



## Addressing Our Missiological Comorbidities

By Fred Farrokh

**C**omorbidity. In this season of the coronavirus pandemic, we have been continually confronted with this term “comorbidity.” These “comorbidities” are pre-existing conditions that compromise the ability of the body’s immune system to fight off the virus. Comorbidities, such as diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, and old age, make it more likely that the patient will get seriously sick or die after contracting COVID-19.

### Considering our Missiological Health

As I observe missions training and teaching, I detect an analogy to this concept of comorbidities. It appears that our missiological health is compromised. In short, theological and missiological errors swirl around us. In our context, these could be considered “pre-existing conditions” or “comorbidities.” These missiological comorbidities render us susceptible to fad teachings and methodologies that can be missiologically lethal. Similar to the way people today are taking extra vitamin C and zinc to bolster their immune system, I propose the following *positive* recommendations to boost our missiological health and help missionaries to disciple strong converts and plant spiritually-healthy churches.

### Bolstering Missiological Health

#### 1. Keep Theology as the First Lens of All Evaluation

Gailyn Van Rheen’s renowned “Missional Helix” provides an instructive tool for missionaries and missions leaders. In this helix model, Van Rheen describes four components in the missional process: (1) Theological Reflection, (2) Cultural Analysis, (3) Historical Perspective, and (4) Strategy Formation. With a view to pragmatism, we often jump right to strategy formation. Van Rheen describes why theological reflection must precede the other elements in the progressive spiral:

Theological reflection is the beginning point for ministry formation and the most significant element in the spiral. All missiological decisions must be rooted both implicitly and explicitly in biblical theology in order to mirror the purposes and mind of God. Too many church planters, while acknowledging the Bible as the Word of God, allow culture rather than Scripture to shape their core understandings of the church. The Bible is used to proof-text practice rather than define its essence. With-





# Until All Have Heard

*How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? – Romans 10:14*

**Mark Brink**

International Director  
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Reaching Muslim Peoples



The “whole Gospel to the whole world” describes the focus of the Assemblies of God missions movement and the theme of the Bible. Genesis to Revelation unfolds the dilemma of humanity’s spiritual lostness, reversed by the Good News of salvation through Jesus, the Messiah and Savior. As gospel-focused people, Christians have the mission of sharing the Good News of God’s redemptive plan. What makes the gospel such Good News is that our heavenly Father has provided a remedy to the malady of humanity’s sin disease.

The dimension of our gospel message is the whole world. When we say the “whole world,” we acknowledge every nation needs to hear this gospel message, but we also recognize the people group aspect of our mission. Revelation 5:9-10 declares that Jesus was slain, and “by his blood he ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.” Furthermore, Romans 10:13-15 declares:

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

The word “beautiful” in the original language comes from the root word meaning “hour.” An alternative translation could read, “How timely are the feet of those who preach good news.” We preach an urgent message because every day many people die without hearing the Good News of Jesus. Our gospel message must reach them in time!

At Global Initiative, we could re-word our mission statement and the gospel statement to read: “The whole Gospel to every Muslim.” *We believe that every Muslim should have the opportunity to hear the truth of the Good News of Jesus Christ.* Is this possible? Yes, but only if every follower of Christ sees the urgency of the mission and assumes personal responsibility to take the whole gospel to the whole world!

First, since we are a gospel people we must make gospel proclamation the priority of our lives and the priority of the church’s missions endeavors. And second, we must never lose sight of the simplicity of our message: all people are spiritually lost and condemned in sin, and Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross is the only solution for their dilemma. As you read this edition of the *Intercede*, may you renew your vision that it is the simple gospel message that all people need to hear! *We must preach the simple gospel with simple faith in God’s simple plan of salvation.*



# Muslim World News



## **Niger: 79 Villagers Killed**

Suspected Islamist militants have attacked two villages in Niger, with reports of dozens of civilians killed (January 3). Around 49 died and 17 were injured in the village of Tchombangou, while another 30 died in Zaroumdareye—both near Niger's western border with Mali, *Reuters* reports.

