelieving friends and family to his Presbyterian church.

#### **Participant Four: Solomon**

Solomon was born in Malaysia to a Sikh family. His entire family was baptized together in 1995 after his father first converted to Christianity. Leaders in the Sikh community visited his family after their conversion to persuade them to return to Sikhism. Solomon came to London to study finance, but he sensed a call into pastoral ministry. He has a desire to share the gospel with Asians and serves as an evangelist and pastoral assistant in a Presbyterian church in London. He also manages a charity shop that seeks to witness to the Asian community.

#### **Participant Five: Stephen**

Stephen was born in Kenya into a Hindu family and grew up not knowing any Christians from an Asian background. So he was surprised to meet a convert from Hinduism and after a period of time, believed and was baptized in 1984. His father did like Stephen's decision to convert to Christianity, especially that Stephen found a new family in the church. Stephen later immigrated to the United Kingdom and currently works for a large London city based mission as a church based evangelist.

#### **Participant Six: Tabitha**

Tabitha was born in India as a high caste Hindu and came to London for employment. While in the United Kingdom, she contracted a nearly fatal illness and was confined to a solitary room in the hospital. During this hospital stay, she met believers

who witnessed to her. Tabitha was baptized in 2005 and currently works as an evangelist for a Presbyterian church located in an Asian community of London.

### **Participant Seven: Bal**

Bal was born in India but grew up in the United Kingdom after her Sikh family immigrated. In 2003, her adult son was having trouble and a distraught Bal contacted her friend who had become a believer from a Sikh background. Bal's friend encouraged her to find help from Jesus and gave her a Bible. Bal read it for two weeks and could not put it down. She was baptized in 2005 and currently serves as a deaconess in her Presbyterian church.

#### *Appropriate, Culturally Sensitive Witness*

The first research question explored in this study asked: which aspect of the local church's witness shows appropriate cultural sensitivity towards the British Asian community, such that it is beneficial towards conversion? All of the participants agreed that cultural sensitivity plays an important role in the witness to unbelieving British Asian. Because conversion to Christianity in and of itself is so radically countercultural, cultural sensitivity is helpful in making Jesus and his church accessible for and understandable to Asians.

### **The Accessibility of Christianity for Asians**

For the church to be culturally sensitive in its witness to Asians, it needs to cultivate an awareness of how Asian culture perceives it and the questions Asian culture asks of it. Most of the participants explained that they had little exposure to Christians and the church growing up because Asians commonly believe that they could not or should not become Christian. Solomon, growing up in a Sikh family in Malaysia, did not

believe that Asians could be Christian because “everyone had their own religion. We were Punjabis so we had Sikhism. The Tamils had Hinduism. The Chinese had Buddhism.” Bal, who grew up in a Sikh family in the United Kingdom, agreed, “I never thought Asians could be Christian.” Tabitha, as a Hindu, also faced this barrier between here and the possibility of her becoming a believer, but Tabitha’s barrier related to caste instead of ethnicity, “Christianity is a low caste religion. And I was born in a high caste family.” These participants were raised with the cultural belief that Asians could not become Christians because each ethnic or caste group had their own belief system and religion, and the group to which they belonged was not Christian.

Raj, on the other hand, explained that his family taught him that he should not become Christian. Growing up in the United Kingdom in a Muslim family, Raj remembered his father limiting his exposure to Christian teaching and practice, “He didn’t want us having anything to do, he wanted no connection: Christmas presents, Christmas tree, decorations. There was this fear of us getting involved. In hindsight, I think I can understand now, but back then I couldn’t. I think it goes to honor and shame.” Raj explained that his father feared his conversion because professing Christianity would bring shame on his father, “My dad was rejected by his family because they blamed him for my conversion. Because they said, in their opinion, that he failed to teach me Quran and if he would have taught me Quran properly, I would have never converted. He now has to bare the shame of it.”

In light of these barriers to Christianity, the participants agreed that the church can most appropriately respond by making their witness to Jesus accessible for Asians. Sonia explained that for the church to be culturally sensitive to Asians in their witness, it needs

to pursue Asians intentionally rather than waiting for Asians to come to it, “But I think with the Hindus and Muslim people and people of different faiths, it is very difficult, so I would meet them one to one. So, I would go to where they are.” Asians, because of their culture, will not readily seek out Christians to learn about Jesus. Instead, Christians, by being sensitive to and aware of the cultural reasons inhibiting Asians from coming to church, need to adapt and focus their ministry to seek out Asians.

Tabitha experienced this intentionality in witness prior to her conversion, explaining how an evangelist came to visit her regularly in the hospital and also how a nurse “came to visit to visit me to share the gospel more than to give medicine.” Bal prioritizes and practices intentionality in her witness to other Asians. She explains, “I try to talk to people one to one or talk to people at bus stops. I invite strangers to church. I share my testimony.” Like Bal, Mick also emphasized the need to bring the gospel to Asians rather than waiting for them to approach Christians. But he went further by applying it to the corporate witness, suggesting that the church should be intentional about having “open days” to which the Asian neighbors are invited to a church event, “As long as you let the community know you are there, I think people will come.”

In addition to making the church’s witness accessible to Asians through intentionality, most participants explained that a culturally sensitive witness to Jesus must also address the possibility of conversion by meeting other converts or believers of their same ethnicity. Stephen explained that he was not interested in Christianity until he first met an Asian convert, “It was at first a shock for me to see a Gujarati Indian taking the name of Jesus, being very open about Jesus, and expressing her faith in Jesus. That caused in me quite a curiosity.” And it was in that curiosity that he “started debating and

questioning” his own faith and trying to understand Jesus. Bal shared that before she stepped into the church for the first time, she “prayed that there would be other Asians there. And God answered that prayer.” Solomon explained that other converts can serve as guides to understanding Christianity, “They help with the changes.”

Mick provided a social reason for why it was important to meet other Asians, “Then you didn’t feel alone. Although I have never seen color as a barrier, it is nice to see your own kind at times.” Solomon agreed that social concerns are important and need to be addressed in witnessing to Asians, explaining “One of the things that convinced my dad when he was baptized was that he saw the other Sikh believers which meant his kids could intermarry with them.”

Meeting someone who has converted introduces the possibility of Asian conversion, and it also addresses the social concerns that arise from being the only convert. Culturally sensitive witness, according to these participants, must be aware of the questions, barriers, and concerns presented by Asian culture. Then Christians must be willing to address these issues in appropriate ways.

### **The Understandability of Christianity to Asians**

In addition to making Christianity accessible to Asians, the participants also agreed on the importance of making it understandable to the culture. Intelligibility was important, for the participants, in the church’s witness through its word, lifestyle, and corporate worship and life.

### **Culturally Sensitive Verbal Witness**

A culturally sensitive verbal witness that British Asian unbelievers understand can be achieved in these three ways: speaking the language, explaining the gospel with



appropriate cultural illustrations, and patience. First, most participants mentioned the importance of using Asian languages in verbal witness. Sonia commented that the use of Asian languages helps with comprehension, “It helps in a church where some of the songs you can understand because they are in Urdu and Punjabi, that really helps because you can understand the words a little bit better.” Using an appropriate language helps for understandability, but it also demonstrates how the gospel is for all people. Bal felt accepted in a church that spoke her ethnic language, “I think it is important to use Hindi to help the non-English speakers. That attracted me to the church as well, even though I am fluent in English. Having worship in other languages helps people feel included and a part of things. Heaven is going to be diverse.” Solomon agreed, “It is good because there are Asians who speak English, and for the sake of those who do not, we are trying to bring the idea that God is for the Asians. He is open to all.”

Raj also thought that using common words helped in verbal witness, “And when I end my prayers, I say ‘Ameen’ the same way that they do. I try to do things with a lot more commonality.” The use of Asian languages in witnessing to British Asians helps with comprehension, but for those who are fluent in English, the use of Asian languages demonstrates the gospel’s universal call to people from all nations. Using different languages helps Asian unbelievers understand that the gospel addresses them too.

In addition to the importance of language, participants also commented that using appropriate cultural illustrations and expressions help unbelievers in their understanding of the gospel. Tabitha uses a cultural illustration in her witness to Hindus by contrasting the Hindu practice of purification with the cleansing offered in Christ, “The only way is through Jesus for salvation. Jesus died on the cross for our sins, he paid a penalty and

removes our guilt and shame. And my family goes miles and miles to wash their sins in the Ganges water and some temples and do some special poojas.” Raj also borrowed cultural expressions in his witness to Pakistani Muslims to aid in their comprehension, “I use some of the same words that he may use. I call God ‘Khuda.’” Using cultural expressions and illustrations, which both compare and contrast Christian beliefs with those from other religions, help unbelievers comprehend the gospel better.

Finally, most participants agreed that patience in witnessing to British Asians is important because it avoids pressure tactics and instead trusts God to work on his schedule for change. Sonia explained how her friend was patient with her before she became a believer, accepting her as she was, “She wanted me to trust her, but she accepted all of my negative doubts on who is this Jesus. There was a question in my mind, but she was very patient...her accepting me as I was, her own agenda was not rushing me at all to make a decision for Jesus.” The woman who witnessed to Sonia did not have a hurried agenda to bring her to conversion but instead allowed Sonia to control the discussion by addressing her doubts and concerns.

Stephen also urged patience by explaining that everyone is different and will come to faith and church on different timelines, “We are not trying to force it, we want to help them explore. We are not saying you must come, but rather you must see. It is part of the journey. If they are not ready, then we can say ‘fine it is not now.’ It is not never, it is just not now.” Patience in evangelism is important culturally because it respects the person and is sensitive to other cultures that are less familiar with the gospel.

In addition, patience expresses faith in God’s ability rather than that of the evangelist. Mick agreed and explained why pressure and coercive witness undermine

evangelism, “It just pushes you away...People have said God does everything in his own time and does everything with a purpose. If we push, they say ‘why isn’t God pushing?’ God is not pushing because it is under his time and he says ‘just wait.’”

Raj also wants to witness according to God’s leading, and he emphasized the importance of prayer in evangelism, “So I always begin with prayer for the person. I will do things on a human level and if God opens a door through prayer and doing something, then I will take that as a sign from God that he wants me to try and point this person to Jesus.” For Raj, evangelism is “quite personal,” and he takes a unique approach with each person. Nonetheless, he begins with prayer and looks for God to open doors for witness.

#### Culturally Sensitive Lifestyle Witness

In addition to sensitivity in verbal proclamation, the participants also shared how cultural sensitivity in believers’ lifestyles is important for unbelievers to understand the gospel. Several participants emphasized the importance, when witnessing to an Asian individual, of being aware of the broader family. Sonia explained the Asian cultural view of family and how it is important to be sensitive to it, “Asian culture is very good on family, we come as a family unit, not just one person but as a unit. If you get to know me, you also get to know my family. I think this would be a really good tool for the church to learn.” Witness should be directed to the individual, but also when possible to the broader family, so that they know that the church is “concerned for us too as a unit.” Raj agreed in explaining how his family operated,

We were very much community oriented. We functioned as a family in that regard. And deciding to do something outside that which is not part of that community is betrayal. For my father, he said ‘you are turning your back on who you are, you are turning your back on me as leader of this family, you are turning your back on your family, your community, your culture.

