What Can We Learn from Global Christians?

Part 2 of 2: Church Lessons from Non-Protestant Countries
with Darrell Bock, Shane Angland, Cesar Restrepo, Mikel del Rosario
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Darrell Bock: So let me ask you this question, Shane, because it’s an interesting observation. What do you suspect you’ll have to adjust to going back, if you’re going back? What do you expect that experience to be like as you think – I mean you’re still a little ways away from it but still?

Shane Angland: Yeah, I don’t know what it’s going to be like. It will take a huge adjustment. It’s a different world where evangelicalism is a minority, and church is done differently in a minority setting. I think it’s a lot tighter. People tend to be active in their faith by virtue of them even going to a church. It comes expected for them to be active like that. But I don’t really foresee how I can – I don’t know, I don’t know what to expect really going back, I mean I really don’t.

Darrell Bock: Here’s a problem that some people face and maybe I’m asking it ahead of time, maybe we need to do this in five years after you’ve graduated and gone back, but do you anticipate an adjustment being that now that you’ve seen a variety of things and what’s possible and thinking about going back and doing some of those things, what the reaction might be? Do you anticipate and would you ever have a sense of saying, well, they’ll react to that because they’ll think I’m just trying to do something American rather than doing something Christian?

Shane Angland: Yeah. The American coming back wanting to change everything. My home churches back in Ireland are very much excited that I’m here in Dallas and they’re eager for Katie and I to come back and to get involved in church life. I don’t really have any grand visions of changing everything when I go back. I think I’m a pretty realistic person, really. I just want to take the excellent teaching and instruction that I’ve been getting here and use that in a way that’s beneficial. Maybe I might start an adult Sunday school class, I don’t know.

Darrell Bock: You’ve said that a few times.

Shane Angland: I like it, I really do, yeah, maybe.

Darrell Bock: Yeah, interesting. Cesar, what do you think?
Cesar Restrepo: Yes. In Venezuela, most of the Protestant churches are Pentecostals and most of them are prosperity gospel. So when I go back, I would like to start a church that is more biblically based and perhaps also incorporating some of the things I’ve learned in the church in the U.S., the small groups, the Sunday school, things that we usually don’t do over there. And I think that change for a person who comes from the Catholic background to go to a Presbyterian church would be much less, they would feel more at home than going to the Pentecostal churches where they are more vocal, I would say.

Darrell Bock: So this question comes to mind. You know, American culture is very individualistic, particularly when it comes to churches, at least in the Dallas area. I tell people you can get whatever kind of church you want, you can get a Jack-in-the-Box church, you can get a McDonalds church, you can get a Subway church, you can get Quiznos, you know, you can get it in any kind of variety and you also have this individualistic thing going on. Is there a difference in how a corporate group is seen in the cultures that you live in? In other words, is there a different kind of mentality about being a part of a group versus being an individual and how does that work itself out? Mikel, let’s start with you.

Mikel Del Rosario: I think especially in the church there is loyalty not only to your church but to your youth group, let’s say, or to your small group, that they’re a part of everybody’s lives, far more than would be at work, let’s say, where you’re part of a department. With church, that group identity is so important to them, so much so that in some cases there is actually some animosity between like other churches, you know, like one mega church versus another mega church kind of a thing, and they’re making some efforts at unity. But yeah, it’s in a collectivistic, communalistic culture, there is definitely that loyalty to the group and your identity is in the group.

Darrell Bock: And Filipinos are structured that way, are they more corporate, generally speaking, than –?

Mikel Del Rosario: Yes, definitely.
**Darrell Bock:** So whereas in the United States you might say well, I choose to be a part of this youth group, the identity when it flips is, now if I’m going to make sense of who I am, I need to be a part of this group, this is part of what it is to be a person, it flips in that kind of way.

Now, Europe is kind of an interesting culture in that regard, it’s kind of a little bit of a mix. I’ve lived in Scotland and in Germany, Scotland for three years and Germany for four, and it does strike me that Europeans, generally speaking, do have a bigger corporate dimension to the way they view things, but there also is the heavy individualism that has always fueled what’s going on in Europe because that’s actually where the individualism came from that fueled what happened in the United States. So does that play itself out at all in Ireland, the corporate versus individual thing or not?

