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This month marks 40 years since my wife and I, along with our 18-month-old son, boarded a plane for the south Pacific to launch our missionary career. That “career” has subsequently taken me from being a long-term field missionary on an undeveloped island, to being a regional director for East Asia, then on to becoming a professor of missions, and finally to be on staff with Missio Nexus. Meanwhile, the world dramatically changed over the course of these 40 years.

Eldon Porter’s article in this edition alerts us to the fact that we are living in a new global reality. Looking at the big picture over the course of the past 40 years, the Church is now found in every country on earth, technology makes this Church highly interconnected, and as never before, there is an unprecedented number of people migrating in all directions. According to Porter, these mega changes dictate the need to do missions differently than in past years—like in 1978 when my family arrived on the island of Papua.

There are additional trends that need consideration as well if we are to fully comprehend today’s mission environment. Other notable global shifts are: the de-stabilization of the Middle East, paired with the diminished number of Christians there through genocide; the de-Christianization of Europe; the accelerated evangelization of sub-Sahara Africa and China; the rising affluence of Asia with its corresponding flourishing mission movement; and the swelling Charismatic movement, especially across Latin America.

Considered together, these new realities bring reflection as well on corresponding mission transitions that have taken place over the past 40 years. The following are some of the notable shifts.

**From Geographical Focus, To People Group Focus**

Cross-cultural evangelism is no longer confined to sending message bearers “over there.” The unbounded mobility of the world’s peoples has brought about a fluidity of humanity as in no other time in history. Geography is an increasingly inconsequential barrier to reaching the lost. They are showing up right on our doorsteps. Unreached people groups can be accessed with the Gospel not only in their traditional homelands, but in other locations well as.

**From Remote Hither-Lands Focus, To Urban-Centers Focus**

Human migration is also from rural and remote locations to thriving metropolises. The densification of civilization continues at an astonishing and unabated rate. Forty years
ago, one third of the earth’s population lived in urban centers. That has swelled to 55%. The total world urban population stands at 4.1 billion. There are now 522 cities with populations of over 1 million people. Clearly the need today is for more pioneer missionaries to urban centers.

**From Long-Term Missions, To a Mixture of Delivery Methods**

From the beginning of the modern mission movement until the mid-1960’s, cross-cultural missions was almost exclusively the work of long-term missionaries. I call them the “residents,” for that is what they did; they settled into a foreign country, learned the language, culture and worldview, while building long-term relationships. However today we add to this category two others (not to mention BAM). One is the “transients.” The commercial jet age, beginning in the 1960’s, has allowed this group of short-term workers to fly in and out of focus ministry areas to do short stints of ministry. The other, which is newest to the mix, is the “digitals.” From the mid-1990’s till present, the virtual age of missions has become accessible by anyone who can get “online” and thereby touches people in any part of the globe.

**From Western Mission Dominance, To Majority World Dominance**

Forty years ago ninety percent of long-term foreign missionaries could be described as white, west, and rich in resources. They were primarily from the North Atlantic region of the world. Thus, missions was considered “mono-centric.” With the explosion of non-Western missions today, the majority of missionaries are coming from anywhere and going to everywhere. Missions is now polycentric, with the majority of today’s missionaries (70 percent!) being sent from the majority, or non-western world. In contrast to their predecessors, they can be described as primarily south, of color, and poorer in resources.

**From Missions Being Well Defined in Task, To Ill Defined**

This transition primarily relates to the North American church. Forty years ago, evangelicals clearly considered the work of missions to primarily consist of evangelism, discipleship, and planting the church. The Church’s worldwide mission was based on Jesus’s mandate to “make disciples of the nations.” Over time other notions have emerged that have brought ambiguity to the western Church’s global outreach. Most notably are the twin concepts that missions consists of not just following Jesus’ mandate, but also, and at times primarily, his model of doing good works. Thus, the Church has become “missional,” meaning anything and everything it does either inside or outside of a local church’s Sunday service is promoted as missions. Consequently, the singular task of world evangelism has become diluted by subordinate, ill-defined competing agendas. The Church has become “distracted,” as Michael Cooper points out in our lead article, “Not On Our Watch.”

Unquestionably, we are ministering in different world realities compared to forty years ago. Management guru Peter Drucker famously posited that, “the first task of a leader is to define reality.” That being the case, in light of these realities, it follows that the next task should be that we initiate necessary adjustments in global outreach. That’s the reality of these realities.

Marvin J. Newell
Editor
In the 1980s, young American evangelicals were optimistic about seeing the Great Commission fulfilled in our generation. The extension of the gospel over the previous decades was nothing short of miraculous. Stories of the faith of 19th and early 20th century missionaries like William Carey, Hudson Taylor, and CT Studd ignited our imaginations. But perhaps even more so, some university students of the 1980s were captivated by the faith and courage of the likes of Jim Elliott, Bruce Olson, and Chet Bitterman. Reading their exploits compelled many of us to missions.

The Past 30 Years

It is now thirty years since those same missionary heroes motivated us to leave careers and head to the mission field. In the 1990s, communism began to crumble and we moved in to seize the day. In the 2000s, we came to the unsettling reality of a post-Christian West and the rise of fundamentalist Islam in the Middle East with the corresponding need for the gospel in both areas. And now, one of the largest humanitarian events of our generation has brought 65 million refugees within the proximity of the gospel.

Still, with all that has happened over the past thirty years, Kent Parks informed us to the reality that Christianity is not progressing. In fact, it is regressing. The inspiring stories of those early missionaries and the youthful optimism of university students of the 1980s could not compete with the growing population of those born without access to the gospel. No doubt, there are many causes to the shrinking of the Christian world. Along with population increases of the non-Christian world, the fact that our missionary force focuses in areas where the gospel had long ago reached is certainly a contributor to our regression.

Regression of Global Christianity

I was in Romania when I read Parks’ enlightening observations recalling the incredible events surrounding the collapse of the communist regime. The fall and winter of 1989 was an unbelievable time for those of us who worked in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. After years of praying, the unimaginable happened. That December, the bloodiest of all struggles from the oppression of communism occurred on the streets of
Timisoara. For several days, Romanians protested the oppressive dictator, Nicolae Ceausescu, only to be met with deadly military resistance until finally the army joined with the people. There was such excitement and enthusiasm as thousands of Romanians gathered in Opera Square and began chanting in unison, “Exista Dumnezeu, exista Dumnezeu.”

Back then, Romania had a population of 23 million and one of the highest percentages of evangelical Christians in Europe. It was also a country that captured the hearts of people around the world. The appalling images of orphans and the stories of persecution compelled many to get involved in missions. In the past 28 years since the revolution, Romania’s economy has become vibrant and the markets are full of goods. However, similar to many parts of the world, Romania’s evangelical population has not grown. It would not be an exaggeration to say that millions of missionary dollars were invested in the country, yet the impact has been minimal.

This story could be repeated around the world. I was recently in one African country meeting with Christian leaders. Christianity was introduced there in the 15th century and no doubt revolutionized life and culture. Over the past two decades, Islam has grown rapidly to an estimated 30 to 45 percent of the population. During a lunch with a prominent Christian leader who had retired from fulltime ministry, he reflected that after all the money that had been invested by Christians from around the world, the impact of the gospel was relatively nominal.

Perhaps no other place in the world provides a telling example of the stark and rapid decline of Christianity than Turkey. Granted, it was more than 600 years ago when the Ottoman Turks invaded the once Christian area today known as the “Forgotten Holy Land.” The conquest of the Turks is even more remarkable when we consider the region’s impact on the formation of early Christianity. All of orthodox theology was articulated there, but theology was not enough to prevent Asia Minor from being overtaken by Islam.

The global decline of Christianity should be of deep concern. In the 1990s, data indicated that more than 234 thousand people were committing their lives to Christ every day only to be outpaced by the global birthrate of 257 thousand per day. This downward trend has continued. Parks’ recent analysis suggested that in 1980 only 24 percent of the world was out of reach of the gospel. Today, that number has increased to 29 percent. Data indicates that Christianity is losing ground.

The New Testament alludes to at least three distractions that could have thwarted the missionary efforts of the early church that are relevant for us today. Theological, Social, and Material Distractions each have potential to undermine what God has prepared for those who love Him. While being preoccupied on any one of these distractions impacts our outreach, I’ll conclude with suggestions for those of us who want to join together to say, “Not on our watch.” First, let us take each distraction in turn.

**Theological Distraction**

One only needs Facebook to see the number of instances where Christians debate with their brothers and sisters over points of theology to understand how distracted our missionary efforts have become. The endless banter about the end times, Joel Osteen, Donald Trump, politics and race, even a liberation theology being articulated with a “social justice” moniker, ultimately results in a church who has reified human constructs at the expense of the divine command to make disciples (Matt 28:18). We have become divided by our particular theological penchant and paralyzed in our efforts to be God’s fellow workers in
proclaiming the foolishness of His incarnation.

Such theological distractions are not new. As Jesus prepared to ascend to the Father, Luke shares the story of His last gathering with the disciples. No doubt that their lives had been changed by the events of the last 40 days. They had seen what they could not have imagined when Jesus rose from the dead. In spite of Jesus’ continual emphasis on gospel proclamation, the disciples were concerned with the establishment of the Kingdom. This was not the first time. Luke tells us in his gospel that the disciples were focused on the Kingdom rather than the work at hand (19:11–27). Clearly, Jesus wanted the disciples to focus on using the resources He was providing to expand His recognition as King.

In Acts, again, the disciples focused on a theological point concerning the end times and, again, Jesus directs them to focus on His mission. His final words before ascending to the Father are poignant, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:7–8). It is not the Kingdom that we are called to establish on earth. Though we are to anticipate and pray for its arrival (Matthew 6:10), our imperative is making the King known to all peoples.

Many of us are passionate about our theology and, no doubt, theology is important. It is our attempt to understand who God is and it should naturally occupy our time. However, it must be kept in balance. A preoccupation with constructing a theology leads to an impotent church if it is not combined with gospel engagement.

Social Distractions

We live in a day where information is transferred at unprecedented rates. It does not take long to learn about tragic circumstances around the world. We are in constant contact with news that can overwhelm our emotions. The fact that an average of 16,000 children under the age of five die every day from preventable diseases, that 2.4 billion live without proper sanitation, or the reality of living in what might be one of the greatest mass migrations of people in human history with refugees flooding over foreign boarders on nearly every continent, these events compel us to respond. After all, as we do to the least of these we do to Jesus Himself (Matthew 25:40). However, our genuine concern for the physical needs of the poor can distract us from our focus on the Great Commission.

In Matthew 26:8–9, the disciples chastised Mary for anointing Jesus with very expensive perfume. What seemed to be the consensus opinion of the disciples was that the perfume could have been sold to help the poor. They had seen Jesus heal the sick, give sight to the blind, and make the lame walk again. They had recently heard him say that they were to care for those on the fringes of society. They naturally believed this was their mission (Matthew 25:31–40) and, for some odd reason, they believed poverty would be solved with money rather than by following Jesus’ example. Jesus’ response teaches us that Mary’s heart was in the right place: on Him. “For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me” (26:11). Then, if that were not a remarkable statement in and of itself, He focuses the disciples on His mission, “Wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her” (v. 13).

All the social good we might do in the world will not result in the alleviation of global poverty. Jesus naturally directs our attention to the proclamation of the gospel as our primary mission. As a Kenyan pastor working in the slums of Kibera recently told a group of
Christian leaders gathered from around the world, “It would be a terrible tragedy to meet the physical needs of people living in deplorable conditions only to see them miss the streets of gold.”

Material Distractions

The United States continues to be the leading power in the global economy. The amount of wealth is staggering when compared to the rest of the world. The annual GDP of the United States (nearly 20 trillion USD) is greater than the combined total GDPs of 176 of the 192 countries in the United Nations. How we use that wealth is even more remarkable. We spend $522 billion on entertainment, $48 billion on jewelry, and $30 billion on pets. Evangelicals alone spend an estimated $183 billion on entertainment, $17 billion on jewelry, and $10 billion on pets. Sadly, even with all that wealth, we only give $66 billion to the church and only $5 billion of that goes to foreign missions. We actually spend more on our pets than we do on taking the gospel to people who have never heard.2

The issue of material distractions was certainly a concern for the Apostle Paul. He gave very clear instructions to Timothy to instruct the wealthy to find their significance in doing “good works, to be generous and ready to share” (1 Timothy 6:18). A friend recently encouraged me when he said, “Don’t give until you hurt. Give until it feels good.” This sums up nicely what Paul meant in 2 Corinthians 9:7, “Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” No doubt, the words of Jesus are in Paul’s mind as he imparts this wisdom with the Corinthians, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

As we saw in the disciples’ interaction with Mary (Matthew 26), money is not the solution to poverty. Nevertheless, it is necessary to continue the Lord’s work of taking the gospel to every people group on the planet. There are approximately 1,363 distinct people groups around the globe who have not had the opportunity to hear the gospel. It is totally feasible for us to finish the task of fulfilling the Great Commission. It only requires Christians making their financial resources available for the work that He has prepared for us as His fellow workers (1 Corinthians 3:9).

Not on Our Watch

For good or bad, right or wrong, I have a deep sense that I am, in part, responsible for our current missionary inefficiency. Perhaps it is due to naivety or ignorance. It could very well be that I fell victim to theological, social, or material distractions, maybe all three. The regression of global Christianity is alarming and should trigger us to question our missionary focus. Nevertheless, it is not too late. An awareness of the current state of global Christianity and the need for us to make a corresponding response to join with God in His work has caused me to exclaim, “Not on my watch.”