For this reason and out of respect for the family and in particular his father, Raj recommended that his friend seek the permission of Raj's father for him to attend a Christian event, "And to my surprise, he did phone my dad and my dad said I could go." Sonia also explained that she would want her family aware of her relationships with Christians, "If my family is Muslim, then I want the church to come to my house and get to know my family a bit, so that they understand that this is my church family that are concerned for me and my wellbeing." The examples of Raj and Sonia demonstrate the importance of respect for and sensitivity to the broader family when witnessing through one's lifestyle to unbelieving Asians.

Another example of cultural sensitive witness through one's lifestyle is hospitality. Sonia commented, "having them over to your house, that is a great way, I think, that you do evangelism." Bal agreed that witness to Asians through one's lifestyle should include hospitality in the home, "I try to be gentle, share my story, and invite them to events or to my house." Sonia explained further that hospitality should reflect Asian culture and values when possible,

Learn to cook Asian food, because Asian culture is very hospitable and we just love food and have fellowship. And when Jesus had fellowship, he had fellowship over food everywhere with his disciples. He even fed the 5000, and he didn't let them go away hungry. Food and fellowship is so important in their culture, so if you can do anything to bring that or invite them to your house, but be sensitive not to serve pork or to have alcohol around. I am not saying hide it, but I am not saying that at all, but just be sensitive.

Including hospitality, especially hospitality which incorporates Asian food and practice, is appropriate contextualization because hospitality bestows honor upon the unbeliever and strengthens the witnessing relationship. Tabitha agreed and explained how

cultural sensitivity strengthen her relationship with her church, “They celebrate our dressing and they celebrate our food....Yeah, they love the culture and enjoy it, the Asian culture. Dressing, food, language, they try to learn it. Especially, I respect this church for how they respect our culture.” Hospitality towards Asians welcomes them into the church, demonstrates that they could belong in the church, bestows honor upon them and their culture, and deepens the relationship leading to increased trust and vulnerability. Hospitality is an important part of lifestyle witness because it demonstrates the reconciling power of God to heal the nations and create a new humanity.

#### Culturally Sensitive Corporate Witness

The participants lastly encouraged churches to prioritize making the gospel understandable to unbelieving Asians through cultural sensitivity in its corporate witness at church events. Bal mentioned the importance of unbelievers seeing other Asians at church so that they would feel welcome and know that they could belong to this group, “I think an Asian unbeliever would feel welcome at a church which has other Asians. There are plenty of multicultural people to welcome them straight away.” Tabitha agreed, explaining that an unbelieving visitor to a church that respects Asian culture would “feel at home.”

It is important to help Asians feel welcomed at church, but other participants also emphasized that it is important to help them feel that they are part of the family. Mick described the church as needing to be a family to Asians, “There are one or two Asian cultural things which don’t impact on our Christian way of life and it makes everyone feel at home. It makes them feel a part of the family. The one thing we do in our church is the meal, and I think that is one of the best things.” Stephen agreed, explaining the social

needs of unbelievers, “We have seen that a lot of people have expressed that they are lonely and are struggling with relationships which can only be addressed at a communal level and need to be around each other. So for them, the offer can be two things: be welcoming at all times and let them explore the gospel at their own time when they are ready.” Sonia agreed especially for new believers,

And what really would have helped me would be a family to take me under their wings. You know the loneliness, I still remember that time when I thought I would be surrounded by Christian family, and I wasn’t. And I felt I didn’t have an identity in the church, and I didn’t have an identity in the Asian community. And I was so lost. Then I started to mature and grow my faith. So I was always determined to be a family to someone else who had lost everything. And I think the church could really learn from that, to be a family to the lost and the lonely and somebody who has given up a faith to follow Jesus and lost everything to include them in the social life of their own family and church.

Cultural sensitivity in the corporate setting that is welcoming and inclusive of unbelieving British Asians helps towards their conversion because it demonstrates the gospel message that people from every tribe, tongue, and nation can belong to God’s family.

Appropriate sensitivity to British Asian culture is important in the church’s witness because it will result in an accessible and understandable gospel message and church. By being culturally sensitive, the church will be aware of what the culture thinks of it and its beliefs, be aware of the needs within the culture, and then be able to address it in an appropriate and understandable way.

#### *Inappropriate, Culturally Insensitive Witness*

This study’s second research asked: which aspect of the local church’s witness shows inappropriate cultural sensitivity towards the British Asian community, such that it is harmful towards conversion? As mentioned above, all of the participants agreed that

cultural sensitivity plays an important role in the church's witness to unbelieving British Asians. Likewise, the participants all agreed that inappropriate cultural sensitivity can be harmful to the church's witness. Inappropriate cultural sensitivity occurs when cultural values and beliefs are emphasized over biblical values and beliefs. According to the participants of this research, cultural insensitivity can result in a lack of biblical faithfulness, an obscuration of the witness to Jesus, and the bearing of false witness about the believer's true identity.

### **Culturally Inappropriate Verbal Witness**

Inappropriate cultural sensitivity in verbal proclamation was a concern for several participants who found it to result in a denial of biblical truth. Raj does not want contextualization to Muslims that omits parts of the Bible with which Muslims would disagree, "I definitely do not want to compromise on the Bible. I think some of the things like removing the names 'Son of God' and 'Father' from the Bible would be compromising." Solomon agreed on the importance of affirming truth, explaining the importance of holding the Bible in tension with a love for others, "And I think the questions which you have to keep in balance is: do I love my neighbor and do I deny Christ?"

In recognizing that there are certain aspects of biblical belief to which people from other religions will object, Raj felt it was appropriate to wait for the right time to explain these beliefs, "I think that 'Father' and 'Jesus as Son of God' can come later on." But he was quick to clarify that he would not deny them if asked, "But I wouldn't say if a Muslim asked me 'Is Jesus the Son of God?' I would say, 'yes' to that question. I cannot say, 'no.' That would be complete betrayal." These participants limited how far they

would go in their contextualization before being dishonest about their beliefs, resulting in them denying and ultimately betraying Christ.

### **Culturally Inappropriate Lifestyle Witness**

In addition to verbal proclamation, inappropriate contextualization can occur in lifestyle witness when believers identify themselves as unbelievers and adopts their indigenous religious practices. Sonia expressed concern when believers knowingly mislead an unbeliever as to who they really are by clouding their true identity in Christ, “But that is misleading. Relationships are built on trust, so if you mislead them from the beginning, they will not want to know Jesus because they will use your example as a Christian.” Solomon agreed that when Christians try to be someone they are not, this behavior can come across as propaganda,

When a particular Asian guy joins the church, he is not expecting you to go out of your way to make him feel well in the way he should be welcomed in his temple in his cultural way. Because if you over do it, we are going to sound a bit cheap and that we are trying to convert them. It is propaganda, if you over do it. If all the American people start dressing up like Asians with no Asians there, it is propaganda. The hippies did it, that is fine because it was Hinduism with the hippies singing Hindi songs. That is fine.

A false and misleading witness, particularly about identity in Christ, harms evangelism rather than helps it because the lies damage trust in the relationship. In addition, these lies also obscures the witness to Jesus, Sonia explains, “You see for me and for many other Muslim converts, when we come to faith, we want to be in love with Jesus and we want to know more about him....Don’t mislead. Be truthful and be honest. Give them what they want. That is Jesus.” Sonia, of all the participants, strongly expressed the need to emphasize Jesus above and beyond contextual techniques and cultural commonality as chief importance in witnessing to British Asians. When believers are no longer authentic



to who they are in Christ, the participants found their lifestyle witness to be greatly hindered. The participants identified authenticity and consistency by living in Christ as appropriate cultural contextualization.

### **Culturally Inappropriate Corporate Witness**

Finally, inappropriate contextualization can occur in the corporate witness of the church when cultural practices are emphasized over biblical faithfulness. Mick expressed a limit to contextualization marked by theology, “You need to bring some of the stuff that Asians do in their place of worship into the Christian church, but you can’t change the way we worship. That has got to stay the same.” For Mick, faithful worship is more important than contextualization and needs to be protected. Mick also felt that contextualization, when done, should be sensible and not done for its own sake, “Maybe something like taking your shoes off [would be acceptable contextualization], but on a cold hard floor, you wouldn’t want to do that.”

Sonia agreed with Mick on the need to guard biblical faithfulness, but she went further by refusing to see the church become like a mandir or mosque, “I am a believer and I am going to come to church. If I see you taking your shoes off, I won’t come in there because that is not church to me, that is being in the mosque. And I have come away from the mosque. I don’t want another mosque in the church.” Sonia was concerned that by blurring the lines between the look and feel of a church and mosque, the witness to Jesus would be obscured,

I think we get so caught up in this thing that we have to be Muslim friendly. Be Jesus friendly. Don’t be Hindu friendly. Don’t be Muslim friendly or Muslim convert friendly. Be Jesus friendly. Shake their hand, get to know their name, get to know them and say, “is there anything we can pray for you” or “is there anything else we can do or explain something else to you, let us know.” That is all they want. And if I came

and if I saw men sitting on one side and women on the other [as in a mosque], I would walk out of that church and never come back, because you are giving me the same that I have been brought up with.

For Sonia, inappropriate contextualization, which she thought came from a desire to please unbelievers, harms the church's witness, "Don't be a hindrance and do things that you think will please them. You have to do things which will please God. You being transparent will help a Muslim grow."

Solomon expressed another limit to appropriate contextualization in a corporate church setting: the unnecessary division of a church due to ethnicity or religious background. He disagreed with the idea that a Muslim focused church needs to be set up for Muslims and a Sikh focused church for Sikhs,

And when you open a church, and you see a Sikh man and a Muslim man both worshipping Christ, and they could meet at a place where they both are foreign and equal, that is a great witness. That is already the witness, that the Sikh is caring for the Muslim. Of course you have them becoming friends, but to have the Lord between them, that is the witness. So rather than having a church for Sikhs and a church for Muslims, it doesn't go because they have the same linguistic group. That is the witness, that the nations are becoming one before the world.

Solomon believes that, because of the common language and culture shared by Pakistani Muslims, Indian Muslims, and Sikhs, dividing a church along religious backgrounds inappropriately inhibits the church's witness to the reconciliation the gospel offers. British Asians share common British and Asian culture and languages; therefore, the church can appropriately witness to those from different religious backgrounds.

Inappropriate sensitivity to British Asian culture can be harmful to the church's witness to Christ when it obscures or denies Jesus, according to these participants. All participants strongly expressed the importance of authenticity in who believers are in Christ and how they are to live. Also, Christians must prioritize biblical faithfulness and

not compromise in their witness. The participants found contextualization that crossed these limits to be harmful and inappropriate.