There have been several recent violent incidents in Africa's Sahel region, carried out by militant groups.—*BBC*

## **Uganda: Pastor Raped**

Muslim extremists raped a church pastor on December 21 in eastern Uganda, sources said. The female pastor, whose identity is withheld for her protection, was returning to her home in Kapyani, Kibuku District, from Christmas preparations at her church site at about 7 p.m. when someone near the swamps of Lake Kalyango asked her for help, she said.

"When I stopped," the 50-year-old pastor told *Morning Star News*, "I was surprised to see people coming from the bush, and one of them shouted in the Arabic language, 'Allah is greater—we have warned you several times to stop converting Muslims to Christianity. Today we shall teach you a lesson that you will not forget.'"

Doctors treated the pastor and took several tests, she said. Her children reported the assault to the chairperson and police of central Kapyani, she said.

Uganda's constitution and other laws provide for religious freedom, including the right to propagate one's faith and convert from one faith to another. Muslims make up no more than 12 percent of Uganda's population, with high concentrations in eastern areas of the country.—*Morning Star News*

## **Nigeria: Kneel and Confess**

Islamic extremist terrorists who kidnapped 11 Christians in northeast Nigeria on Christmas Day have executed five of them, according to a video released by the Islamic State's AMAQ News agency.

The 49-second video, dated December 29, 2020, shows five armed members of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) lined up behind five men dressed in orange robes, kneeling with their hands tied behind. Ordered to state their names, each of the kneeling men in turn is heard saying their name and adding, "I'm a Christian."

Just prior to the executions, one of the ISWAP militants then says, "This is a warning to Christians in all parts of the world and those in Nigeria. We have not forgotten what you did to our brethren in Zangon Kataf town and other parts of Nigeria. Use the heads of these five of your brethren to continue with your ungodly celebrations."—*Morning Star News*

## **Congo: 25 Farmers Murdered**

At least 25 people were killed in an attack on New Year's Eve by rebels in Congo's eastern Beni territory. Farmers had gone to the fields in the village of Tingwe when they were attacked by Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) rebels.

Local civil society representative Bravo Muhindo confirmed more than 25 dead and said many had been beheaded. The ADF originated in neighboring Uganda and has long been a threat in eastern Congo.

The Islamic State group has claimed some attacks carried out by ADF rebels, but the exact relationship between the groups is not clear.—*Associated Press*



# Addressing Our Mission

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out a biblically-rooted ecclesiology, the teachings and practices of the church are likely to be shaped either *implicitly* by the dominant evangelical culture or *explicitly* by random surveys to ascertain what people want.<sup>1</sup>

My father, a retired doctor who practiced medicine for over 60 years, recently explained to me in layman's terms how the novel coronavirus works. The human body continually fights against pathogens—invaders that seek to bring sickness and disease. Our white blood cells form the first line of defense, and without white blood cells, he said, we would all be dead within a single week. The body maintains other lines of defense, too. COVID-19 is new to human beings, whose immunity to it is still developing. Thus, the virus may crash through these lines of defense, anchoring in the lungs, and may prove fatal, particularly to those people with comorbidities.

In missiology, the Bible is our first line of defense against serious errors. Orthodox, biblical theology continues to be the most reliable safeguard of our missiological health. Charles Kraft, an ideological father of “Insider Movements,” provides this important perspective: “I feel we have focused so much on appropriateness at the culture end that we have neglected the Scripture end of our discussion.”<sup>2</sup>

Ideas have consequences. Anti-biblical ideas have disastrous consequences. Too many of these ideas have found a vulnerable host in Christian missions. In some cases, relevant cultural analyses have morphed into dangerous, pathogenic missiologies.

## 2. Understand that Church History is Our Family History: We Must Know it Well!

Missionaries do well to read church history extensively. Our familiarity must extend beyond our own respective denominational histories. We are God's church. As such, *church history is our family history*. The study of church history enables us to know which issues are truly non-negotiable. Which hills are hills to die on? Where is it better to agree to disagree?

