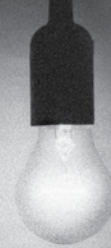


# THE WORDS WE USE



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**B**etter understanding ourselves is a crucial step in understanding, explaining and living out the gospel to those from other cultures. We learn more about ourselves and God by living and working with people from different

backgrounds. One of the things we learn, is that different ethnic groups, countries and generations tend to emphasize distinct issues or problems.

Some view missions, as it developed in the UK and US in the 1800s to 1900s, as growing out of British or American “exceptionalism.” Our nations/societies had “advanced” and improved in certain ways ahead of other nations, so we believed they needed our help—both practically (as nations) and spiritually (as believers). Our feeling blessed by God as a nation fed into the desire of many Christians to go and share the Gospel. We saw the gospel as a part of what helped us to advance—which is partially true.

The amazing ability and obedience of those early pioneering missionaries and their willingness to sacrifice brought the gospel to many places. Ralph Winter identified these as the 1st and 2nd Eras of Missions. At times however, they subtly communicated that they had everything the “pagans” needed.

Certainly mission efforts brought improvements and in many places helped establish a strong church. Yet that well—meaning pioneering spirit can also come across with a “superiority” mentality. Any society that has developed beyond the receiving culture—including many in Asia—must fight against the view that we are better. “White power” or Korean superiority, or... influences relationships and can derail the best of intentions. Everything is a delicate negotiation when you have more of certain resources than those around you.

That is especially true in the eyes of major remaining blocs of peoples—such as Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist. In their view, we are not seen as superior religiously (or morally, or...) and they really do not “want” much of what the Western world has to offer. While many are looking for help or improvement in some areas, they are not sure we have it to offer.

H.L. Richard—with 30 years in India—said it this way:

...when we think we are superior and are recognized as superior then we are working from a common worldview and things can proceed smoothly, but when our assumed superiority is not recognized, there is a worldview clash and little hope of success, particularly since God is not going to bless our sense of superiority where it contradicts fundamentals of the gospel.

We need to remember that we are not promoting one cultural approach to religion over another. We are not promoting religion at all. We are trying to lead people to our Savior—

by grace through faith—to see them become partakers in the divine nature like us. Of course, many missionaries of the past realized and acted with this in mind.

At the end of the book of Acts, Luke refers to Paul’s ongoing ministry as: “proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with complete boldness and without restriction.” (Acts 28:31 NET)

A friend of mine suggested another way we can talk about how we spread Gospel truth in other global religious contexts. Rather than emphasizing “evangelism and the Great Commission,” or even church planting, we put that commission and method in the context of our wider mandate to honor God and manage his creation. Ultimately, it is not about (rapid) church growth or even the number of multiplying disciple-making movements, but it is about that wider mandate being taken seriously and followed, as the kingdom of God on earth. God’s glory restored where Satan has distorted it.

How that will be lived out in a given context will likely be different than what we have experienced before. I believe that not knowing how it will work or what it will look like is actually normal for pioneering work—and sometimes life in general. As one of my life long mentors put it, “nothing works” short of being very close to the Lord and his word. 