### *Appropriate Counter-Cultural Engagement in Witness*

The third research question explored in this study asked: which aspect of the local church's witness shows appropriate counter-cultural engagement with the British Asian community, that it is beneficial towards conversion? All of the participants agreed that cultural sensitivity plays an important role in witness to unbelieving British Asians. But the participants expressed even more strongly the importance of the counter-cultural witness in reaching British Asians. The participants emphasized the importance of contrasting Jesus and his followers' lifestyle to the teaching and lifestyle of other religions more than that of finding commonality with them.

### **Counter-Cultural Verbal Witness**

The participants unanimously agreed upon the need for a bold, verbal witness to Jesus. Bal, in wanting to witness to her family about her new faith in Christ, experienced fear prior to doing so. However, she found comfort in Christ, "Jesus has given his life for us on the cross, and I'm sitting here worried about telling my brother. I was convicted, ashamed, and embarrassed that I'm scared to tell my brother the truth. That just gave me the courage. Whatever I do, I will tell and not hide it." Bal's culture does not accept Christian conversion, so, understandably, she feared rejection and desired to conform through silence. Bal's conviction, to be bold in the face of cultural persecution, stands as an important aspect of appropriate cross-cultural witness, one which each of the participants shared in their interview.

For the all of the participants, a bold witness included telling their families that they now believe in and follow Jesus. In addition to boldness, the participants also unanimously agreed that the Bible required verbal witness from them. All of the participants shared how their conversion included reading scripture. For example, Sonia shared how the lady who visited her read scripture and prayed, “All I wanted to know was about Jesus, which she did. So she read the Bible to me, read scriptures, and she would pray with me.” Bal also shared of the importance for her of reading the Bible, “That week my friend sent me a Bible. I started reading it, and I couldn’t put it down. In two weeks, my friend and I used to read the Bible together over the phone...Every day I quickly would do my housework so that I could then spend time reading the Bible.”

The participants also agreed that the bold, verbal witness must emphasize Jesus and the exclusivity of his person and work. Sonia, in explaining her approach to evangelism, said, “I give them Jesus. Everything, I don’t hold back. So this is what Jesus did, this is how he died, this is how he rose again, and he wants to give you eternal life. He wants to give you the peace that you yearn for...So I build that foundation straight away with Jesus.” Solomon explained that an emphasis on Jesus’ exclusivity among the world religions was important, “I emphasize the forgiveness that Christ offers and the challenges that Christ made and the distinctive claims that he makes that other religions cannot make, such as the way and the truth and the life, the forgiveness of sins, that he makes a way to the afterlife, that he is the only one who could make a way to the Father, those kinds of things.” According to the participants in this research, verbal witness of Christ to unbelieving British Asians must be bold in the face of persecution, biblically faithful, and strong on the uniqueness and exclusivity of Christ.

### **Counter-Cultural Lifestyle Witness**

A second aspect of counter-cultural witness that the participants strongly support was that of a visible witness through deeds of love and living consistent to the gospel. Raj explained these two counter-cultural traits, “He won me over by two things: by his love which I have never seen before, and his consistency: he practiced what he preached. He was the genuine article.” Tabitha commented that a physical deed displaying love was important for her in coming to faith, “The day that the lady came, she gave me a hug. A stranger...and I felt the love that made me amazed. How come one person who looks very ugly, how can she touch me that way even with my illness which could go to others. I was on an isolated ward, and no one could come without a mask. But this lady she gave me a hug and she comforted me.” Tabitha explained that the lady’s actions were consistent with her words. When Tabitha asked her to explain why she would hug, she answered, “God loves.”

Bal agreed on the importance of loving deeds in witnessing to others, because they embody who Jesus is and what he has done. Bal described how she expresses her new faith in counter-cultural ways and how this has made her a better family member, “Before I became a Christian, I might have said, ‘Oh, I’m tired’ if my sister-in-law asks for help, trying to make excuses. Now I say, ‘yes’ automatically and often say, ‘I’ll do it, you sit and have a rest.’ Automatic serving and loving like Jesus.”

In addition to the counter-cultural acts of love, participants also thought that living consistently with their beliefs was integral to witnessing to British Asians. Stephen was impressed by how faith in Jesus was made manifest in all circumstances of life, “It was clearly demonstrated. A couple of things were evident. One of them was the genuine

love for God and for Jesus throughout whatever happened and expressing it continually in prayer and need or expressing thanks for answers and help...And the second was joy in friendships amongst the struggles.” Raj also found living consistent to the gospel helpful when he converted,

Love and consistency really stood out to me when I compare it to the way we were as a Muslim family...Whereas with Jerry and his wife in Canada, their whole life revolved around Jesus. Their home revolved around their faith, relationships, what they did on Sunday, what they did during the week, he used to go to meetings, he would talk about Jesus, he just lived for Jesus. That part of it struck me quite contrastive.

All the participants expressed the importance of faith’s counter-cultural, visible display in everyday living because it authenticates that the gospel claims are true and witnesses to Jesus’ work to put all things right.

### **Counter-Cultural Corporate Witness**

The final aspect that the participants emphasized with counter-cultural witness was prioritizing a corporate witness. Stephen explained how the communal aspect of Christianity is different than Hinduism, “For a Hindu community, the faith aspect is a personal journey, my personal journey to god or with god. Whereas I think one of the biggest aspects of Christian faith is that it is communal. Jesus banded not one guy, he banded twelve guys.” Raj agreed that one of the differences between a church and a mosque was that it was communal, “It was so different [going to a church for the first time]. It was a lot warmer. It was a lot more relational.” Mick also found the church to be different from the gurdwara, “The one thing that is missing in Hinduism and Sikhism, is that family connection.”

Not only was the church different in that it was bound together as a family, but the behavior and actions of the church were counter-cultural. Tabitha shared what she

noticed in her first time at a church event, “That guy took me to the cell groups and helped me to grow with other Christians. And they are not talking about people, because my culture is to talk about people and gossip and worrying about others and pretending to be good.” Raj explained how the church was different in that it would help others, “The one thing they [Sikhs or Hindus] say is that you should pray to god. I said, ‘you can pray to God all you want, but you still want that physical help.’ You want someone to phone up and see how you are. I think that is missing from the Hindu and Sikh groups but is more prevalent in the Christian churches.”

Solomon explained that within Sikhism, there is no theological view towards helping someone in need, “Sikhs might overlook the needs of a widow....The whole of Sikhism is oriented towards worship and service in the temple. Nobody comes to visit you if you are lonely, no one picks you up.” Bal agreed with Solomon regarding Sikhism and found that “The church is more welcoming and more like a family. We feel each other’s pain. If someone has a problem or can’t afford something, you want to go and help them...Other religions, if you help, they remind you and throw it in your face or expect something in return.” Bal found the church to more generous and charitable, “Our church, I know, helps others in need. Some are wealthy in our church; some are not. Like the Bible says, if your brother is lacking, you help.”

In addition to love and service for others, participants also found worship in the church to be different in its authenticity and joy. Bal explained how she found church worship to be more authentic, “In churches, there is more peace. People are concentrating on God and focused on worshipping. They are truly looking to God. At gurdwaras, people go to worship God but they really don’t.” Sonia also found one of her first

worship services to be authentic. She explained of her initial hesitation to sing, because they do not sing in the mosque, but once she sang, her heart was stirred for God, “I said to myself I would never do that...And the next thing I know my hands are lifted up and it was just me and God....I didn’t see or hear anybody and to me, I was just praising the One and the Holy One. So that changed for me.” Like Sonia, Raj also found church worship to be different from the mosque because love for God was expressed corporately, “But when I went to the church, it was so much warmly and friendlier. There were a lot more feelings involved. There was a lot more emphasis on love, serving God out of the heart.”

A final counter-cultural part of the church’s corporate witness is how it is multiethnic. Solomon noticed, during his first visit to church, its diverse ethnic make-up, “But what impressed me was that there were Chinese and Tamils and people of other races, Portuguese descent, these are the different groups of people in Malaysia, they were all worshipping in one place.” Stephen also was struck by how the races mixed in the first church he visited, “But the things that seem foreign would be Asian with Africans. That was huge because I had never seen an Asian and African worship setting in Hinduism, all my twenty-three years.”

When Solomon witnesses today, he also notices that unbelievers are impressed by the diversity within church, “And over time, I think what amazes them is the people of different cultures loving each other, the sense that people are putting their needs aside and taking care of these other people who even with their own culture are not looked at.” Solomon explained that people are impressed by the work of God in healing the nations: “That is the witness, that nations are becoming one before the world.”



All of the participants thought that corporate witness to unbelieving British Asians was important. Only Raj expressed hesitation on bringing an unbeliever to church, but his hesitation was born out of several bad experiences in which his Asian friends were offended by inappropriate cultural references. Raj admitted, when pressed, that he would take an unbelieving British Asian to church, as long as it was a culturally sensitive church, “I do feel somewhat comfortable [bringing an unbeliever] at some churches.” The other participants agreed with Solomon, “The church should be a part of the witness.”

Participants in this research generated strong data for the importance of the counter-cultural witness of the church, when done appropriately. Appropriate witness, according to these participants consisted of a bold verbal witness that emphasized the exclusivity of Christ, a lifestyle witness marked by love and consistency to the teachings of Christ, and the corporate witness of a multi-ethnic community that loves God and one another.

#### *Inappropriate Counter-Cultural Engagement in Witness*

The final research question explored in this study asked: which aspect of the local church’s witness shows inappropriate counter-cultural engagement with the British Asian community, such that it is harmful towards conversion? All of the participants gave examples of inappropriate counter-cultural engagement, in which the behavior of the church harmed its witness. In some cases, the practices of the church resulted in little or no witness at all, with the church accidentally or intentionally ignoring British Asians and making them feel unwelcomed. In other cases, the witness of the church was harmed by its acceptance of certain Western cultural practices, considered by many in the British Asian community to be immoral.

### **Inappropriate Verbal Witness**

The participants agreed that a lack of understanding of and response to Asian culture can harm the church's verbal witness. The church's witness for most of the participants growing up was nonexistent. Bal, who grew up in the United Kingdom, was never told the gospel was for her, "I used to think church was just for English people." Tabitha, also had little interaction with Christians, saying, "We saw Christians, but I never met a Christian." Her experience with them in India led her to believe that "They think Jesus is only for them. They never talk about Jesus. I thought Christianity was a religion growing up in India. They never talk about Jesus, share about Jesus, tell about Jesus." Solomon also had little exposure to Christians. Instead, his understanding was influenced by the movie industry, "I had some sort of view about Christians from Bollywood movies, where they were not portrayed very good." When he met Christians, his impression was initially not favorable, "To us, it was a little bit intellectual, people who read a funny book called the Bible." Clearly these participants did not receive a healthy and consistent witness from Christians, such that they heard and understood the gospel.