**Shane Angland:** Yeah, I think your evangelical in Ireland is primarily thinking of himself as part of a community, I really do think that because you are, in a sense, removing yourself from a large section of the population when you do make a stand as an evangelical Christian. And so there is no way I think you could survive without that community, it becomes necessary for your spiritual life. It’s not so much as a, I don’t know, a thing of enjoyment or a thing of reinforcing yourself.

**Darrell Bock:** It’s not a consumer choice.

**Shane Angland:** It’s not a consumer choice, it’s a matter of survival that you would seek out community. If you’re living in the west of Ireland, I know people that drive for hours to go to a local evangelical church because they realize that if they are not doing that they are very much on their own. And so it becomes essential to your spiritual life. I don’t think you can foresee yourself apart from that.

**Darrell Bock:** I think it’s hard for people to realize that in Christian communities where there may be one church of choice in a large area, it’s not – it’s a completely different experience than the church on every corner where you can pick and choose what kind of – you have to make it work.

**Shane Angland:** Right.

**Darrell Bock:** And differences have to be sorted out and that kind of thing, because there is in one sense no other place to go. And so that does something to the dynamic of what happens in the community, it seems to me.
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Shane Angland: Mm-hmm, yeah, I think so. I think it reinforces unity. Like you said, I think people are more inclined to work through issues rather than go to the church down the street because there isn’t one.

Darrell Bock: Yeah, and I suspect there – for some people listening to us who have grown up in American Christianity, particularly if they’ve grown up in the south where you do have all those choices and all those options, to think about a Christianity that functions that way would be to think of it in a completely different kind of context to operate in, very, very different than what they’re used to. Cesar, what do you think?

Cesar Restrepo: Yeah, Latin Americans are very much family-oriented and community-oriented, so most people would live most of their lives in the same city, there’s not that high mobility as there is here in the U.S. So for someone to go from the Catholic church to a Protestant church, that’s a really big change because you won’t be praised for that, you will be probably ridiculed and so Christians there tend to be very much genuine Christians, there are not many nominal Christians over there. So they are sometimes rejected by their families and so it’s a big deal to be a Christian.

Darrell Bock: Now, that’s another dimension of this that is, if I can say context dependent, it seems to me. I have a very close friend who is Guatemalan, who teaches school at Denver, in fact we’re going to have him on a podcast related to the discussion on immigration that we’re going to be doing, and he also came out of a Catholic background, his parents were Catholic and he became a Protestant, and the tension between the Catholic church and the Protestants in Latin America is a completely different kind of experience than what you get sometimes in Europe.

And so maybe that’s another part of the discussion we ought to have. What is it like to move from the Catholic church to Protestant church in Latin America?
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**Cesar Restrepo:** Well, first of all, you don’t have many buildings, you have to meet in houses, so that’s the first thing, you really don’t have a place to meet. So first of all, finding a church is hard, it’s not as easy as here in Dallas. Second, your family will not understand what you’re doing, why are you doing, this, you were baptized Catholic, why are you doing this. And in your work you will be ridiculed because most evangelicals are on the lower classes, so mostly uneducated, so you’ll be kind of labeled as an uneducated person. On the other hand, people like to have evangelicals work for them because they know they are honest people. So they have this double standard.

**Darrell Bock:** Double approach to the question, interesting. Now, how about in Ireland in relationship to the Catholics? Now, again, I’m going to reflect a little bit about our experience, but when we were in Scotland and we were in Germany both, with so many – with such a pervasive secular culture, if I can say it that way, the very fact that Catholics believed in God, talked about Jesus, that kind of thing made a difference. And at least where I was you didn’t sense the degree of tension that my Latin American friend felt in Protestants and Catholics going on in Latin America. Was that true in Ireland as well?

**Shane Angland:** It is true now. I mean it was different 40 years ago.

**Darrell Bock:** Yeah, sure, I know the history.

**Shane Angland:** Yeah, now it’s completely different. I mean – and I think it is secularism, it’s completely – people are not really concerned about the theological differences between denominations, that’s largely irrelevant for most Irish people. They just know that you are an evangelical and that might be perceived as strange but they’re not antagonistic towards you generally speaking. They just see it as something that you’re into or, you know, that’s just your choice, but they’re not going to be perceiving you as a threat or as someone to persecute.

