

# Are We Ready for Tomorrow's Kingdom?

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Pasadena, CA. After serving ten years as a missionary among Mayan Indians in the highlands of Guatemala, he was called to be a Professor of Missions at the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary. Ten years later, he and his late wife, Roberta, founded the mission society called the Frontier Mission Fellowship. This in turn birthed the U.S. Center for World Mission and the William Carey International University, both of which serve those working at the frontiers of mission.

A Jewish rabbi in Los Angeles has thrown down the gauntlet to wayward Westernized Jews. He claims that his own Orthodoxy is the only genuine form of the Jewish faith. He feels Conservative and Reformed Jewish congregations have gone the way of “Christianity”!

The idea is that the true faith can only be contained in a certain, specific true culture, the original culture.

Holding on to a “true culture” is not very likely to succeed if only because we can look around and see that Jewish Orthodoxy is a very small piece of the global pie, even of all those who think they are holding on to the true biblical faith, and even among those who specifically hold on to a Jewish culture of some sort.

OK, so the Roman socialites threw rice at a wedding. Do Jews who live in Rome have to do that? So the Romans had a big party, giving gifts to each other on December 25th. Should Jews take up the practice? Well, not even Greek Christians took up the 25th of December. To this day they are not impressed by what was in Jesus’ day, on December 25th, the Roman pagan holiday for Saturn—the “Saturnalia.”

More ironic still is the plain fact that much of Jewish Orthodoxy today consists of large and small additions over the centuries since Christians grabbed the faith and ran with it, certainly long after the sacred days of Hebrew culture. And, when was that? In King David’s day, in Moses’ day, in Abraham’s day? Wow! Not even the Jewish Bible portrays a single cultural way of life.

It would seem that God has determinedly been kicking people out of one culture into a new one (Abraham to Canaan, to Egypt, to the dispersion of the Northern tribes, to the booting out of the Judean tribes, on and on). What is going on? It looks as if God wants them to learn how to carry their faith into different cultures, not just preserve a given way of life within a discordant culture. The Bible, as a whole, would seem to sit in judgment upon every human cultural tradition, no matter whether it is Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidian, first century Jewish, Paul’s mixture with Greek elements, Roman-Latin, Germanic, Anglo-Saxon, or you name it.

Now then, is “God’s culture” fixed as an evangelical American pop culture with its CDs, DVDs, television, horrifying divorce rate, childcare centers, etc.?

Quite honestly, are our missionaries—any of them—now assuming that the ultimate achievement of the biblical faith

is what we have today in evangelical Christianity?

If not, when are we going to seriously contemplate the future form of what we call the Christian faith?

OK, forget the turgid theologies of contextualization. Take a look for just one second at the actual global record. It is not too early to recognize that the largest growing edge of biblical faith is not Jewish Orthodoxy, not Roman Catholicism, not Eastern Orthodoxy, not German Lutheranism, not Anglicanism, not American "mainline" denominationalism, not Evangelicalism, not Pentecostalism, not the Charismatic renewal, etc.

What is it? It is the often ignored but vast company of those "outside and beyond" what we usually call Christianity. In Africa, it is the 50 million within the "African Initiated Churches." In India, it is a phenomenon already in the millions which is arising within the 600 million caste sphere, where "Christianity" by that name is virtually absent. In China, it is the "house church" movement which, up to this point, we in the West like to call Christian, but at closer look might not fit very well at all.

The fact is that anything Western has its attractions and detractions, and while most cities of the world are superficially

Westernized, Western Christianity has really only successfully lapped up minorities around the world, peoples who had nothing to lose by opting for an outside, foreign culture as against an oppressive majority culture. This is most obvious in India. It is perhaps true in China. It is true in much of Africa. The growing edge may more and more be the kind of thing we would call cultic or at least anomalous in this country.

Are we prepared for that? Does our attitude towards "home grown" aberrant forms of basically biblical faith in this country match what is needed in the rest of the world? Can we trust the Bible to eventually balance out these thousands of new, "out of control" movements? Can we digest the plain fact that the entire Islamic tradition is, like Roman Catholicism, full of "non-Christian" elements which we despise, yet is clearly the product of the impact of the Bible (unlike Hindu culture)? What do we do with such forms of quasi-biblical faith?

Rather than look at the bewildering varieties of forms of religious faith—at the different "earthen vessels" in which the faith is contained—let's look at the extent that the will of God has taken hold. That is the Kingdom of God. 🌐

## Study Questions

1. Why is it difficult to evaluate our own cultural forms of Christianity?
2. What influence can be expected to correct or balance out errant forms of the Christian faith?