The reasons for this lack of witness had to do with an inappropriate response to Asian culture by the church. Tabitha believed that the caste system was a reason she did not hear the gospel earlier,

Christianity is a low caste religion. And I was born in a high caste. When missionaries come, they reach low caste and untouchable people. So all we know is the low caste people, dalits, even my family until now, they don't touch the people, and they are Christians. So I never thought about Jesus as a god, and I need to worship him, but I thought, "no, he is a low caste god and we are not allowed to worship him."

The missionaries to her village in India excluded Tabitha in their evangelistic witness because she was of the wrong caste for their witness. Upon coming to the United Kingdom, Tabitha also found church leaders who intentionally chose not to witness to British Asians, due to fear, “The pastor doesn’t like to evangelize people. He was afraid if you go to the Muslims, the Muslim people may come and stone the church.”

Stephen also found reluctance in the church in Africa to witness to Hindus, but he believed it was due to a lack of faith, “I think in many of these cases, they think Christianity is too difficult to touch a Hindu man or family and it is too risky.” Due to these various reasons, the participants found churches that chose not witness to Asians. These participants agreed that remaining silent about Jesus was an inappropriate counter-cultural response to Asian culture.

In addition to a silent witness, other participants experienced a harmful witness from culturally inappropriate words spoken to them. For example, Sonia shared how she was treated disrespectfully when she was pressured to convert from Islam, “But there were others that just wanted me to make a commitment there and then. I wasn’t ready, because I wanted to know about Jesus.” Sonia felt disrespected because those witnessing to her were treating her like a project and had not taken the time to determine her comprehension of the gospel. Raj also experienced a disrespectful cultural witness when he brought his Muslim friend to church, “And on the day she came, the pastor talked about terrorism. He painted Muslims as terrorists who blow up things. She was in shock.” By stereotyping all Muslims in his sermon, this pastor caused understandable offense to any Muslim in the audience.

Others experienced inappropriate witness that was culturally insensitive with when and how the gospel was explained. Raj's initial reaction to the gospel was negative because the phrase, "personal relationship with God" was used throughout the gospel presentation, "I didn't know the word blasphemy, but I thought that was blasphemy. You couldn't do that with God. So when I heard that, I could understand maybe the Jesus bit, because we were exposed to him as a prophet, but the personal relationship aspect, no way. That was a complete turn off. That initially caused me to reject, and I didn't want to hear about it." Raj agrees that Muslims need to know that through Jesus, they can know God personally. But he felt that it was inappropriate to lead with that phrase in witnessing to Muslims, because it directly contradicts the Islamic understanding of Allah's transcendence.

Mick found that the gospel was often explained inappropriately to him because the church did not understand his questions but left the matter to him to figure things out, "It was just a matter of getting on. If you had a question or two, the pastors try and explain themselves. But I never felt they gave a good explanation. So we just left it and I just went on my own devices and did my own thing."

The church's verbal witness to British Asians can be harmed, according to the participants in this research, when it chooses to not share the gospel with Asians because of cultural bias and fear and when it unnecessarily offends due to lack of cultural sensitivity and understanding.

### **Inappropriate Lifestyle Witness**

The participants also shared of how they observed Christian lifestyles that harmed the church's witness because Asians would judge these lifestyles as immoral. Raj

explained how important modesty, especially in religious settings, is to Asians, “Dress is an issue. Women [at church] wear things which you don’t need a lot of imagination to see how they are.” In addition to modesty, Raj also mentioned that Christians should avoid disrespecting holy books, “Unless it is a church that is in an Asian area, and they have made an effort not to put Bibles on the floor.” And for Solomon, he found pets in church to be disrespectful, “Your pets should not be there because it is dishonorable.” In these examples, Christians violated the Asian cultural value of respect for God and other worshippers in their immodest dress at church, their careless treatment of the Bible, or having pets at worship. These cultural differences between Asians and Western Christians harmed witness efforts and were shared as examples of counter-culturally inappropriate behavior.

In addition to behavior that Asians would judge as disrespectful, the participants also found behavior that they would consider immoral. For example, Tabitha initially disapproved of Christians who drank alcohol, “And Christians were having wine, and I was totally like ‘no this is no good’ ...I came from South Indian background, only bad people drink alcohol.” Stephen experienced a similar negative reaction from his cousin when Stephen introduced his cousin to Christians who smoked, “So he had seen the grandmother come out for a smoke, and he was getting all freaked out. And we didn’t process that.” In addition to alcohol and smoking, Solomon added public romantic affection to the list of behavior that Western Christians find culturally acceptable but Asians do not, “We are fine at this point in my church, so long as we don’t have PDA, public display of affection.” Immoral and disrespectful behavior, which is more reflective

of Western cultural values than Christian values, harms the church's witness to British Asian, according to these research participants.

### **Inappropriate Corporate Witness**

The participants identified a final area of concern as when an inappropriate cultural practice occurs during the corporate worship services and results in Asians feeling unwelcome in the community. Several participants shared that their first experience at a worship service was strange to them, and they were confused. Tabitha shared how foreign everything was for her, "Different language, different culture, different beliefs....I had never heard singing, that was strange to me." Her experience at this church remained difficult for her even after she became a believer, because the church community was not able to explain things clearly, making her feel unwelcome, "But talking to the people, that was like closing the door. They were talking so different which a mind of a new believer could not understand. I didn't understand what they were talking about. I felt that there was something different or special. I thought Christians were special."

Sonia also was struck by how different Christian worship was compared to Islam, but instead of being confused as to what was going on, she thought the worship was disrespectful and worthy of judgment, "I never knew anyone who would worship without the head being covered. And I thought any moment Allah was going to send his bowl of fire and condemn them to hell because they had not washed themselves, and they would dance...and clapping and sitting on the floor and kneeling on the floor. To me, it was so alien, so alien." Her previous experience as a child with a group of Christians also was marked by inappropriate explanation of the Christian message,

I never knew any Christians. I had heard of them, and I heard that they worshipped three gods, and I was forbidden to ever speak to one by my family. All I know is that when I was growing up in an English school, I remember one song we used to sing was “Onward Christian Soldiers Marching onto War with the Cross of Jesus.” That was all I knew of the Christian faith was that they went to war.

Solomon also did not have a positive experience when he first went to church, “I went to church. I was very afraid because of the loud music, people praying in tongues. I was afraid for the first few weeks.” Bal’s first impressions also were unfavorable, “One of the things I first noticed when I went to church was the offering plate. It was passed by and I would see only pennies in the offering plate. I used to think that English people aren’t generous to God, and that Sikhs gave more.”

For these participants, their first experience among a group of believers was marked by confusion, fear, and even condemnation, which was to be expected because the religious practices are different. Unfortunately, they experienced believers who worshipped without an awareness of outsiders’ presence who would need special explanations and interpretations of the gospel and worship practices. This lack of awareness to the needs of outsiders is inappropriate and disrespectful when witnessing to people of other faiths who come into a church service.

An additional problem raised by the participants was the failure of the believers to welcome and include outsiders. Sonia shared that she felt a barrier due to her clothing, “I think people [in church] looked at me suspiciously because I came to church with Asian clothes.” For Sonia, that her cultural dress was unaccepted by some in the church harmed the church’s witness to her and other Asians.

In addition to rejecting Asian cultural practice such as dress, when a church fails to meet the social needs of Asians, especially recent converts, it harms the church’s

witness. For example, Raj felt excluded after he had converted, “Another problem is lack of community. I didn’t expect my church to be my new family, but I had massive needs when I was thrown out of my family....I did have an expectation that they would receive me, but sometimes these big busy churches are not like that. If you don’t get involved in a mid week group, you are done for.” Raj thought that the church family would be inclusive and welcoming of him, as an Asian family would, but instead he quickly learned that he had to seek out community for himself in the church. Sonia also felt excluded from the church family during her first Christmas holiday, “You know the loneliness. I still remember that time when I thought I would be surrounded by Christian family, and I wasn’t. And I felt I didn’t have an identity in the church, and I didn’t have an identity in the Asian community. I was so lost.” By converting, Sonia had lost all her community, and the church, unaware of the effect conversion can have on Asians, did not provide it.

By not providing community and practicing hospitality, both of which are Asian cultural values, the church community communicated an unintended but harmful message to these recent converts that they were not yet insiders and family. Often, this exclusivity was communicated to unbelievers as well. For example, Stephen shared of how his father was aware of this exclusivity in his interaction with the church after Stephen had converted, “I think the ineffective bit was probably my dad expressing that some of the Christian workers were self-glorying and had claimed a prize.” By claiming Stephen as a prize in front of his father, an excluding barrier was put up between Stephen’s unbelieving father and the church. These believers were unnecessarily isolating Stephen’s father and caused harm. Inappropriate cultural practices which communicate that



unbelieving British Asians are unwelcome among the community should be avoided not only because they harm the church's witness, but also because they are inherently disrespectful.

Churches in the United Kingdom often come under the influence of Western culture and adopt practices that are more reflective of that culture than the Bible. When unbelieving British Asians meet Christians, they will notice these cultural practices, especially if they are immoral and unwelcoming to Asians or if they confuse Christianity with Western culture. The church in its witness to British Asians would be wise, according to these research participants, to be aware of what Asians consider to be offensive and immoral. Further, a church would also be wise to prepare well for unbelieving Asians to visit a worship service by planning to welcome them and explain the service and gospel to them.

### *Summary of Findings*

The purpose of this study was to explore how converted British Asian Christians evaluate the role of the local church in its witness to the British Asian community. Seven British Asian believers who have converted and been baptized for at least five years were interviewed to determine what they consider to be appropriate and inappropriate witness to British Asians through cultural sensitivity and counter-cultural engagement. The interviews explored their personal experience of how the church witnessed to them prior to their conversion, their witnessing efforts to British Asians, and their evaluation of the witness to British Asians by their own church and the churches in general within the United Kingdom.

The seven research participants agreed that the church must be aware of and sensitive to British Asian culture. However, they expressed a stronger opinion that the church must interact with people of other religions through counter-cultural engagement. The speech, lifestyle, and a faithful community of believers are collectively a witness and contrast to people of other faiths. Cultural sensitivity must result in a gospel message that is understandable to British Asians but is still biblically faithful.

Harm is done to the church's witness when the church is either insensitive or overly sensitive to British Asian culture. The participants agree that the church needs to guard itself from absorbing Western cultural practices that can cause unnecessary offense to Asians. However, they also expressed the concern of syncretism by being overly sensitive to British Asian religion and incorporating too much into Christianity that would compromise faithfulness to Christ.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Discussion and Recommendations**

The purpose of this study was to explore how converted British Asian Christians evaluate the role of the local church in its witness to the British Asian community. While there is a wealth of resources on how to witness to Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs through personal evangelism, the literature review showed that researchers have given very little attention to the corporate witness of the church in reaching people from these religious backgrounds. The literature emphasized personal evangelism far more than church planting as the strategy to reach British Asians. This study sought to address this deficiency by providing insight from seven mature converts who are actively involved in witness through their local churches. In addition, the literature review and interview findings have also shown that a need exists for an increased witness to British Asians that is understandable to them. To that end, the following research questions guided the qualitative research:

5. Which aspects of the local church's witness show appropriate cultural sensitivity towards the British Asian community, such that it is beneficial towards conversion?
6. What aspects of the local church's witness show inappropriate cultural sensitivity towards the British Asian community, such that it is harmful towards conversion?
7. Which aspects of the local church's witness show appropriate counter-cultural engagement with the British Asian community, that it is beneficial towards conversion?
8. Which aspects of the local church's witness show inappropriate counter-cultural engagement in relation to the British Asian community, such that it is harmful towards conversion?