**Darrell Bock:** Now, evangelicals are – I take it from listening to you that evangelicals are such a minority in Ireland that they’re ability to coalesce say around social issues with Catholics, that wouldn’t – that’s fairly negligible as a factor, is that true?

**Shane Angland:** Yeah. I mean the 2011 census, the people that returned the census form as evangelical were .09 percent of the population.

**Darrell Bock:** Wow.
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Shane Angland: I mean so you can’t really say that we’re to the forefront of social issues because it’s tiny. I mean there are very many people in the Republic of Ireland that probably don’t know any evangelical Christians or – they probably don’t have any evangelical Christian friends. That’s different in other parts of the country but it is a tiny minority, definitely.

Darrell Bock: That’s a staggering number because that reminds me of stories I’ve heard about like Christians in Turkey and places like that where there are only – I mean I know in Turkey at one point here recently there were only two people who had the equivalent of an MDiv degree, ministering in Turkey. I mean that – so, you know, you could count – I think at one point it was 200 out of 80 million, okay, which makes your thing look like a megachurch, but still that’s incredible. Now, that situation has changed and the church there is growing, but it’s interesting when a group is that small what the dynamic is, and you can see why it would be driven towards a kind of community.

Shane Angland: Oh yeah.

Darrell Bock: Now, I have no idea because, as I said, I’ve never been to the Philippines, what it’s like in the Philippines. What’s the Catholic-evangelical relationship like in the Philippines?

Mikel Del Rosario: I think for most people they see the two as apart from Islam, the two major religions, seeing them as different religions. So much so that for a Protestant who would come out of a Catholic background, what they would struggle with and what my dad struggled with was this feeling that he had somehow rejected the family tradition or rejected the family structure. And there are certain things that everybody does that you won’t be participating in as a Protestant.

And so the question then is – you know, they struggle with did I do the right thing, I want to follow Jesus but am I going to be rejected for it and so there is that struggle. And what my dad would say to his family is have I gotten further away from God by doing this, you know, how have I gotten further away from God by becoming a Protestant. And so yeah, they’re almost seen as different religions and there is very little, if any, working together there.
Darrell Bock: Now, so you all come out of this kind of mixed bag of backgrounds, with very different experiences overseas from what you’re experiencing here. What combination of values do you hope to bring to your ministry? In other words, given the fact that you’ve got this mixed pedigree, in terms of your training and experience, what would you hope to take with you into ministry that is a reflection of the combination of experiences that you’ve had, Cesar?

Cesar Restrepo: Well, certainly time management for me has been a big thing. One of the first things that my mentor here told me is you have to do a time management, you have due dates. So that’s a big thing, because time over there is relative, so that would be something important for me. And also in terms of my ministry, I would say the depth of teaching that you get here at Dallas Seminary is something that it’s lacking over there. The teachings over there tend to be very superficial because, as I said, pastors are not very academically prepared. So I think this depth of teaching will be something I would bring that would be very helpful.

Darrell Bock: So now when you think about again—this is kind of like the question I asked Shane earlier—so when you bring an element of time management to Latin America, what in the world is that going to look like?

Cesar Restrepo: Revolutionary, I think. You would have to adapt and obviously you wouldn’t be able to do it as well as you do it here.

Darrell Bock: Just be glad you’re not a German bringing time management.

Cesar Restrepo: Yes. I think it would bring some—more efficiency to my ministry.

Darrell Bock: So that’s what you’ve gained from it is seeing how it makes you more effective in some ways?

Cesar Restrepo: Yes.

Darrell Bock: I see. Shane?
Shane Angland: I don’t know about values but I mean, like Cesar was saying, the training and the teaching that I’m being equipped with, that’s something I really want to bring back and share with the church and that’s something that they’re excited that I would bring back. But I mean these are things that we – that Christians all over the world share in common. I mean every Christian wants to grow in their theology.

Darrell Bock: Right.