Here are three final thoughts for us to consider as we strive to leave distractions behind in order to focus on the task ahead. First, we have to realize that the Great Commission will one day be fulfilled, whether we are participating in it or not. The Apostle John’s final book of the coming apocalypse provides a picture of people from every nation, tribe, and language before the throne of God (Revelation 5:9; 7:9). The only way to that throne is not through social action or theological acumen, but through Jesus Christ. The message of salvation is a sweet message to those who understand; something our material wealth
cannot acquire. It is at the same time, a difficult message. It is a calling of surrender and commitment, a laying aside of ourselves for the sake of others. It will bring persecution and martyrdom, but it is a message to be declared to all people and languages and nations and kings (Revelation 10:11). We know it will eventually happen. The challenge we face is whether or not we want to be a part of bringing the good news to those who do not have the opportunity to hear.

Second, we must turn our focus to a biblical understanding of the mission of God as one clearly announcing the good news of great joy that is for all the people (Luke 2:10). At the center of the heart of God is His desire to restore His relationship with those who bear His image. It is not changing the social agenda of a country, although that should be a result of a redeemed people. It is not increasing the wealth of a nation, although there is certainly evidence that this happens. Nor is it aligning all beliefs under a unified theological system, although this will one day occur. God’s mission in the world is using the inabilities of the weak to declare the foolishness of Christ (1 Corinthians 2) crucified and resurrected (1 Corinthians 15) to bring forgiveness and new life (Romans 5).

Third, we do not have an option to not participate. Scripture is clear. We are all to participate in fulfilling the Great Commission. That does not mean that we will all become vocational missionaries. However, missionaries alone are not enough to finish the task. This is an “all hands on deck” call for everyone to take their rightful place as God’s fellow workers. Some will plant and others will water. Ultimately, God is responsible for the results (1 Corinthians 3:7).

There are those of us who God has gifted to take the risk of bringing the gospel to a people group who has never heard of Jesus before. There is danger and we do not take this lightly. Nevertheless, just as God told Paul that there were those He had prepared to receive the gospel in Corinth (Acts 18:10), so, if we truly believe that every people group will one day stand before the throne, He has already prepared them. We simply need to go. There are others who God will use to help send these missionaries to unreached people. Both the goers and the givers are vital to the task of fulfilling the Great Commission. He is not looking for our abilities or our pocketbooks, although He will certainly use them. He is looking for our availability. Are we available to go and give?

Conclusion

Our particular theological persuasion influences our understanding of the mission of God. Over the past century, we have witnessed various theological, if not missiological, adjustments to Christianity from fundamentalism to the social gospel, from the emerging church to social justice. Some adjustments have had a profound influence on missions from those that focus on social actions to those that focus on the proclamation of the gospel. There certainly must be a balance as Jesus not only proclaimed the offering of forgiveness of sin and new life, but He healed people and cared for the marginalized. However, the apparent pendulum swing between proclamation of the gospel in word or deed raises serious concern. We see in contemporary evangelicalism a growing focus on building the Kingdom through acts of social justice at the expense of the verbal proclamation of the gospel; a reversion back to the social gospel in new garb. In essence, the gospel becomes the good news of the Kingdom of God being established on earth as evidenced in the betterment of the social conditions of people rather than the transformation of a person in preparation for the coming King (Matthew 26:29).
Ultimately, our calling is not about some obligation we must fulfill. It is not about us at all. It is about the God who created the peoples, languages, tribes, and nations; being ignored by them and not receiving glory due Him. It is about He who was crucified and whose blood ransomed people for God; not receiving the varied and diverse worship from every people group (Revelation 5:9). Our primary role then becomes helping to make that happen, not theological prowess, social change, or material wellbeing although by God’s Spirit those things can certainly follow.  

Michael Cooper, PhD is Vice-President of Equipping at East West Ministries International where he leads a team focused on training and empowering local believers and church leaders in evangelism, discipleship, leadership, and catalyzing church planting movements.

Notes


Partnerships and the Strategic Role of Networks

Eldon Porter

We live in an unprecedented period of mission history. The new paradigm of “from anywhere to everywhere” is by nature complex, resulting in an increasing need to partner with others for effective ministry. The challenge of connecting with potential partners in the global context is best done in and through the evolving world of networks.

The website Linking Global Voices (www.linkingglobalvoices.com) tracks over 500 networks globally. These networks are the nodes of a highly interconnected global Church and are an essential tool for effective ministry in the global partnership dependent context. The Body of Christ from around the world is coming together in networks around hundreds of different challenges, seeking to learn from each other and to find ways to work together in unity. The real challenge is to understand the world of networks and how specific networks might be beneficial for one’s ministry. This article seeks to provide an overview of the world of evangelical networks for the purpose of helping ministry leaders develop an appropriate network engagement strategy.

A New Global Reality

Over the last thirty years we have witnessed a shift from a reality described as “from the West to the rest” to that of “from anywhere to everywhere.” Three factors have driven this change, each underlying the need for the global Church to partner for effective ministry. First, there is now a Church in virtually every country of the world which in turn is obeying the Great Commission in ways relevant to them. The second driver of change is communication technology that has resulted in this global Church now becoming highly interconnected. This factor alone has enabled local churches to engage directly with global partners, no longer limited to simply working through the traditional mission agency. And the third factor is the unprecedented number of people moving from their context of origin to other locations around the world. This global diaspora movement significantly challenges the notion that a missionary is sent “from here to there” to reach a specific people group. In many cases that same people group is now scattered to different regions of the world which in itself highlights the need for, and the complexity of, ministry partnerships.
Until about the mid-1980s almost everyone who wanted to serve cross-culturally joined mission agencies and went from the West to the rest of the world. While there was some agency to agency collaboration, most ministry strategies took place within the confines of each traditional agency. But in sharp contrast, in the new global paradigm, we find local churches, ministries, and mission structures all engaging in cross-cultural ministries. The vast majority of those leading these ministry teams desire to work in unity with the rest of the Body of Christ. But the reality is that most are doing their own thing with little or no awareness of potential partners. It is in this reality that networks are developing and beginning to play such a strategic role.

Definitions

There are some basic differences between a network and a partnership. A network is a coming together of totally autonomous entities around either a geography or issue that is shared in common. A partnership is characterized by collaboration between entities that know each other and agree to work toward a common goal. One only partners with those that you know and to some degree trust. A true partnership takes place when two or more entities agree to work together as equal partners to achieve something they could not do independently. Well-run networks are constantly birthing partnerships.

Clarification

Every network is unique and has the potential of empowering those they serve. The description below of evangelical networks is intended to highlight general principles at play within this environment. No network complies with all of the points that are made, nor should they. But these points provide some categories to use as one begins to engage with the world of networks.

Categories of Networks

There are two basic categories of networks. The first are those defined by geography and the second by those that focus on specific issues. Geographically defined networks break down into two subcategories. The first is the networks or alliances of churches in a given country or region. The majority of these tie into the World Evangelical Alliance which officially represents the global body of evangelicals. The second is the mission networks either originating from a country or region or those that are focused on an unreached country or region. The first is referred to as mission movement networks and the second is mission focused networks.

The second category is that of networks focused on specific issues. While some of these are geographically restricted, the vast majority are global in nature. These issue focused networks take different forms but they all seek to encourage the coming together of independent entities in order to achieve greater collaboration. Almost all the issues we face in missions are addressed by a network. In some cases, you will find multiple networks focusing on the same issue.

A search under “Issues” in the Linking Global Voices website will reveal the wide spectrum of issues addressed by different networks. But it is important to understand that
not all issue focused networks are organized and led in the same way. Here are some basic examples of how some of these networks are run.

Some represent a specific group of autonomous ministries all sharing the same core ministry focus. The European Freedom Network would be an example. This network represents ministries related to the challenge of human trafficking.

There are also “concept networks.” The International Orality Network, for example, pulls together those wishing to wrestle with the concept and implications of the “orality issue” for the global Church.

Platform-based networks are networks that leverage the trust and respect of a global network to champion a cause. You will find some excellent examples of these tied to larger networks such as the WEA, Lausanne, or Transform World. These networks are led by individuals respected in their specific field who champion collaboration on a particular issue.

Vision driven networks, such as Finishing the Task, encourage collaboration around a shared vision. Their events are usually motivational with reports of the progress being made.

Some networks are defined by a commitment to use a specific ministry methodology. Some of the church planting networks that champion the Disciple Making Movement methodology would be good examples.

The Significance of Networks

If you want to know what the Lord is doing in a specific area of the world then you must spend time with and learn from the Church leaders who meet together as part of the evangelical alliance representing that region. And if you want to learn about a specific issue, then you must listen to and interact with those who come together from around the world with first-hand experience regarding that issue. This phenomenon of the coming together in networks of those most directly involved in a region or around a particular issue has significant implications. Networks are quickly becoming the best platform for leadership and influence and the best space for the global Church to engage around a common challenge.

Primary Task of a Network

In very general terms the primary task of a network is to empower their clients for more effective ministry. They do this first by curating resources. These resources could be information on who does what kind of ministry or who are the experts in a particular area, etc. The goal is to become the place to which people look for good information related to the core identity of the network. Networks also empower their clients by facilitating ministry connections. These could be simply for the purpose of linking an expert to those looking for information or by connecting two or more ministries that potentially might become partners. The third way that networks empower their clients is to represent their interests both in relation to governments and the general public as well as to outside ministries seeking to know how best to connect with their context.

If the objective of a network is to empower their clients, then the success of a network needs to reflect the degree that clients are empowered. Does the network leadership know and understand the needs of their clients and are they intentionally developing services that will empower them for more effective ministry? While not necessarily unimportant,
all too often networks consider factors such as the number of those who attend their conference as being the measurement of their success.

**Primary and Secondary Clients**

Every network has both primary and secondary clients. Primary clients are those that naturally affiliate with the network because of either geography, as with the evangelical alliance of a particular country, or an issue that is central to a particular ministry. Secondary clients are those networks of ministries that intersect with the core identity of a network because of a particular challenge. For example, the Refugee Highway Partnership network is comprised of individuals and ministries focused on refugee ministries. These would be their primary clients. But there are other networks of ministries that bring a valuable specialty to the context of serving refugees. Some examples of these secondary clients would be networks with expertise in media, advocacy, human trafficking, and the evangelical alliances in the refugee context. A network must function with both categories of clients in mind. Effective ministry leadership in today’s environment also requires an intentional engagement with multiple networks that intersect around a particular ministry focus.

**Network Leadership**

Leading a network is not the same as leading an organization. A network leader has no authority over any of those he or she seeks to lead. Network leadership has a lot to do with creating an environment that attracts their primary clients to their sphere of influence. The vast majority of network leaders are knowledgeable of the focus of their network but are not necessarily the experts. But the effective network leader knows who the experts are and is able to provide a context where their voices are heard.

**Network Finances**

There are three main sources of income to cover network operational expenses. Some generate income from events they organize, others from membership dues, and still others from donations. But the vast majority of networks do not have any solid income source and depend almost entirely on volunteers.

This brief overview of evangelical networks provides points of reference for those trying to understand the dynamics at play. Finances, leadership styles, security concerns, cultural differences, and the fact that most networks are led by volunteers all have an influence on how networks are organized and function. While the vast majority of networks struggle to achieve their goals, the simple fact that these networks exist is significant.

**Developing Your Network Engagement Strategy**

If we value the unity of the Body of Christ, then it is important that one functions as part of the global Body rather than as an isolated entity. With a basic understanding of evangelical networks, one can begin to craft a network engagement strategy for the purpose of connecting into what God is doing around the world.

The first step is to understand and articulate your identity. What is it that is unique about your church, ministry, or mission agency? What ministry expertise, fields of service...
or relationships define your ministry? Understanding your unique identity will determine which networks to engage with or invest in.

Once you have a fairly clear understanding of your identity then you can begin developing your strategy for engaging networks. There are four degrees of network engagement. These can be illustrated using the analogy of hundreds of country homes spread out across a large valley. Each home represents a specific network. There are both geographically defined networks as well as issue-focused networks. The first task is to research which networks align with your institutional identity. Explore the database of networks listed on the Linking Global Voices website and make a list of those that are of particular interest. Having done this, you are ready to develop your strategy.

Using the analogy of the country homes, the four degrees of engagement are represented by different parts of the homes. Each home has a front porch with a couple of rocking chairs, a living room, a dining room, and a kitchen. The direction for greater engagement moves from the porch to the living room then into the dining room and finally into the kitchen.

The first level of engagement takes place on the front porch. The windows into the living room are open so take a seat in a rocking chair and listen to the conversation coming from there. You do this by reading the network’s website, following their Facebook page, and subscribing to any communications the network provides. This will give you an idea as to the nature of the network and whether or not you feel it has sufficient value for you to move to the next level. You also have the option of remaining on the porch waiting for the correct time to take the next step.

If you like what you are hearing from the network then you might decide that it is worth your while to move to the second level of engagement. In that case, you come through the front door and sit down in the living room with other network participants. The living room represents a network event. Those attending a conference are there to learn and meet others with shared interests. Many of the conference participants feel that simply attending an event meets their needs and don’t engage on a deeper level. But there are always some who get up and move into the dining room.

The dining room represents the third level of engagement. It is around the dining table that critical issues are debated and papers are reviewed by those who have extensive experience and understanding. Those at the table come from different areas of the world with different perspectives on the particular issue. It is when those from this group begin to speak about the particular issue or region that those on the porch or in the living room take notice. It is what happens at this level in a network that has led many to say that networks are becoming the best platform for leadership.