### *Summary of the Study*

In Chapter Two of this study, the researcher conducted a review of literature from three relevant areas: those biblical and theological works that describe the witness of the church in the world, those works which describe contextualization for witness to South Asian religions, and those works which describe evangelistic approaches to Islam, Hinduism, and Sikhism. The researcher then conducted interviews with seven mature converts who are actively involved in witnessing to the British Asian community through their local church. The interview questions were guided by the four research questions, and the responses were analyzed and presented in Chapter Four.

This study provided insight into how local churches could witness to British Asians more effectively. The literature review established the need to explore how contextualized church planting could bear more fruit in British Asian communities. In the literature on the biblical and theological witness of the church in the world, a disagreement was found on the role and relative importance of nonverbal witness. Agreement was found on the need for evangelism that proclaims the gospel, but scholars debate the place and importance of witness through worship, loving service, justice, and fellowship. In the literature on contextualization, this researcher found disagreement on what can be considered appropriate contextualization and the line between orthodoxy and syncretism. Finally, in the literature on evangelistic approaches to Islam, Hinduism, and Sikhism, scholars generally agreed on the need for friendship evangelism, but few have studied the role of a church community and church planting as an approach to witness to these religions.

The interview research found that the church must be aware and respectful of British Asian cultures as it interacts with people of other religions. The local church witnesses to the British Asian communities in three distinct ways: through what the church is as a community, through what it says in evangelism, and through what it does through worship and deeds of love. When the church is culturally sensitive in its witness, the gospel becomes accessible and understandable to the unbelieving communities. The church's witness is harmed, however, when the church is either insensitive to British Asian culture or overly sensitive. The interview participants agreed that the church needs to understand Western culture and guard itself from absorbing Western cultural practices that cause unnecessary offense to British Asians. Participants also expressed concern over syncretism, which occurs when the church becomes overly sensitive to British Asian religions by incorporating them into Christianity in ways that compromise faithfulness to Christ.

### *Discussion of Findings*

As a church planter in a British Asian community of London, it is obvious to me that most Asian unbelievers have had little exposure to the gospel. Indeed, demographic studies show that the gospel has hardly penetrated into these immigrant communities, and this was confirmed by the personal experiences of the research participants. One of the reasons for the lack of gospel penetration into these communities is a lack of witness. Churches exist in these British Asian communities, but some of them are closing because they have not adapted the culture of their outreach efforts to the demographic changes of their neighborhoods. By remaining entrenched in a culture from a by-gone British era, these churches appear irrelevant or unintelligible to their British Asian neighbors. These

churches speak a different language than their community. With little gospel witness, churches have closed and sold their buildings for renovation as mosques, temples, or housing complexes.

Not all is bleak, however, in response to this evangelistic need. The Lord has brought evangelists and missionaries to assist or rekindle the witness efforts to these immigrant communities. Some evangelists are active at street preaching and public debate. Other missionaries do diaconal and justice work among the poor. Others seek to establish incarnational communities that live and work among the immigrants. These efforts are outstanding and should be commended. But the interview research has shown that these efforts alone do not go far enough. With few of these evangelists, missionaries, and church leaders embracing a strategy to plant new, contextualized churches as a way to reach the immigrant communities, the witness of Christ to these immigrant communities will remain truncated. These individual, evangelistic efforts need to link together with the planting of new contextualized churches or the revitalization and refocusing of existing churches towards the British Asian communities.

### **The Need for Corporate Witness**

The literature review examined evangelistic approaches to Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism and found a lack of emphasis on the role of the local church body in the witness to unbelievers. For most authors, the corporate witness of the local church was eclipsed by an emphasis on individual, friendship evangelism. Wardell and Gidoomal presented the best summary of friendship evangelism in their approach to Hindus by emphasizing the need for individual believers to have a love and respect for Hindus, prayer, individual

witnessing, and dependence on the Holy Spirit.<sup>348</sup> Not only was a corporate witness lacking, but there was a warning against inviting a Hindu to church, “You must be very careful how you do this [inviting a Hindu to church] - never invite her as an easy way out of talking to her personally about your Christian faith. You should first establish a real friendship in which she feels she can trust you before you issue such an invitation.”<sup>349</sup> Other authors like Naaman<sup>350</sup> and Clark<sup>351</sup> allowed for some corporate witness through parachurch ministries, but these were distinct from that of a local church.

Solomon, however, disagreed with this overly individualistic approach, “The church should be a part of the witness.” Of the seven interview participants, only Raj expressed concern about inviting an unbelieving British Asian friend to church, but he qualified his concern by saying that an invitation to the right kind of church would be appropriate, “I do feel somewhat comfortable at some churches.” Raj explained his hesitation was due to a lack of sensitivity in some churches to British Asian culture. Raj had experienced certain churches that adopted too many Western practices that his British Asian friends find offensive.

Should the corporate witness be abandoned out of fear of offense? Certainly not, in scripture, God calls a community of people together for mission. Bavink shows that in the Old Testament, God elected Israel as his people on display before the nations. As a national community, they stood apart from but witnessed to the nations, “Israel lived its

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<sup>348</sup> Gidoomal and Wardell, *Chapatis for Tea : Reaching Your Hindu Neighbour : A Practical Guide*, 12-16.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid., 121-122.

<sup>350</sup> Naaman, 125.

<sup>351</sup> Clark, 119-124.

own history as something enacted before the eyes of the surrounding peoples, ever conscious that the glory of God was at issue.”<sup>352</sup> In the New Testament gospel accounts, Jesus can be observed gathering together a new Israel through the calling of his twelve disciples.<sup>353</sup> Goheen explained the significance of this calling, “Jesus’ appointment of the twelve is a symbolic prophetic action of the beginning of a renewed and restored Israel.”<sup>354</sup> Stephen takes seriously Jesus’ call to community, saying, “Whereas I think one of the biggest aspects of Christian faith is that it is communal. Jesus banded not one guy, he banded twelve guys.”

This new and restored Israel became the church commissioned by Christ to witness to the nations. Miller explained that the church as God’s new humanity was commissioned to have a corporate witness, “The popular understanding of the Lord’s missionary mandate is simply that it calls the church to send out missionaries to distant places. Clearly, that is the task given us, but this is not all that is implied. What is expressed in Jesus’ words is really a commissioning of the whole new people of God.”<sup>355</sup> And the purpose of this new people of God was, according to Wright, to call the nations to repentance and faith in the God of Israel,

Jesus’ earthly ministry was launched by a movement that aimed at the restoration of Israel. But he himself launched a movement that aimed at the ingathering of the nations to the new messianic people of God. The initial impetus for his ministry was to call Israel back to their God. The

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<sup>352</sup> Bavink, 14.

<sup>353</sup> Mark 3:13-19

<sup>354</sup> Goheen, 84.

<sup>355</sup> Miller, 53.



subsequent impact of his ministry was a new community that called the nations to faith in the God of Israel.<sup>356</sup>

The church could not act alone and apart from God in this mission, but through the indwelling Spirit carried out this ingathering work, which Christ began. As Goheen explained, “Mission is a work of God: Jesus working by the Spirit. His people are taken up into that mission: they prolong the mission that Jesus began. Continuing the mission of Jesus is not just one more task given to his discipleship community. Rather it defines its very identity and function in God’s ongoing story.”<sup>357</sup> Mission is the work of God carried on now by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit directs and empowers the church for God’s mission in the world. God receives all glory for his salvation, which is never the work of man.

Witness to Christ constitutes individuals talking to individuals, but friendship evangelism must never be divorced from the corporate witness of God’s people gathered in a local church. God has elected for himself a people, not a collection of individuals. Sinclair is correct that the goal in evangelism should be to “leave behind believers in community.”<sup>358</sup> But Sinclair did not go far enough to see that the witness of the church itself, as God’s new humanity, is a means towards that goal. Allen, however, correctly viewed the church as both the goal and the means of witness, “Paul’s theory of evangelizing a province was not to preach in every place in it himself, but to establish centres of Christian life in two or three important places from which the knowledge might

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<sup>356</sup> Wright, 506.

<sup>357</sup> Goheen, 122.

<sup>358</sup> Sinclair, 29.

spread into the country round...he intended his congregations to become at once a centre of light.”<sup>359</sup> Converts joined churches not as an end in themselves, but as a means for witness to the unbelievers around them.

Corporate witness has distinct advantages, which cannot be conveyed by friendship evangelism alone. First, the number of witnessing events that can occur when an unbeliever meets a community of believers increases geometrically rather than by the linear, additive increase of personal evangelism. When unbelievers interacts with an entire community of believers, they receive a far greater exposure to the gospel simply because the number of believers with whom they can interact multiplies. In personal evangelism, witness is linear and constrained by the interactions of one believer. But in a church setting, unbelievers will interact with many believers, often simultaneously. If lack of exposure to believers and the gospel is a reason conversion rates are low, then it stands to reason that increasing exposure to Christian witness by involving unbelievers in the church would be beneficial.

Second, corporate witness displays relationships between believers that have been changed by Christ and marked by acceptance, love, and forgiveness. The community itself is a witness to Christ because its character is different from those found elsewhere. Raj identified that the sense of community in a church was different from that of a mosque, “It was so different [going to church for the first time]. It was a lot warmer. It was a lot more relational.” Mick agreed that the church offered community in ways not found in Hinduism or Sikhism, “The one thing that is missing in Hinduism and Sikhism is that family connection.” The church as a community welcomes outsiders and strangers

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<sup>359</sup> Allen, 12.

and accepts into membership people of every possible background. Diversity abounds in the church. The common denominator between its members is baptismal vows of confession of sin and need for Christ. Further, the community is marked by love between believers and towards outsiders, and when trouble occurs, forgiveness and reconciliation is encouraged and desired.

A church embodying the gospel addresses the felt need of belonging that many unbelieving British Asians experience. Raj touched on this sense of belonging amongst British Asians whom he labeled as “double outsiders,” because “they were seen as ‘outsiders’ when they became migrants to the United Kingdom. At the same time, they were marked as outsiders from the places they left behind.”<sup>360</sup> Stephen, who works as an evangelist to the British Asian community in London, also identified this need for belonging and relationship among the unbelievers he meets, “We have seen that a lot of people have expressed that they are lonely and are struggling with relationships which can only be addressed on a communal level and need to be around each other.” This need for inclusion in an accepting and welcoming community is often not being met in their places of worship. The church, by being a contrast community in which acceptance, love, and forgiveness are taught and modeled, continually offers an invitation to all of its neighbors to come in, join with God’s people, and enjoy.

