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GOD'S LIVING WORD FOR ALL PEOPLE

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A Faith-based Ministry Sustained Through the Faithful Prayers and Partnership of God's People

Understanding Co-locational Clash

“What Is It and Why Is It So Important?”

By Ron Myers

Dear Friends and Supporters

I'm glad you asked. To correctly understand the term *Co-locational Clash*, we first need to parse it into its separate components. **Location:** A point in space where something resides. **Co:** Together, with, or alongside. **Co-location:** two or more separate things trying to reside in the same space at the same time. **Clash:** A state of conflict between dissimilar things.

Simply put, *Co-locational Clash* refers to dissimilar things trying to reside in a single space at the same time. They're either incongruous or don't function at all since they're in direct conflict. Like two vehicles colliding, opposing political platforms, dissimilar worldviews or belief systems (including ideas about Salvation, Creation, and the origin of things). Light vs darkness, truth vs error, right vs wrong. For example, see anything *incongruous* about this photo? It's a satellite dish in a jungle-house setting. Possible, but not very probable, unless it's a clandestine spy outpost.



I'm referring to things missionaries ministering to unreached peoples on foreign fields face daily. Traditional beliefs about worldviews, origins, customs, cultures, and languages. Concepts ingrained in the lives and minds of local people. The further these differ from a biblical worldview, the greater the problem missionaries have trying to accurately convey God's *Good News* message of Salvation from sin and death, by Grace alone through Faith alone. And, the harder time hearers have in understanding it's a gift from God for all who believe. Here's a prime example.

Consider this profound biblical truth: “*God Loves You and Jesus Died for Your Sins.*” Pretty easy for us to understand. That's because we have grown up under a Judeo-Christian or biblically-based worldview. Yet, there are billions of souls who don't have that privilege. That's those who grew up under an Eastern or Asian worldview. They find it impossible to comprehend the meaning of this short Gospel message, because these people have been born and raised under a system I call a *metaphysical* worldview. It's a worldview that is conceptually abstract, transcending physical matter and laws of nature. Too illogical for the Western mind to grasp, like the lyrics of *Magic* sung by Olivia Newton-John. In summary, it means everyone's beliefs or religions are good. They're all valid even if they don't meet the veracity test.

The goal of any missionary worth his or her stuff is *Successful or Effective Cross-cultural Communication*. The Gospel is *etched in stone*; it never changes. The less a missionary understands the importance of these things and adapts his or her presentation—combined with understanding the disconnect between worldviews—the greater problem hearers will have understanding and responding to the Gospel message. They'll either reject in whole that which is hard to comprehend, practice it superficially as a *religion*, or combine it with what they already believe and practice. That blend of beliefs is called *Syncretism*. It's hard to recognize. Especially for missionaries who lack spiritual discernment, and tend to believe things at face value.

To Bible-believing evangelicals with a Western or Judeo-Christian worldview, “*God Loves You and Jesus Died for Your Sins*” makes perfect sense. Having a Judeo-Christian culture and biblical worldview, we either know mentally, or believe spiritually that there is a Creator God. That He is a righteous God who loves us. That He sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to live a perfect sinless life according to God's Law, then offered himself as a sacrifice for the sins of all mankind, making Salvation a gift to all who believe ...even Thai Buddhists *if* they would turn and believe. Yet, understanding is the key that opens their hearts!

But how will they hear and believe unless someone goes to tell them? *“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things”* (Romans 10:13–15).

Countless missionaries have gone to the Thai people, starting more than a hundred years ago. More recently Cheryl, me, and many others. Yet, the Joshua Project reports an average of only 0.1% of the Thai population are Christian.

Little-reached Northeast Thailand (the Isan region), are a tenth of that, with a miniscule 0.01%. Isan readily qualifies as an *Unreached people group*—97% of its 34,000 villages still without any Gospel witness. That’s why God, in His wisdom, led us there, to reach the unreached. The Thai are a free-spirited people. Thailand is called *The Land of 10,000 Smiles*. Their lives revolve around their local Buddhist temple, their head monk’s teachings, and protective amulets. At last count there are over 40,000 Buddhist temples in Thailand; four for every smile, and the Thai smile a lot.

Why aren’t they all flocking around us to hear and believe? Their worldview and corresponding beliefs are Eastern metaphysical in nature, not Judeo-Christian, as I just explained. Therefore, announcing that *“God Loves You and Jesus Died for Your Sins.”* is met with a huge CO-LOCATIONAL CLASH! Here are the reasons. Concerning origins, they all love nature but are ignorant that a Creator God exists. Also, Buddha is not their god but their teacher, instructing them how to do good, for which they honor him. They don’t pray to Buddha, but to malevolent spirit entities in the unseen realm, called Animism.