Most unreached peoples live in traditional societies that value their own tribal, national, and religious histories. Our invitation to embrace Christ is not an aimless safari into a historical vacuum. Those who receive Christ as Lord become part of a 2,000-year living history, cheered on by many witnesses. The knowledge of and appreciation for church history greatly bolsters our missiological immune system.



## 3. Approach Our Beloved Bible with a Healthy Measure of Fear and Trembling

Jesus is a loving and approachable Savior. He is our good shepherd. The beloved disciple John rested his head on Jesus' chest. The Bible is an everyday book for the everyday Christian and speaks to every area of everyday life.

Unfortunately, theological liberalism is undermining biblical missions and must be identified as a dangerous comorbidity. Very few Christians, seminaries, and missionaries will claim to have a low view of the Bible, but proof is in the actions. One example is the massive liberties Bible translators have taken in producing “Muslim Idiom Translations.” Much of what should have been, at best, left in comments or footnotes has been inserted directly into the divine text and presented to Muslims as the very words of God. The issues here are not mere turns of phrase; they rise to a virus-like invasion upon the sacred terms of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Changes to these terms should have been handled with fear and trembling. Sadly, these mistranslations only confirm in the minds of many Muslims their erroneous belief that the Bible has been corrupted. It is difficult to overstate this missiological tragedy; it has left us on ventilators.

# ological Comorbidities

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## 4. Decrease Our Susceptibility to the Success-Story Marketing of New Missiological Products

Marketers spend billions to convince people to buy things that they neither want nor need. Many advertising appeals include a success story. Whether it is a weight loss testimonial or a glowing “product rating” of some kind, people are quick to trumpet success stories. However, in many cases they are being paid to do so or have some vested interest in this marketing. They may not be truly objective witnesses.

In missions, we are often urged to “buy into” something new—paradigm, methodology, doctrine, or book. Historical and theological perspective provide a bulwark against fad missiologies, yet instead of being wary of fad theologies, we are instructed to celebrate them. Jayson Georges, proponent of the new Honor-Shame ideology, finds surprising license to reinterpret a doctrine so central as Christ’s atonement:

While atonement of sins is the central theological interpretation of Jesus’ death in the early church, the way each New Testament author interprets Jesus’ death to make the historical event significant for his community directs contemporary theologies in new ways to meet new needs.<sup>3</sup>

This statement is made within a troubling article on ministry to Muslims. The new ideology championed by Georges is woefully light regarding any consideration of sinfulness, repentance, regeneration, or conversion. The blood of Christ is not mentioned. Yet, he has attempted to create a new theory of the atonement for Muslims, and apparently Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Paul have *directed* him to do so.

## 5. Leave the “Gurus” to Hinduism

All too often we listen to the wrong people and read the wrong authors. I am a big believer in open access to ideas, especially since I am a former Muslim who would like Muslims to have increased access to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, many people who write or speak, even under pseudonyms, have come to be considered Christian missiological gurus. Many of them have no accountability relationship to a recognized church body.

We must require more vetting of these gurus. Improved critical thinking skills will dash this comorbidity. Here are several questions to help in a responsible vetting process regarding any teacher, author, or speaker:

- To which recognized church group is this person accountable?
- Is their contextual familiarity, including their ministry history, credible?
- What information may be missing from their published bios?
- If they claim to have expertise in evangelism or church planting, is that expertise verifiable?
- Can an indigenous person verify proclamations of expertise and Christian integrity?

All people should aspire to be life-long learners—including teachers. But the reality is that we have many people teaching missions that need better training before they consider teaching others.

## 6. Affirm the “Null Hypotheses” when Appropriate

Many missions trainers have high academic degrees. On the surface, this is neither a good thing nor a bad thing. The first and greatest missionaries did not have academic degrees. Jesus’ apostles were noted by the local religious leaders to have been “uneducated and untrained men,” other than the small detail that they had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13).

