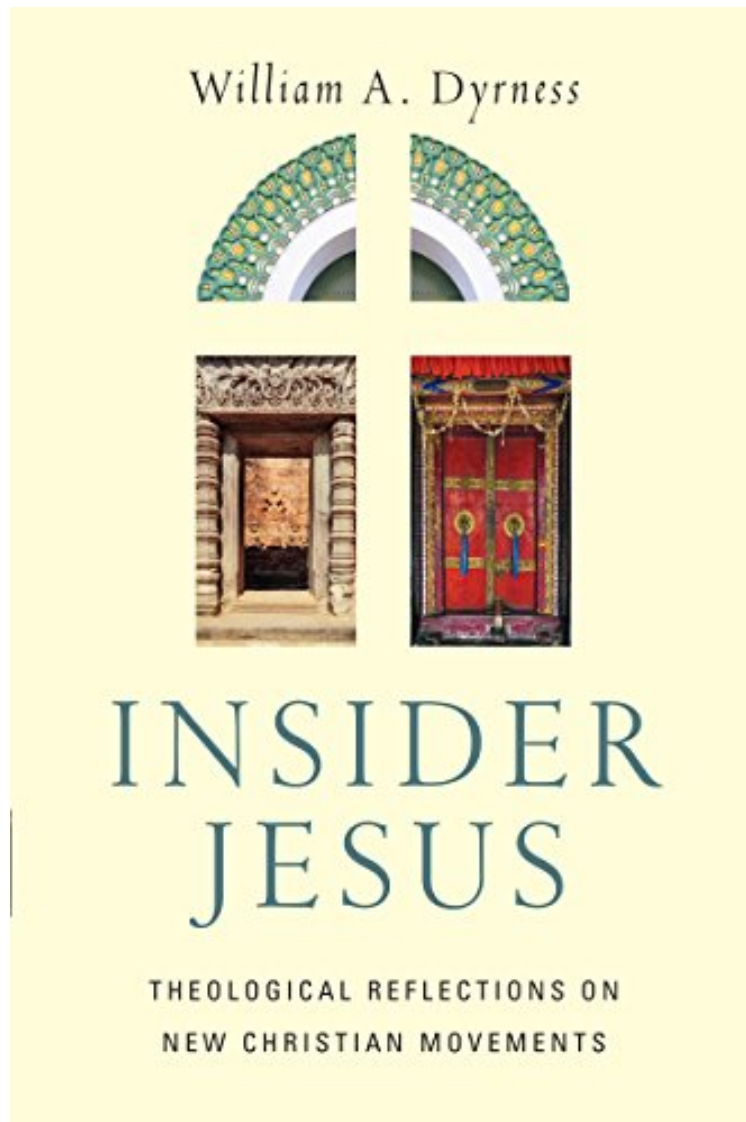


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Insider Jesus: Theological Reflections on New Christian Movements

William A. Dyrness

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William A. Dyrness : Insider Jesus: Theological Reflections on New Christian Movements before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Insider Jesus: Theological Reflections on New Christian Movements:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Insider Jesus, by William A. DyrnessBy James B. PateWilliam A. Dyrness teaches theology and culture at Fuller Theological Seminary.Can a person be a Hindu and a Christian at the same time? How about a Muslim and a Christian? Or a Buddhist and a Christian?This is not exactly the main topic of the book, Insider Jesus, but it is a significant aspect of the book, in terms of its larger agenda and thesis. Dyrness talks

