

Darren T. Duerksen, *Christ-Followers in Other Religions: The Global Witness of Insider Movements*, Regnum, Oxford, UK, 2022. 206 pp. £15.00 paperback, ISBN: 978-1-914454-64-6; £6.00 e-book, ISBN: 978-1-91445-46-39. (See forty-minute interview with Duerksen on this publication: “Darin Duerksen and Christ-Followers in Other Religions,” Multi-Faith Matters YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0eCFO7Qbqzo&t=2s>.)

In Darren T. Duerksen’s book *Christ-Followers in Other Religions*, readers should be prepared to encounter testimonies like this one from Mazhar Mallouhi, a Muslim follower of Christ:

Islam is the blanket with which my mother wrapped me when she nursed me and sang to me and prayed over me. . . . I inherited Islam from my parents, and it was the cradle which held me until I found Christ. Islam is my mother. You don’t engage a man by telling him his mother is ugly. . . . I have an emotional attachment to my culture which I imbibed along with my mother’s milk.²

Statements like this will strike many as provocative, perhaps even troubling. But there is more. Like the story of Yussef, the South Asian who turned his back on his Muslim identity and heritage to become a Westernized Christian, then later, after a long spiritual journey, moved away from the mission compound that had become his home and returned to his extended biological family to apologize. “I am a Muslim,” he told them, “but I follow Isa al-Masih (Jesus the Messiah). He’s my Savior. That’s all. Otherwise, I’m a Muslim. I am born Muslim. It was wrong to say that I am a Christian. I apologize to you” (71).

Are such statements even possible? Apparently so. In fact, in recent decades, hundreds of thousands of Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, and Native American people have claimed faith in Jesus and look to the Bible as their authoritative guide, all the while considering themselves members of their religious communities of origin. The term “insider” is increasingly applied to this phenomenon as explored extensively by fifty authors from more than ten nations in the nearly 700-page anthology *Understanding Insider Movements: Disciples of Jesus within Diverse Religious Communities* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2015). Not surprisingly, the movement has generated considerable interest and has variously been described in missiological conversations as controversial, syncretistic, messy, and

² Mazhar Mallouhi, “Comments on the Insider Movement,” in *Understanding Insider Movements: Disciples of Jesus within Diverse Religious Communities*, eds. Harley Talman and John Jay Travis (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2015), 111, quoted in Duerksen, *Christ-Followers in Other Religions*, 88.

perilous as well as God-breathed, a true revelation, a recalibration, a redefinition, a fresh outbreaking of the Holy Spirit, and a new chapter in mission history.

Duerksen—who currently serves as Associate Professor and Director of Intercultural and Religious Studies at Fresno (CA) Pacific University—jumps into the fray with this important volume by challenging the Western church and world Christians significantly shaped by Euro-framed mission history and perspectives to join with God’s Spirit in creating “alternative missiological imaginaries” through an in-depth examination and appreciation of insider groups and individuals. Such willingness, openness, and curiosity offers to the global church, according to Duerksen, an “invitation to consider the new works of the Spirit among non-Christian religious communities. Insiders do *not*,” he insists, “present us with a perfect, or even preferred, way of following Christ amongst religious communities. The world, and God’s kingdom, is much too rich and diverse for such blueprints. Rather, insiders and their imaginaries help us see a glimpse of God’s mending and patient mission among those who have been ‘marginal’ to the dominant forms of Christianity. And they invite us,” he asserts, “to quietly listen, learn, and join with that mission as God leads” (175).

Duerksen is keenly aware of the monumental task he faces in convincing his readership to join him—and insider followers of Christ—on this journey of discovery. To do so, he devotes considerable time to defining key terms frequently discussed in missiological circles—terms related to the general field of religion, religious tradition and hybrid religiosity, contextualization, and people group realities and identities (chapters 2 and 3). He helpfully situates the conversation historically by turning to the New Testament church and the dynamics at play as Hebrew believers navigated their way into the new realities of faith in Christ.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the spiritual itineraries of two late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century “Christ-follower imaginaries” in the persons of Black Elk, a Lakota Native American medicine man, and O. Kandaswamy Chetti, a Hindu reformer, both of whom remained convinced that “Christ could work within and *through* their religious tradition and communities to bring healing and wholeness to their people” (63). Other testimonies are more contemporary, embedded in the religious realities and identities of current Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh, Hindu, and Native American communities. Full chapters are additionally devoted to specific themes central to the topic—themes related to religious revelation in the interpretation and application of the Bible and other sacred texts, written and oral (chapters 6 and 7), questions concerning the meaning of salvation (chapter 8), the journey of conversion (chapter 9), and the socio-religious impact of family realities and identities (chapter 10).

Duerksen’s case studies and illustrative testimonies are, in large part, situated geographically in South and Southeast Asia and among a few select native communities in North America. Harold W. Turner has documented similar phenomena wherever “primal” religious realities have come into contact with

Western Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa; North, Central, and South America; and throughout Asia and Oceania.³ It would be an instructive exercise to compare Duerksen's work here with Turner's helpful typology of new religious movements as they pass back and forth between phases of identity and change from what Turner refers to as neo-primal, syncretist, Hebraic, independent churches and movements with primary influence shaped by Western mission-founded initiatives.

Likewise, sub-Saharan Africa—the current heartland of world Christianity—is entirely absent from this conversation. Had Duerksen expanded his reflections to this continent, he would have found insights in the work of fellow Mennonite missiologist David A. Shank on conversion and the religious itinerary of African Christians from traditional religion to New Testament faith.⁴

There are a few minor typos in the *Christ-Followers* volume, but they do not detract in any significant way from the colossal challenge that Duerksen lays out before the world Christian community to spark “imaginaries” of how God might be at work in and through insider Christ-followers and how their understandings of and witness to Christ might challenge, enrich, and de-center current Western understandings of Christian mission and discipleship.

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3 See, for example, Harold W. Turner, “A Typology for African Religious Movements,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 1 (1967): 18–21; and “A Typology of Modern African Religious Movements,” *Journal of Religion and Religions* 1, no. 1 (1967): 1–34.

4 David A. Shank, *Mission from the Margins: Selected Writings from the Life and Ministry of David A. Shank*, ed. James R. Krabill (co-published by Institute of Mennonite Studies, Elkhart, IN, and Herald Press, Scottsdale, PA, 2010), chapters 12 and 13.