But it is from the kitchen that the leadership of the network takes place. The network leaders don’t sit at the head of the dining table to direct conversation but they are rather in the kitchen preparing the meal. They know who is at the dining room table, what they need to eat or be exposed to, and when and how the meal needs to be served. And when serving the food, the cook might tap the shoulder of one of those at the table and suggest that he or she “share the story about…” because he knows it is something everyone needs to hear. The network leader provides leadership by creating an environment where leadership happens.

The four levels of network engagement are all legitimate and every ministry will decide to position themselves at different levels with different networks at different times. Almost everyone will have only a few networks in which they decide to engage at either
the third or fourth level. But there is a growing number of agencies and churches that are deliberately positioning themselves in the kitchen, recognizing they can achieve far greater influence serving from there than they could in a local ministry context.

**Conclusion**

Christ is building His Church around the world and calls us to live and minister in the unity of the Body of Christ. While the new paradigm of “from anywhere to everywhere” is complex, networks are filling a strategic role in connecting the various parts of the Body where collaboration is most needed. Understanding and engaging in and through networks will help you to recognize the unique place God has prepared for you and the partners He would have you collaborate with.

**Eldon Porter** serves as a Consultant for Global Engagement within the evangelical missions community. He is considered an expert on the role networks play in the highly interconnected world of global missions. In addition to his formal role as a consultant with Missio Nexus (North America) and COMIBAM (Ibero-America), Eldon assists network leaders around the world as they seek to adapt their networks to the current globalized missions environment.
Over the past eight years I have been researching various aspects of leadership to gain a deeper understanding of how to lead mission movements within the globalized ecosystem in which we now live. This article presents a new theory on polycentric leadership to help missional leaders effectively traverse this modern landscape. It is based on research meant to review fresh perspectives on mission leadership in a global era. Given that the Lausanne Movement provided a unique ecosystem in which to conduct the experiment, a study of the history of the movement was made, paying keen attention to the last 15 years of dramatic global shifts.

The primary research for this project revolved around four key authors and researchers, augmented by leadership studies from both the mission and business world. The four sections below coincide with each of these key authors and researchers. Finally, after reviewing these ideas, the study concludes with recommendations toward a new model for effective mission leadership in the global era.

Movement Theory

The first step in discerning the impact of leadership in missional movements was to gain a greater appreciation for movement theory, with a particular focus on religious (missional) and church movements. The study began with a look at Ted Esler’s research on Movements and Mission Agencies.1 Esler provided an overview of various aspects of movement theory, looking at social, organizational and religious movements.

As Esler looked at the various types of movement theory, he posited a General Integrated Movement Attribute Model which focuses on resource mobilization.2 He states:

Resource mobilization theory suggests that movement organization is a dominant feature of a movement … Understanding the missionary agency as an organization bent on forming religious movements opens up the possibility that organizational theory can be applied to the study of movements.3

In coming to this model of movement theory, Esler looked first at New Social Movements
and Social Movement Organizations. He sought wisdom from these models and theories to better understand how church planting teams could be effective. Esler rightly notes that religious movements don’t necessarily form from a position of unrest. He reviewed missiologists like Roland Allen, Donald McGavran and David Garrison. In doing so, he sees an interesting conflict. The observations cited above point to a multiplicity of leaders for a movement, but Paul Pierson suggests that “breakthroughs, expansion, renewal movements and the like are almost always triggered by a key person.” Esler suggests that reconciliation may be in the form of the leader purely as a “catalyst or lightning rod” rather than as the sole leader of the movement.

Another aspect of Esler’s research relates to organizational or movement structures. Esler highlights the work of Campbell in developing a bricolage as a fresh way to form these cooperatives. He points to the work of Zed and Asher who say of coalitions, “The coalition pools resources and coordinates plans, while keeping distinct organizational identities.”

Team of Teams

In 2015, General Stanley McChrystal partnered with researchers from Yale University to study the fight against the Al Qaeda network. McChrystal argues that “to succeed, maybe even to survive, in the new environment, organizations and leaders must fundamentally change. Efficiency, once the sole icon on the hill, must make room for adaptability in structures, processes, and mindsets that is often uncomfortable.”

According to McChrystal, the U.S. military is the single most efficient, prepared, and powerful force in the world. Yet with all their might and proficiency, they could not defeat the Al Qaeda network: “We were stronger, more efficient, more robust. But AQI was agile and resilient. In complex environments, resilience often spells success, while even the most brilliantly engineered fixed solutions are often insufficient or counterproductive.”

Many leadership books of past eras highlight the role of the CEO, the pastor, or General Manager. McChrystal states that this type of leadership led to more things being produced in a faster time for less overall cost. However, “This new world [of conflict with Al-Qaeda] required a fundamental rewriting of the rules of the game. In order to win, we would have to set aside many of the lessons that millennia of military procedure and a century of optimized efficiencies had taught us.” He adds, “These events and actors were not only more interdependent than in previous wars, they were also faster. The environment was not just complicated, it was complex.”

McChrystal realized that their leadership needed a new theme: “It Takes a Network to Defeat a Network.” He states, “Cooperative adaptability is essential to high-performing teams.” McChrystal argues that a more decentralized structure is better designed for this type of warfare: “Adam Smith’s ‘invisible hand’ of the market—the notion that order best arises not from centralized design but through the decentralized interactivity of buyers and sellers—is an example of ‘emergence’. In other words, order can emerge from the bottom up, as opposed to being directed, with a plan, from the top down.”

Given these new realities, the military instituted a systems form of thinking where information was shared broadly. It was less efficient, but it created holistic awareness and allowed them to operate as a team of teams. McChrystal cites the research of Sandy Pentland from MIT, who found that “sharing information and creating strong horizontal relationships improves the effectiveness.”
Collaboration and Partnership

In Phill Butler’s book Well Connected, Butler points out that what attracts people and keeps them committed to a partnership are 1) great vision and 2) seeing results. According to Butler, once you have a compelling reason to work together and a desire for strong results, you must then build trust. “All durable, effective partnerships are built on trust and whole relationships.” There must be trust between the people, the processes and the plans for effective partnership to develop. Leading a movement is significantly different from leading a company that doesn’t have a lot of stakeholders. It’s similar, perhaps, to leading a modern university. Butler emphasizes:

Spiritual breakthroughs are not a game of guns and money. No human effort, expenditure of resources, or brilliant strategy will alone produce lasting spiritual change. Our partnerships must be informed and empowered by God’s Holy Spirit in order to be effective. The challenges of relationships, cultural and theological differences, technical and strategic issues, and sustainability can only be dealt with in a process rooted in prayer.

Butler also highlights practical considerations for managing the actual partnership: Developing clear and measurable goals, setting a realistic time frame for action, putting in place sustainable personnel to see the project through, and fostering ownership of the vision that grows over time.

visionSynergy CEO Kärin Primuth, in a recent article in Evangelical Missions Quarterly, points to movements in the Muslim world that began with Western leaders now being led by indigenous leaders. Primuth notes that these multi-cultural networks are a demonstration of biblical unity:

Networks offer a context to build trust across cultures and to genuinely listen and learn from our partners in the Majority World. They provide a platform for dialogue with our brothers and sisters in the Global South to mutually define what the North American Church can contribute to today's mission movement.

Cube Theory and Systems of Leadership

In Mark Avery’s dissertation Beyond Interdependency: An identity based perspective on interorganizational mission, Avery found that a critical factor to effective interorganizational leadership was governance across multiple organizations. As agencies worked together, the key was how they coordinated their efforts. Avery states that “the [CUBE Theory] model provides a coherent language for analyzing eight distinct coordination schemes along (at least) three generic axes.”

In a personal interview, Avery told me that the model is simply a grid-group model of communication across different cultures. “Partnership is the solution to a problem many people don’t feel or don’t have. (It) helps transform the process rather than a cause [and is] much more about shared responsibility about how things work in a particular context.”

Avery describes the key finding for leading movements as “A network … a high voice,
low power, adaptive form native to an extra group environment. Social norms, absence of formalized boundaries, voluntary involvement, and centrality of trust are some characteristic factors of this scheme of coordination.25

Asian Access has done initial research in this area. Executive Vice President Elliott Snuggs interviewed Ken Moy of Masterworks, who was doing research for the Lausanne Movement. Moy contrasted the differences between the Arab Spring and Al Qaeda. Both were powerful movements led by volunteer forces. Moy pointed out that the key difference between the short-lived Arab Spring and the sustained movement of Al Qaeda involved Al Qaeda having a small core at its center who were the keepers of the vision, mission, and values. Moy suggested that Lausanne and Asian Access were more illustrative of movements than they were of traditional mission organizations.26

To gain insight into how CUBE Theory might operate within a networked organization, Snuggs used the model below from Asian Access colleague Takeshi Takazawa (see Figure 4.2).27 Given that the Asian Access Community is a network of pastors and NGO leaders from a number of different nations, communication practices have to adapt based on the different cultures and leadership ideals of each country. Add to this the global body of Christ interacting with each of these members of the Asian Access Community, and the complexities become enormous.

Snuggs then addresses leadership within the system:

An example might be Wikipedia. Anyone can be a part of Wikipedia as a user of the information or a creator of content. But there are values and ensuing “rules” that a core of people ruthlessly enforce. And many people who do this are not paid staff. They are a very small percentage of the Wikipedia movement who spend a
huge amount of their time editing and reviewing entries. They do it because they are committed to the vision, mission, and values of Wikipedia. They are a part of the core which keeps Wikipedia relevant. And they are enhanced by organizational-like units of paid staff.28

Mike Breen captures this concept from a spiritual perspective, stating, "I can assure you that if you look at the great movements of the past (whether in business, politics, societal change, etc.), what you will find in the middle is a group of people truly living as an extended family."29 Breen’s findings on leading missional movements dovetail with Jesus’ approach of investing life into a few key disciples and encouraging them to reproduce the dynamism that he gives them in mission.
Interviews with Lausanne Mission Leaders

To test these findings, I conducted and analyzed interviews with Lausanne Movement leaders to discern key issues, trends, and challenges they face, how they have grown and been formed as leaders, and how leadership has changed in the past twenty years.

I selected 20 key leaders of major initiatives and movements, collecting data through first-hand observations. Given that some of these interviews were conducted with leaders in shame-based or shame/honor cultures, Appreciative Inquiry methodology proved helpful. Appreciative Inquiry provides a positive approach to interviews, providing more fruitful and relevant material from those interviewed.

It became apparent that there were a number of common threads between the interviews. Long-standing leadership traits that several noted as constant included the spiritual aspects of missional leadership: being biblically formed, character formation, and Christ-like servant leadership. Other, more tangible threads related to the need for vision, passion, and relational competence.

Every leader pointed to a common thread in their life story—of how God clearly intervened and called them to ministry. One leader mentioned the crucial importance of a "private, personal and intimate worship of the Lord as being priority number one … [Further stating that] powerful public ministry comes from a passionate, private worship walk with the Lord." Another leader stated, “The Church is yearning for this type of intimacy." And another leader pointed to the importance of listening to the Lord as well as to the Lord’s speaking through others.

Globalization, economic disparity, migration, and technological advancement were all issues leaders identified as requiring changing forms of leadership. They also discussed moving away from a broad vision toward a more clearly defined set of outcomes, complete with measurable qualities, as being important in the current era.

One leader observed that “We are now living in a globalized world … We need to look at this more carefully because it impacts the Church … It impacts the whole life." Another leader put it this way: “[We] live in an increased globalized world where issues are more than transnational. How do we fit into what others are doing and what pieces are missing and what can we do to create structures to help?"

Leaders emphasized the need for further collaboration and teamwork in diverse societies. The need for more strategic and directional leadership was also emphasized. One leader highlighted the importance of gift-based leadership rather than trait-based leadership. Another leader shared, “[Leadership is] much more dispersed and distributed (not management by objective), [We need a] vision and values approach—not [simply] by goals and objectives.”

The relational thread was strong in all of the interviews—that vision should emerge from the group more than an individual, and that people should be empowered. As one leader suggested, "giving away power" is critical to success in this age. "The ownership—confidence of indigenous leaders to lead their own way and let westerners get out of the way [will be key for leaders of the future]."

The final common thread in these interviews was a need for further creativity and innovation as we look to the future of mission. As one leader said, “[We are] constantly looking for innovative ways to engage around spiritual issues and lots of interesting methodologies in our network.” Another interviewee shared, “[We need] more emphasis on relationship, collaboration, prayer and listening to the Lord, and experimentation.”
Toward a New Model of Global Leadership

This research discovered and set the tone for the development of a more synthetic model for global leadership. Beginning with the chaotic transition of the information age to the era of globalization, the need for a change in leadership is apparent. It was discovered that leading missional movements requires different skills than those needed in past generations. We need a new understanding of leadership for the future that addresses the increased complexities.

While a catalytic person or event may provide the key launching point, a movement sustainable for the long term is led by a multiplicity of leaders. These leaders are able to cast vision and mobilize others through simple actionable steps without falling into micromanagement. Cultural and cross-cultural acumen in leading networks is paramount if a movement is to thrive in the current global context.

A team of teams, built on enduring relationships and grounded on a foundation of deep trust, makes a network or movement strong. Speed and adaptive leadership are crucial skills. The team of teams must also exhibit an ability to empower others more than themselves and foster a culture that encourages information sharing and decentralizes authority to the ground levels.

Making a difference in a complex ecosystem requires that we work together. The ability to rally people and groups around purpose and vision is critical to leading a partnership well. Building deep relational ties and developing trust bind movements and teams together. Listening to the network and movement leaders is critical; as it is in listening, that the team not only feels heard, but valued.

