



### WHY SACRED TRIBES JOURNAL?

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**New religious movements, New Age, Neo-Pagan, and minor non-Christian spiritual movements are a global phenomenon**, and for over one hundred years have been the focus of evangelical critique and apologetic. In June 1980 the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization sponsored the "Consultation on World Evangelization" in Pattaya, Thailand. The purpose was to develop strategies for reaching unreached people groups. One of those groups was called "Mystics and Cultists," now referred to as new religious movements. The consultation formally recognized new religious movements as unreached people groups comprising frontier missions yet to be encompassed by the kingdom commissions of Christ. [\[1\]](#)

As religious pluralism and the uniqueness and particularity of Christ develop into major issues for the twenty-first century, **the Christian church cannot afford the luxury of overlooking the impact of these spiritual alternatives**. Some of the most influential and challenging alternative movements include the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Iglesia Ni Cristo, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mahikari, Neo-Paganism, New Age (or New Spirituality), Rastafarians, Santeria, Siddha Yoga, Umbanda, and emerging Do-It-Yourself Spiritualities. Although the Western evangelical community has produced a number of popular books and articles in response to several (but not all) of these movements, the bulk of these have been in the area of apologetic refutation of doctrine as heresy in contrast to Christian orthodoxy.

Towards the end of the twentieth century a new climate of opinion began to be expressed by several Christian authors, writing from different reference points in North America, Great Britain, and Australia. Through

various journals and periodicals (*International Journal of Frontier Missions*, *Missiology*, *Themelios*, and *Lutheran Theological Journal*) they began to question the effectiveness of the dominant apologetic methodology in reaching adherents of cults and new religious movements. **It was argued that the apologetic refutation of cult teachings, while helping Christians differentiate between biblical orthodoxy and heresy, has not translated into any substantial evangelistic and discipleship efforts among adherents of new religions.** They indicated that this impasse might be overcome through the integration of contextualized mission principles into the apologetic task. [\[2\]](#)

Now in Britain, North America, Australia and New Zealand several evangelical practitioners have been pioneering some practical ways in which the twin disciplines of apologetics and missiology can be complementary practices in the effective proclamation of the gospel to adherents of alternate spiritual pathways. What these western practitioners have discovered in the field is that **methodology does not have to become an "either/or" polarization, but rather a "both/and" blending of apologetics with contextual mission principles** rooted soundly in the Bible.

**The purpose of this international online journal is to explore ways in which to bridge the gulf between the disciplines of cult apologetics, contextual missiology and religious studies.** As the phenomenon of new religions constitutes a global missiological challenge requiring a holistic response, this journal will draw together the combined insights of apologists, missiologists, missionaries, sociologists, anthropologists, theologians, and others from around the world. Contributors will primarily address issues related to biblical and historical perspectives, various methodological issues, and share practical applications of field-tested, creative models for engagement and dialogue. In this forum relevant issues will be discussed, explored, and perhaps even debated. By showing that apologetics and contextual missions are two components to a single task, this journal will navigate the way forward for evangelicals to discover a new identity and to become effective missionary-apologists to new religious movements. An important component of effective engagement and dialogue with new religions is quality descriptive articles on the religions. As such, *Sacred Tribes Journal* is committed to scholarly treatment of religions and values correct and accurate descriptions that are ethnographic in nature.

One other feature is that from time to time special editions of this journal will be dedicated to **actual engagement with devotees of specific groups.** We feel very strongly that we must not slip into the time-



honored luxury of merely talking hypothetically amongst ourselves about how we might undertake mission. As co-editors of this journal we have a holy obligation to ensure that we (and our contributors) move from our armchairs and into street life realities by demonstrating with practical illustrations and case studies how contextual mission-apologetics works. To this end we anticipate that the special editions of the journal will attract readers who are devotees of non-Christian pathways.

Why the title, *“Sacred Tribes Journal”*? **We very consciously wish to place our discussion of respective beliefs with others on a footing that from the outset signals our willingness to treat them as human beings made in God's image.** We, as evangelical Christians, belong to sets and sub-sets of people groups defined via specific religious beliefs, practice, and social paradigms. Likewise, a Zen Buddhist belongs to sets and sub-sets of groups rooted in specific religious paradigms. By using the term "tribe" to describe such groupings, whether Christian, Buddhist, neo-pagan, or agnostic (to name a few), we hope to make clear our aim: dialogue and exchanges of information, yes, but even more, exchanges of our respective visions of the sacred that mean so much to each of us. As evangelicals, we do indeed have a specific mission in mind. We wish to introduce our Lord and Savior to those of other sacred tribes. Yet as we do so, we pray and hope that our presentation can be seasoned with wisdom and humility. And we believe that the first part of humility is to truly listen, to deeply study those we say we want dialogue with. Thus, *Sacred Tribes Journal*.

The editors of this journal envision no adversarial relationship between themselves and the "counter-cult" apologetics community. We recognize and acknowledge the important contributions of those who have come before us and the continued faithful labors of hundreds of individuals comprising counter-cult ministries. The contents of this journal are set forth in a spirit of humility and cooperation. As individuals we wonder whether we can improve our ministries, and we offer this journal as a forum for discussion and exploration to improve the collective efforts of the Body of Christ. **We invite the reader to join with us in this exciting journey.**

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[1] See *The Thailand Report on New Religious Movements: Report of the Consultation on World Evangelization Mini-Consultation on Reaching*

*Mystics and Cultists* <electronic document>

<http://www.gospelcom.net/lcwe/LOP/lop11.htm>

[2] John Drane, 'Methods and Perspectives in Understanding the New Age,' *Themelios*, 23/2 1998, 22-34. Idem, *Cultural Change and Biblical Faith: The Future of the Church. Biblical and Missiological Essays for the New Century*, Carlisle UK: Paternoster Press, 2000. Philip Johnson, 'The Aquarian Age and Apologetics,' *Lutheran Theological Journal*, 34/2 2000, 51-60. Gordon R. Lewis, 'Our Mission Responsibility to New Religious Movements,' *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 15/3 1998, 115-123. J. Gordon Melton, 'Emerging Religious Movements in North America: Some Missiological Reflections,' *Missiology*, 28/1 2000, 85-98. Harold A. Netland, 'Toward Contextualized Apologetics,' *Missiology*, 16/3 1988, 289-303. Everett Shropshire & John Morehead, 'Hidden in Plain Sight: The Mission Challenge of New Religious Movements,' *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 15/3 1998, 141-145. Also refer to the following two essays that suggested the value of missiological principles in David Fetcho, 'Disclosing the Unknown God: Evangelism to the New Religions,' *Update: A Quarterly Journal on New Religious Movements*, 6/4 1982, 7-16. Irving Hexham, 'Witnessing to the Cults,' *Crux: A Quarterly Journal of Christian Thought and Opinion*, 16/1 1980, 12-14.