Finally, corporate witness displays the reconciling work of Christ to heal the nations, because the bonds between believers are different from those offered anywhere else. Solomon explained that in a multiethnic church, especially with converts from different religions, “nations are becoming one before the world.” The church then

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<sup>360</sup> Raj, 27.

becomes a sign and foretaste of God's kingdom, displaying God's work of making a new humanity of people from every nation. Before Stephen became a believer, he was struck by how the races mixed in the church, "I had never seen an Asian and African worship setting in Hinduism, in all my twenty-three years." Solomon explained that in his church today, unbelievers are impressed by how diverse people love one another, "And over time, I think what amazes them is the people of different cultures loving each other, the sense that people are putting their needs aside and taking care of these other people who even with their own cultures are not looked at."

God's mission strategy for his gospel to be known across the face of the earth is the Spirit empowered Church. Christ left behind a group of followers, a family, his church to carry on his mission of gospel announcement and gospel shaped living. To divorce the church from witness is to misalign oneself with God's strategy.

### **The Need for Visible Witness**

Only a church, empowered by God's Spirit, can reach a community, and the whole church must exercise all of its God-given gifts to do so. The literature review discovered a debate on what constitutes the witness of the church, with disagreement found over the role of love, justice, and good deeds. Coming down strongly on one side of that debate, the research participants agreed that the witness of the church to British Asians must include both verbal proclamation and visible acts of love and justice. For them, love and good deeds were integral to the church's witness and should not be viewed simply as a response to gospel preaching. The participants' views contrast sharply with Horton's comments that "The Kingdom of God in this present phase is primarily audible,

not visible”<sup>361</sup> and that the “church’s mission is accomplished through the three marks: the preaching of the gospel, the administration of the sacraments, and discipline.”<sup>362</sup> Raj rebutted the spirituality of the church advocates and their priority on word alone ministry as he described the man who witnessed to him, “He won me over by two things: by his love which I have never seen before and his consistency: he practiced what he preached. He was the genuine article.” For Raj and the other research participants, the witness of the church must consist of both word and loving deeds. Each have equal weight, with neither taking priority.

### The Witness of Deeds and Justice

Witness to Christ must be both audible and visible. Words must accompany and match deeds. Chris Sicks is correct in his apologetic of mercy, “The church must both demonstrate and declare God’s compassion for bodies and souls. That’s what the early church did, following Jesus’ example.”<sup>363</sup> Visible and audible witness impacted Tabitha who experienced the love of a stranger who put herself in danger for the sake of loving Tabitha, “I felt the love that made me amazed...how can she touch me that way even with my illness which could go to others. I was on an isolated ward, and no one could come without a mask. But this lady she gave me a hug and she comforted me.” This witness of deed authenticated her gospel message, which came when Tabitha asked why she was the recipient of such love: because “God loves.”

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<sup>361</sup> Horton, *The Gospel Commission : Recovering God's Strategy for Making Disciples*, 69.

<sup>362</sup> Horton, *People and Place : A Covenant Ecclesiology*, 243.

<sup>363</sup> Sicks, 18.

Witness that consists of word and deed together is faithful to the Bible. Wright explained that the mission of the church is to reflect the mission of Christ, “The church’s mission flows from the identity of God and his Christ. When you know who God is, when you know who Jesus is, witnessing mission is the unavoidable outcome.”<sup>364</sup> Bosch described the fundamental characteristic of Jesus’ kingdom ministry as an “all-out attack on evil in all of its manifestations.”<sup>365</sup> The gospel was preached; the sick were healed; sins were forgiven; the lame walked; nature was put in submission to humanity; the blind received sight. Mott explained that a literal reading of Jesus’ program “should warn us against spiritualizing the references to justice in his ministry...his actual deeds of compassion for physical suffering are the evidence that he is the agent of God’s Reign.”<sup>366</sup>

The witnesses of deeds have more than an indirect witness through the “making friends and breaking down barriers,”<sup>367</sup> as suggested by DeYoung and Gilbert. Rather, they provide direct evidence that God is reversing the effects of the fall and is using his people, empowered by his Spirit, instrumentally in the process. English agreed and explained how a combined witness of word and deed is more authentic, “to be with Jesus, to preach and to cast out evil spirits; witnessing, proclaiming, and setting people free. That word and deed, proclamation and action, are both seen as emerging from being with

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<sup>364</sup> Wright, 66-67.

<sup>365</sup> Bosch, 32.

<sup>366</sup> Mott, 91.

<sup>367</sup> DeYoung and Gilbert, 235.

Jesus, and both are authentic witness to him.”<sup>368</sup> Wright explains the link between word and deed as the change brought about by God,

Though of course the gospels reflect the life of the early church, in which the four evangelists lived, prayed, and wrote - how could they not reflect that life? - the whole point for each of them, and for any sources they had, was that something had happened in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus through which the world had changed, Israel had changed, humankind had changed, their vision and knowledge of God had changed, and they themselves had changed. They were reflecting the changed world, to be sure. But they were talking about the change itself, how it had come about, and what it all meant.<sup>369</sup>

Christ as king has indeed ushered in a whole new cosmos in which his people receive a new heart, a new record, and a life in the Spirit. To witness to Christ as king and savior, his people talk about this change and reflect it in how they live. God’s work of sanctification in the life of a community of believers is itself a witness to the gospel.

When deeds accompany evangelism, words ring true, calling for a change of direction and community, not just a change of beliefs. For example, Raj was impressed by the consistency in word and deed he saw in his friend Jerry,

Love and consistency really stood out to me when I compare it to the way were as a Muslim family...Whereas with Jerry and his wife in Canada, their whole life revolved around Jesus. Their home revolved around their faith, relationships, what they did on Sunday, what they did during the week, he used to go to meetings, he would talk about Jesus, he just lived for Jesus. That part of it struck me quite contrastive.

Shumack also understood the importance of living one’s life consistently with one’s message when witnessing to Muslims, “We claim that he is changing us into people

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<sup>368</sup> English, 84.

<sup>369</sup> Wright, 105-106.

who live Godly lives.”<sup>370</sup> For Shumack, living the gospel also resulted in being accused in ways similar to Jesus, “I want to be seen as someone who values love and service over rules, but I also want to be seen as someone who sets profoundly high moral standards.”<sup>371</sup>

Wardell and Gidoomal hold a similar view on the importance of godly living as a part of the witness to Hindus, “Hindus are attracted to Christ by his life of unselfish love and sacrifice. The lives of Christians who profess to be his disciples should also show these virtues. The Christian who puts the welfare of other people before his own will win more Hindus to Christ than one who lives for his own personal ease and comfort.”<sup>372</sup> Stephen, as a Hindu, was challenged by what he saw in believers prior to his conversion, both in their love for God and their love for one another, “One of them was the genuine love for God and for Jesus throughout whatever happened and expressing it continually in prayer and need or expressing thanks for answers and help...And the second was joy in friendships amongst the struggles.”

For people who have much to lose by converting, a demonstration of deeds, which show that faith in Christ is necessary and desirable, must accompany verbal evangelism. Asians are similar to those to whom the church witnessed in Acts, and Bosch’s explanation on the role of deeds in witness applies, “Evangelism is only possible when the community that evangelizes - the church - is a radiant manifestation of the

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<sup>370</sup> Shumack, 31.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>372</sup> Gidoomal and Wardell, *Chapatis for Tea : Reaching Your Hindu Neighbour : A Practical Guide*, 151.



Christian faith and exhibits an attractive lifestyle.”<sup>373</sup> Deeds serve to authenticate and manifest the gospel for unbelievers, demonstrating that the way of Christ is both true and more desirable than what they have known.

### The Witness of Worship and Fellowship

In addition to a church community that acts consistently with its teachings, worship and fellowship play an important role as the church witnesses to the community. Harvie Conn correctly included the witness of fellowship and worship in his five gathering tasks of the church, alongside of proclamation, service, and justice.<sup>374</sup> While the primary audience of worship is God, church worship is on display before the unbelieving world and thus has a witnessing component. Bal explained how Christian worship was helpful in witness because it, like deeds, authenticates and celebrates the gospel, “In churches, there is more peace. People are concentrating on God and focused on worshipping. They are truly looking to God. At gurdwaras, people go to worship God but they really don’t.”

Corporate worship witnesses to the glory of God, that he is worthy of our worship and that the forgiveness and healing he brings results in joy. Worship, like deeds, authenticates the gospel message. It also, when it is multiethnic, demonstrates that Christ is Lord of all, as Bal explained, “Having worship in other languages helps people feel included and a part of things. Heaven is going to be diverse.”

In addition to worship, fellowship also witnesses to the unbelieving world as it glorifies God by embodying love. Loving and caring deeds within the church reflect the

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<sup>373</sup> Bosch, 414.

<sup>374</sup> Conn, 41.

grace of the gospel because Christians offer them to one another unconditionally. Bal commented on how fellowship marked by grace is uniquely Christian, “The church is more welcoming and more like a family. We feel each other’s pain. If someone has a problem or can’t afford something, you want to go and help them...Other religions, if you help, they remind you and throw it in your face or expect something in return.” Solomon agreed and touched on how grace ensures that fellowship includes the poor and vulnerable, “Sikhs might overlook the needs of a widow....The whole of Sikhism is oriented towards worship and service in the temple. Nobody comes to visit if you are lonely, no one picks you up.”

In addition to fellowship, hospitality is equally important, both as an expression of fellowship but also when used in witness. Sonia included it in her outreach strategy towards unbelievers, “having them over to your house, that is a great way, I think, that you do evangelism.” Bal agreed on the importance of hospitality in evangelism, “I try to be gentle, share my story, and invite them to events or my house.” Pohl explained that hospitality “was a basic category for dealing with the importance of transcending social differences and breaking down social boundaries that excluded certain categories or kinds of persons.”<sup>375</sup> Hospitality almost always includes sharing a meal together, because in “most cultures, eating together expresses mutuality, recognition, acceptance, and equal regard.”<sup>376</sup> Hospitality, especially through shared meals, binds people together, “When strangers and hosts are from different backgrounds, the intimacy of a shared meal can

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<sup>375</sup>Pohl, *Making Room : Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, 62.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid., 73.

forge relationships which cross significant social boundaries.”<sup>377</sup> When people from different social and cultural backgrounds who share faith in Christ also share a meal, they function as a sign of God’s kingdom of people from every nationality and a foretaste of God’s kingdom healing among the nations.