In the Western academic model, researchers in all disciplines study the relationships between variables. As a simple

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example, one may research the variable of the height of a person. Soon it will become evident that another variable, the height of the person's parents, will correlate strongly with that person's height. The "Null Hypothesis" suggests that there is no significant relationship between two variables being studied. For researchers, this is often seen as a "non-finding" and boring. Research projects that affirm the null hypotheses are less likely to get published than research projects that "reject the null." Hence, in academic circles, there is a strong impetus to identify the new, the novel, a unique angle, a new theory, a new hypothesis, or a new relationship between variables.

In missions circles, a fascination to believe the new and even the untried constitutes a problematic comorbidity. We want to hear something we have not heard before. We want to try something that has not been tried before. IF variable X is done, THEN variable Y will happen. This type of thinking leaves us impatient and, therefore, vulnerable to fad missiologies and silver-bullet methodologies. One example of this in ministry to Muslims is a Qur'an-based gospel approach to Muslims. This "Camel Method," authored by Kevin Greeson, lauds itself in the book's foreword: "There may not be a magic bullet for Muslim evangelism, but the Camel is as close as it gets."<sup>4</sup> Greeson has apparently discovered a magical positive relationship between variable X of reading Sura 3 of the Qur'an, and the variable Y of Muslims receiving Christ. However, sticking with the initial null hypothesis would have been better in this case.

## Conclusion

Our missiological immune system is compromised by comorbidities. A variety of bizarre ideas, fad methodologies, and unbiblical initiatives wage war against our spiritual health. Though we will one day look back on this era with shame and embarrassment, that day has not yet arrived. The present situation is serious. The Body of Christ remains susceptible. We have been told to wash our hands longer than usual—for 20 seconds—to limit the spread of the novel coronavirus. We should likewise take additional time and care in evaluating novel missiologies and fad methodologies.

With God all good things are possible. *The simple preaching of the simple gospel by simple missionaries with simple faith is the time-tested, God-approved missiology.* Prayer, perseverance, and patience truly are needed as never before. By retaining a Christ-centered and Bible-bounded understanding of missions, rooted in the 2,000-year history of the Church, the Good News will flourish in contexts where it has yet to take root—and Jesus will continue to be glorified.

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<sup>1</sup> Gailyn Van-Rheenen, "What is Missiology?" <http://www.missiology.org/blog/What-Is-Missiology-Gailyn-Van-Rheenen> (emphasis in original).

<sup>2</sup> Charles Kraft, *Appropriate Christianity* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2005), 5.

<sup>3</sup> Honor Shame, "Jesus' Death for Muslims," <http://honorshame.com/jesus-death-for-muslims/>.

<sup>4</sup> Kevin Greeson, *The Camel: How Muslims are Coming to Faith in Christ* (Bangalore, India: WIGTake Resources, 2004), 13.



# JUMAA PRAYER FELLOWSHIP

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[Facebook.com/JumaaPrayer](https://www.facebook.com/JumaaPrayer)*

**Friday, March 5, 2021. Please pray for**

*...workers who are preparing to reach the Maba, a Muslim unreached people group of 558,000—most of whom live in Eastern Chad and Sudan. Especially pray for a Bible translation project into the Maba language that has begun.*

*...Muslim Algerians, Moroccans, Tunisians, and Libyans who have responded to Arabic gospel broadcasts via radio and internet. As a result, many “home fellowships” have been established in each of these predominately Muslim countries.*

*...The Children’s Center in the Punjab region of Pakistan. Opened in January, the Center provides shelter, food, clothing, and Christ-centered education for children from disrupted Christian and Muslim families.*

**Friday, March 12, 2021. Please pray for**

*...a Christian organization in a Muslim area of northern Ghana that operates five schools, with a total enrollment of 900 children—a mixture of Christians and Muslims. Many of the Muslim children have come to faith in Christ.*

*...stability for Christian workers in Turkey. The Islamic government continues to harass and deport workers, especially those suspected of “evangelizing locals.”*

*...Muslim Fulani and Boko Haram members who continue to wreak havoc in northern Nigeria. Ask the Holy Spirit to break the powers of evil and draw the perpetrators to repentance and eternal hope in Jesus Christ.*

