

This Inbetweenness

THIS INBETWEENNESS

Paul G. Hiebert

This inbetweenness
 This walking the two
 This expansiveness
 That sees me neither
 Fully one
 Or the Other

Fully one
 Seems to promise so much

Neither one
 Seems so un fulfilled, empty, vague

.

The gift of betweenness
 As we journey to be
 Fully one

May we be generous with our
 Discontent

David Michie, Perth Australia

David Michie, a young Australian Christian poet, captures the essence of this volume, namely that missions in the twenty-first century will require new paradigms that move with a rapidly changing world, and that one of these new perceptions is that missionaries and global leaders are increasingly transcultural mediators—those who live between cultures and deal with issues arising in-between different communities. Missions to unreached peoples must continue, but to this will be added missions involving the building of global Christian fellowship, and partnerships in missions and ministries..

The modern mission paradigm (roughly 1700 - 1970) was characterized by ‘going’ from one place to another to spread the Gospel. Missionaries left Europe and North America to go to

the 'utter most parts' of the world. The organizing principle was geography. Missionaries went to India, Africa, China, Latin America, Burma, the South Sea Islands and other parts of the earth. They began along the coasts, and then moved inland. They divided their work into geographic 'fields' and brought the Gospel to people who had never heard it.¹ The flow was one way: from the 'West' to the 'non-West,' from the 'civilized Christian world' to the 'uncivilized pagan world.' God used the modern mission movement, with all its flaws and failures, to plant churches around the world. Today the young and vital churches, and centers of Christianity are not in the West, but in Africa, Korea, China, Latin America, India and other lands once thought to be remote (Jenkins 2002).

The world, too has changed. In William Carey's day it took six months by ship to reach India. In 1960 it took four weeks by steamship. Now we come and go in a day. In 1960 it took three weeks to send airmail letters and get a response. Now we have instant communication by phone and web. We are rapidly becoming one global world in which events in one part of the world immediately affect the rest of the world.

MISSIONS INBETWEEN

What is the shape of the new mission paradigms emerging in the 21st century? A consensus has not yet emerged, but several elements are increasingly clear. One is that missions to new and unreached areas must continue. The number of people who have not heard the Gospel meaningfully enough to make an intelligent response is greater now than when

¹George Jennings points out that most of the missionaries from the U.S. in the nineteenth and twentieth century came from mid-West farms where each farmer lives alone in his fields, in contrast to much of Europe where farmers live in hamlets and go to their fields.

Ziegenbalg and Plütschau left for India in 1706. The task of pioneer missions is not finished. It is greater than ever.

A second fact is that a growing number of missionaries are ‘inbetweeners,’ standing between different worlds, seeking to build bridges of understanding, mediating relationships, and negotiating partnerships in ministry. In anthropological terms they are ‘cultural mediators.’ They stand between different communities and cultures. They need to know both well, and speak to each for the other. Both communities will be suspicious of them, because they do not know what the missionaries are doing when they are with the others. ‘Inbetweeners’ often feel like they have no home or identity because they live in two or more worlds, and must constantly change their identities as they move from one to another. But ‘inbetweeners’ are increasingly vital to global missions and the global church. Here we will look at several areas in which this inbetweenness are highlighted in this volume, and then at some of the qualities missionaries serving in this role need to be effective in their ministries.

Between the Gospel and the World

The heart of missions has always and remains the communication of the Gospel to the world. In the past, the ‘world’ was defined as the non-west. It was assumed that the West had heard the Gospel, and that it was essential Christian. It was the rest of the world that was pagan and heathen. They needed to hear the Gospel for the first time.

Today the church is global, and the most vital churches are found the non-west. This has profoundly changed the way we perceive missions (Walls, chapter 4) First, the globalization of the church has made us much more aware of the need to contextualize the message, the mission

and the church. This contextualization has both cultural and social dimensions to it (Van Engen, chapter 5 Priest, chapter 11, Meneses chapter 9). Contextualization of the Gospel in local cultures began with using local languages, translating the Bible, and using local worship forms. There is an increasing awareness that evangelistic methods, too, need to be contextualized. Now questions arise about the contextualization of theology. As Robert Priest shows, western theological categories cannot simply be translated into other languages. Theological reflections in different cultures must be done initially in their conceptual categories. Moreover, reflections must like link abstract, experience-distant concepts, which are often reductionist, with concrete experience-near manifestations in everyday life which are rich and intertwined.

