

Do It from the Inside: Inculturation in the West

by Jonny Baker

Reading stories of missionaries who went to other cultures to share Christ inspired me as a young adult.¹ The particular kinds of stories were those of missionaries like Vincent Donovan² or Bruce Olsen³ who were seeking to share the gospel in the soil of the local cultures and grow communities of disciples who remained in their own cultures rather than having to Westernise in order to follow Christ. When I was working with young people outside the church I realised that we had similar challenges around mission and culture and began to explore what it would look like to have our imagination shaped by that cross-cultural set of instincts to share Christ within youth cultures rather than extracting young people and expecting them to join our churches with their associated cultures (which wasn't working).

Several things came together at that time. One was a growing realisation that Western approaches to mission had been too colonial or imperial. Another was what felt like significant changes in Western contexts, the shift to post-modern times. The mainline denominations were also declining and so feeling under pressure.

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Pretty quickly the discussion moved on from just being about young people to being about whole groups of people outside the church who, however well church was done, were simply not going to come. And a number of movements and networks began that sought to inculturate the gospel with those groups. Because of the advent of the Internet it was a conversation that was being shared between Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand online, with a few from the majority world joining in too. Several writers at the time had a narrative about cultural change, a gap between church and culture and the need for inculturation in the West building on the likes of Lesslie Newbigin. Michael Riddell summarises the changes well in *Threshold of the Future* where he says:

Enculturation, people movements, development, syncretism, contextualisation; all these have become familiar subjects of theological investigation in relation to foreign mission. Unfortunately, few of the resulting insights have made much impact on home base. The one massive gap in the church's expertise is how to do mission in the post Christian West.⁴

1 This essay is based on a presentation given at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago in October 2017 as the annual Louis J. Luzbetak Lecture on Mission and Culture.

2 Vincent J. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered* (London: SCM Press, 1982).

3 Bruce Olsen, *For This Cross I'll Kill You* (London: Lakeland, 1973).

4 Michael Riddell, *Threshold of The Future: Reforming the Church in Post-Christian West* (London: SPCK, 1998), 12.

Perhaps a simple way of summarising the realisation would be in David Bosch's words: "The gospel always comes to us culturally robed."⁵ A pure gospel outside of culture and language is simply not available, and that is as true in the West as anywhere else. This was not news for missiologists who had been talking about these things for years because of the cross-cultural and intercultural experience of missiologies.

I joined the Church Mission Society (CMS) sixteen years ago to help encourage mission in the UK in the emerging culture(s). CMS had focused on foreign mission for 200 years but had felt God's call to mission in the West in a fresh way. I found a gold mine of treasure on culture and mission. One of those bits of gold was a series of books published from 1958 through 1963 called *Christian Presence* which included considerations of Christian presence amid Islam (*Sandals at the Mosque*), amid Buddhism (*On The Eightfold Path*), amid faiths old and new (*Japan's Religious Ferment*), and amid African religion (*The Primal Vision*). The editor for the series was Max Warren, the then- General Secretary of the CMS.

This Luzbetak paper is a reflection on inculturation in Western contexts using *The Primal Vision* by John Taylor as a conversation partner. I have used direct quotations from the book, and the language is of its era and not inclusive. It did not seem to work trying to change the language—I hope the reader understands. Also, I say Western contexts as though that is meaningful—there are multiple contexts, but I think there has been an exchange of conversation and learning between a number of those contexts so am persuaded that the conversation is relevant across national boundaries, though my examples are from the UK.

Adventure of the Imagination

Taylor wonders if we took contextualisation seriously whether we would even recognise the results!

"If Christ came into the world of African cosmology to redeem man as Africans understand him would he be recognizable to the rest of the church universal?" He describes this process of looking at the world through African eyes as "an adventure of the imagination."⁶ It's a creative way of thinking about mission. At CMS we train pioneers or pioneer ministers, which is the name in the UK we give to people starting new projects in mission with communities outside of the church.⁷ That might be in a new housing area, in an economically poorer community, with spiritual seekers, or with a sub-cultural group like steam punks, or in one of the diasporas. They are going on an adventure of the imagination. That adventure involves leaving and letting go of what is known and familiar and presencing themselves in the midst of that new community. It is long term—getting to know people, sharing in things with others to make that community a better place on God's good earth, building friendships, doing life, and naturally talking about their faith alongside others. God is already there so it is prayerfully paying attention to that and seeking to join with God's Spirit who is at work in peoples' lives.