Because Christ is Lord of all aspects of believers’ lives, because he can change all aspects of believers’ lives for their ultimate good and his glory, and because his church is a sign, instrument, and foretaste of his kingdom, all aspects of the church and all aspects of believers witness to the watching world. Even to limit witness to word and deed misses the corporate aspects of worship and fellowship. All aspects of believers’ lives and all aspects of a church’s activity are on display as a witness to the glory of God, whose salvation changes everything.

#### The Witness of the Whole Body

Because all aspects of church life serve as a witness to the work of Christ in the world, each member of a church must embrace their role in God’s mission. Miller is correct that “The entire church is a ‘sent church,’ a commissioned body that is itself involved in the harvesting task.”<sup>378</sup> Mission is not the work of a select few leaders but of every believer. The mission of the church, as pointed out by Newbigin, is more than the preaching ministry of a gifted few whose aim is to win souls.<sup>379</sup> When the church limits its mission to the word and sacrament activities of its pastors, it deprives most of its

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<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

<sup>378</sup> Miller, 53.

<sup>379</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 222.

members of exercising their diaconal, administrative, and service gifts. Every person and every gift has a role to play in the church's mission and witness.

Pastors need to unleash and celebrate their deacons' service rather than limiting or devaluing them by teaching that the church's mission does not include these ministries. Pastoral arrogance emphasizes one role and gifting over all others. Rather, pastors need to exhort and encourage deacons and others towards works of service and mercy. Pastors must see themselves and other teaching gifts in vital partnership with those who have gifts of service. Passages such as Acts 6:1-7, Romans 12:4-7, 1 Corinthians 12:14-31, Ephesians 4:7-13, and 1 Peter 4:10-11 teach that all gifts are necessary "in order that in everything God may be glorified."<sup>380</sup> In other words, God's grace is administered in various forms. As Miller explains, "The church must still have a corporate witness to her neighbors. It is our deeds of love that show forth the glory of God who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. And the deacons of the local church can become the pacesetters for a congregational witness by word and works."<sup>381</sup>

Instead of marginalizing the service and mercy work of deacons out of fear that word ministry might be eclipsed, pastors need to unleash and encourage deacons and others in the church towards these ministries so that they as pastors can fully embrace their ministry of word and sacrament. Diaconal work is the primary responsibility of deacons who are uniquely called and gifted for it, while word and sacrament ministry is the primary responsibility of pastors who are uniquely called and gifted for it. When both roles are unleashed and in full operation, the whole church is a witness to the gospel in

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<sup>380</sup> 1 Peter 4:11.

<sup>381</sup> Miller, 152.

how they live, what they say, and what they do. Newbigin expresses it well, “I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it.”<sup>382</sup>

### **The Need for Understandable Witness**

In addition to the need for the whole church to exercise all its gifts in witness to British Asians, the church also needs to be aware of the cultural dimension of its witness and adapt to practices that help British Asians understand and embrace the gospel. Ward’s general comment that ethnographic research has been strangely “divorced from any real or sustained engagement with actual churches and communities”<sup>383</sup> rings true for churches in British Asian communities. For example, a pastor showed great disrespect to Raj’s Muslim friend through his sermon that “painted Muslims as terrorists who blow things up.” Sonia’s also experienced this disrespect as a child while singing “Onward Christian Soldier Marching onto War.” These examples are common. This lack of cultural awareness damages the church's witness. Raj’s friend stopped attending church, and Sonia for many years thought that the “Christian faith was that they went to war.” By God’s sovereign grace, many years later Sonia learned that a Christian soldier was not someone who killed Muslims but rather loved them. Perhaps God will call Raj’s friend to faith at a later time in her life. Salvation is of God alone, and he works in, through, and despite of his people’s unclear, confusing, and ineffective witnessing efforts. But a church that relates with cultural intelligence and respect towards its neighbors will be

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<sup>382</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 227.

<sup>383</sup> Ward, 1-2.

more fruitful in its witness by creating more and better opportunities to show and tell the gospel through ways that would be both understood and appreciated.

### Avoiding Separatism and Syncretism

Culture matters in witness. Danger lurks when the church positions itself at either extreme of its relationship to the surrounding culture. What Goheen observed for exilic Israel as her two lines demarking cultural danger apply equally to the church today,

On the one hand, withdrawal into a closed society might help keep the purity of faith, but it makes the message irrelevant; on the other hand, identifying and participating in the life of pagan nations may take away the distinctiveness of the people of God. The literature of the exile speaks against both threats.<sup>384</sup>

Too little cultural awareness can result either in separatism or syncretism. At either of these extremes, the surrounding community does not hear the gospel. At the separatist extreme, traditional British congregations often expect British Asians in their neighborhoods to "come to them" both physically and culturally. When British Asian converts visit or join, the church often encourages them to leave their Asian cultural practices at the door. The church extracts their Asian identity by encouraging them to become more British. Tennent correctly labeled such churches as C-1 or C-2, commenting, "these churches are, by definition, extractionistic in their attitude towards Islamic cultural forms."<sup>385</sup> Separatism also erects unnecessary walls between the convert and his unbelieving family and society, similar to those that Stephen faced when he converted, "I think the ineffective bit was probably my dad expressing that some of the

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<sup>384</sup> Goheen, 61.

<sup>385</sup> Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity : How the Global Church Is Influencing the Way We Think About and Discuss Theology*, 199.

Christian workers along with us were self-glorying and had claimed a prize.” Stephen’s father was aware that his son had joined a church and was changing, by emphasizing this change, the church unnecessarily hurt its witness to Stephen’s family. For the church to guard against cultural withdrawal and separatism, it needs to heed the words of Jeremiah, “Seek the welfare of the city.”<sup>386</sup>

At the other extreme, the church must also guard against syncretism and assimilation. While being warned against isolationism in the exile, Israel also was to stand against syncretism. Goheen correctly pointed out that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego’s bold proclamation, “we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up,”<sup>387</sup> set them “against an entire pagan worldview.”<sup>388</sup> As cultural outsiders in Babylon seeking the peace of the city, these Israelites defied Babylonian culture when it contradicted biblical values. They would agree with Sonia’s “be Jesus friendly” exhortation, “I think we get so caught up in this thing that we have to be Muslim friendly. Be Jesus friendly. Don’t be Hindu friendly. Don’t be Muslim friendly or Muslim convert friendly. Be Jesus friendly.” Sonia expressed well the concern that an overemphasis on cultural sensitivity can result in syncretism and an eclipse of biblical truth about Jesus. When this occurs, the church’s witness is harmed because commonality is emphasized over important and necessary distinctions. Syncretism is a danger in some of the practices of those in the Insider Movement. Particularly troubling is Travis’ view that a mosque can serve as a place of worship for a true follower of

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<sup>386</sup> Jeremiah 29:7.

<sup>387</sup> Daniel 3:18.

<sup>388</sup> Goheen, 64.

Jesus.<sup>389</sup> Travis is correct that “the term ‘Church Planting’ implies inventing a new structure. No matter how contextualized the ‘church’ may be, it is still a new structure that is foreign to the people group.”<sup>390</sup> In the New Testament, the Christian movement began in the synagogues and other places of prayer for the Jews. While many Jews accepted the claim of the Nazarene sect that Jesus is both Messiah and Lord, most did not and a separate structure was necessary. Interestingly, Paul and others chose a generic term for “public assembly” that could apply to many types of public gatherings. By its new use, however, “church” came to be identified with those who gather to worship Jesus. Travis incorrectly assumes that because something is culturally foreign, it therefore is necessarily harmful to gospel witness. While the contextualization process is “theologically messy”<sup>391</sup> church planting is an essential, biblical practice of Christian witness that has a proven, transcultural, and intercultural track record from the earliest days of the Christian movement. While Travis and other Insider Movement proponents should be commended for their years of sacrifice to serve Muslim and Hindu peoples, they also put Christian witness at risk of invisibility by undermining the practice of church-planting.

Stephen and Mick would urge the advocates of the Insider Movement to have patience in evangelism and avoid syncretism. Stephen viewed an unbeliever’s pathway of faith to that of journey, “It is part of a journey. If they are not ready, then we can say ‘fine it is not now.’ It is not never, it is just not now.” Mick correctly provided a sound

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<sup>389</sup> Travis, "Contextualization among Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists: A Focus on the Insider Movements," 12.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid.



theological reason for this patience, “God does everything in his own time and does everything with a purpose. If we push, they say, ‘Why isn’t God pushing?’ God is not pushing because it is under his time and he says ‘just wait.’” While the church must learn and communicate in the language and cultural forms of those it seeks to reach for Christ, it should avoid the two extremes of separatism and syncretism.

Churches in London and the rest of Britain must articulate and embody the whole story of the Bible to British Asians and not the “stripped-down skeleton core of a gospel.”<sup>392</sup> This faithful presentation, which would include how God calls people to himself by grace and into covenantal relationship with one another, will ultimately result in new church plants. As Tennent explained, “To the charge that Jesus’ use of the word ‘church’ is only spiritual and not referring necessarily to a visible community, I reply that the very word *ekklesia* means ‘public assembly.’ The choice of this word helped to launch the church as a visible, defined community in the world.”<sup>393</sup> Witness to British Asians which is faithful to God’s story will in time result in fruitfulness, “India has tens of thousands of churches all across the country whose members do sing Christian bajans and not Westernized hymns, who do take their shoes off and sit on the floor rather than in pews, and who do not think twice about their women wearing bangles or participating in cultural festivals.”<sup>394</sup> Garrison, like Tennent, sees no need for C-5 contextualization to replace C-3 or C-4 church planting,

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<sup>392</sup> Bevens, 65.

<sup>393</sup> Tennent, “The Challenge of Churchless Christianity: An Evangelical Assessment,” 174.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid.

What separates the two movements is how they respond to that outpouring. Insider Movements respond positively to Christ but refuse to identify themselves with public expressions of the Christian religion. Church Planting Movements, though opting for indigenous house church models rather than traditional church structures, nevertheless make a clean break with their former religion and redefine themselves with a distinctly Christian identity. The resulting movement is indigenously led and locally contextualized.<sup>395</sup>

Culturally sensitivity and guarding against separatism is extremely important in witness to British Asians, but they must not eclipse faithfulness to God's story and his work in and through his people.

#### A Culturally Sensitive, Visible, Audible Gospel

Churches reflect and create a culture. At the very least churches need to be aware of the culture in which they live. Therefore, the church can speak its language, understand the questions it asks, avoid unnecessary offense, be positioned to serve the common good, and be able to make understandable gospel presentations. Hiebert is correct that there is a dual challenge when communicating the Bible across a cultural divide, "It is increasingly clear that we must master the skill of human exegesis as well as biblical exegesis to meaningfully communicate the gospel in human contexts."<sup>396</sup> Churches need to be culturally aware so that they can hear, speak, and serve appropriately and understandably.

Newbigin highlighted the importance of the church's language, "The communication has to be in the language of the receptor. It has to be such that it accepts, at least provisionally, the way of understanding things that is embodied in that language;

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<sup>395</sup> Garrison, "Church Planting Movements Vs Insider Movements: Missiological Realities Vs. Mythological Speculations," 154.

