Roland Müller, *The Messenger, The Message, and The Community: Three Critical Issues for the Cross-Cultural Church Planter* (2d. ed.; Canbooks, 2010).

Roland Müller is an evangelical teacher and church planter among Muslims with WEC International. Drawing from 30 years of ministry, his writings have aimed at equipping westerners to communicate cross-culturally with Muslims. Perhaps his best-known title is *Honor and Shame: Unlocking the Door* in which he deals with three fundamental worldviews, namely, those that are guilt-based, shame-based, and fear-based. In this volume, *The Messenger, The Message, and The Community: Three Critical Issues for the Cross-Cultural Church Planter*, Müller offers a practical model for missiological strategy, especially for a Muslim context. The author's previous work *Honor and Shame* actually constitutes the second section of this edition of *The Messenger, The Message, and The Community*.

Müller asserts that missiological strategy and success rest upon three pillars: the messenger, the message, and the community. Each theme constitutes one of the book's three main sections. In addition to language, cultural acquisition, and creative thinking, he says the best "messengers" gain credibility by the godly example of their lives. Müller explains that such conviction manifests itself in the way the evangelist teaches others. Thus, he or she neither settles for mere friendship nor uses people for the sake of making a convert; instead, Müller suggests that ministers utilize "teacher-based evangelism." In this approach, a teacher has a definitive Christian "agenda" that determines how he will relate to non-Christian hearers. In order to earn a hearing and meet the needs of a non-believer, messengers should wisely assess the openness of those they teach. This enables the teacher to most wisely steward his time and conversation. An effective messenger is extremely intentional, taking into consideration local worldviews, customs, and ways of teaching (e.g. parables or proverbs) that fit the audience. In all things, especially contextualization, Müller suggests that the messenger's goal is identification with the local people. The missionary wants to honor the people and win their trust. Given the collectivistic nature of many cultures (like Arab peoples), the western missionary may need to adapt his concept of discipleship. Müller advocates "friendship discipleship," which is time intensive, practically oriented, and personal. This resembles more of an "apprenticeship," by which the discipler stresses, "that what the new disciple does is more important that what he says" (89). The messenger not only reinforces the biblical message, but also helps the believer to express his or her faith within community.

The book's second section focuses on the importance of "worldview" on the missionary's message. Acknowledging the complexity of the concept, Müller proposes a simple model grounded both in the Bible and in anthropology. In short, he surmises the existence of three "common-ancestor worldviews," each originating from Eden (Gen 3:7–10). These "sin-based worldviews" include those that are guilt-based, shame-based, and fear-based. He clearly affirms that human cultures are a blend of the three, though one or two may have greater prominence in certain places. Nevertheless, it is inappropriate to say one is more important or biblical than the others. The guilt-based view is commonly seen in western theology, which emphasizes right, wrong, and the law-motif. The shame-based perspective is group-oriented, focusing on what is honorable or shameful. The fear-based view longs for power to overcome a chaotic world, often influenced by supernatural forces. Müller's main point is that the Biblical, gospel message does

and should speak in terms of each of the three basic worldviews. When the worldviews of the missionary and the non-Christian conflict, "Either we must change our listener's worldview to be more like our own, or we must find a way to communicate the Gospel so that it speaks to the listener's worldview" (133). Müller unequivocally affirms the latter, wary of discipleship methods that de facto acculturate the missionary's culture (133).

Finally, Part Three defends and explains the conviction that "community" is a *central* concept, easily overlooked by mission workers. To begin with, he says that Eastern and Western ideas of community can differ drastically, having contrasting expectations, internal rules, ruling metaphors, and importance within society. As a result, how one understands "community" bears heavily on both the conversion and the discipleship process. Müller argues from Scripture that the Christian life prioritizes, even presumes, the central place of community; therefore, the messenger and his Christian community must make explicit what loving others looks like in practice. For the Muslim who lives in a group-oriented, honor-shame context, conversion essentially means switching one's loyalties from one community to another. It is not merely the affirmation of a few simple doctrines. In short, the seeker expects the Christian community to validate the Christian message that has been conveyed by the messenger. Accordingly, evangelism engages the community, not just the individual. Seekers may test the authenticity of this professing community, i.e. the local church. Discipleship involves incorporation into a new community. Hence, the integrity of the community is integral not only in propagating the gospel but in sustaining a gospel-community.

The author has effectively achieved his goal of presenting a picture of what Christian evangelism and apprenticeship looks like in a cross-cultural environment. Furthermore, it reflects the practice of experienced evangelists who have seen numerical and long-term growth in forming Christian fellowships (3). While the three categories are simple enough, he combines an emphasis on character with a balanced regard for the complexities of culture, contextualization, and theologizing. Therefore, Müller is not reductionistic. He has presented a model from which others can establish and assess mentoring, church planting, and evangelistic ministries. Structurally, he rightly orders the 3 sections to give proper emphasis on the messenger, who bears the weight of delivering the message and forming a community.

This text is foremost a practitioner's guide. One limitation then is that we do not see extensive exegetical or theological analysis. He pauses to examine biblical texts and ideas at key junctures, such as when he defends the three common-ancestor worldviews (Ch. 12). His questions for reflection, listed at the end of each chapter, do facilitate further Scriptural meditation on each topic. Müller's thesis does not rest on any single or few theological assumptions that would be highly contested. When overtly examining honor and shame in the Bible (Ch. 17), he gives a survey, not an academic defense.