The contextualization of the Gospel in different cultures raises profound questions on the need for and limits to contextualization. To what extent can we use local signs, beliefs and practices go without losing the Gospel and Church, and how can we transform these to become faithful communicators of the Gospel? The dangers are to under-contextualize and to over-contextualize them. The task calls for missionaries and leaders who understand both theology and human cultures well, and bridge between them.

Contextualization has to do with the incorporation of the missionary in the local social systems. What is the role of the missionary in the local culture? 'Missionary' is a role in the west, but not found in other cultures. Local people look at how missionaries behave and place them in one of their own cultural categories. Too often missionaries are seen by the people as rich land lords (because they build large compounds), powerful patrons (because they control resources and hire people), or as foreigners (Loewen 19###). How would they respond to the Gospel if the missionaries came as 'holy persons?' What would a holy person look like in

different cultures? Is such a role possible for missionaries with families? What would incarnational ministries look like in each culture?

Contextualization also has to do with the embodiment of the church in the local system. Often this has been the hardest adjustment for western missionaries to make. If they come from episcopal churches, they set up episcopal styles of organization. If they come from many protestant churches they assume that democracy and elections are the best way to organize a church, even though these lead to polarization in the churches and law suits in many parts of the world. They rarely study the ways local societies organize their communities—by elders, councils, chiefs, and others—and organize the local church accordingly.

It is becoming clear that all forms of ecclesiology are shaped by the societies in which they emerge, and need both theological and social critique. How should churches deal with ethnic differences in the neighborhood and in the church—and the racism that so often emerges out of these? How should it deal with class and gender differences? What are its role in reconciliation and peace ministries in a conflict torn world? Missions can no longer ignore the hostilities and conflict around the world.

Second, there is a growing realization that the West is a mission field—and a difficult one to reach (Walls, chapter 4). This raises questions of priority. How much effort should be given to the West where people do have an opportunity to hear the Good News, and how much to the many parts of the world where people have no opportunity to hear it? The temptation is to lose sight of the big picture and to focus on the West with its great spiritual needs.

Third, it is increasingly clear that missionaries must not only speak to the world, but also to speak for the world to the church. Most churches understand little about churches and cultures

in other parts of the world. They assume that these should be like themselves. But missions must begin with truly loving others, and this requires a deep knowledge of them. Increasingly missionaries must help sending churches understand and identify with people around the world. Moreover, in every church there need to be mission minded leaders who constantly remind the church of its mission calling. Too often the church is a community with its own subculture, and through the process of institutionalization it spends more and more of its efforts on building itself. Every church committee should have someone designated to speak for the world—to remind us that all our efforts have not only consequences for ourselves, but also for God's mission to the world.

Between Christianity and nonChristian Religions

The question of religious pluralism will be one of the key issues in the 21st century. In the past missionaries faced this question as they encountered other religions abroad. Now with migration and the evangelistic efforts of other religions, churches in the west face the same question at home. Most have given little thought to the deep issues involved, and are unprepared to defend the uniqueness of Christ. Harold Netland (19##, introduction) helps us understand the deep issues involved in inter-religious dialogue, and ways to present the Gospel winsomely, speaking the truth in love.

Between Church and Church

A third area of 'inbetweenness' is in world-wide church to church relationships. In the past, mission churches were often supervised by sending churches. Today, they are increasingly mature, independent churches. Moreover, there has been a rapid growth in locally initiated

churches with few official ties to churches in other lands. There is a growing need for missionaries who are bridges between these diverse churches, seeking to build bridges of understanding of the Gospel, and partnership in mission (Tiénoú chapter 1; Escobar chapter 8; Pluddemann, chapter 13) address issues related to global relationships in the Church and missions.