This imaginative endeavour is not just about communication—this is a common reduction in mission. In youth ministry in the UK lots of effort went into relevant communication of the gospel but it often stopped there. When someone expressed interest in following Christ they would then join a bible study group and worship and church where nothing much had changed. But this adventure must address everything, letting go of preconceived notions to find imaginative other ones with those on the inside—what language is used to speak about God, how to open up prayer in and out of the experience of peoples' ordinary spirituality, what the gospel is, what church is, how life and faith would make sense in that community in ways that seem natural to the rhythms and forms of local culture, what materials from the store cupboard of the tradition might be drawn on and remixed. In the same

5 David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 297.

6 John Taylor, *The Primal Vision: Christian Presence amid African Religion* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 24.

7 See Pioneer Mission Leadership Training at <http://pioneer.churchmissionsociety.org>.

way that Taylor wonders whether the church universal would recognise inculturated forms in Africa if they were really done from the inside of African imagination and worldview, can we conceive of inculturated forms in the West that are also unrecognisable because they are so on the inside of the imagination and worldview of groups of people outside of the church?

The danger when this adventure is partial rather than addressing everything is that it almost inevitably leads to a dualism where the gospel only affects part of life. Taylor puts it this way: “This might well be a terrible failure of the whole church in Africa that it meets people only in their best clothes... Such Christianity becomes something to put on at certain times and in particular circumstance and has nothing to do with other areas of life.”⁸

Holy Ground of Another Culture

In the background of quite a number of Western Christian traditions and churches are some interesting postures in relation to culture, many of which are suspicious if not overtly critical of other cultures. At the same time there is a blindness to the embrace of particular taste cultures in our churches which might prefer classical art, poetry, and music whilst being suspicious of or dismissing another taste culture which mixes tattoos, hip hop, and graffiti. Max Warren, in the introduction to all the books in the Presence series, speaks of the holy ground of other cultures.

When we approach the man of another faith than our own it will be in a spirit of expectancy to find how God has been speaking to him and what new understandings of the grace and love of God we may ourselves discover in this encounter. Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we may find ourselves treading on men’s dreams. More serious still, we may forget that God was here before our arrival. We have, then, to ask what is the authentic religious content in the experience of the Muslim, the Hindu, the Buddhist, or whoever he may be.⁹

I first read this when I was joining with some other pioneers to take part at a mind/body/spirit fair in London. My background by way of faith tradition would have led me to avoid or even pray against such practice. But to think that God might be present there and that in running a stand there I might conceivably be on holy ground seeking where God was present was quite a switch in my mind. Indeed, what I found in practice was a lot of people seeking and open to prayer for healing, in many ways more open than those I encountered in church. Of course this is not to sacralise all that was taking place there, and discernment is much needed, but a shift of posture towards love, presence, and listening away from judgment and anxiety was and is so helpful.

Taylor has some lovely ideas about this posture in relation to our tendency towards judgment rather than embrace. He suggests for a start that judgment is something that comes last rather than being the front foot. “The evangelism that proceeds by listening and learning, entering into another man’s vision in order to see Christ in it, does not start with assertions about sin but waits to be told about it. And usually the truth about sin is almost the last truth to be told.”¹⁰

For Taylor, if you are not tempted to join another religion (or culture) then you haven’t been listening carefully enough, because there is clearly something about it that has drawn others into it. So never call “another’s light darkness.” For me I had unwittingly picked up that sin is usually the first truth to be told. My experience since in mission with groups and individuals has found the wisdom of Taylor’s advice. He also suggests that some of our

⁸ Taylor, *Primal Vision*, 20.

⁹ Taylor, *Primal Vision*, 10.

¹⁰ Taylor, *Primal Vision*, 172.

ways of speaking are extremely unhelpful in relation to other cultures. It sounds an old-fashioned way of saying it, but he suggests we should eschew the foreigner's language. "Recognising that we have to do with a spiritual religion we shall eschew much of the foreigner's terminology—'evil spirits', 'witch doctor', 'devil possession'—and be constantly careful never to call another's light darkness."¹¹

This is a practice of deliberately letting go both of judgment and also particular ways of making the world, which is what language does, in order that we might find new ways of speech and of making the world that are in the vernacular. In particular, I suggest gritty or angular local forms of speech and using the texts and artefacts of culture as the building blocks of construction. In particular, it's worth noticing, looking out for, encouraging, and celebrating artists who speak in that way from the ground, from the inside—the poets and local prophets. Art and prophecy are close friends, and this connection with artists will likely open up a prophetic kind of imagining and speech. "More and more necessary to Africa are the spokesmen be they poets, prophets or statesmen who can articulate this hidden rejection of the West and more positively give voice to the passionate affirmations which Africa needs to make."¹²

Every culture has a redemptive gift. We know the face of Christ more fully as we see the many faces of Christ represented in cultures around the world. So in the same way that "the world church is impoverished and incomplete without the insights that the logos has been preparing for it in Africa,"¹³ we are impoverished without the redemptive gifts that might come from subcultures in the West.

