



Negotiating identity: Extending and applying Alan Tippett's model of conversion to believers from Muslim and Hindu backgrounds

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Abstract

This article begins by analysing how the model of conversion developed by Alan Tippett corrects some missionary blind spots. It explores the issue of identity negotiation in conversion and proposes an extension of Tippett's model that addresses this issue. Challenges that Muslims and Hindus coming to faith in Christ face and pathways of response that they take in negotiating their new identity in Christ are then examined. These challenges and responses are illustrated by case studies from the Middle East, West Africa, Bangladesh, and India. Finally, implications of identity negotiation and of an extended version of Tippett's model for cross-cultural workers serving new believers from Muslim and Hindu backgrounds are outlined.

Keywords

identity, conversion, Muslim, Hindu, church, community, model

Introduction

For at least a century, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, and religion scholars have included religious conversion among their fields of study. There has been a rapid surge of publications on this subject since the 1980s, as evidenced in religion

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scholar Lewis Rambo’s comprehensive bibliography of conversion studies (Rambo, 2002). Researchers have developed a range of models to depict what happens in conversion, and missiologists have drawn on these models to facilitate our understanding of the process of turning to Christ. One of the earliest models of conversion developed by a missiologist came from the pen of Alan Tippett through his book *Verdict Theology in Missionary Theory* (1973). This model has proven to be a particularly helpful portrayal of what happens when people come from other religious backgrounds to faith in Christ, and it has been used to inform many other models of conversion to Christianity developed by missiologists since then. This article explores Tippett’s model, proposes and illustrates an extension of this model that addresses the issue of identity negotiation among Hindus and Muslims turning to Christ, and explores the implications for cross-cultural workers.

Tippett’s model of conversion

As a result of his own missionary experience in Fiji (1941–61) as well as his analysis of people movements to Christ in other parts of the Pacific, Alan Tippett developed a model of conversion (1973, modified and extended in 1977, and republished in 1992). Tippett was particularly fascinated by the process of cultural and religious change that resulted from the interaction between missionaries and local people, a process that was so important to Tippett that one observer describes his view of missionary work as fundamentally being the advocacy of change (Dundon, 2001: 32).

Tippett’s model is shown diagrammatically in Figure 1 and has several emphases. The first of these is that conversion is seen not as a point in time but as a process that incorporates a series of stages and key events or moments.

In the first stage—the Period of Awareness—individuals and groups come to an awareness of another way of life particularly through evangelism and relationships with Christians. As people’s understanding of Christianity increases, they eventually

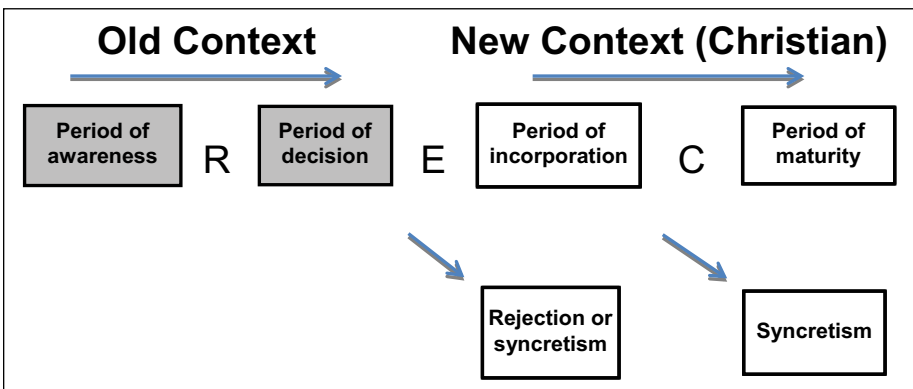


Figure 1. Tippett’s model of conversion (adapted from Tippett, 1992: 204).

reach a Point of Realization (R) in which they (individual or group) realize that the new way of life is not only an idea but a meaningful possibility for them. This leads to a Period of Decision, which may last weeks, months, or even years. This period may result in rejection of the new way of life, total acceptance of it, modification of it (leading to either syncretism or an indigenous church), or fission, in which part of the group accepts the new way of life and another part rejects it.

