

## Follow Jesus for Reaching Out to Peoples of Other Faiths

### Christian Population Trends Requires Reaching Out to Peoples of Other Faiths

In 1900, the world population was 1.6 billion and Christian population was 560 million and Muslim population was 200 million. Christian population was 35 % of the world population at the time, and Muslim population was 12.5 %. Christianity was definitely the largest religion of the world. Now after 122 years in 2022, the world population has increased to 8 billion and Christian population has increased to 2.4 billion and Muslim population has increased to 2 billion. Christian population has increased in absolute number but decreased from 35 % to 30 % as a fraction of the world population. On the other hand, you can see that Muslim population has increased by tenfold and its fraction of the world population increased from 12.5 % to 25 %, nearly comparable to the Christian population. Even worse is the future trend of Christian population. According to PEW Research, by 2070 Muslim population is to exceed Christian population. This was predicted several years ago, and the trend in the last few years shows that Muslim population increase is accelerating, and the Christian population increase is slowing down. I predict that Muslim population could exceed Christian population a few years before 2070! Now, let's look at the population of the four great religions of the world. There are, at present, 2 billion Muslims, 1.2 billion Hindus, 500 million Buddhists and about 500 million Confucianists and followers of Chinese classic philosophies. The total population from these four faiths is 4.2 billion or 52.5 % of the world population. Clearly, we cannot accomplish the Great Commission without reaching out to Peoples of Other Faiths.

### Complacency in Christian Outreach

Am I the only one crying about this despairing Christian population trend? Why is no one crying about this? I attended many Christian mission or missiological conferences. They brag about what they have done in the local area and their local success stories. I took a class called Perspectives in 2006. It is an introductory missiology class for lay Christians and Seminarians. It teaches that 98 % of Christian missionaries sent overseas go somewhere where Christian churches are already established. What then are they doing overseas? They work as local pastor in the local church. I have read a confession from a Swedish Missionary sent to Bangladesh who worked there for 35 years. He confessed that he could not convert a single Muslim to Christianity. I like him because he was honest. Most of those 98 % do not give a clear answer as to what their accomplishments were. Also, some Christians told me that they do not care because everything is under God's control. This is a complete misunderstanding of God's plan. Can you imagine that Abraham or Moses would not do what they were supposed to do because God is in control? Jesus said in John 5:17, "My Father is working until now, and therefore I am also working." Jesus showed an example for us. With the attitude that we do not have to anything because God is in control, the Protestant church did not send any missionaries overseas for more than 200 years after the Reformation until William Carey went to India in 1793.

### Review of What Christians Did Right and Failed to Do

Christians have done many things right. They preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and many were attracted to it. They also followed the Apostle Paul to reach out to people groups who do

not have their own solid religions. This was primarily to the European continent in the beginning and then later to North and South Americas. The people groups reached by this approach did not resist the Christian advancement like Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, or Confucianists. The religions prevailing in the Roman Empire before Christianity did not have scriptures of their own and did not teach such strong ethical teaching as the Great Religions of the World. This made Christianity the largest religion of the world. We should be grateful to Paul for his initiative to lead the Christian mission efforts into Greco-Roman world.

On the other hand, Christianity failed to reach out to Peoples of Other Faiths. The task of missionary work has become auxiliary to the function of church ministry. Missiology studies the approach on how to do missions but has become a small side topic in mainline theology. This is my observation and may not be the generally accepted view of the churches and the mission organizations. As a result of achieving the position of the largest religion of the world, perhaps Christianity became complacent. The Christian mission does not have to be emphasized as in the early Christian period. The net result is in effect abandoning reaching out to Peoples of Other Faiths.

Along with this, the Biblical messages are not interpreted as broadly as possible to embrace Peoples of Other Faiths, in spite of the fact that most of the teachings of Jesus Christ are metaphoric.

#### What Should We Do to Reach Out to Peoples of Other Faiths?

Then what should we do to reach out to Peoples of Other Faiths? After we have found these basic trends, we concluded the following regarding missions towards Peoples of Other Faiths. We should follow Jesus instead of Paul in reaching out to Peoples of Other Faiths. The present-day missiology follows the approach of Paul, which has worked well in the past. We must ask ourselves if this is still the right approach. If we look at church history, Jesus evangelized Jews who had their own solid religion, but Paul evangelized the Greco-Roman area where there was no solid religion. The Roman Empire had many mythologies and no religion in the Empire had a Scripture like the Bible. With this basic shift in our approach, we should do the following two things to reach out to Peoples of Other Faiths:

1. We should study other religions to form the common bases with other religions. Jesus was familiar with Judaism and quoted 78 times from the Old Testament, but His Gospel does away with 80 to 90 % of the contents of the Old Testament, such as the Mosaic Law, Ceremonial Law, Food law, etc. Jesus only quoted the part He needed from the Old Testament.
2. We should follow Jesus instead of Paul in our detailed actions for evangelism towards Peoples of Other Faiths. Jesus evangelized Jews who had their own religions, but Paul evangelized people who do not have their own solid religions. Jesus and Paul share the same core theology, but their actions taken for evangelism were not the same. Jesus said, "Follow me," 20 times in the four Gospels.

Another major shift we should make from the present mission approach is to apply Social Psychology to interpret the Bible more broadly to embrace Peoples of Other Faiths. Social

Psychology is a part of the science of Psychology and has three main areas of study: (1) attitudes of people, (2) how a person or a group of people form their identification, (3) the interaction between different people groups such as in-group or out-group. Hundred percent of the contents of Social Psychology is applicable to Christian missions. People's attitude is important in Christian missions, and how an individual gains the identity as Christian is important in missions, and how the new Christian group interacts with the existing old faith group is also important in Christian missions. I have taken a couple of missiology classes and read so many missiological papers and books. None of them refers to Social Psychology. The history of Missiology and Social Psychology is about 100 years each but the two have never communicated with each other.

