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Global Analysis



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Welcome to the November issue of Lausanne Global Analysis.

Whether you are planning to read the full articles or just the executive summaries, we hope that you find this issue stimulating and useful. Our aim is to deliver strategic and credible analysis, information, and insight so that as an influencer you will be better equipped for global mission. It's our desire that the analysis of current and future trends and developments will help you and your team make better decisions about the stewardship of all that God has entrusted to your care.

I hope you enjoy the new look and feel of the *LGA* rolled out in the September issue. We look forward to your feedback on it.

In this issue we address how we can respond to the challenge posed by the Nigerian militant group Boko Haram. We highlight Europe as a strategic mission field. We continue our series of articles on Christian engagement with people of other faiths by looking at Confucianism and how we can present the gospel to cultural Chinese. And we consider how to engage the key US Millennials generation in mission.

'Boko Haram's ideology has four main features', writes John Azumah (Lausanne Senior Associate for Islam and Associate Professor of World Christianity and Islam at Columbia Theological Seminary, Georgia, USA): opposition to aspects of Western education; opposition to the modern secular state of Nigeria; the desire to establish an Islamic caliphate; and the use of violence to achieve their goals. However, 'stereotyping Muslims and problematising Islam will only alienate Muslims and create an "us versus them" situation, which is exactly what the jihadists preach and are seeking to achieve', he suggests. Instead we should collaborate with local and international ecumenical and interfaith groups to build bridges across communities, and offer resources for pastoral care and counselling, as well as share deeper theological reflections in the light of a widespread prosperity gospel that offers little in dealing with suffering and persecution.

'Europe, the nursery of world Christianity, has itself become a most challenging and strategic mission field. What hope is there for the continent that has been fundamentally shaped by the gospel, but paradoxically, also by its rejection?' asks Jeff Fountain (Founder of Schuman Centre for European Studies). We evangelicals have often developed blind spots, distorting our vision of Europe. However, if the story of Jesus was the most influential shaper of Europe's past, why should that not also be true of the future? A transformed Europe will begin with transformed disciples, a transformed body of Christ. 'As people of hope, pregnant with God's future, we look expectantly past today's crises to see how the Lord of history will fulfill his purposes for Europe and the wider world', he concludes.

‘In view of the historical disrepute of the Christian faith among cultural Chinese, one persuasive way to present the gospel is by addressing what resonates with their aspirations and values—especially with regard to human flourishing as defined by the ideals of Confucianism’, writes I’Ching Chan–Thomas (Director of Training of the Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, Asia–Pacific). Confucius’s ideal of human flourishing reflects the *shalom* that Jesus came to restore. While Confucius was right in his prognosis of humanity’s purpose, he was too optimistic about man’s ability to perfect himself. Instead of self-effort, Christ has already provided a way for us towards that end, which we may attain by trusting in him. ‘When the narrative of the gospel is presented this way . . . it seamlessly corresponds with Confucius’s ideals for humanity but with a realistic solution’, she concludes.

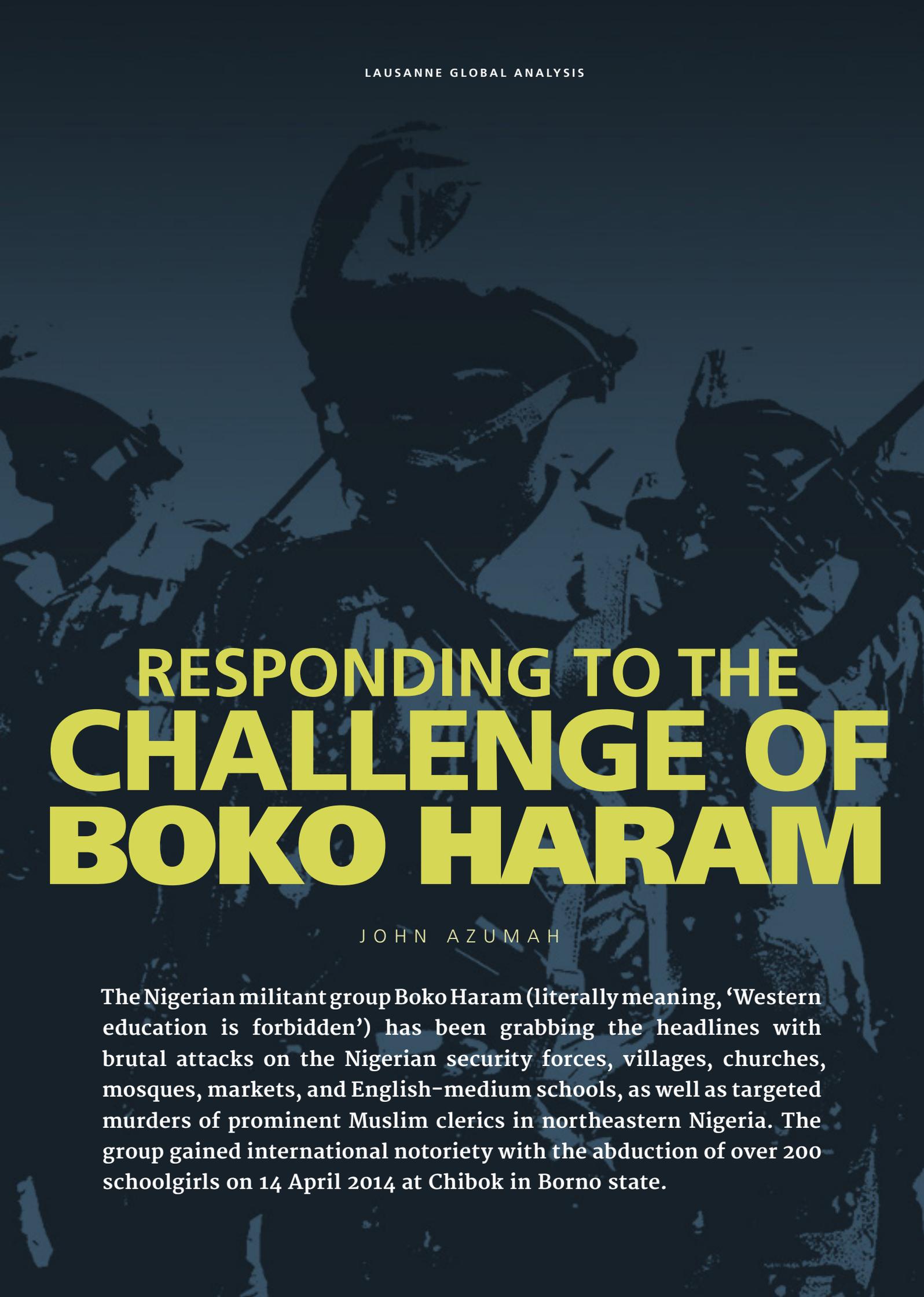
‘The largest sub-segment of American society, the Millennials (born 1980–2001) are coming of age’, write Steve Steddom (Executive Director of the Harry J Lloyd Charitable Trust) and Tom Harvey (Academic Dean of the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies). They will receive the largest intergenerational transfer of wealth in American history. Nonetheless, compared to previous generations, they are more likely to be religiously unaffiliated and less likely to believe in God. Thus, the impact of this on how Millennials give and to who is a growing issue for evangelical leaders. ‘The time is ripe for a compelling and coherent vision of holistic mission for this Millennial generation: a vision that embraces the present realities of technology, globalization, urbanization, and racial diversity, and is grounded on biblical theology that seeks to maximize our time in the redemptive period of the biblical narrative’, they conclude.