Tippett observed that the Period of Decision led to a Point of Encounter (E) that involved a visible act of transferring allegiance to Christ. In the animistic context of the South Pacific, a power encounter such as burning a fetish, destroying an idol, or burying an ancestral skull often marked this event, but in a Western context it might be expressed in a less dramatic event such as an altar call (1967: 100–11; 1992: 200). The key point is that, in his words, “there must be a psychological moment or experience when the persons involved actually turn from the old god(s) to the new” (1971: 169), constituting a visible rejection of the old ways and an embrace of the new. The Point of Encounter was “simultaneously an act of rejection and an act of acceptance” (1992: 203). Tippett argued that unless this break with the powers of the old religion was clearly and publicly declared, the new group of believers would be unstable and tended to drift into neopagan movements (1992: 200).

This act of transferring allegiance was not enough, according to Tippett. It had to be followed by a Period of Incorporation into the group of believers if they were to last. The new convert “coming out of something, must enter something else. There are no vacuums here” (1992: 204). In this period, new norms are learnt through processes of socialization and training and various rituals of incorporation are engaged in. Tippett emphasized that whatever forms of worship and discipling new converts engage in, they should both meet the needs of converts and operate in forms which are meaningful to them and fit their frame of reference (1992: 198–99). He saw baptism as the key act of incorporation that functioned as a confirmation and consummation of the change of faith. The act of incorporation “is likely to be a highly emotional and spiritually satisfying event, and will provide a sense of belonging to the individuals, and a sense of identity and satisfaction to the group” (1992: 199).

Tippett’s first conceptualization of this model ended at this point, but he later observed that some groups in the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea who had been incorporated into churches later turned away and developed a heterodox religion. As a result he added a third point and a fourth stage: a Point of Consummation (C) that is a precise work of the Holy Spirit and an experience of God that enables people to enter a Period of Maturity in which they continue to be transformed and grow in grace.

How Tippett’s model corrects missionary blind spots

Tippett’s model emphasizes that conversion is a dynamic, multi-stage process. Western evangelical missionaries have sometimes had an overly simplistic and superficial understanding of conversion, perhaps based on a fear of ambiguity (Harris, 2002). They have wanted to know precisely when someone is converted, and have assumed that conversion occurs at one moment of conscious decision by an individual, a view

that Conn (1979a: 101) has labelled “one-step decisionism.” Conversion is often conceptualized as crossing a line and involving a radical, sudden change. The apostle Paul’s conversion is seen as paradigmatic for this approach to conversion. But this confuses conversion—the human turning to Christ in response to God’s saving work (cf. Smith, 2001: 16)—with regeneration—a movement from death to life—that happens at a point in time (cf. Jn 5:24). Although from God’s point of view there is a clear distinction between those who are in his kingdom and those who are outside (Col. 1:13), between those who are sheep and those who are goats (Matt. 25), and between those who have eternal life and those who don’t (Jn 3:36), these boundaries are not always easy for other people to discern, especially when those other people are from a different cultural background than the one being observed.

More recent models developed by missiologists have affirmed conversion as a process rather than a crisis, including the “Engel Scale” (Engel and Norton, 1975) and the model developed by Charles Kraft (1977, cited in Conn, 1979b: 202). These models emphasize the gradual and often incremental nature of change in the conversion process. They see decisions and turning points of shorter duration as being integrated into an overall process that includes longer periods of gradual change. This understanding of conversion that includes decisions and processes as “two parts of an organic whole” reflects an emerging consensus among scholars (Shinn, 1993: 204).

A second emphasis of Tippett’s model is on the local people as active agents rather than passive recipients in the process of conversion. While missionaries are advocates whose message may be rejected or modified by the local people, the local people are the ones who, if they accept the new way of life, develop innovations in the way they shape their faith. These are shaped by their culture and make their faith meaningful to them. The fact that the peoples of the Pacific “preserved their decision-making mechanisms” was a key reason why strong indigenous churches emerged (Tippett, 1977: 204). The ways that the people worship and are disciplined are ideally expressed in ways that are shaped by “the thought-forms and behavioural-forms” of the people and their culture (1967: 110). The Point of Encounter and acts of incorporation should be expressed in culturally shaped forms that are meaningful to the local people so that they meet their needs (1992: 198–99). This means that different people groups will and should do these things in different ways.