Shane Angland: I mean that’s not something that I need to instill in my Irish brothers and sisters, they have a desire and a passion, but there just isn’t that legacy and that heritage of evangelical seminaries in Ireland. And so being here is not so much a different value that I’m getting, it’s more being able to fulfill that desire that I’ve had for many years and something that my church has encouraged me to pursue. And so bringing something like teaching back to the church would not be seen as a revolutionary thing but a welcome gift, I think.

Darrell Bock: Now, I haven’t asked you this question but have either of you been back to your homes since you came here as students?

Cesar Restrepo: Yeah, I go back every two months, as I practice surgery over there and yeah, it’s sometimes very shocking when I go there and when I compare what I’m living here. So yeah, and everywhere just – we had a good standard of living there but the country in general doesn’t, and when I go to church I feel that I could be much more useful once I’ve learned all that I’ve learned here. I’m in class and I’m blown away by what I’m learning by such gifted teachers here.

Darrell Bock: Yeah, Shane have you been back?

Shane Angland: I haven’t been back yet but I’m going to be heading back this summer. My brother is getting married, so that’ll be a great family event, so going to spend some time in England. He’s getting married in England and I’m going to spend some time back in Ireland. So hopefully get to meet my friends and spend some time at my church, yeah.
Darrell Bock: Yeah, because I do think one of the hard adjustments that students who do come here have when they come here and they’ve been exposed to our culture is going back and there’s almost a reculturalization. Now, the fact that you’ve been able to go back regularly and stay in touch with your culture while you’ve been here is probably going to be terrifically helpful to you.

Cesar Restrepo: Yes.

Darrell Bock: So, Mikel, I know you live here and you don’t – and you were a missionary for a while in the Philippines and you’ve been back here in the States for some time or –?

Mikel Del Rosario: Yes.

Darrell Bock: Now, do you have any family still in the Philippines?

Mikel Del Rosario: Yeah, my parents are there and all my brothers.

Darrell Bock: I see. So do you ever go back?

Mikel Del Rosario: I have not been back since 2006, when we were missionaries.

Darrell Bock: Oh wow. So you’ve been away for some time. Yeah. Now, you did do the reentry thing, where you had grown up in your cultural context, you’d come to the States and you’d gone back, and you went back in ministry so what was that like? Did that require some adjustments or –?
Oh yeah, definitely. One thing that was very different was being an adult versus being a kid, because when you’re a kid if there’s a problem it’s your parent’s problem, you just put on your Walkman and press play and, you know, listen to your cassettes, those cassettes. But now as an adult you have to deal with all of life as an adult there.

When we were doing our worldview training one of the things that I was able to take back with me from the apologetics training that I got at Biola was really looking at worldview and seeing how in this city we had just a backdrop of religious pluralism, where there is people involved in everything, there’s Chinese immigrants who are practicing Chinese traditional religions. There are people who are both – you say you’re a businessperson and you’re opening a new building, you may have a priest come bless it, you may have a feng shui master come in later on, and all along down the line.

A feng shui master. A feng shui master, what is that?

It’s a Chinese geomancy. It’s to make sure that everything is oriented just so so that positive energy can be manipulated and flow through the place.

Oh wow, okay.

And so there is a lot of this “I’ll take whatever from whoever,” right. And that’s part of the animistic background as well as, you know, if I’m going to get some prosperity then it really doesn’t matter who it comes from, I’ll just cover all my bases.
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Mikel Del Rosario: So they would say – and that’s one thing that Christians struggle with, actually. Evangelicals will say in my business we’re not going to do that, but then their employees might say well, what do we have to lose, why not. So taking back some of those kind of worldview training kinds of things was very helpful to them, it was helpful to me also to see where is the person coming from when they ask such a question, what are the presuppositions that they’re bringing to the table.

So, also theological training, there is sometimes some pushback against that in the Philippines. As one Philippian author put it, talking about American missionaries, let them take the Bible apart and put it back together again like Legos, we’re going to dance and make art. So there was this kind of distinction between doing an academic scholarly study of the text and just living “real life.” So being able to bridge that gap and show how we can love God with everything that we are, with our mind, with our intellect, our emotions and everything that we are.