Please send any questions and comments about this issue to analysis@lausanne.org. The next issue of *Lausanne Global Analysis* will be released in January.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Taylor".

David Taylor, Editor
Lausanne Global Analysis



RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGE OF BOKO HARAM

JOHN AZUMAH

The Nigerian militant group Boko Haram (literally meaning, ‘Western education is forbidden’) has been grabbing the headlines with brutal attacks on the Nigerian security forces, villages, churches, mosques, markets, and English-medium schools, as well as targeted murders of prominent Muslim clerics in northeastern Nigeria. The group gained international notoriety with the abduction of over 200 schoolgirls on 14 April 2014 at Chibok in Borno state.

Understanding who they are, what is their origin, and what they really stand for has been made difficult by various factors, including the climate of fear and hysteria that the attacks have created within Nigeria and the nature of Nigerian politics that breeds, and feeds on, rumours and conspiracy theories.

Origins

The origins of the group lie in a youth group at the Alhaji Muhammadu Ndimi mosque in Maiduguri in Borno state in northeastern Nigeria in the mid-1990s. Muhammad Yusuf assumed leadership of the group at that time. Yusuf was a student of Ja'far Mahmud Adam, a prominent *Ahlu Sunna* cleric based in Kano, and for some time, was considered a potential successor to Adam.

Yusuf and Adam apparently fell out around 2002, and Yusuf began to withdraw from the Ndimi mosque to establish his own community around a new compound in Maiduguri from where he launched what became known as Boko Haram. At the height of public polemical exchanges between Yusuf and Adam, the latter was gunned down in 2007 during early morning prayers inside a mosque in Kano, apparently on the orders of Yusuf.

Yusuf continued to mobilise and consolidate his group until July 2009, when following a confrontation with police, the group's compound and mosque in Maiduguri was razed to the ground. Yusuf himself was captured by the military and handed over to the police, who by all accounts, executed him. Several members were killed and some escaped into neighbouring Niger and Cameroun. Others went to Algeria and Somalia for training in militant camps. Abubakar Shekau, Yusuf's second-in-command, assumed leadership, and from 2010 started a wave of brutal attacks apparently to avenge Yusuf's death.

Foreign links

After Yusuf's death, Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) issued a statement of condolence, offering Nigerian Muslims training and weapons to fight Christians.¹ In 2010 Shekau pledged allegiance to the leadership of al-Qa'ida, al-Qa'ida in the Maghreb, ISIS in Iraq, and al-Shabab in Somalia. However, it seems that groups like al-Qa'ida and AQIM may be distancing themselves in the wake of the abduction of the school girls in April.

Hard evidence to support claims that Boko Haram receives funding from the Gulf or other foreign sources is elusive, but Adam and his organisation in Nigeria were certainly funded by an Islamic trust in London.²

Ideology

Boko Haram's ideology has four main features:

- opposition to aspects of Western education;
- opposition to the modern secular state of Nigeria;
- the desire to establish an Islamic caliphate in line with the old Islamic empire of Borno which covered part of present-day northeastern Nigeria; and
- the use of violence (militant jihad) to achieve their goals.



In August 2014, Boko Haram declared an Islamic Caliphate around the town of Gwoza, in northeastern Nigeria.

The group's ideology is rooted in northern Nigerian Islamic history. Joseph Kenny, a leading Roman Catholic specialist on Islam in Nigeria, describes Islam in northern Nigeria as 'firmly reformist and separatist with regards to anything non-Islamic'.³

The term *Boko* is a Hausa word meaning fake, counterfeit, or inauthentic which came to be applied to secular-Western education within northern Nigeria long before Boko Haram. The suspicion of secular-Western education in northern Nigerian Muslim society is therefore deep-rooted and widespread. In the words of an anonymous Nigerian Muslim intellectual, 'the genealogy of Boko Haram comes partly from the long-standing negative attitudes towards Western education among the Muslims of northern Nigeria, and partly from Salafi-Wahhabi trends in Nigeria originating from the preaching career of al-Shaykh Abubakar Mahmud Gumi'.⁴

The group's position on secular education is more nuanced than is portrayed in the media:

- On the basis of an Islamic tradition, Yusuf pronounced aspects of non-Islamic knowledge that contradicts the Qur'an and Sunna *haram* (forbidden).
- Public schools are considered *haram* due to mixing of boys and girls.

The group also rejects the secular nature of Nigeria as based on *kufir* (unbelief), and calls for Muslims to undertake civil disobedience against the government, shun its services and institutions, and remove it from power by force, if need be, in order to replace it with an Islamic government. It views Western education and secularism as a 'camouflaged conspiracy' introduced into Islamic societies by Europeans to corrupt pure Islamic morals and Muslim religiosity.

Other historical influences

On these scores Boko Haram is not alone. Gumi, arguably the most dominant voice of northern Nigerian Islam in the last century, talked about the conspiratorial and destructive nature of the education system bequeathed by the British colonialists who, he said, built

schools to teach destructive Western culture. Gumi also taught that the roots of Nigeria's sociopolitical and economic woes lie deep in the concept of secularism.