Facilitation fosters the capacity for leaders to influence rather than directing toward an organizational objective. The importance of management skills is juxtaposed with the need to hold matters more loosely, combined with a tolerance for ambiguity, a commitment to hands-off management, and allowance for goals to be developed from a variety of cultural vantage points.

Further work needs to be done in order to contribute toward a new theory for polycentric leadership. That said, a more comprehensive model of leadership for the global era in missional movements involves all of these traits and begins to move away from more centralized forms of leadership and toward a more polycentric model.

Some traits endure through time—the importance of a solid foundation in Christ, competence, character, and a reliance on the leading of the Spirit. But it is ever more apparent that leading a movement effectively requires more facilitative and less directive approaches, ones that empower leaders at all levels throughout a movement.

Rev. Joseph W Handley, Jr. is president of Asian Access. Previously, he was the founding director of Office of World Mission at Azusa Pacific University and lead mission pastor at Rolling Hills Covenant Church. He serves on the International Orality Network leadership team and the board of PacificLink.
Notes

2. Esler refers to the mobilization of resources toward a cause most commonly pointing to personnel and finances though other factors can be part of this as well.
10. McChrystal et al., loc. 971, Kindle.
11. McChrystal et al., loc. 1127, Kindle.
12. McChrystal et al., loc. 1581, Kindle.
13. McChrystal et al., loc. 1702, Kindle.
15. McChrystal et al., loc. 3576, Kindle.
22. Avery, 96.
27. In this diagram, A2i refers to our international leadership serving the movement while A2 community refers to all of those who serve within the scope of our vision and mission. Within our movement, we have a network of leaders committed to one another and our common cause. Beyond that, each participant is engaged in activities that may relate to our mission but may not be something everyone within the movement is committed to.
29. Mike Breen, Leading Kingdom Movements, loc. 1079, Kindle.
In evangelism, church planting, and community development, missionaries are bound to accidentally hurt feelings and offend some people. Restoring relationships often requires apologizing. Outsiders often fail with their apologies by using forms from their home culture that don’t work in the target culture. They mistakenly assume that because the function of apology is universal, the forms are also universal. Using culturally inappropriate forms for apology undermines reconciliation, intensifies resentment, and prolongs hostility.

Some Cross-cultural Communication Theory

Meaning to tell the audience his embarrassment was great for being late, the foreign missionary actually ended up telling the congregation that his private parts were very large. This misunderstanding turned out to be a humorous and common pun, but the misunderstandings resulting from wrongly communicated apologies can be exponentially more disruptive.

Different cultures have different meanings for forms that accomplish universal functions. All societies have ways to apologize. However, words, grammar, and gestures create forms that often differ between cultures. In the above example, the foreign guest chose the wrong word (form) to accomplish his intended apology (function), resulting in misunderstanding (missed meaning).

The “Languages” of Apology

Author Gary Chapman popularized the five “love-languages.” He and clinical psychologist Jennifer Thomas have identified five “languages of apology.” They are:

1. Expressing Regret—Saying, “I am sorry.”
2. Accepting Responsibility—Admitting, “I was wrong.”
3. Making Restitution—Committing, “I will make it right.”
4. Genuinely Repenting—Promising, “I will not do that again.”

5. Requesting Forgiveness—Asking, “Will you forgive me?”

Chapman and Thomas assert that people differ in their perceptions of apology. Different forms speak more deeply and more sincerely to different people.

You may appreciate hearing all languages, but if you don’t hear your primary apology language, you will question the sincerity of the apologizer. On the other hand, if the apology is expressed in your primary language, then you will find it much easier to forgive the offender.

What’s true between individuals who vary in personalities is doubly true between cultures that vary in language, heritage, and majority religion. Different apology forms also speak more deeply and more sincerely to different cultures. Familiar apology forms may ring hollow across a cultural boundary. Someone hearing an apology in an unfamiliar form will likely doubt its sincerity. On the other hand, accommodating local apology forms may better facilitate reconciliation.

Different historical, economic, and political contexts underlie the one reason. Different beliefs about apologizing to God underlie the other.

Some Social-Context Driven Differences

Social context impacts forms for apology. North American civilization exercises significant power over its environment. Personal control over their careers, marriages, and destiny. Governments have considerable global influence. People with a high sense of power and control also have a high sense of responsibility. As a result, they tend to doubt the sincerity of apologies that avoid taking responsibility. They typically respect people who own up to their mistakes. They usually disrespect people who make excuses and blame others or circumstances. North Americans especially despise the word, “but,” in any sentence that includes the words, “I am sorry.”

Most people in the world, however, have little power and minimal control over their environment. They are generally more vulnerable to nature and disasters. Arabs, for example, have little personal control over their careers, marriages, and destiny. The frequently uttered phrase “insyallah,” meaning, “If God wills,” illustrates the perception that ultimate responsibility rests with God rather than people. This passivity actually enhances perceptions of personal piety. Middle Eastern governments have little global influence and tend to see themselves as victims in a world order dominated by others. People with little sense of power and control have a low sense of responsibility. Therefore, shouldering responsibility is rarely a necessary part of their apologies, and placing blame elsewhere often becomes part of the form for apologizing. People in these contexts desire dignity more than accountability.

North American quickness to apologize to the world for everything from unequal wealth distribution to past injustices like the Crusades and the slave trade, flows from a sense of being responsible and in control. Confessing such “sins” and taking such responsibility fills an American emotional need, but it has not led to reconciliation with offended populations. Those offended parties aren’t desiring admissions of guilt or acceptance of
responsibility, as much as they want restitution and the affirmation of dignity that comes when someone humbly asks for forgiveness while admitting they don’t really have control. Making restitution and requesting forgiveness are the primary apology forms for much of the world. Neither requires admitting responsibility.

Some Religious Context Driven Differences

Religious heritage contributes significantly to forms for apology. The way people relate to God establishes a pattern for the way they relate to each other. In Christian tradition, God forgives sins when his people confess them and take responsibility for them. Accordingly, no one can make restitution for his or her own sins. Only God can do that. Theologically, it’s called “substitutionary atonement.” Historically, it involves the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. This concept plays out in personal and corporate relationships by having restitution frequently made through neutral third parties like the government or insurance companies. Offended parties often reconcile with no restitution happening at all. North American apologies typically require the words “I was wrong” (confession), and “I am sorry” (regret). Often, they include the words, “I will try not to do that again” (repentance).

Apologies in most of the rest of the world don’t need those words of confession and accountability. To North Americans, apologies without those sentiments are incomplete. And yet reconciliation happens all the time around the world in families and between tribes without anyone ever admitting guilt or accepting responsibility. In North American culture, the main glue of relationships is trust, an important ideal in relationships is innocence, and a major destroyer of relationships is guilt. In most of the rest of the world’s cultures, the main glue is respect, an important ideal is honor, and a major destroyer is shame. North American apologies seek to restore trust. Humbly admitting guilt enhances trustworthiness. Apologies in most other cultures seek to restore respect. Respectability involves honor, status, and appearances. Under such conditions, admitting guilt undermines honor, projects arrogance, embarrasses the offended party, and humiliates all involved.

In both Christianity and Islam, relationship with God begins through identity with a profession of faith. In Muslim tradition, however, God forgives the sins of his people when they demonstrate that they are good Muslims by performing the ritual works of Islam (like the five pillars of fasting, praying, pilgrimage, alms giving, and reciting the creed). Confession is not necessary. Respectability is maintained. Humiliation is avoided. God forgives sins based upon good deeds outweighing bad ones.

That pattern for reconciling with God translates in personal and corporate relationships to making restitution and asking for forgiveness. Restitution affirms the dignity of both parties. Similar to the way that an insurance company can restore what has been lost without being at fault, a wrong-doer can restore what has been lost without admitting responsibility. Asking for forgiveness differs from saying, “I am sorry.” It surrenders control to the other party. It moves responsibility for restoring relationship from the guilty party to the offended party. It admits to imperfection, but it does not admit to all of the details of the offense. That kind of detail would be a confession.

Making restitution and asking for forgiveness, while often blaming circumstances or others in order to avoid responsibility, is the principle apology form in cultures with Muslim majorities. In many years of living and working among Muslims, I have rarely
heard a Muslim say, “I am sorry,” but I frequently heard Muslims asking for forgiveness. In fact, requesting forgiveness from friends and relatives is an important feature in Muslim holiday celebrations. Humility in cultures with Muslim majorities isn’t demonstrated in the ability to admit faults but in the ability to depend upon grace from others to forgive faults that remain unconfessed. From the perspective of the people in those cultures, it is the North American form for apology that sabotages reconciliation by undermining the dignity of the parties who need to reconcile. It publicly humiliates one party, it embarrasses the other, and it gives relational control to the offender rather than to the offended.

Some Practical Implications

These different forms have strengths and weaknesses. One form may be objectively better than another, and one may spark better social harmony than the other. For example, when reconciliation depends primarily on confession and repentance, its highest price is simply humility—but a weakness may be that without restitution, restoration becomes facile and shallow. That shallowness may be seen in admonitions to children to say, “I’m sorry,” whether or not their heart is in it.

On the other hand, when reconciliation depends heavily upon restitution, a satisfactory price for justice may be too high to pay. One theological explanation of the death of Christ is that he paid a price for justice that was too high for us. And on that same hand, when harmony in relationships requires a favorable balance between good deeds and bad deeds, such balance may never be satisfactorily attained. Between tribal populations nursing long-standing grievances, such balance is an impossible dance. In those situations, a useful concept may be that someone else has paid the impossible price for restoring balance.

Yet comparing forms of apology to ascertain superiority or inferiority can be a futile endeavor. People in different systems will perceive a superiority in the system that’s most familiar to them unless and until they have a powerful world view change. And the form that’s best for a church congregation isn’t likely to be the best for a criminal justice system.

North American missionaries can teach and model the Biblical form of forgiveness through confession and repentance. They can also embrace the value of restitution because, as shown later in this article, that is also demonstrated in Scripture. New believers need to mature into a responsibility-taking apology form. And North American missionaries need to accommodate the prevailing apology forms in their target culture to live in harmony with those around them.

A Negative Example

In 2012, some local workers at Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan discovered singed Qur’ans in a burn pit. Taliban prisoners had written messages to each other in them, and they’d been thrown out. Violence against the American and NATO presence in Afghanistan broke out almost immediately. Leaders all the way up to President Obama apologized by communicating regret and claiming the ones responsible would be held accountable. Resorting to this standard American form likely exacerbated the violence. It’s like a doctor apologizing for accidentally sewing his scissors into a patient after removing an appendix. The admission of guilt increases settlement costs.

In Islam (and also frequently in Western law), forgiveness follows restitution or retribution. Blaming circumstances for what happened reduces the cost of restitution.
contrast, underscoring responsibility raises restitution’s cost. Naveed Qamar, the head of Jamaat-ud-Dawah in Karachi, Pakistan said, “We don’t accept Obama’s apology. The Muslims don’t accept his apology, as it is nothing but a farce.” Without restitution, Obama’s apology seemed insincere to the Islamic world, and its demand for retribution escalated as he took responsibility.

In their Judeo-Christian system for apology, North Americans usually consider that avoiding responsibility is poor form. They consider that paying someone off for their loss is insensitive (except in the impersonal legal system). And responding to an offense or insult with random violence is uncivilized and evil. However, in Sharia systems, reconciliation flows from balance. When salvation depends upon good deeds outweighing bad deeds (as in Islam), then justice between people depends on bad deeds and good deeds balancing too. People in Sharia systems restore balance with one side making restitution or the other side taking retribution. In this case, Afghan people took retribution when America offered no restitution other than taking responsibility by claiming the perpetrators would be held accountable.

The Muslim and Judeo-Christian “dwellings” have different “house rules” for reconciliation. North Americans cannot import Judeo-Christian “house rules” into Muslim “dwellings.” In this situation, deflection and restitution would have been more productive than taking responsibility. The President and his generals could have blamed the Taliban by saying something like, “Some detainees were desecrating Qur’ans by writing messages in them, and it is God’s will that they have now been exposed in this way.” Then, they could have highlighted the damage caused by those detainees, both with respect to the way the Qur’ans unfortunately got treated and the retribution happening through random violence. Most importantly, they could have offered restitution on behalf of the detainees for the resultant insult, damage, and carnage through something significant and symbolic like a big donation to a Muslim literary association. With those steps taken, they could have asked for forgiveness in a generic sense for anything done that had been offensive.

A Positive Example

When Don Richardson took his family to live in the Sawi tribe and translate the Bible for it back in the 1960s, Sawi villages were warring to the point that the tribe was facing extinction. The Sawi valued treachery to the degree that Judas was their hero in the gospel story. But when Richardson threatened to leave unless the warring stopped, the Sawi settlements found a way to reconcile in order to keep the Richardson’s medicine and steel tools flowing. The warring clans exchanged the infant sons of their prominent leaders. An exchanged infant was called a “Peace Child,” who ended the treachery. Don Richardson used the practice as an analogy of the gospel. He convinced many in the tribe to put their faith in Jesus as the “Peace Child” sent by God. The Peace Child Ritual is a form for reconciliation that minimizes confession and taking responsibility. It established an enduring reconciliation through mutual forgiveness and the offering of a child who functioned as restitution.

Examples from the Bible

Biblical cultures were probably closer to today’s Middle Eastern and Asian cultures than to today’s North American and European ones. Restitution seems to have been a big factor
in several apologies recorded in the Scripture. Consider, for example, the reconciliations between Zacchaeus and his community and between Jacob and Esau.

