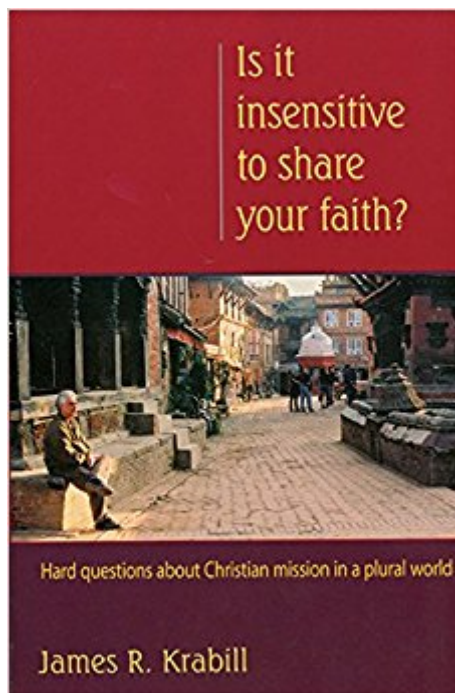




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Is It Insensitive To Share Your Faith?: Hard Questions About Christian Mission In A Plural World



Synopsis

Is it impolite-is it even imperial-for Christians to invite others to faith? James Krabill, who grew up in the freewheeling skepticism of the late '60s and early '70s, writes vulnerably about how he answers. A confessing Christian, Krabill looks at Jesus and what he said and did. Then Krabill walks right into discussions often considered off-limits. Are Christians hopelessly narrow and willfully uninformed? Why do they act as though only they are right and everyone else isn't? Why would Jesus possibly be someone to follow today? And what difference would that have a chance of making in the world? Never arrogant and never shifty, Krabill acknowledges both the audacity of God's efforts, the often miserable failings of the church, and yet his own hope. Among his chapter titles are "What was God thinking anyway?" "Why our encounters with other faiths create unease." And "One faith, one hope, one God. . . how crazy can you get?" Krabill's very readable style and honest manner make this book accessible to young adults and other critical thinkers. The book honestly explores whether Christians can talk about and live their faith without veering into a salesman mode or without condemning persons who believe otherwise, and why this is such a tension-filled matter.

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Customer Reviews

James R. Krabill is a Good Books author.

1. THE PROBLEM: It's time to call a squirrel, a squirrel The story is told of a Sunday school teacher who was trying to get a conversation started in her class. She held up a large photo of a squirrel and

asked the students, "Now, boys and girls, what do you see in this picture?" Her question was greeted with total silence. And so she asked it again, "Well, what is this? What do you see here in this picture?" Finally, a little boy in the back row raised his hand and, squirming and sputtering, blurted out, "Well . . . I think y-y-you probably want us to say Jesus, but it looks an awful lot like a squirrel to me!" Sometimes it is important to simply stop fidgeting in our seats and call a squirrel, a squirrel. There are certainly many areas in our personal lives and within our communities and the church where this is not only necessary, but long overdue. Many questions are being asked about mission today. One of these areas is in our feelings and understandings about mission. I hear, on one hand, a great deal of enthusiasm for increased commitment and involvement in mission as I travel to various Christian communities across North America. Many churches are being totally revitalized as they learn to think beyond themselves to the bigger picture of what God is doing in the world. The possibility of local believers seeing their congregation as a "center of mission," or perhaps, even better, as a faith community wholly "centered on mission," brings fresh energy, purpose, and hope. On the other hand, there is a degree of discomfort and a pestering uncertainty about the whole mission enterprise—uncertainty about where and with whom to engage in mission, about how such mission should be carried out, and ultimately, about whether mission is even appropriate at all in this diverse, multicultural 21st century. One Christian writer, expressing his feelings in an "alternative" newsletter (which has ceased publication), likely speaks for many others when he asserts: I am a Christian because it is a part of the Western tradition of religion, and I am also from that tradition. But the longer I live, the more convinced I am that different religions are the different socio-cultural manifestations of the same Creative Spirit at work. After all, why would a loving, all-powerful and jealous deity reveal itself only to a small group of wandering tribespeople, expecting them to spread a rather imperialistic message around the world? And where is the justice in dooming persons to eternal torment simply because they had the misfortune of being born in an area not yet "penetrated" by this "good news"? Thus, the idea of "converting" to another religion has lost its importance for me. More important is "converting" to a deeper and more meaningful understanding of one's own religious heritage. The questions raised here are by no means the only ones people are asking. Several years ago I taught a spring semester course at Goshen College, a small Mennonite liberal arts college in northern Indiana. The course, entitled, "Missions-New Millennium," treated many of the issues one might anticipate in such an offering: biblical and theological foundations, religious worldviews, history of missions, cross-cultural communication principles, current strategies for mission, case studies of particular significance, and so on. What interested me more than what "the scholars" thought about these matters was what the students

thought. And so, during the very first class period, the 37 participants in the course were divided into small groups to reflect on what questions they wanted to have addressed throughout the semester. It took no longer than 20 minutes of discussion to produce 144 questions needing attention. Some of these, of course, appeared multiple times in various group reports. But at least 63 distinct questions were identified by this process, and, of that number, 10 in particular seemed to be most on students' minds. Much of the students' work throughout the remainder of the course was focused on seeking responses to and reporting on these Top Ten Questions: 1. What is most important in missions-meeting the physical needs of people (social action) or sharing the Good News of Jesus (evangelism)? 2. How does one present the gospel without imposing one's own cultural viewpoints? 3. Is Jesus the only way? 4. How far away does one need to go to be a missionary? 5. In what ways are the Christian faith and following Jesus at odds with North American culture? 6. What about those who have never heard of Jesus? 7. How does one decide where to evangelize, and what methods are most appropriate in carrying out the task? 8. Is there a place for short-term missions today? If so, what should it be? 9. What will it take to revitalize and motivate less active, traditional churches for mission? 10. What qualifications are required to be a missionary today, and what kind of training is most helpful in preparation? (continued)

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