Another factor contributing to the rise of Boko Haram is a jihadist legacy dating back to the early 19th century when Uthman dan Fodio led a Fulani insurgency against the then Hausa Muslim rulers on the grounds that the latter were not Islamic enough:

- Dan Fodio founded a theocracy, the Sokoto Caliphate, which came under British colonial rule from 1904 to 1960.
- Through indirect rule, the British maintained the old order and extended the rule of Muslim emirs over hitherto non-Muslim ethnic groups.
- Western scholars have romanticised the Caliphate as providing progressive, good Islamic governance, ignoring unspeakable brutalities, massive enslavement, and a far from cohesive caliphate on the eve of colonial rule.
- They have also joined the jihadists in branding Muslim scholars who opposed the jihad as venal and corrupt, endorsing the jihadi interpretation as representative of normative Islam and dismissing the non-ideological and non-militant face of Islam as 'mixed Islam', 'black Islam', and heterodox.
- Virtually all northern Nigerian Muslims have come to revere dan Fodio, while radical groups, including Boko Haram, are bent on turning the romanticised jihadist legacy into political programmes.⁵

Recent factors

In addition, the 1966 coup which resulted in the death of leading Muslim politicians such as the first Nigerian Prime Minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, and the Premier of the Northern Region, Ahmadu Bello, was generally perceived by northern Nigerian Muslims as a southern Christian attack on Muslims and Islam. Successive military dictators kept the lid on intra-Muslim factionalism, which by the late 1970s turned into Christian-Muslim tensions over debates about the Federal Shari'a Court of Appeal, strongly opposed by Christians.

The 1980s started with violent intra-Muslim conflicts, while the late 1980s marked the beginning of Christian-Muslim riots and violence, mostly started on campuses by student groups. These conflicts persisted and increased in intensity through the 1990s and 2000s—Nigeria's 'Decades of Blood', with horrific acts of violence committed by all sides.

In the early 2000s, Salafi-Wahhabi leaders, including Yusuf and Adam, were at the forefront of the agitation for comprehensive implementation of shari'a in northern Nigerian states. The shari'a project was an abysmal failure due to selective justice, corruption, and abuse of the system, which led to loss of public confidence and disillusionment among the leadership of the activist groups. Adam himself resigned from his position on the board entrusted with the implementation of Islamic morality in public life in Kano State. Disillusionment with this failure contributed to the rise of extremist groups like Boko Haram.

The initial success of the group was also helped by the patronage of local politicians and prominent businessmen.

Current factors

Boko Haram is able to exploit several current problems for the purposes of both recruitment and operations, including: weak local, state, and federal institutions; widening gap between rich and poor; a climate of rumours and conspiracy theories; the tendency of state and federal officials to deny or downplay the scale of atrocities; incompetent and unprofessional security forces; rampant corruption and collusion on the part of the police; loss of faith in the justice system; and a culture of vigilantism and impunity.



Weak local, state, and federal institutions



Widening gap between rich and poor



A climate of rumours and conspiracy theories



Tendency to downplay the scale of atrocities



Incompetent and unprofessional security



Corruption and collusion of the police



Loss of faith in the justice system



A culture of vigilantism and impunity

The initial success of the group was also helped by the patronage of local politicians and prominent businessmen.

Implications

All of these factors served as fuel (rather than root causes) for the rise of Boko Haram, providing fertile soil for the seeds of religious bigotry to take root. Addressing them will help drain the pus but will not necessarily deal with the causes of the infection.

Suggested responses

Christians should resist the temptation of stereotyping and problematising Islam with arguments that groups like Boko Haram represent the true face of Islam:

- Islamic legal texts are clear that the declaration of jihad is the prerogative of a legitimate ruler of an Islamic state.
- Boko Haram's tactics of declaring fellow Muslims unbelievers and murdering them were roundly repudiated in the seventh century. The Kharijites who espoused such beliefs were ruthlessly suppressed as heretical terrorists.
- Muslim leaders across the world have denounced Boko Haram as criminals and terrorists.

However, more importantly, the narrative that Islam or the Qur'an or Muhammad is the problem is futile and disempowering. If these are the problems, what is the solution? To proscribe Islam as a religion and ban the use of the Qur'an?

Stereotyping Muslims and problematising Islam will only alienate Muslims and create an ‘us versus them’ situation, which is exactly what the jihadists preach and are seeking to achieve!

The pressure on the Nigerian church in general and Christians in northern Nigeria in particular is considerable. In the short term, evangelical movements like Lausanne should seek collaboration with local and international ecumenical and interfaith groups in an effort to end the violence and to build bridges across communities.

The cycle of violence has spread trauma, fear, and hatred among large portions of northern Nigerian Christians who see Islam as an existential threat. Sections of the Christian leadership and youth have been radicalised, with many resorting to violence and openly calling for retaliatory attacks.

Many Christians in northern Nigeria, and the Pentecostal/charismatic stream of the Nigerian church in particular, would benefit from resources for pastoral and professional care and counselling. They would also benefit from deeper theological reflections in the light of a widespread prosperity gospel that offers very little in terms of dealing with suffering, persecution, and Christian presence and witness in conflict situations.

Lastly, ‘de-secularisation’ groups like Boko Haram may be calling the evangelical communion to a long overdue conversation about the effects of the secularisation of society and culture on religious commitment. In other words, there needs to be a serious conversation about what it means to be a citizen and a believer in a pluralistic nation state governed by secular democracy.



John Azumah is the Lausanne Senior Associate for Islam and Associate Professor of World Christianity and Islam at Columbia Theological Seminary, Georgia, USA. John specializes in Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations and has published widely in this field, including ‘The Legacy of Arab-Islam in Africa: A Quest for Inter-Religious Dialogue’, ‘My Neighbour’s Faith: Islam Explained for Christians’, two co-edited volumes, and several journal articles and book chapters.

Endnotes

1. ‘North Africa Qaeda offers to Help Nigerian Muslims’, *Reuters*, 1 February 2010, accessed 1 October 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/02/01/ozatp-nigeria-qaeda-muslims-idAFJ0E6100EE20100201>.
2. Andrea Brigaglia, ‘Ja’far Mahmoud Adam, Mohammed Yusuf and *Al-Muntada* Islamic Trust: Reflections on the Genesis of the Boko Haram Phenomenon in Nigeria’, *Annual Review of Islam in Africa* 11 (2012): 35-44.
3. Joseph Kenny, ‘The Spread of Islam in Nigeria: A Historical Survey’, accessed 1 October 2014, <http://www.dhspriory.org/kenny/Sist.htm>.
4. Anonymous, ‘The Popular Discourses of Salafi Radicalism and Salafi Counter-radicalism in Nigeria: A Case Study of Boko Haram’, *Journal of Religion in Africa* 42, 2 (2012): 120.
5. John Azumah, *The Legacy of Arab-Islam in Africa: A Quest for Inter-Religious Dialogue* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2001), 7-18.
6. *Editor’s Note*: See article by Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu entitled ‘[The Prosperity Gospel and Its Challenge to Mission in Our Time](#)’ in the July 2014 issue of *Lausanne Global Analysis*.