A third emphasis of the model is that each part of the process is needed for thorough conversion. It was not enough for animists in the South Pacific to decide to follow Jesus. For thorough and lasting transformation to occur, they had to engage in a visible act of embracing Christianity and rejecting their old gods. The only cases of people returning to animism that Tippett observed occurred when people failed to demonstrate their faith through such an act (1967: 109). But after doing this, they then needed to develop forms of worship and discipling that were meaningful to them. But even this was not sufficient for continuing growth as Christians. They also needed to experience the work of the Holy Spirit. “The strongest and most indigenous church activity has come with these experiences” (Tippett, 1992: 205).

Tippett’s inclusion of the Period of Incorporation corrects the tendency of some Christian workers from individualist cultural backgrounds to ignore the reality that salvation is communal as much as it is individual (cf. Hibbert, 2009: 328–29). Tippett wrote,

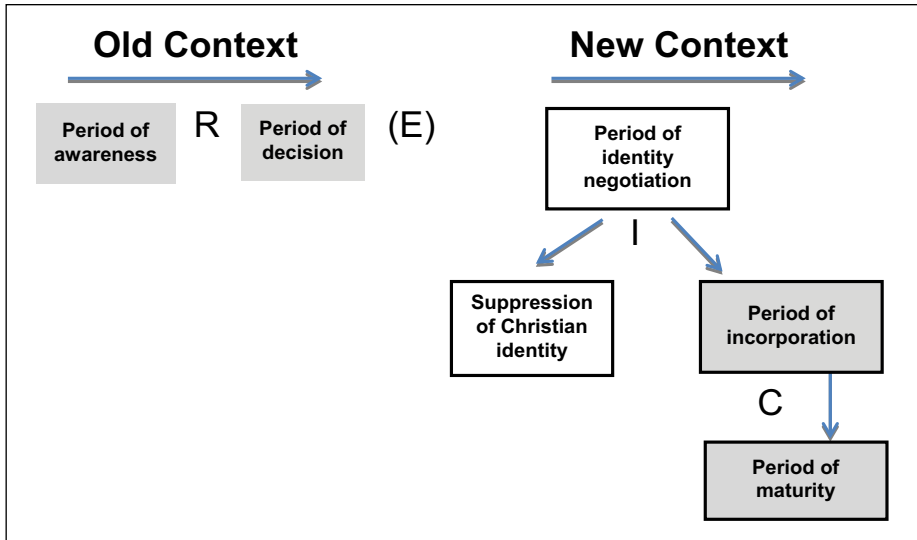


Figure 2. Modified model of conversion (based on Tippett, 1992).

People like to know who they are and where they belong. When there is a people-movement out of paganism and the people involved burn their fetishes. . . as a symbol of their cutting themselves off from paganism, it is important that they should not be left as people who do not belong to anything. (Tippett, 1973: 128–29)

Extending the model to include identity negotiation

While Tippett’s model of conversion illuminates some of the issues in the conversion of believers from Hindu and Muslim backgrounds, it needs to be extended by the introduction of an additional stage: a Period of Identity Negotiation. A modified form of Tippett’s model of conversion that includes the Period of Identity Negotiation is shown in Figure 2.

People from Hindu and Muslim backgrounds coming to Christ usually do not pass seamlessly from the Period of Decision through the Point of Encounter into the Period of Incorporation into existing churches. These believers often feel unable to display their decision to identify with the Christian community through a visible demonstration such as baptism or responding to an altar call, because this would signify a rejection of their culture and their family. Instead, they enter a phase of identity negotiation in which they work out how they can express being a follower of Christ in ways that are most meaningful to them and helpful in exposing their communities to the gospel. They often oscillate for some years between their Muslim/Hindu and Christian communities, exploring what it would mean to join a local fellowship of believers but not fully committing themselves to it. Roland Muller explains that in the early phase of identity negotiation it can seem to the outside observer that the convert has two faces:

At home, and in their community, they continue to be who they always have been. They are often afraid of betraying their family group so they continue to portray their Muslim face. They may continue to pray 5 times a day, and in some cases they may, at considerable pressure, even go on the *hajj*. However they may act with their families, they usually do so out of pressure rather than choice.