The emergence of global relationships between churches raises critical questions of power and control, and of defining the essence of the Gospel. It also raises difficult questions about the nature of partnership in mission. How can the Gospel be presented in a way that is seen as belonging to the world, not one part of it. How can personal, resources, and methods be used in pioneer work? How can cultural differences in multi-cultural teams be worked out so that these enhance, not undermine the work? Here missionaries are needed who can help bridge the deep differences between churches and individuals in different parts of the world.

The globalization of the church also raises questions about relationships between churches around the world. How can the church show the world that it is indeed one. In much of the world the dividedness of the church has been one of the great obstacles to its message. How can governance be truly shared? How can the power of the academy—education, research and publication—become truly global in the church? Here the global church needs missionaries from all countries—people who move between worlds and speak to the old churches for the young, and to the young churches for the old.

Between Theology and Theologies

The emergence of churches around the world raises questions in the academy of doing

philosophical theology in different cultures (Tiéno, chapter 1; and 1993.247), the nature of these theologies as habitus, dynamic and context sensitive (VanHooser, chapter 2), and the relationship between theologies and Theology (Van Engen, chapter 5). It also raises questions about the relationship of systematic (philosophical), biblical (historical) and missional theologies (Tiéno and Hiebert 2004), and the need to develop a meta-theology, theological reflections on how we should do different theologies and how they complement each other.

The answer we give to this question of the relationship between theologies and Theology depends in large measure on our epistemological and hermeneutical frameworks. Chuck Van Engen (chapter 5), examines the relationship between local theologies and the need to work towards a global understanding of theological truths revealed in Scripture, truths given to humans in their cultural contexts as recorded in the Old and New Testaments, but truths that are universal and apply to all humans in their diverse contexts.

To move from local theologies to an understanding of transcultural truths revealed in Scripture, we need a meta-theology, theological reflection on how local theologies should be done. For us as evangelicals this includes the affirmation that Scripture is divine revelation and is our final authority in matters it addresses, that theologies are our understanding of that revelation in our contexts, and, therefore are vital, but not to be equated with Scripture, that interpreting Scripture belongs to the church and a hermeneutical community, and that the Church must seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in interpreting the Scripture.

David and Cindy Strong (chapter 3) show us a Biblical model of what meta-theology as process looks like in their analysis of Acts 15. They point out that doing local theologies and mediating between them involves more than simply cultural issues. Theological reflections are

at the core of the process, and provide the underlying unity of the church in all its cultural manifestations.

As Andrew Walls points out, the church as hermeneutical community involves not only churches in different cultures and theological traditions, but also the church today and the history and legacies of the church down through history. He writes (chapter 4),

For Christian history, which has to take account of the generations, cultural as well as chronological, as potential building blocks in the New Temple, the need is still greater. The qualities required in the Christian historian are those required in the missionary, a capacity to live on terms set by someone else.

Walls laments the fact that western Christian scholars are often little aware of or concerned with what is going on in the Church and Christian scholarship around the world.

Between Theology and Human Studies

Missions is communicating the Gospel to humans. It therefore requires an understanding of both the Gospel and humans. The first draws on theologies, the second on human studies. For the most part, missionaries are well trained in exegeting the Scriptures. Most have little or no training in exegeting human societies. Today we are increasingly aware that we need a deep understanding of the sociocultural contexts in which we minister (Meneswes chapter 9; Whiteman chapter 7, Priest chapter 11). Too often missions have been afraid of using the human sciences lest they become captive to these, not stopping to reflect on the danger of becoming to philosophy and history. In a rapidly changing world, we can no longer minister effectively without knowing and identifying with the people we serve, or settle for stereotypes and second hand reports of peoples and their cultures.

Between the Academy and the Movement

Another chasm that needs to be bridged is that between missions as a movement, and missiology in the academy. In the future we will need missiologists who live between being a part of the academy and a movement. Increasingly we need careful research and reflection on the Word and on the World. Missions requires the best research and theoretical reflections to help guide us in an increasingly complex and confusing world. As such it must draw on the best that the academy can offer.