LAUSANNE GLOBAL ANALYSIS

EUROPE

A most strategic mission field

JEFF FOUNTAIN

Europe, the nursery of world Christianity, has itself become a most challenging and strategic mission field. Already late last century, English missiologist Lesslie Newbigin signalled this development when he compared the difference between the pre-Christian pagan and the post-Christian pagan to that between a virgin and a divorcee. What hope is there then for the continent that has been fundamentally shaped by the gospel, but paradoxically, also by its rejection?

Europe, the most Christianised of all continents, has also exported atheism, rationalism, humanism, secularism, existentialism, communism, and plain ‘unbelief’ to the far corners of the world:

- If Europeans do not return to the life source which shaped their culture and society, the Bible, they will continue to spread ‘unbelief’ in various forms globally.
- Twice as many majority world students study in Europe than in America, for example. Many return home as ‘unbelievers’ to become lecturers, politicians, business leaders, and shapers of their own society.

How then should we view Europe today? We evangelicals have often developed blind spots, distorting our vision of Europe, for various reasons. To correct these distortions we need to look in seven directions:

1. Look back

Christians should be aware of how the Bible and the story of Jesus have been the most influential shapers of Europe’s past:

- Arch-atheist Richard Dawkins says we cannot understand European history without the Bible and Christianity.
- However, many evangelicals seem to believe God went on vacation from the time of Paul until Luther.
- Yet in reality, many lights came on during the so-called ‘Dark Ages’ as people groups, from Armenia to Ireland, embraced the gospel.

The Bible profoundly shaped European art and music, marriage and family, language and literature, business and economics, education and scholarship, healthcare and hospitality, science and technology, law and justice, politics and democracy, and much more.

Short memories breed short-sightedness and rob us of vision. To have faith for God’s future purposes, we need to understand how God has been active throughout history, especially working through faithful minorities.

More recently, the vision for Europe as ‘a community of peoples deeply rooted in Christian values’, shared by Robert Schuman (France), Konrad Adenauer (West Germany), and Alcide de Gaspari (Italy), midwived the birth of what has become the European Union. Yet we evangelicals have too often watched critically from the sidelines as Catholics fought to embed biblical values, including *solidarity* and *subsidiarity*, into EU thinking against secularist influences in the European arena.



2. Look beyond

We also need wide-angle-lens vision to view Europe beyond our nationalistic and denominationalist perspectives:

- Catholics were always conscious of being part of a pan-European communion.
- Then the Protestant Reformation produced *landeskirchen* or territorial churches, and fostered nationalistic perspectives: the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, the Dutch Reformed Church, and the Lutheran Church as state church in Germany and Scandinavia, for example.
- Later, evangelical 'free' churches focused even more narrowly on the local church.
- Perhaps we can say it this way: 'Catholics see woods; Protestants see trees; Evangelicals see branches.'

Mostly we train our evangelical leadership to think local: 'Christian leadership' means pastoring a local church. However, where are the Christian training programmes equipping potential leaders for engagement in politics, economics, and all other spheres of life? Or offering European studies from a Christian perspective?

Europe has hardly been on the radar for evangelicals. Instead of embracing our responsibility to help shape Europe's future, recognising the roles Joseph, Nehemiah, Esther, and Daniel played in transforming pagan regimes, we have sometimes started with negative, disengaged attitudes influenced by popular eschatologies assuming God has planned for Europe to become increasingly apostate.

Yet surely the Lord's Prayer teaches that it is always God's will for his kingdom to come, his will to be done on earth, in Europe, as it is in heaven? Is it ever God's will for his will *not* to be done in Europe?

Twice as many majority world students study in Europe than in America. Many return home as 'unbelievers' to become lecturers, politicians, business leaders, and shapers of their own society.

3. Look forward

If the story of Jesus was the most influential shaper of Europe's past, why should that not also be true of the future? We should ask ourselves: 'What sort of Europe would please God?' What vision for the future of Europe is preached in our churches, directly or indirectly? *Without a vision the people perish* (Prov 29:18). Is this why our churches in Europe seem to be perishing?

During the Second World War, Robert Schuman went underground in France after escaping from Nazi imprisonment and began praying and planning how to rebuild Europe on Christian foundations. Surely that should be our quest today:

- No one wants to turn back the clock to ‘Christendom’ when the church dominated both government and society.
- However, we can pray and work towards a Europe based on Christian values of forgiveness, reconciliation, solidarity, justice, faithful relationships, and creation stewardship.

Many questions hang over the future of the European Union. Schuman warned that the project could not remain merely economic or technocratic. It needed a soul. As the debate heats up, what vision for Europe’s future will we bring to the table?

4. Look around

Europe today is experiencing serious crises in economics, politics, society, religion, and the environment:

- Unemployment in Spain and Greece is as high as in America during the depression.
- Crisis has become the new norm for Europe. It will be with us for a long time.

It should reshape the missions agenda of the European churches, for these challenges also present boundless opportunities for believers to respond with care and compassion. The soft powers of love, truth, and justice won the early church credibility and respect, and eventually conquered the Roman Empire. They could win credibility for the church again.

Prior to the 1974 Lausanne Congress, many saw the so-called ‘social gospel’ as a distraction from the ‘real gospel’ of salvation. That event marked a new evangelical acceptance of holistic mission.¹

After all, Jesus himself talked about feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and the prisoners. While we gladly claimed the anti-slavery campaigner William Wilberforce as ‘one of ours’, for over a century, the evangelical sector had been rather quiet concerning public engagement. Now evangelicals across Europe are again responding—with food banks, anti-human trafficking, debt counselling, second-hand clothing stores, refugee assistance, and much more.