Zacchaeus was a despised tax collector. His neighbors considered him to be a “sinner,” and they severely criticized Jesus for visiting him. As a result of Jesus’ visit, Zacchaeus said, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount” (Luke 19:8 NIV). Then Jesus responded, “Today salvation has come to this house” (Luke 19:9 NIV). The grammatical construction of Zacchaeus’ promised restitution is interesting. It parallels the subjunctive construction of ceremonial Muslim requests for forgiveness made during their holidays. The way that Zacchaeus avoids a clear confession of his guilt and responsibility is also curious. Yet Jesus clearly forgives Zacchaeus on the strength of his conditional promise to make restitution—even without a clear confession of guilt or acceptance of responsibility.

Jacob cheated his brother Esau out of his inheritance and birth-right. Esau sought retribution and threatened his life. So, Jacob fled hundreds of miles away to his Uncle Laban’s. Twenty years later, Jacob set out for home from his uncle’s place as a rich man with sons, herds, and wives. When he learned that Esau was coming to meet him with 400 armed men, Jacob feared for his life. He sent ahead goats, ewes, rams, donkeys, camels, cows, and bulls by the dozens as a gift for Esau. It appears these were a form of restitution (Genesis 32:13–21). And it worked without any formal words of apology, for the story says, “Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept” (Genesis 33:4–5 NIV).

Concluding Recommendations

When North American missionaries and aid workers take responsibility for tragic events, negative circumstances, hapless insults, hurt feelings, or minor to serious injuries in non-Judeo-Christian cultures, they often undermine potential for reconciliation. In fact, the more that they underscore their sorrow, regret, and responsibility for such events or circumstances, the more they undercut their ability to reconcile with the people who are slighted or suffering. Results are exactly the opposite from expectations for the form of apology that’s primary in North America. The admission of guilt and responsibility serves to vindicate the aggrieved parties in their bitterness. Forgiveness for transparently admitting guilt follows when entities are already in trusting relationships. When trusting relationships do not exist, that kind of transparency simply enhances justification for hostility.

Instead of expressing regret and thereby taking some measure of responsibility for everything from the Crusades to slavery’s middle passage, North American workers should request forgiveness—not for the perceived offenses, but for generic inadequacy. They should use words like, “If there’s anything that we’ve done to offend you, please forgive us.” This language transfers the initiative and responsibility for the relationship to the party that perceives itself to be offended without adding to their excuses for nursing bitterness. Aid, relief and development, gifts, presents, connections, access, and awards can be offered not as bribes to cover offenses, but as restitution for damage done by uncontrollable circumstances. Accepting restitution becomes recognition that uncontrollable forces are to blame, that generic forgiveness is being offered, and that relationship is being established or restored. Working through a third and neutral party may be optimal in many cases.
Summary

Cultures have forms, functions, and meanings. Apologizing is a universal function, accomplished with different forms having different meanings in different cultures. Based upon their social context and religious heritage, North Americans prefer a form of apology that emphasizes responsibility while minimizing dignity. Based upon a different context and heritage, many other cultures prefer a form of apology that maximizes dignity while minimizing responsibility.

Apologizing to people in one culture in the unfamiliar foreign form of another compounds misunderstanding and hostility over the original offense. North American workers and ministry entities habitually aggravate hostility and misunderstanding by apologizing in the form most familiar to them rather than in the form familiar to their audience. To further peace, reconciliation, ministry, and evangelization, those working in cross-cultural relationships need to understand and accommodate forms for apology that are appropriate for the culture in which they are present.

Bruce Sidebotham spent seven years working cross-culturally in Indonesia. He is a Geologist, a Civil Engineer, and a former officer in the Army Corps of Engineers. He has a Master’s degree in Intercultural Studies and Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) from Columbia International University, and a Doctor of Ministry degree from New Geneva Theological Seminary. As a chaplain (Colonel) in the US Army Reserves, Bruce directs the consulting ministry called Operation Reveille that helps service personnel with cross-cultural relations.

Notes

Increasing Gospel Impact Through Skill-Based Discipleship Reflections on Southeast Asia Experiences

Matt Kirkas

Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.

Proverbs 19:21 ESV

The church planters filled the small building on the edge of town. Many of them were the only Christians living in their Muslim communities. More than 30 years of work in Southeast Asia had taught us that these frontline workers needed times of fellowship and prayer to strengthen them in their church planting endeavors.

Consequently, every month we gathered the church planters in a safe location where they could encourage one another with their testimonies of what God was doing through them and also give them spiritual refreshment. One church planter with 10 years of experience stood up to share his testimony. A smile beamed from his face as he began to tell of an elderly man whom he had been discipling.

As was common with this unreached people group, this elderly man had low self-esteem. He had come to faith in Christ two years ago. At first, he was afraid to enter the house where the church was meeting, so he sat outside the door. After a few weeks, he saw that he would not be rejected and entered the house during the meeting. As the church planter was relaying the process of this believer moving into the house and then becoming part of the group, his voice grew more excited and his smile broadened. It felt like the story was building towards a momentous conclusion. Everyone eagerly waited for the next part of the testimony. Finally, the big announcement came. The church planter, bursting with joy, told how this believer ended the house church meeting by leading the closing prayer!

While this church planter was bursting with joy in the accomplishment of the believer, I thought to myself, “Who are we kidding? If it takes two years just to have a new believer work up the courage to pray in front of eight other people, how will we ever reach the tens of millions in this people group?”

It was at this point that I knew something had to change. We had to overcome the problems associated with their low self-esteem so that new believers would proclaim the Good News to their family and friends. The solution to this problem was to recover Jesus’ model of discipleship to involve skill training and accountability rather than only Bible studies and character development.
Worship to Restore

The Bible story is one of worship. God desires that His Name be glorified throughout heaven and earth. Both Satan and humans fell because they wanted to be worshipped. But God did not discard His creation. Instead, this afforded God an opportunity to maximize His glory.

Redemption brings the greatest worship. Throughout eternity, Christ is worshipped as the Lamb whose blood ransomed a people for God (Revelation 5:10). Therefore, whenever sinners repent, God receives greater worship because the repentant acknowledges that they are not God and instead gives worship to the true God.

To achieve His goal of maximizing His worship, God prepared both the means and the method. In the Great Commission, we see God's provisions for us. Jesus said, “I am with you always” (Matthew 28:20). Jesus' presence with us through the Holy Spirit is the means to fulfill the Father's purpose of glorifying His Name among the nations. We cannot fulfill God's purpose without His power. But with His power, nothing can hinder the work of God from being accomplished through everyone who believes.

God also gave us the means to fulfill His purpose. Jesus said to, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). We are seeing the Kingdom of God advance in many places around the world as the Church makes disciples. Disciple-making is the method Jesus modeled and implemented throughout the Book of Acts. The Kingdom of God spread not because the Church had buildings, a mission budget, or an organization. Jesus didn’t even provide them with a boat or a horse so they could travel around proclaiming the Gospel! Rather, Jesus gave them the Holy Spirit and said, “Go do what I have been doing.”

It is a recovery of Jesus’ model of discipleship and its implementation in the Book of Acts that will lead to the Gospel being proclaimed among unreached people groups and churches established in their midst.

A Definition to Repair

We need to recover the meaning of the word “discipleship.” The term has been diluted by Western churches and has therefore led to stagnation in Gospel proclamation. The word “discipleship” often creates an image of a small group Bible study or a one-on-one meeting over coffee with your spiritual mentor to deal with your life issues. While Bible study and mentoring are certainly elements of discipleship, this understanding of discipleship falls far short of what the Bible presents.

Discipleship is not merely learning the content of the Bible and growing in Christ’s likeness. His command to make disciples is so much more; it is the method of missions. Instead of discipleship being primarily a knowledge or character focus, we see that Christ’s method of discipleship balances both knowledge, character, and skill. People need to be trained in how to present the Gospel to others and how to train these new believers to repeat the process. After all, isn’t that what is meant by Jesus' command to go and make disciples? The underlying assumption is that you will go to someone who is not a disciple and make them a disciple. Then this person will obey Jesus’ command by going to someone who is not a disciple and making them a disciple.

Therefore, discipleship requires not just personal, individual, spiritual transformation or an understanding of the Gospel, but also the skill to minister. I believe that much of the
potential of the Church lies dormant not because people are unwilling to proclaim the Gospel to the nations, but because they have never been trained. If they knew how, many would rise up and make Him known.

Skills to Acquire

It has been my experience that churches talk and train a lot about what a disciple is, but don’t have a good grasp of what it means to make disciples. The word “make” draws attention to discipleship being a process. Unbelievers hear the Good News, the Spirit works, and they repent. Now they are to obey the Word of God. Typically, churches will invest in teaching new believers how to have a quiet time or how to memorize Scripture. They may also be asked to help out in a service project. But is that enough to make disciples?

A reading of the Gospels reveals Jesus’ discipleship program. Jesus spent time teaching the Gospel to His disciples, correcting their character, and training them in outreach ministry. Many churches have lost the vision of the Church as a training center in which each person is trained to proclaim the Gospel. Jesus modeled a threefold ministry—teach the Scriptures, proclaim the Good News, and meet the needs of those who are hurting (Matthew 9:35). If we want to equip people with the skills to proclaim the Good News, we need a concerted effort. Learning the skills to make disciples is not difficult, but we must be committed and intentional to structuring our ministries to train every believer to make disciples.

The house-church life in Southeast Asia where I’ve ministered for more than 25 years consists of three main areas of focus: sharing with accountability, studying the Word, and setting goals. Each meeting starts with a time of sharing. The members tell what ministry they did over the previous week: who heard the Gospel through them and what the response was. Then they spend time rejoicing before God for the work that He has done through them. After this time of evaluation, the members will study the Scriptures together as they seek to know God more deeply and grow in understanding the Gospel. Then they end their meeting with goal setting. They make plans for the upcoming week concerning their evangelism efforts and ministry. They identify people they want to share the Gospel with, pray for these people, then commission these disciples to return to their communities to shine as lights.

Individuals in house churches that demonstrate a deeper passion for the Lord will be trained to share the Gospel widely, follow up with new believers, and start their own house church. This training is practical and is done in a one-on-one relationship. Although this approach results in fewer being trained, the impact is greater because those who are trained are active in intentionally and accountably reaching out to others.

Imagine if our established churches would develop a similar model of discipleship. Presently, many churches hold a Bible class for adults after the service. They meet in smaller groups to discuss the sermon they just heard. Some churches have mid-week Bible study groups meeting in homes. However, traditionally, these smaller gatherings mostly focus on teaching and fellowship.

Now what would happen if these churches revamped their small groups to focus on training rather than teaching. Small groups would meet and share about who heard the Gospel through them in the previous week. They would study the Scripture together and then set goals for the upcoming week. With an emphasis on training rather than teaching, church members would become equipped to minister wherever the Lord has placed
them—in their offices, neighborhoods, schools, etc. Adding training to our discipleship programs would result in a greater Gospel impact.

A Message to Share

In Southeast Asia, and in many unreached areas around the globe, as new believers are trained in the skills of doing ministry, the Gospel has been breaking through. Soleh, a national church planter that I work with, was traveling through his area proclaiming the Gospel. He met two men and struck up a conversation with them. One of the men, Ahmed, had been in an accident that left him in a coma for five days. As a result of the accident, Ahmed lost 95 percent of his vision. Of the two men, it was Ahmed who came to faith in Christ.

Soleh immediately began to teach and train Ahmed. Although he was not able to read well due to his functional blindness, Ahmed absorbed the Bible stories. He was baptized and grew in His love for Christ. One of his two wives also came to faith, but his son, who was 30 years old, refused to believe. One day, his son confronted his dad. “Call Soleh here,” he said. “I don’t accept what has happened. Everyone in our family is a Muslim. You must also remain a Muslim.”

Now let me pause the story here. In my 25-plus years of working among Muslims, we have seen this story repeatedly. People respond when they hear a clear Gospel presentation. But when pressure from the community arises, many quickly fold. This time, the story has a different ending. Soleh not only had been meeting with Ahmed to share the content of the Scriptures, but he had also been training Ahmed in practical ways to tell others of the Gospel. They learned and practiced a Gospel presentation. Then they went to a market about 30 minutes away where no one knew Ahmed. There they shared the Gospel with Muslims working in the market. As a result, Ahmed grew in confidence.

This is what was missing all these years. People doubted themselves because they were not trained to master the task they were being asked to undertake. We found that once people practiced it, knew what to say, and had experience doing it with their mentor, they were willing to rise up and proclaim it. Ahmed was filled with confidence. He had proven to himself that he could be a witness for Christ. Now, as his son confronted him, Ahmed held his ground and even turned the tables. He once again told the Gospel to his son saying, “You don’t need to meet Soleh. I can tell you why I am following Jesus. I know the truth. I don’t follow Jesus because of Soleh but because I worship Jesus.”

After overcoming the challenges at home, Ahmed continued to tell others about Christ. In this first year of His walk with Christ, Ahmed shared the Gospel with 112 Muslims, started several house churches and is training five people to start house church networks. Imagine the impact that this would have on our churches if every new believer shared the Gospel with 112 non-Christians in the first year of their Christian experience. If an uneducated, practically blind man can do it, we all can. Ahmed’s words serve as a reminder to all of us. Ahmed told Soleh, “Sure we can sit in our homes, resting or sleeping. But what of our responsibility? We have to show our thanks for our salvation by proclaiming the Good News to others.”

Conclusion

Discipleship is certainly the heart of the biblical mandate as the church interacts with
the outside world, and where his people are intentionally training and developing skills to obey, the Lord is bringing fruit that remains, all over the world.