<sup>396</sup> Hiebert, 12.

if it does not do so, it will simply be an unmeaning sound that cannot change anything.”<sup>397</sup> Sonia agrees when applied to the British Asian community, “It helps in a church where some of the songs you can understand because they are in Urdu and Punjabi, that really helps because you can understand the words a little bit better.”

Language selection and translation impacts intelligibility, but perhaps even more importantly, it helps create a sense of belonging. Bal explained it best, “I think it is important to help the non-English speakers. That attracted me to the church, as well, even though I am fluent in English. Having worship in other languages helps people feel included and a part of things.” One of the questions British Asian visitors often ask upon entering a church “is do I belong here?” Their concern has a racial, cultural, socio-economic, and religious component to it. When British Asians see other Asians at the church and when the church uses Asian languages in the service, right away the racial and cultural concern dissipate, and the visitors feel included.

Intelligibility removes unnecessary cultural barriers and sharpens the gospel’s prophetic impact. Keller unpacked human exegesis further by explaining the need to “immerse yourself in the questions, hopes, and beliefs of the culture so that you can give a biblical, gospel-centered response to its questions.”<sup>398</sup> Tabitha provided an example of this by comparing the atoning work of Christ with her Hindu family’s purification rituals, “The only way is through Jesus for salvation. Jesus died on the cross for our sins, he paid a penalty and removes our guilt and shame. And my family goes miles and miles to wash their sins in the Ganges water and some temples and do some special poojas.” When

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<sup>397</sup> Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks : The Gospel and Western Culture*, 3-4.

<sup>398</sup> Keller, 121.

Christians use this comparison in evangelism with a Hindu, the sacrifice of Christ and his work on the cross becomes both understandable and desirable. It comes with prophetic impact because it addresses their concern for purification through showing the superiority of Christ's once for all work on the cross. Wardell and Gidoomal offer similar examples by presenting Christ to Hindus in light of the various Hindu religious beliefs: union with Christ, Christ the guru, Christ the healer, Christ the liberator, Christ versus rituals, and Christ the ideal man.<sup>399</sup>

For Muslims, Oksnevad advocated a Christus victor apologetic which “stresses the sovereignty of God and the victorious aspects of God (familiar Islamic concepts), and broadens the scope of Christ's work to include the devil and death, as well as sin.”<sup>400</sup> This approach appeals to the Asian worldview, which sees the universe to be full of unseen spirits who can do harm to humans. It comes with a prophetic impact because Christ is Lord over the spirits having defeated them on the cross, a victory altogether lacking in Islam.

Cultural sensitivity not only sharpens the prophetic impact of a church's witness to the world, but it also sharpens the Spirit's impact on the church's sanctification. Non-Asian British believers seeking to welcome Asians into their church will themselves change as they interact with and are challenged by Asian culture. Sanneh explained that believers who stand at cultural frontiers acquire a critical comparative perspective on their own cultural identity and are encouraged “to shed the restrictions of their own

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<sup>399</sup> Gidoomal and Wardell, *Chapaties for Tea : Reaching Your Hindu Neighbour : A Practical Guide*, 165-168.

<sup>400</sup> Oksnevad.

particular culture.”<sup>401</sup> They might, for example, become better readers of the Bible as they recognize the Asian cultural emphasis shared by the Old and New Testaments cultures of honor and shame. Alternatively, they might be challenged by and adopt the Asian practices of hospitality, respect for the elderly, and commitment to the extended family. As a church recognizes and adopts these biblical values that are lacking in Western culture, the church is sanctified. The church also benefits as it changes through its missionary encounter with the Asian community. Because the church has repented and genuinely accepted certain Asian cultural values, the church’s culture becomes British Asian, resulting in an improvement in both its welcome and witness to the Asian community and its love and care for one another, especially the elderly.

As a church culture becomes British Asian, all of its activities should reflect the change. Hindi, Urdu, and Punjabi languages should appear in songs and sermons. The church should make Bibles available in these languages, and the church should read Bible passages in a language other than English. Sermon illustrations and liturgies should reflect British Asian culture, with preaching addressing the hopes, needs, and concerns of the Asian community. As the church attends to and learns from British Asian culture’s beauty and brokenness, the church becomes more accessible to those it seeks to reach, and the church shows them that they could not only belong but would have as a home and family in the church.

#### A Counter-Cultural Community on Display

Cultural awareness helps a church become more British Asian. But Newbigin reminded his readers that faithful gospel communication across a cultural frontier always

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<sup>401</sup> Sanneh, *Translating the Message : The Missionary Impact on Culture*, 30.

results in radical change, “However, if it is truly the communication of the gospel, it will call radically into question that way of understanding embodied in the language it uses. If it is truly revelation, it will involve contradiction, and call for conversion, for a radical *metanoia*, a U-turn of the mind.”<sup>402</sup> Cultural awareness helps a church know where to change in itself and in its surrounding community. With reference to exilic Israel, Hunter explained, “The people of Israel were being called to enter a culture in which they were placed as God’s people - reflecting in their daily practices their distinct identity as those chosen by God. He was calling them to maintain their distinctiveness as a community but in ways that served the common good.”<sup>403</sup>

The church’s witness often stands apart from the cultural practices of its time and locale. For example, Allen commented that the witness of the early church in its care for the poor was influential because it was counter-cultural, “The early Church became renowned amongst the heathen for its organized charity, its support of widows and orphans, its tender care for the sick, the infirm and disabled, its gentle consideration for slaves, its constant help afforded to prisoners and those afflicted.”<sup>404</sup> So too is care for the marginalized within the British Asian community, according to Solomon, “Sikhs might overlook the needs of a widow...The whole of Sikhism is oriented towards worship and service in the temple. Nobody comes to visit you if you are lonely; no one picks you up.”

Cultural awareness helps a church identify diaconal and justice needs and respond in effective, lifestyle witness. Wardell and Gidoomal emphasized a distinctive gospel

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<sup>402</sup> Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks : The Gospel and Western Culture*, 3-4.

<sup>403</sup> Hunter, 278.

<sup>404</sup> Allen, 46.

above all else, “Once those opportunities [to present the gospel to British Hindus] arise, don’t try to impress your Hindu friend with how much you’ve learnt about his or her religion. Instead, concentrate on talking about aspects of Christianity.”<sup>405</sup> Sonia agreed with regard to the church's witness to Muslims, “Don’t mislead. Be truthful and be honest. Give them what they want. That is Jesus.” As the incarnation teaches us, Jesus became a Jew in his mission to the house of Israel, but he transformed Jewish cultural categories in relation to his announcement and embodiment of the reign of God.

### *Summary of Findings*

Overall, the literature and interviews revealed that God plans to make his name known among the nations through his church’s witness. It takes a church empowered by God’s Spirit to reach an unbelieving community. Individual, well-intentioned evangelists and missionary deacons who work independently from a church are insufficient. A church that divorces word from deed ministry is also ineffective in its witness. When the church’s neighbors hear and see gospel love in their own language and cultural categories, the church’s faithful witness bears fruit. In order for many more Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs in the United Kingdom to come to faith in Christ, churches must become culturally aware, adapt to preaching styles that allow the word to be heard, and demonstrate to these communities Christ’s sacrificial love. Reflecting on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, Peter wrote, "keep your way of life among the nations honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation."<sup>406</sup> This public holiness is both discernible and distinct.

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<sup>405</sup> Gidoomal and Wardell, *Chapatis for Tea : Reaching Your Hindu Neighbour : A Practical Guide*, 148.

<sup>406</sup> 1 Peter 2:12.

*Recommendations for Practice*

In light of the literature and interview data, churches should pursue planting C-3 or C-4 contextualized churches which embrace an equally ultimate view of word and deed ministry as the primary outreach strategy to British Asian communities. Currently, every British Asian community can use another church because British Asian communities have so few converts. If the resources to plant a new church are unavailable, then existing churches located in or near British Asian neighborhoods should undertake a strategy to cultivate culturally aware outreach.

In church planting and church revitalization efforts, churches must first identify, equip, and include British Asians to serve within the authority structures and strategic planning processes for their outreach to become sustainable. Leadership must be shared for multi-ethnic work to be authentic and credible because the Asian perspective and voice is crucial when determining the degree and shape of contextualization for the church community.

Another early step would be to establish a presence in the community in which believers can meet and interact with unbelievers. Church planters and evangelists should meet as many people in the community as possible through programs offered by the church, by joining other organizations and activities in the community, and by living in the neighborhoods they want to reach. Church planters and evangelists must establish a presence and make themselves known. All members of the ministry team must exhibit an eagerness to learn about and love British Asian people and culture. They must also have a willingness to be positively changed by it. Learning culture must be intentional, and



leaders must immerse themselves “in the questions, hopes, and beliefs of the culture.”<sup>407</sup>

In addition, the ministry team should become familiar with the work of leading South Asian Christian authors, scholars, and musicians, including these voices in team development and training.

Once a presence is established in the community, relationships are being built with unbelievers and their families, and church leaders are gaining an understanding of British Asian culture and religions, the next step would be to start ministry activities, including worship. These church activities should include a healthy mix of word, deed, and community-building ministries. These can include evangelistic book tables, Bible studies, parent-toddler groups, kids clubs, youth clubs, seniors dinner clubs, book readings, comparative religion discussions, charity shops, socials, curry dinners, parties, and church worship. Because Asian families are typically patriarchal and communal, care should be made to befriend and influence the entire family with the gospel, not just an individual, especially when working with children. Church leaders must make the effort to befriend the parents and, in particular, the father.

Starting church worship involves a few logistical and numerical challenges, but in a British Asian context, having an appropriate space, core leadership, and a few committed families and individuals are sufficient to begin. As these activities grow, God will build his church by his Spirit through his people. Because the British Asian community has a high level of resistance to the gospel and lack of knowledge about it, the work may be slow compared to areas that have more Christians and exposure to the

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<sup>407</sup> Keller, 121.

gospel. But God is faithful, and he will call people from every nation to himself, including those from groups which humanly speaking seem hard to reach with the gospel.

### *Recommendations for Further Research*

This study focused on how local churches witness to the British Asian communities in urbanized, western contexts. The research of this study found that the local church is the most effective agent for ministering to these British Asian communities. Further research needs to be done to provide a fuller description of how churches contextualize their outreach to British Asians. While some work has been done on contextual gospel presentations for British Asians, researchers have rarely studied preaching, teaching, and discipleship. They have studied church activities, such as worship, fellowship, leadership, service, and advocating for justice even less.

While this study's findings raise important theological and missiological questions in relation to some practices of Insider Movements in cultures dominated by Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism, the differences in context are both a limit and an invitation to further study. In particular, this study has underscored church planting as an essential aspect of Christian mission and an essential evidence of its fruit. This additional research should continue to acknowledge contextual differences that affect particular outreach strategies but also address transcultural, transgenerational marks of Christian identity.

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