Since they are also seeking, or have found, Christ, they develop a second face. This is the one that . . . other Christian friends are most familiar with. (Muller, 2000: 95–96)

For the purposes of this article, a person's identity can be understood as their self-concept—their conception of who they are and of where they belong in society. People establish or negotiate this sense of who they are by interaction with other people. As a result, their identity is the result of a compromise or negotiation between their ideal conception of themselves and the expectations of the groups that they belong to (Oyserman, 2004: 5; Snow, Oselin, and Corrigan-Brown, 2005: 390–91). In collectivist societies, including most Muslim and Hindu societies, this process of identity negotiation is usually much more strongly influenced by their families and other groups than by their own desires or choices.

Believers from Muslim and Hindu backgrounds face three challenges that give rise to the need to negotiate their identity and that complicate their journey of turning to Christ and growing as Christians. The first of these is that in the early phases of a movement, these new believers are often the first ones in their families to turn to Christ. This is a contrast with the situation Tippett described of whole groups coming to faith in Christ and being able to support one another and provide a sense of group belonging from the beginning. As the first ones from each family to believe, they do not usually have the support of a group of people who are culturally similar to them and who can help shape and support their new identity.

The second challenge is that new believers and their communities often have a negative image of the church. Becoming a Christian is often seen as undesirable to Hindus and Muslims just as much because of cultural or sociological differences as because of theological differences (cf. McGavran, 1990: 239). Part of the struggle with identity that people from Muslim and Hindu backgrounds who are on a journey to Christ face revolves around the question “Does becoming a follower of Jesus mean I have to identify with the ‘Christian’ church with all of the negative [not theological, but sociological and cultural] connotations it has for my people?” New believers naturally want as much as possible to keep strong relationships with families and friends but they also long to express their new identity in Christ and benefit from the care, encouragement, and support of other believers.

In many parts of the world Christianity and the church are perceived as Western, with the attendant negative associations that the West has in people's minds. Because of this perceived connection with the West, Christianity is seen as promoting things like immodesty in dress and action, sexual immorality, and the abuses and humiliation resulting from the colonial era (Mallouhi, 2004: 17–23). Even when people are able to ignore the negative aspects of Western culture, they may

see the church as alien because of the cultural overhang of Western missionary influence. It is not just association with the West that puts people off churches. Long-standing churches in dominantly Muslim or Hindu countries are often comprised of people from religious or cultural backgrounds that are different from that of the new believer. These churches' forms of worship and lifestyle are culturally alien to new converts. As a result, new believers often struggle to embrace such a church as their new community. In some cases the Christian community may also be wary of accepting the convert, suspecting they may be spying on them, faking their conversion for material gain, or bringing unwanted persecution on them (Baig, 2013: 74–75).

Examples of practices that put Muslim communities off churches and Christianity include dress codes and the use of the cross as an ornament. One believer from a Muslim background explained that he no longer attends church. "I don't want to bring shame on Christ's name. . . . I won't take my wife to a place where everyone is half-naked. . . . My wife is modest" (Bartlett, 2013b: 33). The symbol of the cross is another form that offends Muslims not primarily because of what it expresses about Jesus but because of its association in people's minds with the crusades and the abuses of colonialism or of "Christian" powers. Turks and Turkish Roma in Bulgaria, for example, have told me that the symbol of the cross leaves them feeling "cold." One reason for this is that Bulgarian authorities, who are seen as Christian, forcibly tried to change their Turkish names to Bulgarian names and to deny them their identity during the 1980s. Forms such as revealing clothing and the cross are not only unhelpful in communicating the message of the gospel to the community, but they can also make the new believer feel very uncomfortable even to the point that they feel they are dishonouring God.

The third challenge faced by these believers is that national and ethnic identity tends to be fused with religious identity in most Islamic and Hindu communities as a result of their being strongly collectivistic (Green, 2012). Leaving Islam or Hinduism is therefore usually seen as betraying one's nationality or ethnicity. Families often see the conversion of one of their members as a rejection and betrayal of them. Most Turks, for example, assert that "To be a Turk is to be a Muslim" and Turks in Bulgaria automatically assume Bulgarians are all Christians. This fusing of ethnic and religious identity runs so deep that it continues to affect the thinking of new believers. A Turkish-speaking believer who recently rejected Islam to follow Jesus said "I know I'm a Christ-believer now. But as a Turk I'm still a Muslim, right?" (T. Otto, personal correspondence, 2013). When a Turk in Bulgaria becomes a follower of Jesus, therefore, they are often seen by fellow Turks as having rejected their Turkish-ness and become Bulgarian.