As Tite Tiénou (chapter 1) points out, so far the academy has been dominated by the West. The growing voices of scholars around the world have been largely ignored, often because western scholars have not taken time to learn other languages deeply. Here missionaries and national scholars need to counter the hegemony of the western academy, give voice to the theologies emerging in the young churches, and help build bridges of understandings and consensus between scholars around the world.

Between Changing World Systems

A sea change is taking place in the world. Peter Drucker writes,

Every few hundred years in Western history there occurs a sharp transformation. We cross what . . . have called a “divide.” Within a few short decades, society rearranges itself—its worldview; its basic values; its social and political structure; its arts, its key institutions. Fifty years later, there is a new world. And the people born then cannot even imagine the world in which their grandparents lived and into which their own parents were born. . . We are currently living through just such a transformation [cited in Van Engen, 1997, 437).

We are in such a transition world-wide. Not only is the spread of global webs challenging societies, cultures, nation states, and other local identities, post-modernity and post-

post-modernity are challenging the intellectual foundations of the Enlightenment. Modernity and science are increasingly seen as dominant meta-narratives that oppress people and destroy the world. Moreover, as Vinoth Ramachandra (chapter 6) and Eloise Meneses (chapter 9) document so well, modernity was not a product that the West exported to the northwest, it was itself shaped by forces and counterforces around the world. Christianity and missions in the west, as well as contemporary religious movements in Hinduism and Islam shaped and were shaped by it. Too often missionaries have been blind to their identification with their nations and political ideologies, rather than citizens of God's Kingdom with a prophetic voice to all societies, including their own. But what lies beyond post-modernity that seeks to destroy the old tyranny?

Darrell Whiteman points out (chapter 7) that Christian scholars must provide leadership in understanding our rapidly changing world, and building bridges between local and global worlds. This requires a deep appreciation and affirmation of locals with their diversities, but also an affirmation of the oneness of humanity, the oneness of the church and the oneness of the Gospel. It requires leaders that are at home in local and global settings, and can bridge between locals. They must also help Christians stand with confidence in a confusing world, and bear bold witness to a world seeking answers to questions of its very existence. Missionaries and transcultural leaders are essential in such a task for it belongs to the whole church, not just the church in one part of the world. The problems are world-wide, and the global church must address them as faithful servants and witness to Christ that affirms both the global and local nature of the church.

But missions is ultimately a movement that relates to real people and a real world, and as such it must never lose the biblical vision of bearing bold witness to the world of God's saving

love. That vision requires constant re-commitment, sacrificed and suffering (Phil. 1:12-20, 2 Tim. 1:8).

THE MINISTRY OF INBETWEENNESS

How can missionaries and missiologists live and minister as ‘inbetweeners?’ Our model is Jesus in his incarnation as fully God and fully human. He was equally at home as King of the universe on the throne in the palaces of heaven, and as an infant in a manger in a cattle shed on earth. We can never begin to emulate him, but he provides us with a way of understanding our role in bridging between different world. John 17.

Transcultural Identity

The first question that emerges in living between worlds is that of identity. In a sense missionaries belong to two or more worlds. They begin by leaving their home cultures, where they are insiders. There they are known as ‘missionaries,’ a role recognized and respected. They enter another culture as outsiders. There they cannot be ‘missionaries,’ because this is not a role in that society. The people fit them into the local inventory of roles as best they can. Often the missionaries are seen as rich landlords, patrons or colonial rulers.

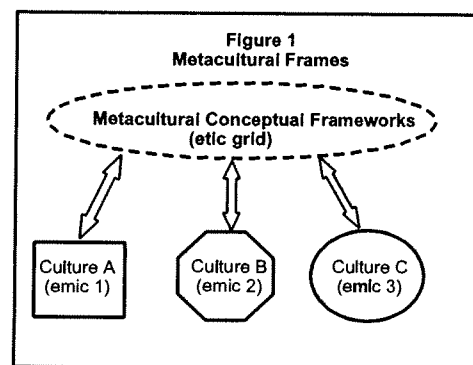
As missionaries live in the new society, they learn its ways and identify with it more deeply. They learn the language, and begin to see the world as the people do, emically. In so doing they become, to some extent, insiders. But they never fully become one with the people, they are outsiders-insiders.