Examples of Practice

There are a growing number of communities meeting outdoors in what has become known as Forest Church.¹⁴ This connects with peoples' common experience of feeling spiritual or close to God in the natural world. This is an example of a redemptive gift from pagans and others reminding us of the beauty of the natural world which is shining with glory. The Forest Church are a mix of communities. None of them are simply taking the church chairs outside and doing what they do on Sunday. It's a much more creative adventure. At one end of the practice is a set who are using familiar Christian forms drawing old things out of the cupboard and mixing them with new in creative ways. At the other is a much more intentional inculturation with pagan cultures. In those cases, they might well use the eightfold wheel of the year and have druids and wiccans participating in rituals that are Christ-centred, but the language for God and prayer has been carefully considered in ways that are open and connect rather than alienate. This is a prophetic dialogue. Paul Cudby describes his sense of this as a movement of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵

In the book *Here Be Dragons*, which takes as a metaphor old maps that had dragons on the edges to warn of the dangers beyond the edge of the known world, Richard and Lorimer Passmore suggest the adventure is to sail off the edge of the known world and participate in mission with young people in their cultures and communities.¹⁶ There is now a network of youth ministers seeking to do this coordinated by Frontier Youth Trust. Working with a group of young people on the streets, Richard Passmore discerned that they used the word "flow" to speak of spiritual experience—when they skated and felt at one with the world they experienced "Flow." As a result of this they developed local theology using Flow as the name of God, the church of Flow, which met relationally on the

11 Taylor, *Primal Vision*, 41.

12 Taylor, *Primal Vision*, 29.

13 Taylor, *Primal Vision*, 33.

14 See http://www.mysticchrist.co.uk/forest_church and Bruce Stanley, *Forest Church: A Field Guide to Nature Connection for Groups and Individuals* (Llangurig, UK: Mystic Christ Press, 2013).

15 Paul Cudby, *The Shaken Path* (UK: Christian Alternative, 2017).

16 Richard Passmore, Lorimer Passmore, and James Ballantyne, *Here Be Dragons: Youth Work and Mission off the Maps* (Chard, UK: Porthouse, 2013).

streets and in a curry house. They wrote some fascinating parables of flow and reworking of bible passages such as, “In the beginning there was Flow and the Flow was God and God created the heavens and the earth...”

An assignment we set pioneer students encourages this playful use of language. They are asked to identify a culture or community that is unfamiliar and to go and be present and observe and notice what it is like, ideally getting to know people. They then reflect on a passage of scripture that might resonate with that community and rework or improvise the language in it so that it would connect. Here is a short piece from a student reworking John 1 as a passage that might connect with Sikh friends:

Always! Forever! The Word was.

The Word was with the Guru.

The Word was the Guru.

He sang the divine Music with the Formless One, before the universes, worlds and continents were made.

World and Form were created by him, All species and colours, Iron and fire. No speck of dust exists except for him.

Where should men look for True Light?

In him who is True Life that is light for all. Darkness and evil tries to extinguish the True Light, Millions of times a day;

But the light beams out unfettered.

The Guru sent John. A holy saint.

He testifies about the True Light, ignoring caste. He knew and saw and touched the True Light. John was pure and devoted to God,

As a guru he brought light to men.

But he was not the True Light,

He pointed to the True One.

The True Light that enlightens all men and all women,

Ignoring all caste and race,

Was entering into our existence.

He lived as the True Humble one.

The Maker of universes was universally unseen,

By the very eyes he had gifted sight to.

How could his own world never welcome him in? ¹⁷

Another movement in the UK is church leavers. The church often assumes that people who leave do so because they have abandoned faith, but that is often not true. A recent piece of research in Scotland¹⁸ shows that significant numbers of church leavers are participating in mission. They give mission as a reason for leaving and find they are freer to participate in mission by leaving church as they have known it. Christ is central to their life as they seek to follow him in the midst of the communities they are in. This could be conceived of as an insider movement. The same sort of movement is happening in the US.