Darrell Bock: So are there syncretistic problems in Venezuela? I know there are in Guatemala, so that’s what – he mentioned the Philippines made me think about that.

Cesar Restrepo: Yes. Now we’ve become very close to Cuba and many of the indigenous religions from Cuba have come to Venezuela, so there’s a lot of spiritism and Catholic people, they don’t see anything wrong with practicing that and belonging to the Catholic church. So there is a lot of syncretism there.

Darrell Bock: See now that’s another thing that’s interesting that we haven’t had time to discuss, I’m not sure if we still do, but there are issues that take place in the context that you all live in that don’t show up or tend not to show up here. If I were to raise that category what types of things do you find yourself facing as a Christian, just thinking about it automatically in some cases, that tends not to be on the radar screen of issues that you would find if you were operating in the churches that you’re now participating in? And probably the least radical difference, although I think there would be some, would be what you might face in Ireland, but do you think – does anything leap to mind about –?
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Shane Angland: Well, before I came to DTS I was working in Cork City, just in a secular job, and I was surprised that one thing I had to defend over and over again was the historical lineage of evangelicalism, in a sense, because people had a perception that it’s American fundamentalism and it’s alien to our culture. And so we’ve been Christians since the fifth century, you know, why this modern American thing? And so being able to try to explain what are the theological and historical difference between Roman Catholicism and evangelical Christians. So I think you do have to bring in the historical element into that.

And particularly in Ireland where we have had a lot of let’s say bad examples of sectarian conflict, and so people have a perception of Protestantism as a political entity rather than the theological reasons behind it because pretty much all they have seen in Irish history is the political arm of the Protestant church.

Darrell Bock: Yeah, that’s interesting. I hadn’t thought of that. I mean I’ve lived in the UK, as I’ve said, I’ve been in Scotland and I watched the Northern Ireland thing unfold from Scotland. In fact, I had never been in a society that had been so impacted by sectarian conflict as when I was living in Scotland. I was there as a student in the late ‘70s and early ‘80s and as a doctoral student, and what was interesting is, is that it was so sectarian that even the sports teams, the soccer teams were structured – there was – in Scotland there was a Catholic soccer team, Celtic, and there was a Protestant soccer team, Rangers, and they had only – how can I say, desectarianized, I don’t know if that’s a word, but they only crossed religious boundaries within five years of my coming over there, and that just seems so foreign to me, to – and the northern Ireland politics as big when I was in Scotland.

And so living in a sectarian context where you see that kind of tension between Christian groups, I mean as anyone knows who knows the history, it was an incredibly violent period in history. Those kind – that kind of religious political mix, generally speaking, we don’t find here, but that’s changed because it’s secularism now.
Shane Angland: Yeah, it has radically changed, and like the Republic of Ireland where I’m from, there isn’t any sectarian conflict because one side dominated, right. I mean from the modern period on. So it’s not really that there’s two groups fighting. But like you said, I think, yeah, nominalism is really sort of the worldview that’s at work in Ireland as a whole, which is predominantly Roman Catholic, 84 percent of the people say they’re Roman Catholic.

The Catholic church did a survey in 2010 where the surveyed Irish Roman Catholics, and 10 percent said they didn’t believe in God. So I mean there’s still a large section of the population that identify themselves as Roman Catholic but are effectively atheists. And so that is a huge thing, much more than sectarianism. I think that’s the real battleground, is impacting people that are comfortably Christian in a very cultural setting but don’t really have a relationship with Jesus and some don’t even believe in God.

Darrell Bock: Yeah. So that’s – and really that, in many ways, is the same cultural conversation that’s starting to emerge in parts of the United States, where it’s becoming so secularized that your Christian tag is more a cultural tag than it is a substantive tag. Cesar, I imagine, though, in Latin America that there are issues that come up as a matter of course that don’t hit the radar screen here, what would those be?

Cesar Restrepo: Especially, the spiritual there is very real. When I go to Venezuela it’s just like evil is present from the corruption in the government there and it’s widespread, but also Catholics, they will go to have their palm read, they’ll go to horoscopes, so – you’ll see that on TV everywhere. So the spiritual is very real to people.