Looking around, we should also note the different kinds of Europeans among whom we live:

- Post-Christian, post-communist, postmodern, post-migrant and post-secular Europeans each require tailored approaches. There is no one-size-fits-all strategy.
- Neither should we expect all to feel comfortable in our current expressions of church. Incarnational mission will mean entering their world, just as Jesus entered ours. That could result in many fresh expressions of church.

5. Look within

If we are really honest, the most challenging Europeans of all are ourselves: average Christians! Like rabbits caught in the headlamps of secularism, we often feel intimidated, immobilised, and unable to articulate our faith in the public square. Our short memories of what God has done in the past in Europe rob us of vision for the future. Our lives are often

church-centred rather than kingdom-centred, as we seek the comfort zone of fellowship with like-minded believers.

It can be shocking to discover that Jesus said little about the church during his ministry. Only two verses in all the gospels mention the word 'church': Matthew 16:18 and 18:17. Of course, Jesus loves the church. She is his bride. However, central to his ministry was the kingdom of God, mentioned in over 100 gospel verses. God's kingdom is where his will is being done. He wants his will to be done on earth, in Europe, in every life sphere.

A transformed Europe will begin with transformed disciples, a transformed body of Christ.

6. Look again

Let us take another look at Europe—this time to see what God is doing. 'Wheat and tares' will always grow up together. We should focus on the 'wheat' and look for signs of hope, faith, and vision among the ruins:

- Recent shakings of God in the Marxist world, the Muslim world, and the world of mammon are signs of his active participation in human affairs.
- Renewed spiritual hunger; new stirrings of prayer; fresh expressions of church; migrant churches restoring faith, colour, and boldness in our cities; new ecumenism of the heart between ancient traditions; and a recovery of awareness of the gospel as transforming all spheres of life are signs of hope in our continent today.

No, God is not finished with Europe yet!

7. Look up

Our hope is not based on circumstances or trends. It is grounded on God's person and promises. The Christian faith is all about death and resurrection. It is a story of apostasy and renewal, over and over again. As people of hope, pregnant with God's future, we look expectantly past today's crises to see how the Lord of history will fulfill his purposes for Europe and the wider world.



Jeff Fountain, a native of New Zealand, has lived in the Netherlands since 1975. After serving as European director for Youth With A Mission for twenty years, he established the Schuman Centre for European Studies. Among Jeff's books are *Living as People of Hope*, and *Deeply Rooted*.

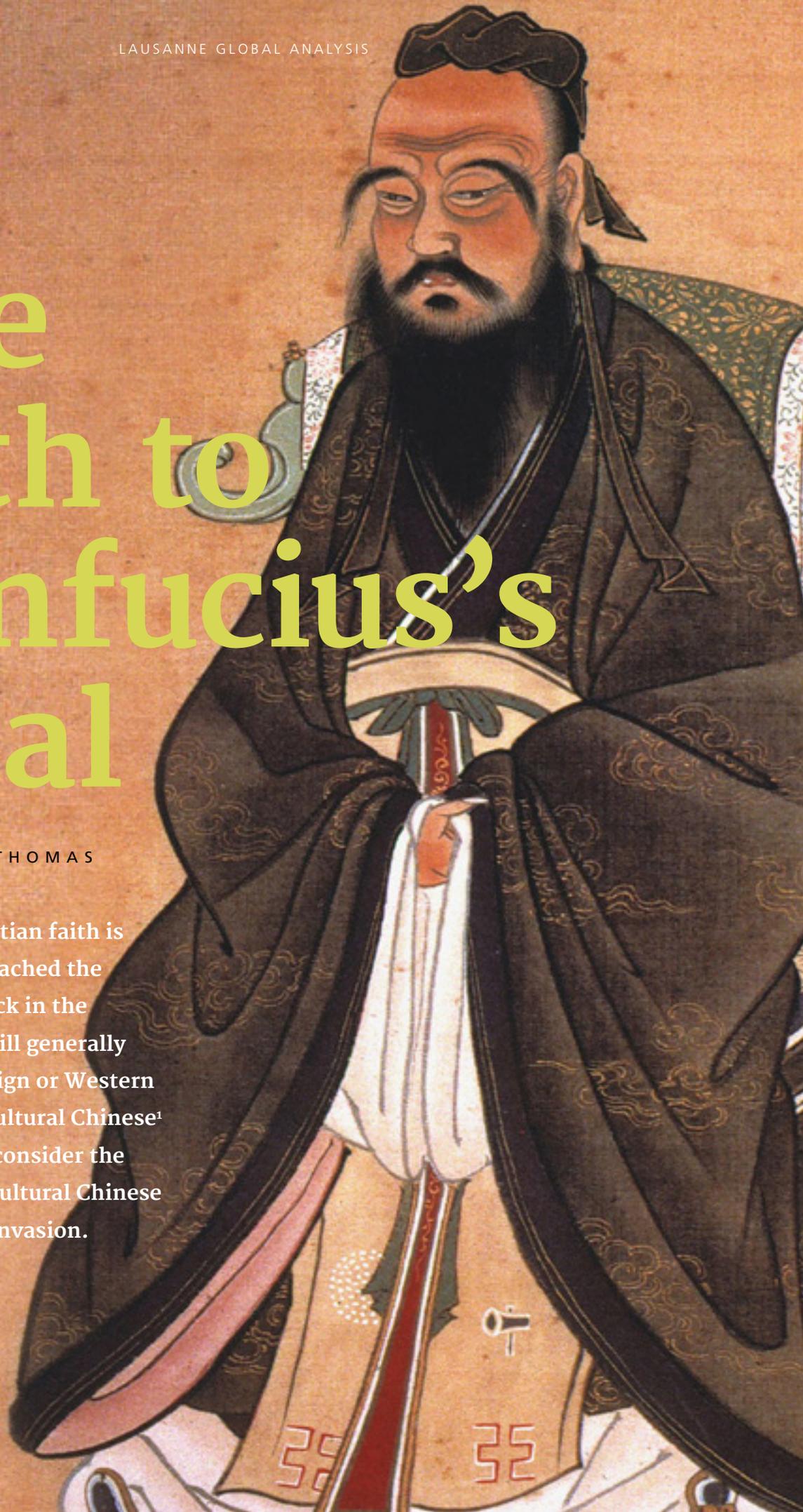
Endnotes

1. *Editor's Note*: See article by S Douglas Birdsall entitled '[Lausanne '74: Stewarding the legacy](#)' in the July 2014 issue of *Lausanne Global Analysis*.