Matt Kirkas is the Southeast Asia Area Director of Partners International and has been involved in church planting in Southeast Asia for more than 20 years. Matt holds an MA in Islam and Muslim-Christian Relations from Georgetown University, and is ordained in the Reformed Evangelical Church of Indonesia.
I believe a cultural blindness exists at the core worldview level of the western missionary and Quichua student that limits the clear teaching and the student’s comprehension and learning in the area of international theological education. The gospel that penetrated the hearts of our indigenous students did not completely replace their old patterns of thinking and values that relate to their animistic and cultural context. At times, the western theological educator and indigenous student experience only brief touch-points of understanding. These limitations are due to contrasting values and orientations such as: time/event, individual/collective, truth/relationship, guilt/shame, linear/holistic, natural/supernatural, etc. In addition, allegiances to family, churches, organizations, and social obligations weigh heavily on the Quichua student, whose value and identity are intrinsically tied to his family, community and political environment.

Challenges for the Missionary

The teacher of indigenous theological education needs to wear multiple hats. He needs to be a theologian who can interpret the Bible in the historical and cultural context of the passage. He needs to be a missionary who understands how to communicate biblical truth through the historical and cultural context of his indigenous student. Additionally, he needs to be a missionary/educator who is aware of the influence that the western culture has on his own thinking, personal research, teaching, and evaluation of learning. Finally, he must be a student of his own personal culture and biases. The challenge for students’ deep learning and integration grows in proportion to the degree that western missionary is unaware or unable to integrate these perspectives.

Challenges from Within the Quichua Church

Divergent theologies, syncretistic practices, false cults, and political influences have converged to fracture the Quichua church and erode trust. Many indigenous pastors are not able to process biblical concepts into their context and are threatened by educated urban youth who ask hard questions they cannot answer.

The fractured state of the Quichua church reveals a pastoral leadership crisis:
1. Theological training programs have been insufficient in training a pastor to apply the theoretical biblical truth to their concrete context.

2. Churches allow syncretistic practices, and have members who visit the shaman or bruja (witchdoctor) during the week.

3. Well trained pastors have left the ministry for political or business opportunities, or through moral failure.

4. Mission agencies have pulled out, in favor of less reached countries.

5. There is an estimated 10% ratio of Quichua pastors to churches. Within that 10%, several have taken itinerant roles, essentially becoming a pastor to several churches, making the role of shepherding difficult to impossible.

6. Missionaries and social-aid organizations recruit pastors/leaders to represent their ministry and work out of the local church. This effectively puts the church under the ministry goals and priorities of the mission, resulting in a disruption of the local economy, organic ministry, and balance of power that weakens the indigenous leadership.

7. Many of the higher trained pastors have migrated to the city, creating a vacuum of leaders in the rural communities.

8. Very few leaders under the age of forty desire to be a pastor. Of those that do, few can afford the time or cost of a traditional seminary.

An alternative model of theological education is needed. Sadly, after 47 years of theological training in the Chimborazo province, only an estimated 5-10% of the needs for pastoral ministry are being met.
Discipleship Training

Discipleship Training is our term for a biblical model of theological education that attempts to integrate the core content of a western theological seminary into a practical, learning-based model that is oriented to the values of an indigenous culture. Through a combination of academic learning and mentoring relationships, attention can be focused on character development, biblical counseling, and applied learning. Discipleship Training provides a learning environment in the context of discipleship that can serve as a model for the student to train and disciple his leaders at the local level.

Discipleship Training Principles Addressed

1. Learning the language in the context of the culture. Language learning is a life-long process. Because one’s culture is often embedded in their language, it is recommended to continue to pursue language even after one feels they are fluent. While Spanish is the preferred language for education, the Quichua language should be used to explain theological concepts.

Some biblical words do not exist in the indigenous language and were borrowed from Quichua words or phrases that had similar meanings or ideas. For example, the Quichua do not have a word in their language for the biblical concept of sin, so Bible translators borrowed the Quichua word jucha, to refer to sin. Jucha has two basic meanings: it describes a responsibility given to an individual, especially in the context of a wedding, it is also used to describe someone who did not complete, or “fell short” of his or her responsibility. Quichua students have no trouble understanding that the jucha in the Bible falls under the second definition. After a time of class discussion, our students concluded that the picture of sin in the Quichua mind was external, in contrast to the biblical concept, which includes an internal moral element they were not grasping.

Contrary to a biblical worldview, external obligation is the basis for trust in indigenous relationships, including their relationship with God. The “normal” understanding of conviction in this culture relates more to a western understanding of shame, than one of guilt. The biblical picture of guilt that leads to repentance, and the internal change of heart that is needed for biblical transformation, are new concepts to be more deeply explored and internalized. This may explain why there is a high percentage of evangelical Quichua who have not yet been transformed out of syncretism.

2. Teaching theoretical concepts in the context of the students’ practical world helps them explore new ideas in a concrete framework. The indigenous student lives in the context of community. The Quichua often do not make independent decisions, apart from the consideration of others, especially when it affects their immediate family. It is common for example, to see students share ideas in class, including their test answers! In Discipleship Training, we have students study in small groups within the class. This “student team” often works through learning tasks together. Specific open questions help them process theological concepts and begin to explore how to apply them to their lives.¹

Using the familiar to introduce theoretical concepts helps increase our students’ comprehension. Western theology is primarily theoretical and logically structured, and is often defended by a rational apologetic. Indigenous students have trouble connecting theoretical concepts to their concrete reality. When we tie theoretical concepts to the practical reality of the student, he can create a frame of reference from which to learn the new
concept. For example, I recently taught a basic introductory Greek course in the framework of a hermeneutical review. Students gained confidence using the already familiar steps of methods of Bible study, which then provided a bridge to help them grapple with how to apply basic Greek tools in their biblical studies. In a theology course on suffering and injustice, I contrasted the divergent teaching of Liberation Theology with the biblical teaching of suffering. Their own history of centuries of subjugation provided a vivid backdrop in which to examine and process theological issues related to the nature of God, the suffering of Christ, and how God can use suffering to draw us closer to Him.

3. Adapting to indigenous relationship structures can create an interesting tension between developing influence and respect and maintaining our witness and integrity in mentor relationships. In the indigenous worldview, trust is often based on obligation. It is important for the westerner to understand that the Quichua student will often put the missionary in the category of a patrón, meaning Lord or Master.

In the eyes of the student, this comes with unspoken obligations of which the missionary may be unaware. Patrón is a term that has been carried over from the old hacienda-feudal system era. The Quichua served his master as the poor slave, or peón, living under the protection of the hacienda owner, working as his servant. As obligations were fulfilled, trust emerged to strengthen the relationship. Often times the student’s effort to fulfill his perceived obligation is received by the missionary as friendship or kindness. The missionary may be clueless of any perceived contractual nature expected in the growing relationship. At some point, the student will approach the missionary asking for his help. This could be financial, emotional, or even the need to be represented or given a recommendation (a white face opens doors). At times he may want favors that could compromise the integrity of the missionary. If the missionary does not reciprocate, the student may withdraw, eventually become discouraged, and fade out of the program. His perceived trust is eroded when he does not receive what he had hoped for out of the relationship. It is not always so cut and dry; family obligations, power struggles, and even a form of manipulation often step in to confuse things. At times, it can take two to three years to discover some of the real motives or expectations of a student.

The Patrón system is often uncomfortable to the westerner as we are trained and prefer to seek a closer equality in our relationships with the national culture. When a westerner tries to over adapt with the intent of establishing an equal footing with his student, the indigenous may perceive this as foolish, which can result in a loss of respect for the missionary. “Why on earth with all the resources God has given the westerner, would he want to live like me?” After I saw how uncomfortable some of our students became with our equality mindset, I realized that, for their sake, I needed to stay in a role that held to a higher degree of power distance in order to meet their cultural expectations. In time, biblical concepts of grace-based relationships can be introduced and modeled through the discipleship process that will help displace their animistic values of obligation and debts owed as a basis for trust. I plan to explore how deep this is embedded in the Quichua understanding of their relationship with God.

4. Building Koinonia in a learning community. I discovered the power of relationship as an educational tool at the end of teaching a two-year pastoral training course. I met once a week with 15 students in a class setting while taking time to visit in our students’ homes and churches. I worked hard to establish a platform for discipleship often giving time to draw in our students’ experiences into the lesson as they related to the topic. As students shared their burdens and prayed for each other a new spirit of koinonia drew them together.
On the last day of the course, I wished them a happy life and ministry, and thanked them for their effort. To my surprise, after we prayed and the class was over, nobody moved. They sat there quietly, then one of the leaders in the group spoke up and asked, “What’s next?” I told them they did a great job, and now they could go back to their churches and equip their people. But they did not want to leave. We had developed a strong sense of community, a sense of identity that our students did not want to lose. Relationships can create a bond that goes well beyond the academic course. I began to look at our program as a learning community. Since that day over 10 years ago, many of those original relationships remain intact.

5. Teaching through mentor relationships helps form a learning community. I have observed a direct correlation between the comprehension and the commitment level of a student as a result of visiting their families, attending their churches, and walking alongside them in their times of struggle. These relationships happen naturally, are intentional, and often result with a student bringing their issues to the classroom or to me after class. When this happens, their learning aptitude more than triples. Students become increasingly motivated to learn when they find answers in class that help them minister to their people.

6. Building a learning community enhances learning. One of our goals in visiting our students’ churches is to encourage the church to become part of their “learning community” that will serve to support them in prayer and provide opportunities for them to apply their learning in a ministry context.

Early on in our program, many of our younger students would announce they were not able to complete their practical ministry assignment. I had assumed that our student’s church would naturally be excited that their leaders were studying in our program and open their church for students to apply their learning. Upon investigation, I found that we were upsetting the balance of power in their church and our student threatened the leadership resulting in the opposite. It is now part of our application process to be in communication with a student’s church.

When a student registers, he submits a letter of recommendation from his church. Once enrolled, I visit the church and share our objectives with the leadership, ask the church to pray for our student, and open ministry opportunities as part of his application assignment. I have seen churches respond positively when we invite their input and seek their support. If there are issues with the student they usually surface then. As a result, our students’ motivation and learning increase when they are able to apply their studies in a supportive learning environment.

Concluding Principles

1. Some of the most effective theological educators for indigenous students will be Quichua pastors and teachers. A Quichua pastor who has 50% of the training and understanding of a western missionary will most likely be 100% more effective in communicating biblical truth to his people. The trust his people have for him as a leader or pastor, the acceptance he has as an indigenous member of the community, and the clarity he has in the command of his heart language, puts him well ahead of the expat in his ability to communicate biblical truth. When a missionary trains a pastor well, he can have confidence he has multiplied himself 200%.

2. Discipleship Training is a sustainable model that can be multiplied by Quichua
pastors. It is interesting, that at one of the darkest theological times in biblical history, after 400 years of prophetic silence, God sent His Son to train twelve students and empowered them to disciple others. “His concern was not with programs to reach the multitudes, but with the men whom the multitudes would follow.”3 He did the job with only one graduating class! The irony is that when one focuses on a few, they can be equipped at a much deeper level, than with a focus on a crowd. In evaluating the leadership need, a pastoral training movement is needed that is well beyond the capacity of the traditional seminary, one that can deeply equip leaders to train and multiply disciples in their context.

3. If the class the missionary is teaching can be taught by a national leader, step aside, empower the national teacher, and train at a higher level. Often a pastor or leader will invite the missionary to teach a class in his church that he could teach himself. There are multiple reasons for this, including the hopes that such a relationship will bring resources. While it is recommended that the missionary visit a students’ local church to understand and encourage the people he ministers to and model discipleship, care should be taken not to stay too long, as to create a confusion or threat to the power structure of the church. Sometimes a visit can give the appearance that the pastor is under the missionary. There are many outside groups that have unknowingly upset the balance of ministry in a church, as they seek to use the local church as the center for their program. When I visit or teach in the students church, I try to limit my visit to a short time so as not to disrupt the natural balance of our student’s ministry.

4. Partnerships among national churches will greatly enhance the work. The indigenous quest for power and mistrust of each other can isolate leaders in their theological training. Often I am counseled by pastors not to partner with the national church association, not to partner with other mission organizations, and not to partner or even associate with the church over the hill. The quest for power and mistrust among the Quichua are strong. The advantage of the western missionary is that he is accepted by pastors and leaders who do not accept each other. This can give the missionary the ability to bring leaders together.

5. Discipleship should be an intentional part of theological training. It involves being a pastor, educator, mentor, counselor, and coach. Because discipleship tends to be more relationally driven, the personality of the educator can play a dominant role. Care should be taken to present the elements of discipleship clearly so the student can distinguish between the personality of their mentor and the principles of biblical discipleship that will enable the student to grasp and reproduce these principles in the context of his/her own personality and gifts. 4

Since 1994, Ross Hunter and his wife Mary have been missionaries to the highland Quichua of Ecuador. They currently serve with Pioneers International in the area of biblical and theological education and discipleship among Quichua pastors and leaders.

Notes
1. Teaching through Learning Tasks was adapted from Jane Vella’s Taking Learning to Task: Creative Strategies for Teaching Adults (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2000).
International Students in China: Who Will Reach This Vast and Strategic Yet Invisible Group?

Phil Jones

Wearing her hijab, “Mounia” from Yemen heard the gospel and felt the love of God in our international church because of her Rwandan classmate’s invitation and her husband’s permission. Without Arabic or visa for Yemen, instead of flying to Sana’a, we walked two meters to welcome her. From a country with 0.03% evangelicals, could she take the gospel back home?¹

“Lazaro” from Tanzania said with resolve, “While in China, I want to fill my life with the Word of God.” He’s an active member of our fellowship, here with his wife and two little daughters, struggling with racism towards Africans, yet hungry to grow and return home equipped as a disciple of Christ. Could he strengthen the church in Tanzania?