In the face of these challenges, believers from Hindu and Muslim backgrounds have three options: (1) to leave their Muslim or Hindu community and "suppress" their identity as Muslims or Hindus; (2) to minimize or cut off contact with the Christian community, suppressing their Christian identity; or (3) to somehow negotiate between and synthesize both identities, retaining aspects of both (Green, 2012; 2013).

None of these options is easy, and the new believer faces unique difficulties in each situation. Suppressing one's identity as a Muslim or Hindu to openly identify with the Christian community has two key disadvantages: First, the family and wider community of the new believer in Jesus is likely to see their leaving their religion to join a culturally different religious group as a rejection of their entire cultural system and of them, and consequently be hardened towards the gospel. Second, it can be much more difficult for the gospel to then spread to the new believer's community through them. The option of cutting off contact with the Christian community has the serious disadvantage of cutting new believers off from the care, support, encouragement, and nurture that a Christian community provides and which they so desperately need.

The third option of negotiating both identities is a path that many new believers take, as illustrated by multiple case studies from a wide range of countries in *Longing for Community: Church, Ummah, or Somewhere in between?* (Greenlee, 2013b). This option involves believers in a process of identity negotiation that is characterized by tension, ambiguity and ambivalence because they feel they belong to both communities but know that to some extent at least they are also outsiders to both (Bartlett, 2013a). One Muslim background believer stated,

There are two aspects to my identity: horizontal and vertical. Horizontally I am a Muslim, you see? This line is my life, my community, my family, my history, my culture, and my tradition. . . . And here, this is the vertical aspect to my identity, which is my faith, my relationship with God. (in Bartlett, 2013a: 22)

Syrian author Mazhar Mallouhi illustrates the challenge of identity negotiation when he describes the “deep internal struggle” and “profound crisis of identity” he wrestled with for decades after beginning to follow Jesus. In the early stages of this struggle, Mallouhi embraced the Christian community and went to extremes in an attempt to be accepted by them. His Christian friends encouraged him to leave his cultural past behind, to change his name to take a “Christian” name, to stop socializing with Muslims and attending family religious celebrations, to cease fasting, to pray in a different posture, and even to eat pork to prove he was a Christian. Wanting to be accepted, he ended all his relationships with Muslims (Chandler, 2007: 105). But Mallouhi did not feel at home, and sometimes felt that he was betraying his heritage and his people. After many years, this long journey of identity renegotiation finally ended with (in this words) a “coming to rest in his true identity” in which he sees himself as culturally a Muslim and spiritually a follower of Jesus (Chandler, 2007: 106–107).

When believers continue to identify themselves as Hindus or Muslims they usually retain close contact with their families and friends. This has the advantage of allowing them to keep sharing their faith with their families without being expelled, and in some cases many others from their families and groups of friends become believers as part of what has been called an “insider movement” in which believers retain their identity as Muslims or Hindus while living under the lordship of Christ (Lewis, 2007).

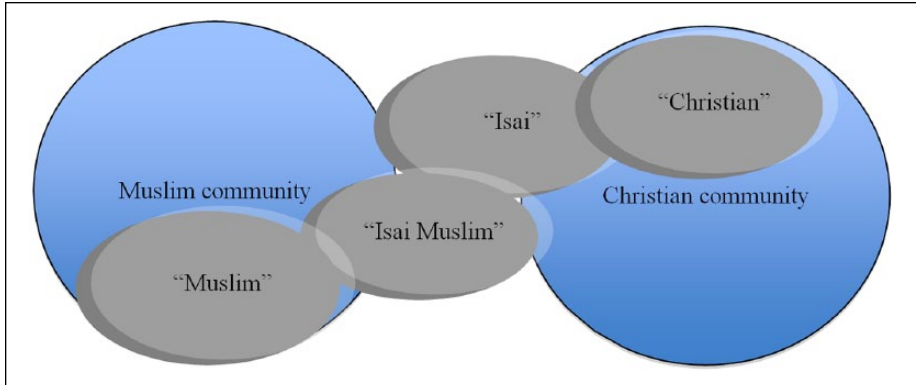


Figure 3. Groups of believers from a Muslim background in Bangladesh (Green, 2013: 60).