**Friday, March 19, 2021. Please pray for**

*...the estimated 600 million children who live in areas dominated by Islam. Pray that God will draw many sons and daughters out of Islam and into His family—mobilizing a new generation of converts to share Christ with their fellow Muslims.*

*...Muhammad Omid, an Iranian Christian convert from Rasht, Iran. In 2016, he was arrested, flogged, and imprisoned for two years. He is serving an additional two years of “internal exile” for his involvement in underground house churches.*

*...the few Christian believers in the Dagestan Republic of the Russian Federation. Against severe Islamic opposition, believers are determined to spread the Good News about Jesus. Of Dagestan’s population of 3 million, 82% are Muslim.*

**Friday, March 26, 2021. Please pray for**

*...the growing Church in the strongly Islamic Issykul region of Kyrgyzstan. There are dozens of village fellowships with 5 to 15 adult converts from Islam in each one. New converts are closely watched and often experience persecution.*

*...Ousmane, born into a fanatical Muslim family in Senegal. He was sent away to Quranic school but, in the Lord’s plan, a Christian shared the truth about Jesus with him. After conversion, his desire is “to share Jesus with as many as possible.”*

*...continued ministry via a mobile phone app called the Minangkabau Gospel Bible, which has caused a furor in Sumatra, Indonesia. The Minangkabau people are strongly Islamic, but many have responded to Jesus as a result of the app.*

*I urge, then, first of all that requests, prayers, intercession and  
thanksgiving be made for everyone. – 1 Timothy 2:1, NIV*





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**Friday, April 2, 2021. Please pray for**

...*27 Turkmenistani leaders*, all Muslim converts, who recently met together for leadership training. One pastor said, “We didn’t expect that there are people who are interested in our lives.” Of Turkmenistan’s 6 million people, 94% are Muslim.  
...*workers to assist with a ministry in Lebanon* that runs a school for 200 mostly-Muslim refugee children from Syria.  
...*a local church in Nukus, Uzbekistan*. The church consists mostly of converts from Islam. Despite arrests and torture, the church is thriving and recently received official status. Of Uzbekistan’s population of 33 million, 83% are Muslim.

**Friday, April 9, 2021. Please pray for**

...*the village of Alindao in the Central African Republic*. Militants from Islamic rebel groups slaughtered 28 women and children, and burned down the local cathedral. Of CAR’s 4.8 million people, 17% are Muslim.  
...*the city of Mhardeh in northwestern Syria*, where thousands of Christian refugees have gathered. Islamist rebels are known to carry out acts of violence against the city, and recently launched a missile that killed 12 people.  
...*1.7 billion Muslims worldwide* as they start the Ramadan fasting month, starting Monday, April 12, and ending May 12.

**Friday, April 16, 2021. Please pray for**

...*the growing number of converts to Christianity* in Muslim majority environments. They risk everything.  
...*Christian believers in the Philippines*, particularly those in Mindanao, who have been targeted by Islamists for years.  
...*isolated, secret Saudi Arabian believers*, especially during this month of Ramadan.

**Friday, April 23, 2021. Please pray for**

...*Pastor Merbek, who ministers among Muslims in the country of Georgia*. He reports, “Many Muslims are coming to faith, but initially the Muslim villagers are very hostile toward us.” Of Georgia’s population of 4 million, 9% are Muslim.  
...*the country of Somalia*, where leaving Islam is seen as a betrayal of national identity.  
...*the effectiveness of outreaches* to the Zaza-Dimli Muslim unreached people group (1.7 million), located in Turkey.

**Friday, April 30, 2021. Please pray for**

...*a breakthrough of the gospel among the Shaikh*—a Muslim unreached people group in India and Nepal (230 million).  
...*devastated villages in the Nineveh Plain of northern Iraq*. Returnees are being assisted by a ministry called SEED, which stands for “Sustainable Enterprise Economic Development.”  
...*the worldwide Muslim community* as it continues with the 30-day fasting month of Ramadan (April 12-May12).

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