These are some of the almost half a million international students in China, arriving from every corner of the globe into a context where cultural complexity meets contextual limitations and gospel opportunities. They form a mixed, dynamic and growing field of ambitious influencers of the next generation. Among them are the prime ministers, CEOs, policy-makers and leaders of the future. How can the global church embrace this opportunity?

Growth in International Student Population?

Who knew that China is the third largest destination for international students worldwide after the USA and UK?² With 442,733 international students in China during 2016, up 11.4% from 2015, this number has multiplied over the past ten years (figure 8.1). It seems that, with consistent growth, high numbers, and such diversity, China is becoming the “hub of hubs” for impacting the world through international students.

Sending Countries

Students come from virtually everywhere. This map (figure 8.2) from 2016 shows that international students at Tsinghua University were from 116 nationalities.³ Across China, almost 60% of international students come from Asia (including Central
Asia and the Middle East). One explanation may be the growing phenomenon of “glo-cal” students—those who pursue a foreign education while remaining in their country or region.\(^4\) It is cheaper and culturally more comfortable than going to the West.

However, the staggering growth is from Africa, with a 23.7% year-on-year increase from 2015 (figure 8.4). Globally, China is the leading destination for Anglophone Africans.\(^5\) Though South Korea sends the most students from a single nation (15.93%), African students in total constitute the second largest group, with almost one in every seven being African. Scholarships from both China and sending countries drive this growth, as does China’s proactive and engaging geopolitical stance especially in strengthening bilateral economic relationships.\(^6\)

Most of the top 15 sending countries are Asian, and they are incredibly mixed. Eight
of these—totaling almost 120,000 students—are classified as “unreached” or “minimally reached” with the gospel.7

Yet, surprisingly, despite China’s reputation for control and constraint, these students can freely visit an international fellowship or engage with believing classmates. The young adult worldview exploration and reassessment engenders great openness. Is this an opportunity to reach the unreached?

Destinations in China

Though Beijing (17%) and Shanghai (14%) attracted the lion’s share of international students in 2016, there was a notable spread throughout the country.8

Reasons for Coming

Due to a combination of diverse factors, China will continue to grow as a destination for
international students. It has some of the world’s top universities, boasts a great diversity of institutions and programs, and is much cheaper than western destinations. Well over 800 colleges and universities in China accept international students, with many offering accessible undergraduate and postgraduate courses entirely in English.

Moreover, Chinese universities are gaining a reputation as attractive research environments. An outward-facing international education strategy for 2020 combined with massive investment (49,022 scholarships in 2016) has attracted many students. In China, international students account for only 0.9% of total higher education students, compared to over 20% in the UK and Australia, leaving significant capacity to welcome more foreign students.

**Student Diversity**

Compared to many western contexts, the international student population in China seems more culturally diverse, so there is more potential for intercultural conflict. What is acceptable to one student may offend another. In addition, cultural naïveté makes it hard for students from culturally homogeneous societies to comprehend, accept, and befriend the other.

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**Table 8.1  Top 15 countries sending students to China**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Total Students in China from this country/region</th>
<th>Percentage of all international students in China</th>
<th>Evangelicals in that country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>70,540</td>
<td>15.93%</td>
<td>16.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Africa (all countries)</td>
<td>61,594</td>
<td>13.91%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>23,838</td>
<td>5.38%</td>
<td>26.45%</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>23,044</td>
<td>5.20%</td>
<td>0.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>18,717</td>
<td>4.23%</td>
<td>2.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>18,626</td>
<td>4.21%</td>
<td>0.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>17,971</td>
<td>4.23%</td>
<td>2.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>14,714</td>
<td>3.32%</td>
<td>3.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>13,996</td>
<td>3.16%</td>
<td>0.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>13,595</td>
<td>3.07%</td>
<td>0.58%</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>10,639</td>
<td>2.40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>10,414</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Laos</td>
<td>9,907</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Mongolia</td>
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<td>1.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>8,145</td>
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<td>2.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>6,880</td>
<td>1.55%</td>
<td>3.25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN CHINA: WHO WILL REACH THIS VAST AND STRATEGIC YET INVISIBLE GROUP?
It is widely assumed that all international students in China speak English. They do not. In fact, many international students, like the growing number from Central Asia, do not have functional English. Furthermore, even those who speak English cannot always understand one another. So, sometimes the best way to communicate is with limited Mandarin—the new lingua franca. Linguistic diversity means that ministry is not just in English. When an American Christian international student recently gathered over a dozen classmates and friends together for a Christmas party—from the USA, South Korea, Thailand, Japan, UK, Australia, Mongolia, Uruguay, Russia, and China—the conversation was entirely in Mandarin. Though the most effective ministry is of course in someone’s heart language, anyone—foreign or local—who can speak Mandarin can easily connect with vast numbers of non-English-speaking international students.

Religious diversity means international students include Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, atheists, agnostics, and Baha’i. Amongst those identifying as Christians, one finds all affiliations and levels of commitment. Various cults also have an established presence, attracting lonely and stressed students.
All this precludes a “one size fits all” ministry model and demands creativity. Despite the challenges, international student ministry offers wonderful opportunities for gospel proclamation. With the control of family and home culture replaced with intriguing new freedom, students are asking, “What do I believe and why?”

Leadership and Ministry Potential

Furthermore, a surprising number of Christian students come to China with church leadership experience. While some are confused or lukewarm in faith, others are eager to be equipped for ministry and are incredibly responsive to capable, intentional, and loving ministry training. A Pakistani Christian student wrote, “Just need more prayers so I could work more for Christ and become a source of light for others.” Is this an opportunity to strengthen churches and train people for ministry?

Simply by being an international student and navigating all of the challenges listed above (unless they collapse under the strain), students become culturally adaptive and resilient. Is this an opportunity to train international students for cross-cultural mission beyond the diaspora in another culture?

Many international students will become influencers of culture and society in their home countries, as some already are. China’s scholarship policy attracts a higher proportion of graduate and postgraduate students compared to the West. Is this an opportunity to influence students’ home cultures with the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Pressures and Isolation

However, there remain significant China-specific challenges facing students. The long-term homogeneity of Chinese culture heightens the culture stress of international students. Anyone who is not Chinese-looking is a 外国人, an “outside person,” and cultural integration proves difficult. Conversely, Asian students without the often-presumed language and culture smarts can face ridicule and stress.

Africans feel alienated, fearful, and powerless in the face of racism towards them. A Kenyan student sadly reported that often on a crowded bus both her adjacent seats would be empty—as people avoid sitting next to a dark-skinned person. Depression is widespread and suicidal tendencies not uncommon, but mental health and medical services are either rarely available or prohibitively expensive.

Dormitories rarely have spaces to congregate and socialize, while students’ financial, academic, and time pressures work against forming deep friendships. The most popular messaging apps that students use—Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp—are blocked in China, choking the connection back home. Restricted freedom of association and university rules against proselytizing can leave students confused and fearful.

All these challenges contribute to isolation and loneliness which can weaken Christian international students, who may then drift towards unhelpful influences. Some students are entirely unaware that healthy international churches exist, or that a Bible study might meet on their campus. In the midst of these challenges, there is an opportunity to show the compelling love of Christ and embrace students in loving community.

International student ministry in China inevitably means it is pioneering. Yes, the challenges are immense, but so are the opportunities. Who will commit themselves to reaching, maturing and equipping these students to be salt and light throughout the world?
Lessons from History

The conviction that God calls people from every nation, and that the nations had come to them, motivated the pioneers of international student ministry (ISM).\(^8\)

Why and How did ISM Movements Start?

John R. Mott was moved to care for and evangelize foreign students in the USA. In 1911 he founded the Committee on Friendly Relations Among Foreign Students.\(^9\) As an international student in China in 1948, Bob Finley noticed the political impact of Chinese students returning from Russia. The strategic opportunities drove him to establish International Students Inc. on home soil “to evangelize, train and deploy foreign students back to their home countries for ministry.” And in 1954 Mark Hanna and John Bjorkland launched American Citizens Residing Overseas for Study and Service (ACROSS) “to empower Americans to study overseas and thereby evangelize in close[d] countries.”\(^{20}\)

Diaspora Missiology

In the last fifteen years, there has been significant development in diaspora missiology, which offers a biblical rationale and strategy for ISM, and gives us a framework for missions to, through, and beyond the diaspora.\(^{21}\) Leiton Chinn writes compellingly about the biblical basis and strategic value of ISM as part of diaspora missions.\(^{22}\) Elsewhere he describes his own journey and that of some churches in the USA from not seeing or caring about international students to now noticing and actively reaching out to them.\(^{23}\) With the same zeal, he points to ISM in Asia as “a most strategic yet least expensive global mission opportunity.”\(^{24}\) Is this a journey on which the church in China has now embarked?

Although there is a mind-boggling diversity of cultures and languages amongst international students in China, in many ways they can be considered together as a diaspora—a group of people maintaining strong connections with their home culture but living temporarily in another.\(^{25}\) However, this is a heterogeneous diaspora gathered from almost every country and region of the globe.

From a kingdom perspective, the theological necessity and strategic value of ISM have been well established. But compared to the West, very few churches, organizations or individuals are dedicated to serving international students in China. If ISM in China is commanded by God, has encouraging historical precedents, and makes sense strategically, who will reach them?

Church in China

Christians in every place have a joyful responsibility to reach everyone in that place. So, is ISM a gift to the church in China? “Church in China” here means any local expression of the church inside China, including the national TSPM church, house or family churches (including returnee-based churches), international churches, and campus ministries. ISM is inexpensive yet high-impact; it provides global connection locally and allows every member to be involved through using their gifts. Those unable to serve abroad can still engage in international missions at home, while others can prepare for working, serving and studying abroad.\(^{26}\)
Notwithstanding existing pressures, it could be argued that the Chinese church bears the primary responsibility to welcome these temporary neighbors with the gospel.

China’s international engagement is growing economically and politically. Perhaps Chinese believers could follow this trend and get more involved with internationals within their borders. Some Chinese brothers and sisters conclude they have no facilities or legal context for ISM, or that they lack experience and don’t know where to start. Others believe ISM is only for well-educated church members, and probably requires significant funds and highly organized teams. Many equate cross-cultural ministry with going outside of China or at least to remote domestic minorities. It takes courage to pray for, listen to, respect and discern the needs of international students in the megacities of China.27

Some international students attend national TSPM churches which occasionally hold English services, but broader contextual constraints may make it difficult for these churches to reach international students effectively. Though notionally receptive to welcoming internationals, these churches appear to be doing very little in this area.

Vast numbers of Chinese have been converted while studying abroad. The challenges of reintegration into society and connecting with a local church are immense, so some churches have emerged which are mostly composed of returnees. Could the culturally and linguistically adept Christian returnees embrace this ministry opportunity?

A handful of house churches, both open and more discreet, are recognizing the joyful duty of sharing the gospel with international students living in China. While at times feeling ill-equipped, culturally uncertain and under-resourced, they have an excitement about reaching out. Some fellowships have quite a few academics and professors at universities where international student are located. Churches have set up “Chinese corners” (akin to English corners or conversation classes in the West) through which they hope to build friendships with international students who are looking for community and the opportunity to improve their Mandarin. However, some are unclear where the international students actually live, don’t know how to connect with them, and are fearful about inviting in the foreigner.

Encouragingly, despite language and cultural barriers and other hindering factors, some churches have been prioritizing reaching international students. One leader recently said that if the local church doesn’t preach the gospel to the nations, especially when they’ve come to China, then “we are sinning against God.”

Some local campus-based college ministries are also beginning to put international students on their radar. The idea of cultural exchange centers is growing as both a legitimate and strategic context in which to build friendships with international students. Undoubtedly there are lessons from the successful indigenization of college ministry in China which could inform a “sideways” development into ISM.

Although international churches in China are minor players within the “Church in China” category, healthy ones do operate in many major cities and have relative freedom to meet openly. Some have non-English congregations. Unfortunately, some Christian students arrive with the preconception that there is no church in China, so they hide and read their Bible secretly in their dorm room. For others, the neon lights of new liberties distract them from seeking out fellowship.

And though these international churches certainly welcome any international student who attends, there remain significant political and capacity limitations. And there are challenges of doing church in a non-first language, a church culture that’s radically different from “back home,” and an environment with strong ethnic cliques and cultural
misunderstandings.

However, students who do integrate into these fellowships often encounter great encouragement from meeting with those who are culturally similar and others who can sympathize with them. And to many, it is also a surprising and glorious thing to witness the unity with diversity of the nations worshipping together, as described in Revelation 7.

**Church Outside of China**

Finally, how can the global church outside of China be part of this ISM vision in China? First and foremost, brothers and sisters could commit to praying for this. Experienced ISM workers could be sent to China to support international churches or to come alongside local Chinese fellowships and campus ministries. Networking could be established between healthy national ISMs, pioneering ISMs outside of China, international churches within China, global sending organizations, and the nascent Chinese ISM movement.

The idea of sending people to a place to minister to those who are not of that place can be a challenge. Some sending organizations have historically focused only on strengthening the Chinese church. Quite apart from recognizing the reality of diaspora mission “from everywhere to everywhere,” could embracing ISM be a strategic way for them to grow the Chinese church’s cross-cultural vision and capacity to fulfill the Great Commission? The reality of diasporas raises healthy questions about the best shape and mode of sending agencies.28

Today programs exist to facilitate mission-minded students to go abroad for study in China. Up until now, they have focused on reaching Chinese, not international students, but gradually they are embracing the strategic value of ISM-focused study-abroad students. For example, the Nigerian church is considering sending graduate students who are eager to reach internationals. Since the Christian center has shifted to Africa, Asia, and Latin America, there may be a responsibility for those regions to send ISM workers and mission-minded students to China.

