of Indonesia. Missionary to the Sundanese: An Interview with Roger Dixon, Religious and Cultural Forms: Contextualization Is More Than...
to the Muslims, in their attempt to imitate St. Paul’s own practice (I Cor 9:20). This concept, that a Muslim (or Buddhist or Hindu or Taoist) can follow Jesus while remaining an insider to their religious community is at the heart of so much debate today, and Dr. Dixon shares his insights on the topic in the interview.

Dixon’s emphasis is on the breadth of contextualization. He believes that it is more than cultural forms touching on political and social realities, and that it is primarily the work of the local believers to do the contextualizing. All of these resonate with the original and, in my view, more constructive vision of Shoki Coe and his colleagues at the World Council of Churches. Roger Dixon lived through these times, knew many of the people involved in the contextualization insider controversy, and after three decades of mission in Indonesia has insights and experiences which are worth the attention of all mission scholars and practitioners in Asia.

Interview

Duane Alexander Miller: Tell us a bit about growing up and your own Christian tradition.

Roger Dixon: Being raised in a nominal Christian home, I was not challenged to commit my life to Christ in any particular way, but I was taught to live a moral and law-abiding life. In my teens, my brother and I began to attend Sunday School again, and I came under conviction concerning the problems I had living the Christian life. This came out in my lack of control over bad language and other normal teenage temptations. Due to the witness of several friends and the obvious power in their lives to live the way we thought one should, I invited

1Some (like Travis 2000) have advanced the unfortunate term “Messianic Muslims” for such people. All Muslims, though, accord the title “Messiah” to Jesus son of Mary, so technically, all Muslims are already Messianic.

Jesus to come into my life. A radical change occurred, and I have been different from that time.

Since I was raised in a Methodist church, there was not much understanding of the deeper walk with Christ, but I did get involved with Youth for Christ and other groups which helped me develop spiritually. I attended a Methodist-related college which actually harmed me spiritually, but many friends there encouraged me in going on with the Lord. My subsequent experience in the army drew me closer to the Lord and gave me confidence in the power of his Word. I really came to view the Bible as authoritative and trustworthy in the army.

**DAM:** Can you share with us about your calling to the mission field, and how you ended up where you did?

**RD:** Being typical of many who were raised in denominations, I was not aware of much of the Christian heritage until I went to seminary. Even though I went to a Methodist-related seminary, my wife and I came into contact with the Keswick movement and OMF. In 1964, we were accepted by OMF to work in Southeast Asia. My wife had an impression of working in Indonesia, but also some of the guiding elements were my difficulty in hearing tonal languages, our college degrees and my seminary degree and ordination. So Indonesia was suggested by the OMF leadership. It was during our years in Indonesia that my wife and I grew to understand much more about the primacy of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit.

**DAM:** What was your experience with your own mission agency?

**RD:** Our mission was led by men who were formerly in China, and both the experienced men and women in the mission emphasized faith in God’s provision. They were oriented to a disciplined structure similar to my army experience. We learned a great deal about the importance of relating to and appreciating the ethnic culture in which we worked. However, because of their Chinese orientation in Southeast Asia, they were unable to flow with God’s work among the Muslim people in Indonesia. In 1969, we left OMF to work in Muslim evangelism and church planting. To do this we became involved in Bible school teaching because we were able to obtain a missionary visa by doing that work. However, our main emphasis has been to plant churches among the Sundanese.

**DAM:** If you could say something to people managing mission agencies today, what would it be?

**RD:** A great deal more thought, planning, and development needs to be done about training missionaries to work among other cultures with their religious systems, models of leadership, and social organizations. In addition, more attention needs to be given to the changing world where missionaries in restricted access countries are under more stress about physical safety. In general, training for missionaries and supervision on the field is inadequate to an alarming degree.

**DAM:** You’ve been at this a long time. In your view, what is the purpose of a mission agency? How does one know if it is good or bad?

**RD:** A mission agency should be oriented to all aspects of the missionary enterprise. It should not concentrate on just one area of the program such as recruitment or deployment. The mission agency should be responsible for training the missionary adequately for performing his/her ministry in whatever ethnic group, religious or political situation where they are assigned. The novice missionary should be under the supervision of a trained worker on the field and not left to struggle through learning the ministry on their own. This should include the authority structure necessary to supervise the missionaries. Workers everywhere need supervision. The high attrition rate indicates to me that this is not being done.

**DAM:** You have some experience regarding the C-scale and how it developed. Can you tell us about that?

**RD:** This is a major subject, and I will only summarize here. A primary problem with it is that it restricts contextualization to mean simply religious and cultural forms. This simplistic use of contextualization

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3OMF was originally called the China Inland Mission, and then, after 1964, renamed the Overseas Missionary Fellowship. This is the mission founded by Hudson Taylor in 1865.
does not set church theology in a comprehensive framework. Contextualization must include a theology of the Fatherhood of God, the person and work of Christ, the activity of the Holy Spirit in Christian faith and practice, the nature of the Church, and Christian ethics.