The Path to Confucius's Ideal

I'CHING CHAN-THOMAS

Although the Christian faith is believed to have reached the shores of China back in the 8th century, it is still generally perceived as a foreign or Western religion by many cultural Chinese¹ today. Some even consider the evangelization of cultural Chinese a form of cultural invasion.

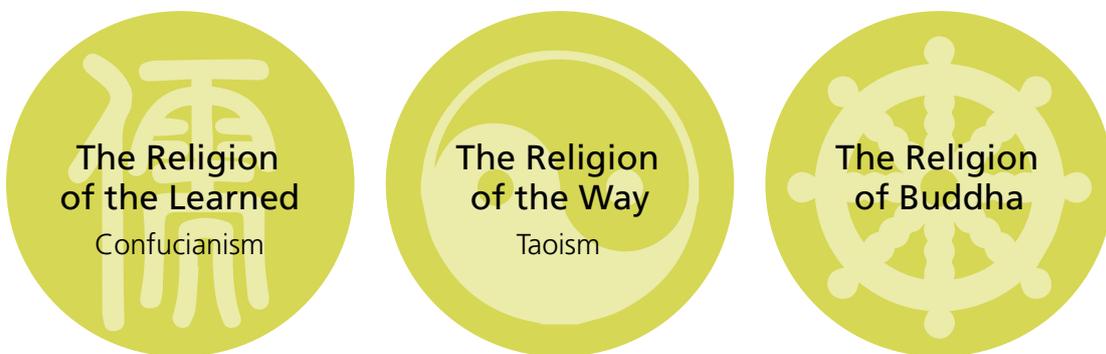


One more Christian, one fewer Chinese' was the chant of the 4 May 1919 movement in China that reinforced the misconception that when one chooses to follow Jesus, one has renounced one's Chinese identity to go after a foreign or Western god and ideology. One of the greatest offenses a Chinese commits when he pledges allegiance to Jesus is that he has betrayed his ancestors and nation.

According to historian Wu XiaoXin, the propaganda that has impacted the Chinese the most is the claim that 'Religion is the opium of the people.' The fact that many of the Western missionaries to China in the mid-1800s rode on the coattails of the opium traders to bring the gospel to the locals means that this statement carries significant baggage.

Cultural Chinese worldview

The worldview of present-day cultural Chinese around the world has undeniably been shaped, in varying the degrees, by the 'Three Religions': the Religion of the Learned (Confucianism); the Religion of the Way (Taoism); and the Religion of Buddha.



Today, although Confucianism is not the formal ideology of many cultural Chinese, its influence on their worldview, culture, and social life remains powerful and undeniable due to its historical significance.

For example, the value placed on education and filial piety can be traced to Confucius's teachings about how life ought to be ordered. While it is possible to detect the metaphysical footprints of Taoism and the existential projections of Buddhism in the cultural Chinese worldview, the philosophy that has most profoundly shaped the cultural Chinese conception of life and reality has been the Religion of the Learned.

Confucianism's ideas

Based on the philosophy and teachings of the ancient statesman, philosopher, and educator Kung Fu-tzu (551-479 BC), Confucianism's pragmatic principles especially addressed the social dimension of human existence. Many labels have been given to what Confucianism really is, from humanism to a complex regimen of rituals, but essentially Confucianism is about how to better ourselves and society through self-cultivation and self-effort.

Confucius was especially concerned that men should develop as humans in the most moral sense:

- Thus, the central idea of Confucianism is that every normal person can aspire to be the Noble or Superior Man—superior to his fellows, if possible, but surely superior to his own past and present self.
- A moral code based on benevolence towards others and the development of self and society via proper education and practice of virtues are key ideals of Confucianism.
- These ideals would eventually lead towards the flourishing of humanity and the achievement of the Noble Man. In other words, the Noble Man is really what it means to be human.

Accordingly, the cultivation of the Noble Man would be impossible without a proper social environment that is conducive to inner harmony and the development of harmonious relationships with others. Confucius viewed the self as the center of a nexus of relationships: family, friends, society, and state. Hence, it is essential that the harmony of five cardinal relationships be maintained at all costs: ruler to ruled, father to son, husband to wife, brother to brother, and friend to friend.

Despite centuries of striving towards the ideal of the Noble Man and human flourishing, they are not making the kind of progress for which they had hoped.

Jesus, the path to human flourishing

In view of the historical disrepute of the Christian faith among the cultural Chinese, one persuasive way to present the gospel is by addressing what resonates with their aspirations and values, especially with regard to human flourishing as defined by the ideals of Confucianism.

Although most cultural Chinese hold to an optimistic view of humanity, the bitter experiences faced by China, particularly in the last century, have exposed the weakness of both the society and culture. Despite centuries of striving towards the ideal of the Noble Man and human flourishing, they are not making the kind of progress for which they had hoped.

Most cultural Chinese would concede that it does not take too much soul-searching to admit that humanity does seem to possess weaknesses that make it impossible for us to reach our aspiration of the Noble Man. Thus, this longing for human flourishing and the cultivation of a moral self present two great openings to express the relevance of the Christian faith for the Chinese culture:

1. The problem of sin

While the Christian belief in original sin and depravity has always been alien and even offensive to many cultural Chinese, they can certainly identify with sin in reality—in their own lives as much as in the lives of others. We can safely say that Confucius’s counsel of self-cultivation has not been able to bring about the human flourishing we hope to achieve.

In fact, the basic human predicament seems to be the incapacity to realize such an ideal. As Christians we are not surprised by this common human failure—‘all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’ (Rom 3:23).

2. The Good News for cultural Chinese

The aspiration of human flourishing and becoming a Noble Man may be unattainable on our own, but we do not have to do it on our own. The path towards that hope is open to us in Christ:

For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes (Rom 10:2-4).

Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’ (Jn 14:6).

As we examine the gospel, we see it is about human flourishing. The Good News is that God has sent his own Son to restore the *shalom* that has been disrupted by sin. While it is easy for us to assume that *shalom* equals peace and harmony, biblical *shalom* encompasses much more than that:

- *Shalom* as expressed in Scripture incorporates not just peace but universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight—the way things ought to be.²
- It is a rich state of affairs where there is contentment, where humanity fulfils its vocation, and where humanity is in perfect fellowship with its Creator and Savior.