Social Psychology teaches the power of authority in changing people's attitudes. When Jesus quoted 78 times from the Old Testament, Jesus gained authority from the Jews because the Old Testament was the highest authority for them. We should also quote the highest authority of Peoples of Other Faiths, when we try to reach out to them. That is following Jesus.

Another example of the Biblical Interpretation by using the principles of Social Psychology can be found in Matt. 10:5-6, where Jesus instructs His Apostles not to go to the house of the Gentiles but "go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." This contradicts the Great Commission in Matt. 28:18-20. The well-known New Testament scholar, D. A. Carson, proposes several theories: (1) Going to the house of Israel only was the short-term mission, and the long-term mission was still the Great Commission, (2) Jesus' instructions before crucifixion and after the crucifixion are different, or (3) Jesus must have felt that His Apostles were not ready to evangelize the Samaritans. All these theories do not fit well with what Jesus had done. Social Psychology has a principle called "In-group favoritism, out-group derogation." This is similar to the proverb, "Birds of a feather flock together." Jesus was God and knew that the first church, the Jerusalem Church, would suffer greatly. Jesus wanted to protect the Jerusalem church, by making it as close to Jewish synagogue with core belief of the Gospel. If the Jerusalem Church were to be composed of Americans and Chinese and were to practice what the modern US churches practice, I bet Herod would have killed them all. Herod killed just James, even though James was a Jew. If the Jerusalem Church had not survived, I am not sure where our modern-day church would be today. When we apply the Social Psychology principle and make interpretation of Matt. 10:5-6, we can see the depth of love of Jesus had for His followers. Jesus was already familiar with Social Psychology. If D. A. Carson had studied Social Psychology and applied it to the interpretation of this passage, I am sure he would have proposed what I have explained here. This is the power of using Social Psychology in interpreting the Biblical passages.

### Review of the Apostle Paul's Ministry

Before I give some examples of applying these new proposed approaches, I want to have short review of Paul's ministry. A common misconception is that Paul did what Jesus would have done and Paul is equivalent to Jesus practically in all respects. This is the biggest misunderstanding: They agree on the core Christian theology, but their detailed actions in Christian missions differed.

Paul delivered the Gospel of Jesus and Jesus was the authority to Paul. The detailed actions Paul took, however, were different from those of Jesus. This can be recognized in Acts 16:6-10, called the *Macedonian Call*. Paul was trying to go to the East, but God sent him the message in his dream through an old Macedonian man who called Paul to the West. At the time, there were several strong religions in the East such as Zoroasterianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. People who went to the East such as Thomas or Matthew did not bear much fruit. God wanted Peter and Paul to work with people who did not have strong religions of their own. They could be easily converted to Christianity. They were low hanging fruits in this sense, and God wanted to bring the masses to Him quickly. The people Paul reached did not have a deep resistance like Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists or Confucianists.

### Field Examples of Application of the Proposed Approach

I want to close this discussion with some field examples. I visited Algeria in 2017. The Muslim population in Algeria is 97 %. The second largest religion is Christianity and comprises 0.6 %. I was having dinner with five Muslim friends. They suddenly said that they need to burn all the Bibles in unison because the Qur'an provides all they need, seeking my agreement. If you were to be in such a circumstance, what would you do? Would you defend the Bible by quoting the Bible? I did not do that. I quoted the Qur'an: Surah 2, verse 4 that says that one should believe in the Qur'an and the Bible to be a true Muslim. I then told them that the same message is repeated 8 times in the Qur'an. I told them that it is important for us to do if God repeats the same message two or three times. I asked them why they are not following their Holy Qur'an when it repeats the same message eight times. They all said that they should study the Bible, abandoning their position that all the Bibles should be burned. In addition, they showed a great respect for me. Can you imagine what would have happened if I were to try to argue with them by quoting the Bible verses?

The next example is regarding how to deal with the violence in religions. In past Christian history, Christians resorted to violence for a certain period. Many Old Testament verses advocate violence. This is resolved by considering the contexts where these verses are provided, typically a situation of battle or war. Also related New Testament verses could show the light.

How about those Muslims who claim *Jihad*? Again, I would quote Qur'an Surah 2 verse 190, that says "Fight in the way of God against those who fight against you, but do not transgress." This is basically self-defense and does not allow initiation of aggression. Some Muslims quote verses in Surah Eight to justify their violence. Then we should explain to them that Surah Eight was written regarding the *Battle of Badr*. The context is on how to fight in the battle. Some Muslims also quote verses in Surah 9 to justify their violence. Again, we should explain to them that Surah Nine was written in preparation for the *Expedition to Tabuk*, another war situation. Surahs Eight and Nine are similar to the violent verses in the Old Testament, and we should explain that the war situation should not be applied in the everyday life. You might ask then why are there so many Jihadists who initiates violence? That is when we take the Nurturing Attitude with Humility with them and teach them what is more important and what is less important in Islam. This is the kind of attitude Jesus demonstrated when He was teaching, and is similar to the attitude of a mother teaching her child. The original meaning of Jihad is one's earnest struggle to

achieve something good. This is the meaning used in the Qur'an. However, in the Islamic tradition called Sunnah, it could include suicide bombing and acts of violence. We can ask them which is more important, man-made tradition or the words of God in the Qur'an.

Hindus also burn many churches in India and ask Indian Christian to "recant or leave." Also, many Buddhist countries do not allow Christian public activities because Buddhism is their national religion. We will provide the proper approaches regarding the violence and oppression toward Christians by these religions in the future after we complete our study on them. We have not done in-depth studies on them yet.