When the missionaries return to their home societies, they find that they do not fully fit in. They now begin to see their cultures as outsiders do. Here, too, they are outsider-insiders. In

a sense they belong to two cultures, in a sense they do not belong fully to either. Increasingly, wherever they go, they are outside-insiders. This creates an identity crisis.

One way to resolve this tension of identities is to affirm one as our 'home' cultural identity, and to go to other worlds as outsiders and visitors. But in doing this we will never effectively communicate the Gospel to them, or be able to speak for them to our home churches. A second answer is to seek to 'go native.' But this is not only impossible in a lifetime, but also destroys our ability to be bridges between different cultures. A third answer is to be cultural chameleons, to take on the trappings of the culture in which we find ourselves. But then we become cultural schizophrenics, with no true identity of our own.

To be effective mediators between cultures we need a clear identity. This requires developing meta-cultural mental frameworks that enable us to live in different worlds while keeping our core identity (figure 1). This etic grid is not acultural. It, too, emerges out of a worldview. But it is a framework that arises out of the comparison of different cultures, and seeks to understand each of them deeply from its own perspectives. Missionaries who are effective in developing such a perspective are



transcultural people. P. S. Adler notes that such a person is,

... a person whose essential identity is inclusive of life patterns different from his own and who has psychologically and socially come to grips with a multiplicity of realities. Multicultural man is the person who is intellectually and emotionally committed to the fundamental unity of all human beings while at the same time he recognizes, legitimatizes, accepts and appreciates the fundamental differences that lie between people of different cultures. This new kind of man cannot be defined by the languages he speaks, the countries he has visited, or the number of international contacts he had made.

As a child of the kingdom the believer then becomes a World Christian. By calling he [she] belongs to a universal fellowship—the Christian church. By conviction he [she] claims a universal message—the Christian gospel. By commitment he [she] owes his [her] allegiance to a universal king—Jesus Christ. By vocation, he [she] is apart of a universal movement—the Christian mission (1986, 137-138).

What keeps inbetweeners from cultural schizophrenia? Here a metaphor may help us. Vincenzo Volentiere notes, “Birds in flight . . . are not between places, they carry their places with them. We never wonder where they live; they are at home in the sky, in flight. Flight is they way of being in the world (Iyer, 2000, XX).” Jesus in his incarnation was fully God and fully human. He was at home as King on the throne in the palaces of heaven, as an infant in a manger in a cattle shed on earth. We can never begin to emulate, but as Christians we should never be so at home on earth that we lose sight of our heavenly identity.

Transcultural Community

Where do missionaries find their communities? In one sense, they find fellowship with members of the various communities in which they participate, but, in another, they no longer belong fully to any one of them. They often find their closest relationships with other missionaries and transcultural people who understand the ‘outside-inside’ nature of their identity. They belong to a global fellowship with friends around the world. They begin to understand that this world is, indeed, not their home—that ‘home’ for Christians is heaven, and that in this world they are ‘resident aliens’ (Hauerwas and Willimon 1989).

Transcultural Ministries

To minister effectively as a mediator between cultures, a person must become a transcultural person with a well integrated metacultural identity. People who identify primarily

with one community will not be trusted by the other. Those who seek to identify fully with another community and 'go native' are seen as frauds and rivals (Howard 2004). We simply cannot fully identify with another culture in adulthood. In a sense effective cultural mediators are outsider-insiders in any culture in which they find themselves. They seek to understand and empathize deeply with the people, but know and are known to still be outsiders. It is this outsidership that enables them to be bridges between different groups.

Outsiders are also able to bring people from different communities into dialogue, and to mediate the dialogue, seeking to help each community understand the others as they view themselves. In interreligious witness, move beyond simply going to Muslims and bearing witness. Need to help Christians understand Muslims, many of whom are more deeply committed to their faith than are the Christians. The goal of such dialogue is not simply peaceful coexistence. But it is a first step towards true and faithful witness to our Christian faith.