about the phenomenon of people of other cultures embracing aspects of Christianity, yet retaining aspects of their own cultures, in terms of beliefs, practices, communities, and identities. Some of them keep their belief in Jesus a secret. Some gather in groups that they form. Many feel alienated from Western missionaries. Dyrness goal in this book, it seems, is to help provide Western Christians with a constructive way to look at this situation. Dyrness opposes imposing Western ideas on non-Westerners in the name of missions. Dyrness does not really offer specifics on how the Western churches can interact with non-Westerners who embrace the phenomenon that he describes, though he does refer to approaches that Western Christians have taken, some more constructive than others. His hope, however, is to influence Western Christians attitudes, which can set the stage for an appropriate and a loving response. Part of Dyrness method is to do what the subtitle of the book says: to offer theological reflections on new Christian movements. The Bible plays a paramount role in these reflections. Dyrness argues, from Scripture, that God engages people where they are, that religion is a part of the human search for God, and that God works through culture. A key idea in Dyrness theological reflections is that Gods goal is the renewal of the earth, and Dyrness believes that Gods Spirit is at work in non-Christian cultures to accomplish that. Dyrness engages questions that Western Christians may have about his view, particularly concerning the special status of Scripture and the church. Does what Dyrness say about the role of the Spirit in non-Christian cultures contradict this special status? Dyrness does not believe so, and he explains why. The book somewhat falls short in addressing whether the phenomenon that Dyrness describes contradicts Scripture, or primary Christian doctrines. Dyrness does note that there are Hindus and Sikhs who receive Christ and worship according to Hindu or Sikh rites, while repudiating idolatry. A repudiation of idolatry would be consistent with Scripture. But do the Muslims who embrace Christ also accept the Trinity and see Christ as God? This was not clearly addressed in the book. And yet, Dyrness was somewhat critical of Western Christians who make orthodoxy the end-all-be-all and thus utterly reject adherents to the phenomenon that he describes. For Dyrness, there are more open and constructive ways to approach the situation. Some things that I like about the book: First, overall, Dyrness theological reflections make me feel better about studying other religions. Part of me is leery about doing so, since the Bible does condemn idolatry, and Dyrness did not robustly explain how the biblical condemnation of idolatry fits into his theological reflections about other cultures and religions (though there was a brief passage in which Dyrness made an attempt). Still, Dyrness does present effective arguments on the basis of Scripture that support an openness to the wisdom of pagan (as in non-Jewish and non-Christian) cultures. Dyrness probably goes further than a lot of other Christian writers in acknowledging parallels and overlaps between biblical religion and non-biblical religions, in terms of morality, rather than portraying biblical religions as vastly superior and non-biblical religions as grossly deficient, or immoral. At the same time, Dyrness does seem to present the biblical religions as superior, on some level. Second, the case studies in the book effectively illustrated the phenomenon that Dyrness is discussing. For instance, there are Buddhists who believe in Christ, seeing Christ as a solution to the human problems that the Buddha identified. Third, Dyrness discussion of Aztec religion was interesting. Drawing on the work of Costa Rican theologian Elsa Tamez, Dyrness talks about the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl (whom my sixth grade teacher called Captain Q when we studied the Aztecs). Captain Q represents the god of life who injures self to bring a new humanity (a fifth creation) into existence (71). That sounds somewhat like Jesus! During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, around the time that the Spanish invaded, Captain Q was replaced by Huitzilopochtli, a warrior deity, and that coincided with the rise of an Aztec military dictatorship. I am rather skeptical when Christian apologists argue that non-Christian religions have Christian themes, and that this is one of Gods ways of preaching Christ to them, or of preparing them to accept Christ. In short, these Christian apologists seem to imply that the presence of Christian-like themes in other religions somehow attests to the truth of Christianity. I think that this is projecting Christianity onto other religions, rather than allowing those religions to speak with their own voice. I one time read a Christian apologist who was arguing that Christ (or the theme of a god dying for peoples sins) is in the Hindu religion, and, when I read the Hindu texts that he was citing to support his point, I found that those texts were making a different point from what he said they were making. At the same time, I try to be open-minded, and I realize that different religions can have similar themes and motifs. Maybe that is the case with Aztec religion and Christianity. The book also had a thoughtful discussion about whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God, surveying Muslim and Christian views on that question. The book helped me better understand John Wesleys teaching of preventing grace. And it included good quotes, such as Dietrich Bonhoeffers statement about the power of the name of Jesus, in whatever context it may appear. I received a complimentary copy of this book from the publisher. My review is honest! 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A Category-Breaking and Category-Making Book. By Andrew T. Le Peau In the midst of the explosion of Christianity around the world, some strange and unusual expressions of faith are emerging. Adherents of other religions are following Jesus in great numbers while remaining in the religious community they grew up in! Some Muslims believe in and follow Isa al Masih (Jesus the Messiah) while continuing to go to their Mosque and practice Islam. Hindu and Sikh followers of Jesus meet in Yeshu Satsangs (Jesus Gatherings) while remaining in their religious communities. Some missionaries are very disturbed by these insider Christians, as they are called, fearing syncretism and suspecting these are cults. Others see this as a great movement of Gods Spirit. William Dyrness does not seek to make a judgment about particular controversial groups of believers so much as seek to give a theological basis for

