

Liberty Theological Seminary

The Unexpected Journey Critique

A Paper  
Submitted to Samantha Linton  
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Contemporary Evangelism  
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By  
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## **Bibliographical Entry**

Rainer, Thom S. *The Unexpected Journey: Conversions with People Who Turned From Other Beliefs to Jesus*. 1st Edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005.

## **Author Information**

*The Unexpected Journey* was written by Thom S. Rainer, who started the consulting group Rainer Group, after serving as a pastor and interim pastor in more than ten different churches. Rainer received his undergraduate degree in 1977 from the University of Alabama and his PhD from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is the founding dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism, and Church Growth at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Rainer is also a conference and seminar speaker and is currently the President and CEO of Lifeway Christian Resources in Nashville, Tennessee. Rainer is the author of over 20 other Christian books like *The Unexpected Journey* such as *The Unchurched Next Door* and *Breakout Churches*.

## **Content Summary**

In *The Unexpected Journey*, Rainer walks his readers through a methodical approach to exploring other world religions outside of Christianity and how to reach those people for Christ. The journey takes Rainer and his wife to many different states to interview twelve different people. These people were once believers in a religion other than Christianity, who turned to Christianity, and have continued to grow, through various trials, for their new faith in Christ. Each different encounter or interview is written in its own chapter in the form of a journal entry discussion on how each person made the conversion. Some background details on each particular world religion are included and, each chapter ends with questions relating to how Christians can reach

people still believing in various other world religions.

Rainer starts off on this journey of interviews with Mormonism and Rauni's story. Rauni and her family were deeply engaged in the Mormon church by the time they moved to Salt Lake City, Utah, coming with years of experience in the Mormon church. After a closer examination of the teachings of Mormonism and the bible, Rauni's decision was to leave the church and turn to nothing after feelings of mis-trust in all forms of religion and a harsh treatment from her former faith. Eventually Rauni made the decision to turn to Christ and she and her family, still today, live near Salt Lake City, the heart of the Mormon Church, with the unique ability to talk to others struggling with similar issues.

The next journey takes Rainer and his wife to Chicago to meet with a former Orthodox Jew named Steve Barack. After a brief explanation of the Jewish faith in comparison to that of Christianity, Rainer tracks Barack's story through the twists and turns that would eventually bring him to an Assembly of God church and on to a faith in Jesus. As Rainer explains from the interview, Barack learned the possibilities of becoming a Jewish Christian, a believer in Christ who is still able to maintain his Jewish heritage.

As Rainer continues his journey and the interviews he is next taken to Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City to meet Dr. Ravi, a once karma deficient Hindu, who would take a long journey to belief in Christ. His conversion, much like many Rainer interviewed, came at a huge cost to himself and his family. As is Rainer's familiar pattern by this point, the author examines Hinduism in a brief form and then ends with a short discussion on how other Christians can reach those in the Hindu religion.

In the next several interviews Rainer travels to several other states, and even conducts one meeting in his hometown of Louisville, KY. Rainer and his wife speak to Mrs. Jones, from Pennsylvania, who claims to have been an Atheist. Mrs. Jones took the unexpected route and goes from believing in nothing or no higher power to faith in Christ, to becoming an effective apologist. Rainer points out that, as Jones explains, “What I really needed was a Christian who had the guts to tell me that I wasn’t the marvelous and upstanding person I considered myself to be.” (Rainer 2005, 74) Rainer goes on to explain a little about the Atheist worldview and shows why it is so difficult for an average Christian to reach an Atheist. As the author explains, Jones points out that she and many of her Atheist friends knew scripture far better than their Christian counterparts, but the one thing they could not counter was the love some Christians showed her.

The next several interviews that Rainer conducts are with worldviews that do not have the highest number of followers globally, but are still important for the Christian witness to understand. Rainer and his wife went to West Virginia to speak with a Jehovah’s Witness, Paul, who like the others went into his religion with a full effort to promote the Jehovah’s Witness worldview and eventually came to a miraculous discussion for Christ. Paul’s cost of leaving the Jehovah’s was costly as well and Rainer tells such a touching story of how Paul’s life was changed by Christ. Next, Rainer evaluates the interviews from those with such wide-ranging worldviews as an Agnostic, a former witch, a Buddhist, New Age, a Satanist, and a compelling story from Dr. Townsend, a former believer in Unitarianism. As is the case with all the interviews, each interviewee comes to know Christ as their savoir through incredible circumstances and

although these are some of the less followed religions, they are still worthy of note to a Christian who believes everyone should be given the story of Christianity.

One of the last interviews Rainer conducted and wrote about was a conversion of a Black Muslim to that of Traditional Islam and then to Christianity. This particular interview is perhaps the most noteworthy one out of all the interviews conducted.

Muslims, and the overall worldview that is Islam, empowers a huge number of people in the world and this religion is more dominant in our day, in 2010, than perhaps it was even at the time the author wrote *The Unexpected Journey*. Because this religion is so dominant in parts of the world, and encompasses so many people, it is an important interview to conduct. The journey for Mumin Muhammad started from hate as he rose through the ranks of the Muslim faith culminating in a personal trial that would cost him his friends, his family, and his job. As Rainer points out with this interview, it is so difficult for a Christian to reach those of the Muslim faith, but Mumin shows God can and does work among all peoples.

## **Evaluation**

Rainer's *The Unexpected Journey* takes on a complicated task of interviewing several people and trying to glean from these people the best way for Christians to reach out to others who believe in religions other than Christianity. Rainer pulled together what had to be an enormous amount of information and found a format and method to share this collective information in a journalistic style. Not only is this extremely helpful in the finished product for his readers, but it allows the reader to compartmentalize each chapter and find ways to place themselves into the stories being told. This format lends itself well to readers, from seminary students, to the casual interested layperson of the

church, who takes an interest in reaching others for Christ.

As Rainer walks through each chapter he humbly addresses the presuppositions that are common among many Southern Baptists and fundamental Christians. This is an important aspect of each interview and the book in general. As Christians form their opinions on how to live out their own faith they often create stereotypes of other religions and people. Rainer speaks to the heart of this issue by coming out with his own stereotypes in the text and addresses them with the person being interviewed.

A more puzzling aspect of *The Unexpected Journey* was the particular religions Rainer chose to include in the book. The author briefly touches on these issues but does not make any real indication as to how these were chosen to be included. This would not normally be of concern to the reader except that the premise of the text is to follow a journey of someone who left a religion and moved to faith in Christ. Some of the religions, which all took up at least one full chapter in the book, were very small in comparison to those practicing other religions worldwide, and some perhaps may not even be considered religions to many Christians. This is a minor point for the effectiveness of the overall text, as all the people the author did interview had changed lives for Christ, no matter where they came from. Perhaps concentrating on the largest or major religions of the world, which encompass the largest number of people, could have been beneficial. It would have allowed a deeper understanding of each story and world religion. Where many Christians will probably come into contact with a Muslim or someone practicing Islam, few may come into contact with a Satanist or New Age believer. While the information was interesting, it probably didn't cover a large enough group of people. While the information is useful in a select number of situations it

probably does not provide enough information for the reader to be able to be an evangelistic witness to those people groups.

Overall, *The Unexpected Journey* presented a journey, not only for those people interviewed in each chapter, but Rainer also took the reader through a journey to better understand many different worldviews and how to reach each of those people for Christ. The organization of the text was easy to understand for readers of all levels, and the author presented his findings in a way that could easily be taken from the book and brought into real life situations.