Darrell Bock: So it’s almost the exact opposite of what’s going on in Europe.

Cesar Restrepo: Yes, right, exact opposite. So I think that the battle will be more on a spiritual level.
Darrell Bock: And the other thing that now I’m sharing out of my own experience in Guatemala because this is one of the things that we did – well, I used to teach a class in which we took students from Dallas and my friend took students from Denver Seminary, and we would combine them with the Latin American students down. And we would do hermeneutics in the Bible but we would do it in a different context and the thing that we would ask our students to do is what strikes you here about reading the Bible and what you would have to deal with that you wouldn’t have to deal with if you were in the States, how does being here make you read the Bible differently, just simply being here.

And the seminary in Guatemala was located literally five blocks from the garbage dump in Guatemala City, that literally every – we would do this class every two years, so you could – as I would go down I could watch it move across this valley. At one point it was approaching us and one year it was with us and the next year it had gone beyond us. And so – that’s the way garbage is. So you’re watching this happen.

But the thing that our students consistently said about, at least many parts of Latin America and I think you alluded to this, is the direct engagement with intense poverty that you often see in Latin America. And you said, many of the Christians who are there do come out of the lower classes, so that if you’re a pastor ministering in that context you are encountering core life choices that you normally don’t see in many churches here in the States, is that fair?

Cesar Restrepo: It is very fair, yes. And this – the wealth and the poverty coexist, they’re side by side.

Darrell Bock: In fact, that’s one of the things we used to do in Guatemala, we would take students into the poorest parts of Guatemala City and we could go not ten minutes and you could be in a part of Guatemala City and you wouldn’t know you were in Guatemala. I mean, you know, you would think you were in Europe or in the States. So you’d – it did very much exist side by side. So a lot of pastoral preparation has to help people cope with just the core basics of survival in life, oftentimes, is that true?

Cesar Restrepo: Exactly. And people sometimes don’t have time to, like here in the U.S. you have time to reflect about theological matters, there you are focused on surviving every day and feeding your kid every day so you don’t have much time for theory, you need to practice. So the gospel there has to have a very practical side.
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**Darrell Bock:** Is that part of what you think drives the prosperity theology that goes on?

**Cesar Restrepo:** Definitely. Because – they are offering these people things that are not real, that they’ll become rich if they start – they call it planting in the church, like tithing. So sometimes they give beyond what they are able to give or they should give and they are not getting any better by doing that. So that’s why this prosperity theology is so successful there.

**Darrell Bock:** Interesting. And what about in the Philippines, what do you see there – what issues do you see there that you tend not to see here?

**Mikel Del Rosario:** Well, first I want to say it’s very similar in the Philippines also with the poverty and the rise of prosperity gospel in the Philippines, very similar situation. One thing that I’ve noticed in the Philippines that we don’t see here is an extreme, which is not necessarily a bad thing, is an extreme commitment to holiness for the leaders. The leaders are held to a super high standard, whereas coming back to the United States I found it would be rare to see church discipline enacted in a church. Whereas, in the Philippines, I was in a church where a leader sent an inappropriate text message to a woman and that leader was disciplined and stepped down. He didn’t even touch her, it was a text.

**Darrell Bock:** Yeah.

**Mikel Del Rosario:** And here in the United States, you know, far worse things than inappropriate text messages happen and we don’t see church discipline enacted as much. So there is a strong emphasis on holiness there.

**Darrell Bock:** Do you have any idea where that comes from at all?

**Mikel Del Rosario:** I think because teachers are held to a higher standard, and in a culture where you have that power distinction between the laity – they want to be able to look up to their leaders and say these leaders are different than me.

**Darrell Bock:** So it comes with the territory of how a leader is perceived, to a certain degree, and so what’s demanded of them.

**Mikel Del Rosario:** Mm-hmm.
Darrell Bock: Interesting. Well, I want to thank you all for coming in and sharing a little bit about your country and your experience with us. You know, we’ve talked a little bit about issues from a kind of global perspective.