Theologian Cornelius Plantinga, Jr, cogently describes biblical *shalom* as a state in which the physical world, humanity, its cultures and ethnicities, families, married couples, friends, and individuals all exist in wholeness while enjoying edifying relations with each other and encouraging one another’s virtues.³

When viewed this way, Confucius’s ideal of human flourishing very much reflects the *shalom* that Jesus came to restore. In fact, as considered earlier, much of what is central to the cultural Chinese’s attainment of human flourishing is the preservation of relationships. Maintaining the goodwill of existing relationships and seeking reconciliation where necessary towards a harmonious society and an inner harmony are part of the notion of human flourishing. If that is the case, we can certainly relate biblical *shalom* to the Chinese idea of human flourishing.

Jesus, the Son of Heaven

While Confucius was right in his prognosis of humanity’s purpose, he was too optimistic about man’s ability to perfect himself. History and experience inform us that we will never be able to achieve biblical *shalom* (or human flourishing) on our own. As such, in *Shangdi*’s⁴ love and wisdom, he has sent the ultimate Son of Heaven, who humbled himself to enter into his creation as one of us to show us what it is like to live in the way he intended us to, according to the example set by him.

Jesus, the Son of Heaven, first atones for our sins so that we may be saved from them if we accept him. He also sends the Holy Spirit to help us live righteously and virtuously. In short, the gospel to the cultural Chinese is this: salvation from the penalty of sin and victory over its power in our lives, which consequently opens the way to flourishing and *shalom*. Instead of self-effort, Christ has already provided a way for us towards that end, which we may attain by trusting in him.

The realization that the Christian message is the missing piece to Confucius's puzzle of the Noble Man could be extremely significant for a cultural Chinese person.

Implications

When the narrative of the gospel is presented this way, it avoids the common pitfall of being perceived as a foreign solution to the cultural Chinese's existential problem. Rather, it seamlessly corresponds with Confucius's ideals for humanity but with a realistic solution.

The realization that the Christian message is the missing piece to Confucius's puzzle of the Noble Man could be extremely significant for a cultural Chinese person considering the claims of Jesus:

- This means that a cultural Chinese person can be a follower of Christ without having to shed his ethnic identity.
- In fact, by choosing the path of Jesus, the uniqueness of one's culture and ethnicity is affirmed, as the Lord of Heaven is the Creator of all.
- There will be no identity dilemma—one can be Chinese and a Christian with honor.

Finally, articulating the gospel this way also avoids the common mistake of communicating the gospel as if it is solely about the salvation of our soul, or even more simplistically, that Jesus is merely our passport to heaven upon death. The gospel is not just about forgiveness of our sins and going to heaven when we die.

Responses

Ultimately the message of Christianity is about the acts of God in human time and space, and most significantly, the acts of God in Christ that took place in real time past. When we begin to consider our faith within the framework of the big narrative of humanity, we will see why it is compelling that we want to live out this truth, this good news of life as it is intended to be, and share it with those around us. The Apostle Paul clearly understood that the meaning, purpose, and satisfaction of his life came by aligning his life with God's historical objectives.

God has been working out his plan for thousands of years, first through the nation of Israel and now through the body of Christ. If you are part of the body of Christ, then you too have a role in this big narrative. It is only when we see this relevance of the gospel to all peoples that we can proclaim along with Paul: 'woe to me if I do not preach the gospel . . . ' (1 Cor 9:16).



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Endnotes

1. 'Cultural Chinese' is used in this article (as opposed to simply 'Chinese') to include all diaspora Chinese around the world—Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Philippines, etc—in addition to those from mainland China.
2. Cornelius Plantinga, Jr, *Not The Way It's Supposed To Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B Eerdmans, 1995), 10.
3. Ibid, 100.
4. *Shangdi* is the title used to refer to the Supreme Lord or literally, 'Lord of Heaven'.

THE MILLENNIALS

HOW TO ENGAGE THEM IN MISSIONAL GIVING

STEVE STEDDOM, TOM HARVEY

The largest sub-segment of the American society, the Millennials (born 1980–2001) are coming of age. They will receive the largest intergenerational transfer of wealth in American history (estimated 58.1 trillion dollars) according to Pew Research. Nonetheless, compared to previous generations, they are more likely to be religiously unaffiliated and less likely to believe in God. Thus, the impact of this on how Millennials give and to whom is a growing issue for evangelical leaders.

Millennial characteristics

According to Pew Research data,¹ 29% of Millennials surveyed identify themselves as religiously unaffiliated, while 50% identify as politically independent, though on most issues they lean towards the Democratic party. They are the most racially diverse generation in American history with 43% non-white. 26% of Millennials are married, compared to Generation X (36%), Baby Boomers (48%), and the Silent Generation (65%)² at the same age.

Some 19% of Millennials say most people can be trusted, compared with 31% of Gen Xers, 40% of Boomers, and 37% of Silents. However, they are more optimistic about the future than Xers, Boomers, and Silents.

As 'Digital Natives', they grew up in the virtual universe of the World Wide Web where identity and meaning are constructed and extend to others through technology. They have 300 billion dollars in direct purchasing power, 69 billion of it discretionary.³ They pursue higher education in greater numbers, but also have accumulated record educational debt. Their social, political, and economic spheres overlap, and they seek to transcend barriers between private enterprise, government, and non-profit organizations.

29%

Religiously unaffiliated

43%

Non-white

26%

Married

50%

Politically independent

19%

Say people can be trusted

\$300B

In purchasing power

Precarious financial situation?

Millennials make comparatively less than previous generations:⁴

- The income of a 25-to-34-year-old male high school graduate averaged 31,000 dollars in 2010 versus 41,000 in 1980 (measured in 2010 dollars).
- They carry greater levels of debt.⁵
- Millennials are more dependent upon parental support, relying financially on their parents well into their 20s.⁶
- They come of age in a time of financial upheaval and an uncertain global economy.
- They face lower job security and constant pressure for new training and education to retain employability.
- They are behind the increasing number of non-profits (1.8 million) competing for limited dollars and limited attention spans.⁷

Implications: an encouraging viewpoint

Kari Dunn Saratovsky and Derrick Feldmann in their book *Cause for Change—The Why and How of Nonprofit Millennial Engagement*, note that Millennials ‘are quickly influencing how organizations communicate to all audiences . . . with an emphasis on authentic stories and visual presentations that are concise, mobile-friendly, and delivered online via social media platforms’. They highlight several characteristics of Millennials that affect their philanthropy:

- They give impulsively.
- They want their contribution to achieve results for a cause.
- They prefer event and peer-based giving.