How Muslim-background believers in Bangladesh and West Africa are negotiating their identity

As a result of the difficulties of leaving one's socio-religious community for the culturally alien Christian community, many Muslim-background believers take the third option of negotiating a new identity. Helpful case studies and descriptions of this process are provided by multiple researchers (Greenlee, 2013b). They show that the process of negotiating a new identity is often long and drawn-out. Early in this process Muslim-background believers (MBBs) "switch" between the two identities, Muslim and Christian, so that they act in different ways in different contexts. As the years progress many go on to develop a more hybrid identity (Green, 2013: 56–57). Tim Green has identified the main hybrid identities that have been developed by groups of Bangladeshi MBBs and these are shown in Figure 3.

The two largest communities depicted here are the Muslim and Christian communities. These are represented by the two large circles that have clearly defined boundaries. Four groups of MBBs are in the process of renegotiating their identity and this ambiguity is represented by their less distinct boundaries. These groups do not have clearly defined boundaries, but instead are "fuzzy" sets around which sharp lines cannot be drawn (cf. Hiebert, 1994: 119). Each group overlaps to some degree with at least one of the others and with one or both of the traditional communities. The group of those that call themselves Christians have suppressed their Muslim identity and relationships and been absorbed into the Christian community. The "Isai" and "Isai Muslim" groups have opted for a hybrid identity and manage to oscillate between the two identities but are viewed with some suspicion by the two main communities. Those in the "Muslim" group of followers of Jesus are "insiders" who, though known as Muslims by their friends and family, meet together to encourage each other and worship the Lord. Another group of "Muslim" followers of Jesus that is not represented on the diagram are secret believers (Green, 2013: 61).

A second example of how believers renegotiate their identity comes from West Africa. A Gambian Fulani MBB told me that when he became a follower of Jesus in his home country, the only church he could join was one in which everybody else was from an animist background. This church loved to sing loudly, clap, and dance. None of these activities felt like worship to this Fulani believer who was used to worship as reverent, quiet prayer with ritual bowing, kneeling, prostration, and chanting. After two years he eventually started the first of several churches for Muslim-background believers that use patterns of worship which fit Fulani thought forms and behavioural patterns, including the use of ritual bowing, kneeling, and prostration in prayer, sitting on the floor instead of chairs, and chanting prayers and poems of worship to God.

How Hindu-background believers in India are negotiating identity

Herbert Hofer (2001) interviewed more than 80 Hindu-background believers (HBBs) in Tamil Nadu in India who had decided not to be baptized. He found that while some of them occasionally attended church meetings, they did not join the church. They and their communities saw the church as having a separate culture alienated from the mainstream of Indian spirituality and values and influenced by Western values. Congregational organization, modes of worship, names, customs of dress, church art and architecture, religious language, eating habits, and ways of selecting leadership were all different from those of the mainstream of society (2001: 151–53). Each of these believers, in Hofer's estimation, was

a sincere believer in our Lord and desires fellowship with the church but feels compelled to remain aloof in order to avoid alienating kith and kin. . . . His major desire is that his family and community might come to share the experience in Christ with him. (Hofer, 2001: 57)

These unbaptized believers wanted to change their religion without changing their culture, but in India the two are very closely associated. Protestant churches have typically responded to this intertwining of culture and religion by developing an entirely separate culture for Christianity, including “different festivals, different names, different appearance, different lifestyle, different worship, gestures, etc.” (Hofer, 2001: 51). Baptism is consequently seen by these believers and their communities as a call to reject their own culture and join a foreign church culture.

While many of the unbaptized Hindu-background believers in Hofer's study had little fellowship with other Christians, another group, who call themselves *Khrist bhaktas* (devotees of Christ) gather together to pray, worship, learn, and encourage each other to live for Jesus using contextualized forms. They gather in homes, in the form of *Yeshu Satsangs* (literally, “truth gatherings”), sit on the floor over a traditional geometric pattern, place the Bible on a book stand, sing devotional songs in a traditional style called *bhajan*, and listen to a sermon given in a traditional Indian form (Jorgensen, 2009; Duerksen, 2013). By using more contextualized expressions of Christian life and worship, the leaders among *Khrist bhaktas* are helping believers negotiate their identity and “mend identity fragmentation” (Duerksen, 2013: 88). One of the key strategies that

leaders of these groups use to help believers achieve a stable sense of identity is to “*give new followers of Christ more time to change practices and lifestyles than many Christian pastors advocate*” (Duerksen, 2013: 87; emphasis original).