understanding what might be going on. This is what animates William Dyrness's category-breaking and category-making book. If God is Lord of the whole earth, he asks, if God made every human, made humans for relationships with each other and with him, and if God is at work sustaining everywhere, if anything good has its origin in God, then isn't God involved in the full-orbed cultures of the world? And can't we and insiders find what is good and valuable in those contexts? As Dyrness says, God is everywhere active in such cultural processes, upholding the order of things, sustaining its processes, and seeking, wooing, and calling by the Spirit those who will worship him (p. 36). Many of us have a hard time seeing this because we are heirs of the Reformation which emphasized heart and mind over against embodied cultural practices. One downside of this (which modernist and Enlightenment tendencies intensified) is that religion has for many decades now been portrayed as something private, separate from the public sphere. Indeed, many contend that private religion should have no bearing on culture or society. Most of the rest of the world, however, sees no division of private and public, of religion and society. For them, it is not strange at all that religious leaders should guide public life. Because we Westerners already see religion and culture as separate spheres, we see no problem asking converts to leave their culture and side with Christianity. But that may in fact uproot them from what God has already been doing in them and in their cultures. We may be working against God instead of with him. If God is at work in the world's cultures, and if our Western view is truncated, is it fair then to require others to reject completely their culture, family, traditions, and all sense of identity to become Christians? While I am sympathetic to the direction Dyrness is going, I think he unfairly makes the Reformation his main whipping boy. Certainly the Greek influence on the early centuries of the church is also key (though Dyrness mentions this belatedly on pp. 142-43). When Judaism had no creed except possibly for the very brief Shema, how else can we explain the proliferation of fixed summaries of belief from the Apostles' Creed to Athanasius? The Reformation stood in the long tradition of the early church in this regard. Dyrness also could have strengthened his case by considering the story of Naaman who asked for and received forgiveness in advance from Elisha for continuing to go to the pagan temple on his return to Damascus (2 Kings 5). In addition, some of his more theoretical considerations could have been placed in an appendix. The book helpfully includes fascinating case studies from recent history and is full of many provocative questions. For example, were first-century Christians actually insiders within Judaism? Overall Dyrness raises significant implications about how we see our own culture and our own faith as well as Christianity around the world. As a result he has provided us with one of the most important and thought-provoking books of the year.

0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Universalism and Neo-Orthodoxy
By Chris Cole
This book is bad. My concern was aroused immediately when I saw on the title page that the author used the New Revised Standard Version. That was made worse by his occasional use of the Contemporary English Bible. While Dyrness refers to himself as an evangelical, he holds to a neo-orthodox view of Scripture, such as claiming that some of the Proverbs were adopted from pagan cultures, and then approved by God. Such a view completely undermines the inspiration of the Scriptures. He also considers non-Christian religions to be the result of men's efforts to understand God (contrary to Romans 1:18-22), and, therefore, God's means of transforming such cultures. He points to the literature and art inspired by other religions, yet says nothing of, for example, the caste system of Hinduism or the terrorism inspired by some versions of Islam. It is also a denial of Romans 3:11: "There is no one who seeks after God." He holds that non-Christian religions are evidence of men's evolving toward God, when the Bible portrays them as degeneration AWAY from God. That irreconcilable difference in worldview makes the paradigm advocated by Dyrness incompatible with a biblical view of sin, the nature of man, and the purpose of missions. Try *Insider Movements: Biblically Incredible or Incredibly Brilliant?* for an alternative point of view.

Christianity Today's 2017 Book of the Year Award of Merit - Missions/Global Church
Amidst the variegated spread of global Christianity, followers of Jesus are showing up in unexpected places. Today we hear of culturally embedded insider movements, Jesus followers in the folds and creases of Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, and other cultural fabrics. They elude our conventional theological categories and elicit wonder and debate. Are these authentic expressions of Christian faith? And if so, how should we understand them? William Dyrness brings a rare blend of cultural and theological engagement to his reflections on these insider movements. Could it be that our own understanding of what God is doing in the world is culturally shaped and needs recalibrating? How might the story of Israel and the early emergence of Jewish followers of Jesus provide helpful perspective on what we are seeing today? What is God already doing amidst a culture and people before the missionary arrives? And how might American Christians need to rethink the nature of religion? Within the present ferment and conversation, Dyrness's probings and reflections open up a theological space for exploring these questions anew.