However, further theological reflection is indeed needed if missionaries are to apply Müller's insights. For example, although he correctly speaks of salvation from shame to honor, one is left with many important questions. For example, such a contextualization needs to show how honor and shame relate to more traditional categories and motifs within theology, in particular the legal metaphors. The book's intended audience would benefit from reading other, more academic works that elaborate on how honor and shame were present in the ancient near

east and, in particular, books of the Bible. Since worldviews are highly complex and integrated, those from a guilt-based culture will need to give considerable effort in rereading familiar texts through the lenses of the other two perspectives.

Müller looks back to the Roman Empire in chapter 14, attempting to explain historically how the guilt-based view became so prominent within Christianity. While his assessment is quite suggestive, more footnotes are needed both in order to defend his assertions and to spur further research. (For that matter, Müller's text has very few footnotes and does not include a bibliography. This limits the reader's ability to easily build on the ideas presented here.) He helpfully reminds the reader that Romans is just as much a contextualization as Acts 17, a point easily missed by westerners who share a Romanized, legal perspective (131). Having shown how lawyers have extensively influenced historical, western theology, Müller observes that theologians have essentially become "spiritual lawyers" (135), deliberating over theological problems based on a legal framework, like eternal security, God's law, and the definition of sin. It would be helpful to see any potential historical evidence showing comparable instances where fear or shame based thinkers have nudged theological discourse. Indeed, he points out that some of the most popular evangelistic methods used in the West, such as the Roman Road and the Four Spiritual Laws, are based on legal metaphors and may obscure the fuller meaning of the gospel for those in other cultures.

Müller's focus on Muslims is another limitation of the book, though understandable given space restrains. He especially highlights honor and shame in contrast to law-based views, not elaborating much on fear-based worldviews. However, many eastern cultures display variations of honor and shame. One wonders whether any of Müller's major premises and conclusions are greatly affected in other settings, says in China or Southeast Asia. It would be constructive to compare the methods of other cross-cultural workers in those contexts to see how well Müller's model is evident in or would apply there.

He offers a useful bridge for westerners when he notes that western, postmodern civilization is increasingly embracing honor-shame and fear-based views (152, 170). His commentary assists one in understanding the interrelationship and dynamics at work amid the three common-ancestor worldviews. For example, as the emphasis on guilt and moral absolutes subsides, there is greater importance given to public approval. Yet, the individualism linked with a legal-based perspective does not accommodate the increasing need for group identification, in particular since it is one's group that gives praise or blame according to its own standards. However, various social factors emerging perhaps from globalization add a sense of fear, creating a desire for power to overcome felt instability.

Another useful contribution for missions and church planting is his set of remarks on community. In the zeal for quantity of conversions and churches, missionaries may neglect quality. Consequently, the messenger and the message lose credibility because of the community's perceived hypocrisy. Conversion essentially means absolute isolation. In Western minds, conversion or profession typically precedes participation in Christian community. Müller emphasizes that all communities have rules, their own narratives, rites, and values. For the Church, these should derive primarily from the gospel message, not the missionary's culture. Expectations vary from community to community. Therefore, intentional conversations,

structure, and procedures must be discussed and implemented to ensure that a distinctly *Christian* ethos is developed. Ecclesiology requires as much intentionality as contextualization and other fields of theology. These considerations will affect how one evangelizes, trains leaders, teaches theology, and relates to others. Leaders must exemplify character and theological competency in order to bear long-term fruit. We are reminded that new believers need help "switching communities." It can be traumatic for them, their families and friends. Since the missionary is not inherent to the local community, foreign workers must show great restraint when advising gathered nationals, so as not to recreated a church in the image of his or her own culture. In essence, the manner in which a community of believer conducts itself paints a portrait of what we are asking new believers to conform to.

Müller's comments therefore should influence how we explain the gospel, conversion, and ongoing maturity. For many westerners, shame-based cultures suffer from relativism since "right and wrong" are less significant than what is judge socially honorable. In short, right and wrong may change with the norms of one's group. However, the messenger invites the non-Christian to join a new community, to adopt its standards of honor and shame. This is not mere relativism because God is the head, the absolute standard or truth, right, and honor. Therefore, all people make a choice whether they will identify with one of two communities—either the world or the people of God. The question is not a matter of western, eastern, Muslim, or Chinese culture. Müller rightly points to the importance of trust in honor-based societies (77–78). In the Church, trust is founded on the character of God. Therefore, he will keep his promises even when our families and friends reject us.

The book can be used as a guide for training nationals in any culture. Its simple framework and broad analysis are applicable for any pastor or church planter. Because it focuses on principles and worldviews, it would be difficult to create some formulaic method for any culture. That sort of generality is of course Müller's objective, which he achieves. The content of this text exposes hidden assumptions, rightly emphasizes both character and thinking (not creating a false dichotomy), and respects anthropological insights without forsaking Scripture. In fact, it opens the reader's eyes to potentially grasp ideas in the Bible previously overlooked.