We begin with that and consider every aspect of our focus culture to determine how those truths can be manifested in evangelism, Christian nurture and the life of the church in the community, in order to transform the community.

The C1-C6 Spectrum does not do that. In fact, it indicates to novice missionaries that contextualization is a simple process. That confuses them as to what the real goal should be in developing a contextualized church. For that reason alone, I feel the C1-C6 Spectrum is harmful in the long view.

Contextualization is not simply about whether we sit on the floor, or chant as we pray, or bow toward a certain place. While knowledge and understanding of all religious and cultural forms is important, contextualization encompasses more than that. Contextualization that results in a strong church will incorporate and transform such cultural forms as politics, education, economy, labor, social organization, and family systems. The list is too comprehensive to include here. It is important for all missiologists to develop a comprehensive model of contextualization and not get diverted by inadequate conceptions. I describe this model as the Diamond Model because the center represents Christ and the facets represent the myriad aspects of culture.

DAM: Indonesia Revival: Why Two Million Came to Christ by Avery Willis has been cited by some scholars of mission in the Muslim world. Did you know him? Did you read this book? If so, what did you think?

RD: I do have Avery Willis’ book, but I don’t remember if I met him. He worked in different province than me. His book is a great service to the work in Indonesia as it outlines the development of Javanese work when the large number of converts came into the church following the attempted Communist coup in the mid-60s. His book illustrates many important aspects of Javanese spiritual characteristics that were previously outlined by other historians.

DAM: Is there one bible verse that really speaks to you in relation to the Church’s mission to Muslims?

RD: I think it would be the one that strikes many others: Revelation 7:9. The ethnic groups will have representatives before the God’s throne. We are encouraged to know that our work will bear fruit.

DAM: One topic of great interest today is insider movements (IM). Proponents of IM claim that these movements exist as a work of the Spirit and apart from the initiative of Western-based missions and missionaries. I have been looking everywhere for a “real” insider movement and cannot find one. Do you know of anything that matches up to the stories we hear of movements initiated by the Spirit without foreign involvement?

RD: I understand your concern for some verifiable facts. They are hard to find. Either the foreigners who report these movements will not identify the persons involved, or if they do, ask that the researcher not to contact them because it would insert a “foreign” element (whereas they have already been a foreign element themselves). My repeated statement/conclusion is that if these reports [of Insider Movements commenced by the Spirit independent of Western missions] cannot be verified by independent research, we cannot really accept them as confirmed results by normal social-science standards.

None of those claiming great results will respond to this. They just claim that we have to accept the reports of these people who write under

C6 simply refers to secret believers and was not part of the original C-scale proposed by Travis.

That is, in imitation of how mosques function—with no chairs, chanting but no musical instruments, and praying while facing Mecca.


pseudonyms about unknown people groups in unknown countries. It is puzzling. I have not heard of any IM groups in Indonesia or elsewhere that were not started by foreigners—mainly Americans. Though there is a strong IM strain in Korea now, and some reports coming from them. Again, I personally do not know of any successful insider movements.

**DAM:** I'm sure you got tired at times. What do you do when you are tired and exhausted?

**RD:** Go to bed. Get plenty of sleep. I am rarely discouraged and have only been depressed a few times for short periods of time. I am one of the fortunate people who stay on an emotional even line with few up and downs. I sleep well and try not to work for long periods such as through the night, etc. I eat on schedule and sleep on schedule. God gave me faith for the conversion of the Sundanese. This is hard to explain but it is the confidence that carried me along for 30+ years among the Sundanese in Indonesia and for the 15 years since we moved back to the States.

**DAM:** Would you summarize your appendix to Jeff Morton’s book\(^8\) for us please?

**RD:** The modern Insider Movement is a reflection of the historic insider model but with radical changes. I understand the historic insider model as orientation to the future as compared to the modern Insider Movement’s retreat into the past. Those leaders of the historic insider models contextualized to the Bible in an attempt to move away from syncretism with the former religions. They were consistently moving into the future toward a model based on a biblical worldview and away from the worldview of both major religious and animistic beliefs.

Unlike the “Insider Movement” paradigm of our day that promotes orientation to the socio-religious community; those practitioners of the historic insider model who adapted non-Christian models were addressing the future of the Church and biblical theology rather than retreating into the existing socio-religious condition of the new believers.

This is the key issue. While many of the individual “Insider” applications are worthwhile, the overall philosophical and theological orientation makes it a non-biblical model.

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