"When we are confronted with the reality of religious pluralism, genuine struggles and dialogues are possible only if we take our own faith seriously and at the same time deeply respect the truth claims of other faiths. Professor Dyrness's creation of hermeneutical spaces makes such struggles and dialogues not only possible but, indeed, imperative. A must-read for anyone yearning to learn more about God's mission in the world today." (Sze-kar Wan, professor of New Testament, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University)" At last we have in this

work an attempt by a Western theologian to understand and truly locate, within our contexts as non-Western Christian peoples, the ongoing work of the Spirit in so-called insider movements. The rise of insider movements is a challenge to recognize the fresh work of the Christ outside of the territorial and theological boundaries of 'Christendom.' In a way, we are seeing a reprise of the Jew-Gentile social crisis those critical times when the gospel broke out of its Jewish wineskins and the early Greek converts had to grope about as to its life-changing meaning within their own worldview systems. It is providential that at this juncture of the history of the churches, we have fellow travelers like the author of this book to accompany us and shed some light along the way." (Melba Padilla Maggay, Institute for Studies in Asian Church and Culture)"This book is groundbreaking. Conversations have been taking place questioning the ongoing value of the contextualization movement. This is because among evangelicals contextualization has largely been a project conducted by outsiders assisting those who are insiders. This was an essential step in missions, yet the limitations of the movement are obvious. What is exciting is that in our postcolonial era new theological discourses and practices are emerging from within believing communities that seek to be faithful to Scripture and address more specifically and resonate more deeply with the worlds of these communities. Dyrness lucidly and sensitively introduces the reader to these developments and provides the reader with the theological and conceptual categories to understand and appreciate them." (Patrick Krayer, executive director, Interserve USA)"Insider Jesus, written by one of the foremost theologians of culture, makes a significant contribution to the growing body of works on global theology. It seeks to move beyond the current models of contextualization, which tend to privilege the outsider's (missionary) understanding of the gospel at the expense of the insider's. It advocates an 'intercultural theology' that involves older Christian traditions engaging in serious dialogue with the newer expressions of the Christian faith in indigenous movements. The result is not only mutual enrichment but perhaps a new kind of ecumenicity from which a genuinely evangelical-catholic faith would eventually emerge. Protestants and especially evangelicals need to read this book!" (Simon Chan, Trinity Theological College, Singapore)"In a day when many too quickly give a thumbs-up or thumbs-down response to new movements of followers of Jesus who try to retain much of their religious and cultural heritage of birth, this study offers a wealth of biblical, historical, and theological insight to help us all give a more informed and constructive response." (J. Dudley Woodberry, dean emeritus and senior professor of Islamic studies, School of Intercultural Studies, Fuller Theological Seminary)"The word insider in the title is accurate but also misleading, because the joy of reading this book is learning more about how God acts and moves in people's lives outside of where and how we might expect. Dyrness takes us through the Bible, theology, history, culture, and case studies to open our eyes to different ways Jesus is being followed today. As a result, our eyes are opened to God's redemptive grace moving creatively in the world. And we're better prepared for thoughtful missions work that participates in God's story without imposing unnecessary cultural baggage." (Kent Annan, Christianity Today, The 2017 Book Awards)"Dyrness interacts with much missional and contextualization literature. . . . He raises questions for anyone interested in missions and how best to approach it in our globalized world." (Gerald Wisz, Christian Market, December 2016)"As the growth in emergent insider movements continues unabated across the globe, missiologists have begun to grapple with the theological and missiological implications of these movements for global Christianity. What does it mean for subaltern communities to embrace Jesus and his gospel while remaining institutionally rooted within their own religious communities? Drawing upon biblical, theological, and ethnographic resources, William A. Dyrness's *Insider Jesus* offers a comprehensive, critical, and constructive theological response to the challenges arising from the continuing growth of emergent insider movements across the globe. This response truly embraces the plurality of hybridized, boundary-crossing, and transreligious ways in which believers have chosen to follow Jesus while maintaining existing social ties, cultural identities, and religious belongings. As the culmination and crowning achievement of Dyrness's lifelong journey as a missionary and missiologist across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, this compelling and indispensable book is destined to be a seminal resource for missiologists and missionaries that is biblically sound and theologically rigorous, yet clear and engaging for nonspecialist readers. I have no hesitation in recommending this as essential reading for scholars and students of Christian mission and global evangelism alike." (Jonathan Y. Tan, Archbishop Paul J. Hallinan Professor of Catholic Studies, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland)About the AuthorWilliam A. Dyrness (DTheol, University of Strasbourg; Doctorandus, Free University) is professor of theology and culture at Fuller Theological Seminary. He is the author of many books, including *Modern Art and the Life of a Culture* (with Jonathan Anderson), *Senses of the Soul: Art and the Visual in Christian Worship*, *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture*, *Changing the Mind of Missions* (with James Engel), *Theology Without Borders* (with Oscar Garcia-Johnson), and was a general editor of the *Global Dictionary of Theology*.