Peers are a significant influence for Millennials:

- They prefer to learn about opportunities from peers.
- They are willing to help raise funds for causes they care about, usually by calling on friends and family.
- The influence of an individual on his friends is substantial.

The top four factors that spurred Millennials to engage in a cause are: feeling passionate about the issue; meeting like-minded people; enhancing their expertise; and lending their knowledge and experience, as well as time, to help a cause.

In relation to technology, they use websites and search engines for information gathering, finding volunteer opportunities, and giving money rather than mailed information and offline events. They connect and communicate online with their networks.

The authors conclude: ‘Our research reveals a generation that is energetically trying to transform the world for the better. The mandate is clear: organizations cannot afford to cater only to older donors and volunteers. Younger audiences are demanding that the causes they support change the way they engage with them. We hope these insights can help organizations work with Millennials to unleash this force for good.’

Implications: a less encouraging viewpoint

Christian Smith in his book, *Lost in Transition—The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*, cautions that although the Millennials are disposed to altruistic motives, they lack the reasoning tools and skills to sustain interest in long-term benevolent engagement with any given project. Thus, ministries and non-profit NGOs feel the need to engage in marketing wars to become the ‘cause of choice’.

Thus, Smith notes that Millennials often develop ‘a strong sense of fatalism . . . about the larger social and political world. So, while they are very optimistic about their own personal futures, they are hardly optimistic about the prospects of helping to make some aspect of the larger sociopolitical world a better place.’ He goes on to state: ‘If emerging adults do not begin to learn the practices of public giving and participation early enough, at least by the time they are settling down, we do not have good reasons to believe they will learn them any better later.’

According to Smith, this deficient ‘moral imagination’ has left Millennials disoriented and morally confused:

‘Engaging the public world entails working out with others the ideals that are ultimately normative and moral . . . very many emerging adults today lack the basic intellectual tools for deciding what is genuinely morally right and wrong or what is really good for individuals and society. Almost none have been taught how both to hold real moral convictions and to live peaceably in a world of moral pluralism Any notion of the shared responsibilities of a common humanity, a transcendent call to protect the life and dignity of one’s neighbor, or a moral responsibility to seek the common good—which might motivate civic involvement, political engagement, volunteering, or even financial giving—was almost entirely absent among emerging adults.’

Smith admits there are many examples of Millennials ‘doing good’, but these examples too often create a wrong perception of this generation in general that ‘young adults today are deeply committed to social justice, passionately engaged in political activism, actively volunteering in their local communities, devoting themselves to building a greener, more peaceful and just world. Almost nothing could be further from the truth, at least when it comes to 18-to-23-year-olds considered at a national level as a group.’

Who is right?

Both viewpoints offer key insights into understanding Millennials and philanthropy. Saratovsky and Feldmann help us to understand Millennials and the ‘how’ of giving, while Smith looks much deeper into the ‘why’ of Millennials and giving.

Both studies stress the primary importance of family and friend networks and the fact that emerging adults are ‘socially engaged’ far more than previous generations. The authors stress the importance of story or narrative as significant for Millennials. Both point out the importance of technology and digital connectedness. Finally, both authors caution against over-generalizing across the entire generation, and conclude that the Millennials defy any one particular label, other than perhaps ‘enigmatic’.⁸

Suggested responses for Christian leaders

Christian leaders should certainly pray and study further; Causeforchangebook.com and the Millennial Impact Report⁹ are good starting points. More specifically:

- As a Christian leader, consider teaching and mentoring Millennials on biblical, moral frameworks (moral responsibility or obligation to other people created in God’s image), but do this in the context of action.
- As a Christian fund-raiser, anticipate (and strive for) smaller dollar amounts from a larger number of Millennial donors. The high-net worth individual giver model will likely not be effective with this population segment.
- Acquaint yourself with some of the newer online giving platforms, such as Crowdrise, Fundly, Razoo, or Kickstarter.
- Consider engaging Millennials around a strategy or vision of a social good (cause) and not a financial need.¹⁰

- Consider a spectrum of ways for Millennials to participate in ministry, starting with small, even virtual, but not insignificant ways, leading to larger more co-creative ways.
- Use narrative as a carrier for truth to spark moral imagination.
- Make sure churches and ministries are open and transparent in all financial activities.
- Since Millennials are influenced by peers and family in significant ways, encourage sharing and provide clear and accurate ways for donors to bring friends and family along in the process.

The time is ripe for a compelling and coherent vision of holistic mission for this Millennial generation. A vision that embraces the present realities of technology, globalization, urbanization, and racial diversity.

Further implications

Millennials are an important and thoughtful segment of society. The hand-off of the stewardship baton to this inquisitive and socially active group is vital in the endurance race of making Christ known:

- Invest time and resources in understanding the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of giving.
- Do not focus overly on technology as if it alone defines this group. They use technology, almost seamlessly, but mostly as a means to relationship.

They value and desire authentic, trusted relationships. Millennial giving to efforts of evangelism and discipleship will involve building trust by helping Millennials see the true impact of their gifts, as well as opportunities to give beyond the financial. If a Millennial donor sees their giving as accessible, engaging, and meaningful, more than likely they will let their peer networks know. When this happens, giving becomes timeless, transcendent of generations—when a friend invites us to come along, we follow.

Finally, as Christian leaders, we must take note of Christian Smith’s admonition to develop the ‘why’ of missional giving. Smith uses the term ‘sociological or moral imagination’ to describe this framework or foundation that he sees as tragically underdeveloped in this generation. Our messages of generosity and giving, especially to Millennials, should be based on a biblical theology of church mission that develops their moral imagination (see Christopher Wright’s book *The Mission of God’s People*).

The time is ripe for a compelling and coherent vision of holistic mission for this Millennial generation. A vision that embraces the present realities of technology, globalization, urbanization, and racial diversity. A vision of mission grounded on biblical theology that seeks to maximize our time in the redemptive period of the biblical narrative, not simply to finish the mission and bring Christ back, but also to attract others to God to find his blessings and salvation in vast and various ways, through the generous giving of time, talent, and treasures.



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10. See *Giving Circles*, Angela Eikenberry. Also see The One Percent Foundation's website, onepercentfoundation.org.

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