Missiological implications of Tippett’s model for working among Hindus and Muslims

Recognize that conversion is a multi-stage, dynamic process and that there is also an essential period of identity negotiation that must be allowed for

Tippett focused on the four stages of awareness, decision, incorporation, and maturity in the conversion process. The case studies and analysis in this article confirm that as Muslims and Hindus begin to respond to Christ as Lord, their journey of faith is not a single step of decision but rather a series of dynamic stages. Just as Tippett emphasized that animists needed time to come to awareness of the gospel, to realize that they could respond to it in some way, and to develop forms of expressing their faith, so Muslims and Hindus need time to engage in these activities. It is not unusual for the periods of awareness and decision-making to take several years. Tippett’s insights about the need for a period of and a process of incorporation into a body of believers are particularly important and liable to be overlooked especially by missionaries from individualistic cultures (cf. Muller, 2010: 259).

Missing from Tippett’s model, however, is a stage that for most Hindus and Muslims precedes the period of incorporation. This Period of Identity Negotiation has also apparently been overlooked in a recent model of conversion from Islam (Straehler, 2013). The Period of Identity Negotiation can last several years and is essential to most Muslims and many Hindus in their journey of faith. Cross-cultural workers must realize that this is a normal and vital part of their journey of faith and allow time for believers to work out their new identity rather than assuming that the transition into a community of believers will be straightforward.

Facilitate rather than control

Tippett stressed that people on a journey to Christ from other religions are active agents in their conversion. This implies that they are also active agents in the negotiation of their identity. Missionaries are not the primary agents in the process, as David Bosch (1991: 453) emphasized: “In inculturation . . . the two primary agents are the Holy Spirit and the local community, particularly the laity. Neither the missionary, nor the hierarchy, nor the magisterium controls the process.” Cross-cultural workers trying to help MBBs and HBBs grow as believers should therefore act as advocates and facilitators rather than policemen. Prescribing to these believers that they must be baptized and be incorporated into poorly contextualized churches can cause intolerable strain on their identities and may lead to them being cut off from their communities or suppressing their Christian identity, thus stemming the flow of the gospel. It is the

local believers who must work out what cultural forms will be most meaningful to them in expressing their followership of Christ and helping others from their families and friends to consider joining them. Rather than there being a single correct way for believers from other religious backgrounds to express their identity in Christ, different groups of believers should be encouraged to develop different ways of expressing this new identity (cf. Greenlee, 2013a: 10).

Get alongside new believers and support them in the period of identity negotiation

The process of identity negotiation is often traumatic, and new believers need support, friendship, discipleship, and a place to feel safe. Missionaries can provide some of this support and nurture while believers negotiate the two communities. They can provide a sense of belonging and a safe context in which they can work out their new identity. This safe place corresponds to an “intermediate state” that Tippett felt that some believers from animist backgrounds needed. He argued that in situations where baptism was delayed because people did not have an adequate understanding of the gospel, missionaries should provide “an intermediate state somewhere into which the convert from paganism is incorporated. Somewhere he should feel he belongs!” (Tippett, 1973: 129).

The importance of providing a supportive environment to MBBs and HBBs is underlined by a recent study of maturity of Muslim-background believers in Bangladesh. Believers whose fathers were also MBBs were much more likely to continue maturing as Christians. The reason for this seems to be that believing fathers provided their children a supportive environment in which their children felt free to explore issues of faith (M. Gibbs, unpublished pilot study).

Cross-cultural workers who are helping new believers should also aim to help them reconcile their two identities. One way of doing this is for the cross-cultural worker to become familiar with the communities that the new believer is a part of, especially his or her family and friends. Visiting new believers in their homes, for example, helps new believers to see that the cross-cultural worker understands and is concerned for them not only as an individual in their spiritual growth but as relational beings who belong to families and communities. This kind of involvement in the new believer’s life demands a significant investment of time and effort for the cross-cultural worker, who will need to spend many hours with them to build trust, help them explore how to preserve their integrity as individuals, and work out what it means to follow Christ in their context.

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