We have some African pioneer students whose question in mission is how to share Christ in ways that don't replicate the culture of Ghana or Nigeria or Malawi. They are part of church planting movements that have grown

¹⁷ Kevin Colyer. Used with permission.

¹⁸ Steve Aisthorpe, *The Invisible Church: Learning from the Experiences of Churchless Christians* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2016).

quickly in Britain. A big part of their story of migration is that God is sending them in mission but they find themselves with a culture of church that is disconnected from their non-African neighbours. So inculturation for them is finding holy ground in the homes of their neighbours and wondering what it might mean to go on an adventure in that form.¹⁹ It too requires an eschewing of foreign language, letting go of judgment of Western cultures, and a discernment of holy ground and finding a new vernacular on the inside.

There is a growing set of practices around mission and transformation in local communities that involves joining in with others in being good news and helping that part of God's good earth experience some healing. This is often with people at the margins and/or in places that are wasteland. A local vicar and pioneer in London reflected together on the way that migrant workers were being treated poorly—in answer to their question of what good news would look like for them, they came up with the answer of a cleaning company. Through participating on a missional entrepreneurship course with other pioneers and a lot of hard work and investment, three years on that dream has been realised. Clean for Good was launched paying the London living wage and developing cleaning contracts with companies that want better ethical practice.²⁰ I heard testimonies of cleaners who had worked seventy-two-hour weeks now beaming as they had found dignity and a better life. This kind of mission will also shine a light on an area of injustice for a fairer world we hope. To see a church catalysing such a project was wonderful, and I was proud when I heard the church telling its story—such good news. Another environmental example—Clay Community Church in Glasgow is restoring unproductive land.²¹ What I particularly love about this project as well as the gathering of a community around the task of renewing a piece of forgotten land is the re-theologising that undergirds the mission—they explore images of the tree of life, Jesus as the destroyer of the destroyers of the earth, and as the healer of the land, as the new gardener. At the heart of their liturgy on Easter day on the land is a tree-planting eucharist.

Pioneers are doing all sorts of other things—we had a piece of research done into our training at CMS and I laughed out loud when I saw the range of projects and communities that they are engaging in—it's truly delightful how imaginative the projects and communities are and how ordinary at the same time.²² Thank God for these dreamers.

Making...

In anthropology and cultural studies there has been a lot of criticism of ways of conceiving of culture as fixed, bounded wholes with a unified set of beliefs and values and worldview, a modern understanding, if you will. Culture has come to be seen as something dynamic, where meaning is contested and negotiated and its boundaries are porous. Culture is made and remade through the use of material stuff and social forms, through creative consumption, poaching and borrowing and repurposing as themes of identity and representation are negotiated and struggled with. Those who resist dominant ways of life do so not by leaving a (fixed) culture to create another one but by making do with a series of ruses and tactics that subvert or change the meanings of signs and symbols within that fluid culture by their creative use.²³ At times what they do seems to almost reclaim the culture over and against itself. An example of making of culture in this way would be the kneeling at American football games. Theology and missiology often imagine "culture" in its fixed way when they hear the word. This tends to close down

19 Harvey Kwiyani, *Sent Forth: African Missionary Work in The West* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014) has pioneered thinking and practice in this area.

20 See Clean for Good, A Different Kind of Cleaning Company at www.cleanforgood.co.uk.

21 Paul Ede and Sam Ewell, "Understanding the Environmental Realm," in *Mission in Marginal Places: The Praxis*, eds. Michael Cloke and Paul Pears (Bletchley, UK: Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2016), 13-16.

22 See Pioneer Mission Leadership Training: 5 Years On—An Evaluation for CMS (2015). Download the report here: <https://pioneer.churchmissionso-ciety.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/PMLT-Report.pdf>.

23 Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

rather than open up possibilities for conversation as it is bounded and therefore defended. In contrast, Kathryn Tanner suggests that the more postmodern notions of culture hold great promise for theological (and I would add missiological) study.²⁴ Pete Ward similarly draws on the fluid (postmodern) nature of culture in his recent *Liquid Ecclesiology*, which is influenced very much by British cultural studies and inculturation in mission.²⁵

Both Tanner and Ward argue that theology, church, and tradition are all culturally made and remade in different generations and contexts. Construction is essential through the use of material and social forms; further, there are bound to be contested notions of what all of those things are and might be. It's a creative making;

... the creativity of a postmodern bricoleur, the creativity that is of someone who works with an always potentially disordered heap of already existing materials, pulling them apart and putting them back together again, tinkering with their shapes, twisting them this way and that. It is a creativity expressed through the modification and extension of materials already on the ground... This sort of tinkering can be genuinely revolutionary.²⁶

The cultural mandate in Genesis which is perhaps the first missional command offers this possibility to creatively make and remake life in response to the gift of God and the gifts we are given. It's our human task. The task in the West (in its particular and local places) is mission as making, making a way where there is no way, making do, making it up, making a world, making church, making communion, making a new society, terra forming, creatively, improvisationally, in an adventure of the imagination, animated by the Spirit sharing in the love of God both inside and outside the church.