Meta-cultural frameworks are essential not only to the identity of missionaries, but also for their ministries of translating and communicating the Gospel in new cultures, They are also essential in building relationships between Christians in different societies. Effective mediators can not side with either party. They must honestly and positively represent each side to the other, helping each to see the other's perspectives. For example, missionaries must not only present Christ to Hindus and Muslims, but also help churches see how Muslims and Hindus see Christians and Christ. In doing so, they do not need to deny their commitment to him as the only way to salvation, but they must understand how others see Christ if they want to present him to them in love.

A number of characteristics mark the intercultural effective person (Corbitt 1998, Hammer, M. R., M. J. Bennett and R. Wiseman 2003, Vulpe, Kealey, Protheroe and MacDonald 2001). At minimum, a transcultural person should be able:

. . . to communicate interpersonally; to adjust to various cultures; to develop interpersonal relationships; to deal with diverse societal systems; to understand another; and to manage psychological (intercultural) stress (Cook 2005, 22).

Essential to in-between ministries is intercultural mediation. Simply living between cultures does not mean one is a good mediator. For cultural mediation, D.J. Bachner and U. Zeujtschel note that persons and parties involved must meet three conditions:

- The development of a transcultural frame of reference and identity whose norms transcend national and monocultural boundaries.
- Relevant programmatic purposes and formal institutional expectations that exchanges are, in fact, to act as mediators; and
- Training that will prepare exchanges to assume a mediatory role and also confer legitimacy on formal status, for them to do so (1994, 39).

One central task of cultural mediators is to help participants in the process to understand each other deeply—to see others as they see themselves, and to see themselves as others see them. A second task is to mediate disagreements and conflicts. A third is to bring about reconciliation where there are deeply hatreds and memories of oppression (Volf, 1996).

At the heart of intercultural mediation is love. Missionaries must truly love the people and identify with them in their common humanity. Only then can they bear bold witness to the Gospel without arrogance and control.

In the twenty-first century missionaries will still go to other worlds, but many of them will find themselves increasingly involved in mediating different worlds. In a global world and a global church these ministries will become increasingly important as the church seeks to carry out its God given mission to the world. As such they must learn to live not here or there, for they are not going from one place to another. How they do so will determine in large measure the successes and failures in the coming global mission era. Their existence, like eagles, is between worlds (Is. 40:31). They look for their final home where God's people from every all the earth gather around the throne of the King.

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Seems so unfulfilled, empty, vague

A space
All our own
Not shared
Not half and half
sounds like
Rest, a contentment

A hope
Sitting on the receding horizon
A dream
Lost in waking to the real
Fully one
Has never been in my veins
I have always walked the two
The expansive ground
Is where my feet have trod

to stretch my skin so far
Could it be morethan exile
could it be the lace of rest
For journeyers separated from
Homeland.

Thegift of betweenness
As we journey to be
Fully one

May we be generous with our
Discontent

David Michie, Perth Australia

I would like draw on a young Australian Christian poet to capture what I would like to say in this essay. He titled one of his poems, "This Inbetweenness."

I grew up at the end of the old paradigm of modern missions (roughly 1700 - 1970). It was characterized by 'going' from one place to another to spread the Gospel. Missionaries left Europe and North America to go to the 'utter most parts' of the world. The organizing principle was geography. Missionaries went to India, Africa, China, Latin America, Burma, the South Sea Islands and other parts of the earth. They divided their work into 'fields' and brought the Gospel to people who had never heard it. The flow was one way: from the 'West' to the 'non-West,' from the 'civilized world' to the 'uncivilized world.'

God used the modern mission movement, with all its flaws and failures, to plant churches around the world. But today the young and vital churches and centers of Christianity are not in the West, but in Africa, India, Latin America, Korea, China and other lands once thought to be remote.

The world, too has changed. In William Carey's day it took six months by ship to reach India. In 1960 when we went it took four weeks by steamship. Now we come and go in little more than one day. In the 1960s it took more than two weeks to send airmail letters and get a response. It took us three days to book a phone call to the U.S. to announce the birth of a grandson to our parents. Now we have instant communication on the web. We are rapidly becoming one global world in which events in one part of the world affect the rest of the world.

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