Let me have us close to have you each tell us what’s one thing you think you could say about cultural engagement in light of your own background, that you would want to emphasize to people who are listening in terms of thinking about how they engage the culture and whether that has to do with how you do it as a Christian who might be in a minority context, which we’re moving towards here or something else? What one thing would you each like to say?

Shane Angland: I think it’s almost easier to engage as a minority because you have to engage from humility and you have to engage from a vulnerability in a sense, that you’re not the dominant group that’s setting the agenda. But yeah, I think Irish Christians – Irish evangelical Christians, I think they do a pretty good job of engaging the culture around them. They have moved past a stage that maybe earlier they had inclination to completely cut themselves off from those things that were formerly part of their life before conversion, so even sports or anything like that, but I think they’ve largely moved beyond that and they are – they see themselves as being able to engage with their fellow townspeople or their communities.

But you just – you have to engage from a position of humility because you are a minority and I think that’s effective and it’s healthy and I think it’s quite easy, to be honest.

Darrell Bock: So if I’m reading between the lines here, that one of the dangers of having – being a large number, the risk is that you’ll minister out of a power entitlement as opposed to out of a context of humility, is that what you’re seeing?

Shane Angland: Mm-hmm, definitely.

Darrell Bock: Interesting. Mikel?
Mikel Del Rosario: I think I would say asking good questions, asking good questions with the tone of humility. Recognizing that people come from all kinds of different backgrounds and they may have religious backgrounds that you don’t know about. They may appear to be, such as in the Philippines, one might appear to be a theist, a Christian and really have an animistic worldview underneath all this, where when they say God they may think of a faraway God that you can’t touch, talk to, and intermediaries are spirits.

Darrell Bock: Yeah, some people here might not have a clue what you’re talking about when you say animism. What would that involve?

Mikel Del Rosario: In the Philippines, we have a specific forum called animism which means that Filipinos would view God as a faraway deity who doesn’t really help you, is too busy to appeal to, so instead you appeal to intermediary spirits, be they spirits of animals, nature spirits or your own dead relatives.

Now, Roman Catholic tradition, when that came to the Philippines, saints had replaced those intermediate states between God and human beings so that people would appeal to specific saints for specific things that they need.

Darrell Bock: So there is an element of ancestor connection – because you do find this very much in other places, in Asia, in fact it’s one of the big issues that Christians face once they become a Christian in relationship to their families, is how do I deal with this element of family expectations, and that goes on in the Philippines. Now, that’s an issue that we don’t think about very much here in the States.

Mikel Del Rosario: Yeah. So we have – you know, more and more immigrants coming to the United States. I was in southern California, we worked with the Vietnamese immigrants and knowing that everybody comes from a certain cultural background, and Christians struggle with different things. And we talked about sacrificing food to idols in Bible study and youth group, it was not a metaphorical thing and they were literally – you know, I go to my friend’s house, they sacrifice the food to the ancestors, now what do I do. So very real things like that. So to find out where the audience that you’re working with is coming from and then engage them, understanding where they are coming from and the struggles they have.

Darrell Bock: And Cesar, what would you say?
Cesar Restrepo: Well, I would encourage the church – people in the church in America to be more open, especially to foreigners, since there are so many foreigners coming to this country. As an example, my wife is in a small group and she felt that the ladies there, they would share very superficial things and next thing you know one of them is just getting a divorce. So people are not opening up their problems in this context, so I would encourage them to open up in their small groups to really share from a deeper level, as we do in South America.

Being a minority you depend on your new family of Christians, so everybody really knows how you’re doing. When you ask people how are you doing, you really mean it, you really want to know how they’re doing. So to not be so superficial here.

Darrell Bock: Interesting. Well, again, I thank you for coming in and taking the time to do this. I hope this has been – and it’s been interesting for me to hear stories from three countries, some of which I’ve known sort of up close and then others very much from a distance, and hear the different kinds of Christian experiences and what that means for you and your own experience as you think about engagement and think about your own Christian development.

And I think sometimes it is helpful for us to kind of step outside our own box and hear from people who have lived in this fishbowl all their life and see – and they say, oh, so that’s what the aquarium looks like. So I very much appreciate it. And we thank you all for coming to The Table again and look forward to seeing you again next time.