Freedom

After five years of training pioneers I went on a retreat, and one of the things I was reflecting on was the amazing gift that pioneers bring and are. I was trying to distill what I sensed the charism of pioneers is and wrote nine aspects of that charism around the metaphor of true north, an overarching pull, or orientation towards God's mission in the world. One of those aspects that has lingered with me the most is freedom—because I think what I have seen is that as pioneers find out who it is they are called to be and are encouraged to be, they find a freedom in themselves, in Christ, and in imagination of what it means to join in the healing of all things, God's mission. The mission communities and orders of the churches at their best are purveyors of imagination and freedom in a church that come across rather too often as overanxious and fearful.

Risk Letting Go Control

This tension between freedom and law is nothing new. The book of Galatians is a tussle for freedom from the Gentile church on an adventure of the imagination and the Jerusalem church and her "right" traditions and practices in the face of those new Gentile practices. Taylor's book is pretty blunt about the challenge in missions between the culture of the sending Western church into new cultural contexts. He says that Western culture and the gospel are often confused as the same gift. So if you are interested in the gospel, you get the other thrown into the bargain, which will require some unbundling. "It has to be admitted quite frankly that during these centuries the missionaries of the Christian Church have commonly assumed that Western civilisation and Christianity were two aspects of the same gift which they were commissioned to offer to the rest of mankind."²⁷ Will we risk letting go of control

24 Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

25 Pete Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology: The Gospel and the Church* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

26 Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 166.

27 Taylor, *Primal Vision*, 5.

and trust God, trust the Spirit, trust the people in their own cultures, trusting those improvising in mission as they seek to inculturate the gospel? “Are we of the West prepared to trust the Holy Spirit to lead the Christians of Asia and Africa or must the controlling Western hand be permanently resting on the ark of God?”²⁸

It’s a great question and it’s taken and is taking a very long time to answer in global contexts. But I don’t think we’re anywhere near answering it in our own backyards. Taking the UK as an example, the Church of England is looser around the edges than it has been for a very long time. Fresh expressions of church have been documented and show significant growth in the church as a whole.²⁹ But it is still difficult for the structures and imagination of the church to accept pioneering mission that is in any shape or form doing something imaginatively different in spite of all the rhetoric in church reports. There is an openness to forms that look like what we have already—for example, a church plant in a new housing area, or the addition of something that looks like a new congregation. But even then the levels of control over issues like inculturated liturgy, licensing of lay pioneers and so on, let alone local theology, make good mission practice very difficult. This isn’t a great surprise. In every culture newness is resisted. Donovan, in his amazing work with the Masai, runs into challenges over the mass, ordination, the liturgy, and so on.³⁰ In his less well-known second book, he seeks to apply the mission learning from Africa to America and suggests that, like the Jerusalem church, the church in the West is “blinded to the fact they have trapped Christ in their own culture,”³¹ and that we need to free doctrine and sacraments from standardisation, and develop a very different kind of formation or imagination for ministry—much akin to what Taylor is articulating. There have been some suggestions in the Church of England for a move towards a centralised pool of resources that ministers might draw on faithfully which would open up a very different set of possibilities of making but that has not got much traction with the liturgical committees.³² It’s ironic because at gatherings of bishops in the Anglican communion imagination and inculturation are two ever-present discussions. But even then they are being considered at the provincial level so that a statement from the bishops in 1998 can say, “... True inculturation implies a willingness in worship to listen to culture.... it has to make contact with the deep feelings of people. It can only be achieved through an openness to innovation and experimentation, an encouragement of local creativity, and a readiness to reflect critically at every stage of the process, a process which in principle is never ending,”³³ whilst at the same time not dealing with this exact issue in Western contexts or at least only imagining it at the centrally controlled provincial level rather than where freedom is needed locally for pioneers involved in mission on the ground. Discussion about inculturation in the Roman Catholic Church tends to have the same provincial nature.