They all adore Nature (*i.e., Creation*) but it’s a mystery as to how it came into being. That’s why I start witnessing to them by discussing Intelligent Design. Pondering aspects of Intelligent Design points to the fact that there must be an *Intelligent Designer*. This leads to the rest of the Creation-to-Redemption story. It ends in an invitation to receive God’s gift of Salvation from sin and death, found in Jesus Christ alone. That Jesus is the Creator of the Nature they all love. It took me years to realize this way to bypass their incessant idea that Jesus is just another religion—the foreigner’s Guru who teaches us to do good. In their thinking, all religion is good. Jesus started a good religion. He teaches foreigners to do good, just like Buddha teaches them to do good.

Salvation to the Thai Buddhist means to make enough merit, compounded over countless reincarnations, so they’ll finally spin off into Nirvana, escaping reincarnation’s wheel of endless sorrow and suffering. Ahh, Nirvana. Sounds just like Heaven. Sorry, but it’s not. Nirvana is a state of non-being. Poof! Gone! Melted into the cosmos leaving nothing to reincarnate.

What happened to the timeless truth of: *“God Loves You and Jesus Died for Your Sins?”* It fell on the deaf ears of an Eastern metaphysical belief system. (CO-LOCATIONAL CLASH.) Peer into the mind of an average practicing Thai Buddhist, and you’ll hear: *“God? What’s that? Must have something to do with the foreigner’s religion. Our beloved Buddhism is 500 years older than their young religion. Besides, it’s hard to understand—doesn’t make any sense to me. Love? Buddha teaches us that the love they talk about is just another desire, a type of lust that brings pain and sorrow in the end, so we should avoid it. Also, Jesus didn’t suffer that horrific death on the cross for my sins. No one can make merit for another, or suffer for another’s bad doings. He actually suffered that vicious, painful death as payback for some wicked thing he must have done in one of his past incarnations. That’s all it was.”* (Incidentally, I have developed some thoughtful responses in answer these and other things they may say.)

Like missionaries to Thailand, you just ran headlong into the temple walls erected in the hearts and minds of every Thai Buddhist. What’s the answer? Einstein’s theory of *Quantum Insanity* states: *“Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.”* About every missionary I know has that mentality, which I once had before I woke up. Keep preaching. Visit new people. Make more friends. Give bags of rice to the poor. Pass out more tracts. Show more movies. Unfortunately, doing the same things, over and over, expecting better results next time around is futile. Visiting Christians and missionaries alike rely on passing out tracts. The per capita number of tracts distributed proportionate to results is too few to count. The message simply falls on unprepared Asian minds. Another CO-LOCATIONAL CLASH!

Conclusion: *Co-Locational Clash* is something to remain vigilant about (not feared) as we seek to present the Gospel in an effectual manner in a cross-cultural environment. Begin at the beginning, Genesis. Don’t start in the middle of the story by saying, *“Do You Know, God Loves You and Jesus Died for Your Sins?”* Or, The Four Spiritual Laws. They’re not ready. Start where they are. All Thai love nature, so build on that. Set your Bible aside for a moment, along with the tracts they can’t understand, and identify with their love for Nature. Discuss intricate details of Intelligent Design, leading to the Creation-to-Redemption story. The Considering Creation booklet God led me to write does just that. They read it and pass it along to others and tell me, *“I never thought about it, but there must be a Creator.”* Knowing God and origins is primary. Without this, they can *never* understand Jesus’ true identity, or their need for Him. With this, they hear and understand, overcoming any potential for CO-LOCATIONAL CLASH.

Nowhere in Thailand, that I'm aware, are people flocking to Christ in droves, except for one I personally experienced. An Isan village asked me to come explain the Gospel. Otherwise, it's one here, two there. I've heard claims of conversions *en masse*, which was untrue—an overly zealous young missionary eager to win souls. Yet, there are some seeking the truth that Buddhism cannot give. Praise God for those few whose hearts are prepared. Like the Thai Immigration Officer whom I led to Christ. Learning I was a missionary, he leaped at the chance to learn about Jesus. I can help you, I offered. We met over lunch the following day. There, he poured out his sin-laden heart, burdened with the many bad things he had done as a corrupt Police Officer. What can I do, He pleaded. Tell Jesus just what you told me and ask Him for forgiveness, I replied. He believed on the spot and continues to walk with God today, as far as I know, having also joined the *Thai Police Officers for Christ* organization.

Coming in My April Newsletter: Understanding Co-locational Clash Part II – Bible Translation Challenges”

May Christ Make His Living Presence Real to You Today,



Ron and Cheryl Myers
Your Missionaries to Thailand

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God's Living Word for All People
Now Advising Chinese House Churches

Prayer Requests: I'll be returning to Thailand soon. **Please pray** for financial provision, safety, and good success. First, I'll be meeting with a delegation of the Chinese house church community in Bangkok, helping in an advisory capacity as they plan to send out young Chinese missionaries around the world. Then, I'll visit believers in the Northeastern or Isan region. Finally, I'll continue translating the *new Spoken or Colloquial Thai New Testament*.