I don’t want to labour this point—I think the challenge is clear but what I do want to reflect on in mission in the West is that we need more than ever the mission communities of the church, the sodalities, the spread out mission orders, the refounding of religious life around the *missio dei*. There is plenty of research around this: that the energy of the church in mission is best carried when there are two structures of the church in mission.³⁴ The first is the local (modal) structure which is the one that is best known. But the second (sodal) is the structures of the church that are gathered around a charism with a focus on mission and have a second-order commitment to that charism—the mission communities. So in our context CMS is a mission community of the church and we seek to nurture this charism and support those pioneers inculturating the gospel in the West (as well as in other contexts).

28 Taylor, *Primal Vision*, 9.

29 Church Army, *The Day of Small Changes*. See https://www.churcharmy.org/Groups/286719/Church_Army/Church_Army/Our_work/Research/The_Day_of/The_Day_of.aspx.

30 Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*.

31 Vincent Donovan, *The Church in the Midst of Creation* (London: SCM Press, 1989), 19.

32 Mark Earey, *Beyond Common Worship: Anglican Identity and Liturgical Diversity* (London: SCM Press, 2013), is one example.

33 “The Down to Earth Worship, York Statement,” in *Liturgical Inculturation in the Anglican Communion*, ed. David R. Holeton (Bramcote, Nottingham, UK: Grove Books, 1990).

34 Ralph Winter, “The Two Structures of God’s Redemptive Mission,” *Missiology: An International Review* 2, no. 1 (January 1974): 121-39.

Embedding mission in other diocesan structures is fine as far as it goes but the gravity pulls in a different direction. Missiology or mission education, rather than having done its work because mission is so much more talked about in churches and other seminaries, is as much needed as ever. Dana Robert concluded in her review of forty years of American missiology, “the church will not move ahead in mission unless the missiologist sounds a prophetic call,”³⁵ and I would add unless her mission communities nurture that prophetic mission and ministry as a distinctive charism.³⁶

Do It from the Inside

Taylor’s radical view of mission in relation to culture could be summarised as “do it from the inside.”

Either we must think of Christian mission in terms of bringing the Muslim, Hindu, the Animist into Christendom or we must go with Christ as he stands in the midst of Islam, of Hinduism, of the primal worldview, and watch with him fearfully and wonderingly as he becomes dare we say it? Muslim, or Hindu, or Animist, as once he became man and a Jew...Once, led by the Spirit, the Church made its choice in this matter at the council of Jerusalem and dared to win Gentiles by becoming Gentile.... Christ answered the call of the Greeks—he came where they were and became what they were. From within their own culture he challenged..., judged..., turned world upside down just as he had turned Judaism upside down—just as indeed if he enters our churches today he turns our Christianity upside down. So would he challenge and judge and revolutionise the African worldview but he must do it from the inside.”³⁷

Jesus’s incarnation was done on the inside. The word became flesh and dwelt among us. We see the value Jesus placed on this in Samaria in John 4 where he remained with Samaritans for a couple of days after his encounter with the woman at the well. Rather than inviting them to become Jewish and learn at Jerusalem he encouraged them to remain inside Samaritan religion and culture. He did the same with the man in the tombs at Gerasa who wanted to go back across the lake with Jesus. Jesus insisted he remain in his own culture and community so that something could grow on the inside rather than have its imagination colonised by the Jewish way of doing things, and perhaps the Syrian church was birthed right there? There is a growing body of writing in mission on what some call insider movements which is primarily written to consider mission and Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism as followers of Jesus remain, say, Buddhist with Jesus at the centre of their life.³⁸ There is some controversy around this in certain circles but Taylor was writing about this fifty years ago! Of course it’s done from the inside—when did we think doing it from the outside, or excarnation, was a good idea? I hope there will be a growing body of practice and thinking as people make the connection between that and following Christ in the West, not just in other religions and lands.³⁹

35 Dana L. Robert, “Forty Years of American Missiology: A Brief Review,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 38, no. 1 (January 2014): 6.

36 Gerald Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church: Dissent for Leadership* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993) and *From Chaos to Mission: Refounding Religious Life Formation* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1996) are insightful in the importance of the spread out religious communities.

37 Taylor, *Primal Vision*, 113.

38 Harley Talman and John Jay Travis, eds., *Understanding Insider Movement: Disciples of Jesus within Diverse Religious Communities* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2015).

39 Michael Moynagh, *Church in Life: Innovation, Mission and Ecclesiology* (London: SCM Press, 2017), does exactly that where he talks about insider communities. See chapter 10.