**The Road Ahead**

Let the global church together with the people of God in China pray for international students in China. We must repent for lack of vision and action, and now joyfully take up this opportunity.

There may be much gospel fruit from listening to Chinese Christians’ hopes, fears, and needs in the area of reaching international students. Together we need to understand the context better, identify those on whom the Lord has placed a burden for international students, discern opportunities, and develop practical ministry models.

Perhaps God is giving us the compassion Jesus had, placing international students squarely on the agenda of both the local church in China and the global church beyond. “Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Matthew 9:38). International students in China are this field, ripe for harvest. Who will love them? 🌼
Phil Jones (pseudonym) and his wife have been working amongst international students for over twelve years, both in their home country and for three years in China. They are growing in their awareness of the opportunities to reach the nations who have come to China.

Notes

11. 忠建丰 [Zhong Jianfeng, ed.], “2016年度我国来华留学生情况统计.”


26. Leiton Chinn, “International Student Ministry.”

27. Andy Johnson, Missions: How the Local Church Goes Global, 9marks: Building
Healthy Churches (Crossway, 2017), Loc. 1176–1180, Kindle.

I had the good fortune recently to spend a few days of strategic dialogue with regional heads of an international mission agency. One of the major topics for discussion concerned the issue of “localization” which has always been part of the heritage of this organization but has become a priority moving forward. This agency is seeking to be more at home in the many local cultures in which it operates and to allow for more diversity in the forms of governance and accountability across this range of contexts. Where the parent body has been the instigator of structural discourse in partner meetings, now global to local accountability will be more of a “two-way street.”

However, as soon as the glow of these ideals is pressed down from the level of ideals to the level of concrete realities, anxieties arise concerning the possibility of losing cohesion across the various units. Human nature being what it is, some would prefer to err on the side of diversity and disbursement of power to individual centres being keenly aware of the alien nature and the negative impact of organizational structures imposed from an assumed global centre. For others, the issues of utilizing the standard decision-making protocols and fiscal responsibility are critical concerns. Localisation seems “nice in theory” but low in feasibility. These are further complicated by the enormous wealth disparity between the founding centre and the financial dependency of a range of first-world global partners.

This sort of discourse is a perennial issue for many mission organizations. Somehow while we want to affirm that units distant in time and space from the original founding organizational structure are just as much authentically the same mission and have the same status as the central body, we also want to affirm that they have a right to “do things their way” rather than the way things are done in “the West.” It is far from clear just how much devolution of power and diversity of structure is ideal. Old colonial habits die hard in the form of semi-conscious assumptions and the difficulty in thinking through a third way.

This sort of discussion regarding what is essential and substantially shared, and what is negotiable and locally distinct requires a model of thinking that is not captured by either hierarchical or temporary project based organizational models. As I witnessed the discussions back and forth I could not help but note the parallels to what we can find out about the historical debates concerning the nature of God in the first centuries of the church. There too, church leaders had to resolve the seeming paradoxical nature of God’s
self-revelation being both one and many always. Revisiting that ancient debate could well provide normative guidelines within which the theological priority of localisation in mission can be conceptualised. Also, hopefully, we can do better than just find a political trade-off between ideals and reality.

**Theological Paradoxes and the Trinity**

The history of the debate really is a history of the principles of theological method. Those who begin with unexamined philosophical assumptions inherited from Greek philosophy were not going to represent the Biblical data even-handedly. These debates were critical. The Trinity is that doctrine that impinges upon all other doctrines and practice.

All parties in these historical debates were right to affirm the undivided simplicity and the “one-ness” of the God we worship. The heresies “to the right” and “to the left” could not envisage the “three-ness” or, the complexity of the Trinity without threatening the simplicity and the oneness. Consequently both heresies attempted to protect the one-ness of the Godhead in different ways. The left solution was at the expense of the deity of both the Son and the Spirit; the right, at the expense of the eternal nature of the persons.

The intentions of both poles were noble in trying to preserve the worship that God was due. The difficulties arose as theologians assumed that the ineffable nature of God could be captured in the sorts of logic that work in the domain of human community. In their effect, both heresies are also a “trade-off” type of solution rather than a dynamic reflection of revealed truth. And both tend to mishear the other pole and feed off the perceived weakness of the other position. Sound familiar?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Left Wing</th>
<th>Orthodoxy</th>
<th>Right Wing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subordinationism</td>
<td>Exemplars: Praxeas, Sabelius</td>
<td>Modalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origen, Arius</td>
<td>Athanasius, the Capadocians</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theological Options to the Right and to the Left**

Sabellius and his type had trouble reconciling a tri-unity of individual separate persons with the simplicity and unity of God. To get around this tension they construed the three divine persons as only three temporary modes of the way God reveals himself through history. Later versions would extend this cyclical movement of God through modes so as to accomplish salvation, but as three periods in salvation history corresponding to fluidity in the mode of God. The Father reveals himself successively as Father, Son and Spirit. And at the end of this scheme any semblance of a Three-ness ceases to exist and we are left only with the Father, the divine being in total.

The “left wing” error, espoused by Arius and his kind, also cannot quite get their heads around how, if the One God is an indivisible simplicity, the Father could also be the Son let alone the Spirit. The very idea of generation to them is confused with giving birth. While
the Son may be eternal or begotten from the very essence of the Father and is not a creature, but he is subordinate to the Father and seated in the divine pecking order somewhere above the creature but less than the God who can only be one. The Spirit fares no better and is not only not deity but just an impersonal force.

The Orthodox Both-and-Model

When the confession “one God in three persons” easily roles off our tongues this captures centuries of theological modelling and prayerful debate. And despite misunderstandings that often arose between the Eastern and Western church, a consensus emerged that captured the complexity of the Scriptural witness. This includes without the eternal Son the Father is not the eternal Father. Their begetting and being begotten is always happening in eternity. All three “persons” possess all the divine attributes. The persons are not parts of God as God is “simple” having no divisions. This God is still the following assertions.

Eternal Equality of the Distinctions

Triune unity is complex. All those qualities that make God uniquely Himself is to be found both equally and totally within each person. The Son is begotten by the Father but this does not mean there was ever a moment when the Father was without Son of Spirit. As Athanasius argued, and always but one subject.

Distinct in Role Within the Godhead

This “bringing forth” is essential to being the Father. Being begotten is essential to the Son and “proceeding from” Father and Son is only true of the Spirit. Each of the persons has a distinct role within the work of creation and salvation that corresponds to their situation or role within the Godhead. In every work of the Godhead the father is the originator, the Son the mediator and the Spirit actualises the will of the one God. Yet each of the persons are not so much autonomous and isolated individuals as would be the case in our modern idea of “person” but each is a unique hypostasis, to use the Eastern word. They literally stand up under their own weight as “subsistences.” They are centres of consciousness, will, and power. These are real “entities” and not just relationships between interchangeable centres. The Father does not just recapitulate himself in each successive hypostasis. The father could not have had two or even more sons nor could he take the place of the Son at Calvary.

Mutual Interpenetration in All God’s Works

And yet, all persons in fact interpenetrate the other and are present in the works of God “perichoretically.” This equality of essence and mutual interpenetration means that the Trinity is much more than an accidental community of divine individuals who have negotiated a common goal or will. There is one Subject sharing a common purpose from eternity unto eternity wherever any of the persons are at work.

Differentiation in Person, Not Essence

Nor does the father transmit or generate the essence or substance but generates only the personhood of the Son and “spirates” the personhood of the Spirit. If this was not the case then it would imply that the Son and Spirit are something less than God which would
be the case if they also received their divine essence from him.

From Divine Relating to Human Relating

There are tantalising analogies between the sorts of historical solutions to the question of the nature of God, how He is to be worshipped and how he is to be served in the advancement of his Kingdom. There has been a debate in the last couple of decades about whether or how we can build inferences from the Godhead for human social realities. Many theologians have felt that since we were created in God’s image, our human political arrangements should correlate with the sorts of inter-personal relationships of the Godhead. Others have questioned this inference. If we make too direct a relationship between God’s life and our political life this neglects that our God is entirely “other” to us as our creator. Nor can we interpenetrate another being. We all exist as discrete individuals. The Scriptures never exhort us to model our lives upon the Trinity but upon Jesus Christ.

Yet reflecting upon divine and human parallels is still a valid quest as long as we do not seek to infer back from our creaturely reflections onto the Godhead, which is the weakness of “natural theology.” Deep down, there is no greater legitimation for what we assume about the right way to order our interpersonal power relationships than how we think about the way God normally relates within the eternal community. The ways the church through the ages has navigated between the twin errors of subordinationism and modalism shows that the same theological reflexes can be deployed when solving localization issues at an organizational level.

Heretical Organizational Politics

The polar options in organizational life are strikingly similar in form to these theological models and just as liable to lose the essential tensions required to frame an orthodox model of the Godhead.

1. A “Subordinationist” organizational rationality would privilege the founding organization with the responsibility to share their expertise with junior partners. The driving metaphor is that of teaching the newbie how to implement the processes that have taken much time to hone in the parent organization. If adoption into full status is to occur then trust has to be earned as new partners demonstrate they can understand instructions. But the parent always is the parent and the partner always the child. The child organization may have its own personality and preferred ways of doing things, but its best interest is served by aspiring to suborn any local innovations that aren’t aligned with the mindset of the parent. Efficiency requires that there be a standardized way to control the operation of the offspring. When the children cannot or will not follow the official template, then interventions and remediation must take place. This stress on accountability negates the notion that the new organization is indeed a “hypostasis” able to “stand on its own feet.” It reinforces passive compliance or, fosters resistance. This mono-centric mindset requires a tireless vigilance from the centre to monitor deviance or incompetence.

2. By contrast, a “Modalist” organizational rationality would seek to honour each emanation of the original mission it sets up each new cultural iteration of the parent
organizations. Making a priority of empowerment honours evolutionary progress as if this was essentially the handiwork of God. The essential mission of the founding organization are transformed into more mature versions. These later emanations may produce unrecognisable expressions, even the eventual dissolution of the mission itself. The relationship of original to successive localised organization actually becomes more that of learner rather than the expert. The parent role is to bless the new and push it off into the unknown future without connection to historical traditions. The founding partner should relinquish their right to question the meaning of processes. While the originator may continue to exist it may as well be spatially in a different universe. By blessing of all the values of the new organization, a form of blind trust is required or the once parent. This is a momentary arrangement too as other evolutions of the organization must lead on to even more resonant organizational forms.

These two options tend to polarise groups as they feed off the fears and resentment of the other pole. The Subordinationist fears that a decoupled approach would automatically lead to a dangerously syncretistic organizational culture. With more and more local values affirmed with each successive generation and the resources invested so far could be squandered on off-centre pursuits. Modalists may fear formal accountability required of the new partner organization is a meaningless enterprise and inherently patronising. The right to self-determination to re-interpret the mission from God is as fundamental as the right to breathe one’s own air.

The Triune Third Way

The doctrine of the Trinity would suggest that we can within cautious limits find mundane human parallels for uniquely divine commonplaces. Three parallels suggest themselves:

1. The Triune principle of eternal equality would suggest that all emanations of a mission agency are just as much the work of God as the first. There may be one alone who is originator, but the offspring agency does not derive its legitimacy from the founder but from sharing in the same mission.

2. Role validity would suggest that the offspring organization is truly such to the extent that it can sustain itself and manage its own decision making. If this is truly “hypostatic” then this refers to the recognition that the offspring organization is recognised as having a will and a way of its own.

3. With the differentiation principle the parent organization would see itself as at its best when the offspring organization is affirmed in their contextualised incarnation of the parent. Generativity, not replication is the central attribute of the founding organization.

Three organizational types may then be contrasted as seen in the table below. These can alert us immediately in those times when our thinking is reflecting a loss of Trinitarian tension.
1. Where God calls a partner into being all are of the same theological status. This would suggest that in all things the mode of inter-organizational communication should be essentially adult to adult once a newer entity has substantiated itself. Communication is two-way not just injected into ignorant receivers. When either partner feels constrained to be unilaterally the expert, or, learner, an organizational heresy looms.

2. The driving metaphor “generation” of the work of the partner agencies rather than either that of the newer partner being liberated “do their own thing,” or, being bound to implement the “common sense” of the parent. A mission organization would not be missional at all if it did not generate imaginative agents. The founding organization comes into its own as these remain in fellowship with the partner and the partner acknowledges their origin with a note of indebtedness.

3. A Trinitarian culture high on mutual trust flows from a shared set of explicit theological convictions about the bona fides of each partner. An adoptionistic mindset only doles out trust when the partner has proven themselves worthy. A Modalist approach turns away from the founding organization as if they/God brought themselves into existence unaided. Mutual trust implies an unfiltered exchange not a “need to know” discourse. It is trust rather than competence that is proven over time.

4. The purpose of the parent is not to direct their energies to uniformalising its organizational offspring. This has the whiff of cohesion brought about by the coercive force of legal constraint rather than shared Spiritual passion. Just as the Trinity is not the Father repeating himself twice confuses essence with identity. Trinitarian organizing implies that each partner is an un-substitutable person who has their own way of seeing, deciding and acting that reflect their cultural setting. The new partner does not have the freedom to deviate from core purpose becoming so enculturated that they uncritically reflect their local cultural norms.

5. A mono-centric model of relating places the responsibility and source of the life juices of the organization in the central nervous system of the organization as if the whole depends on one brain. Such thinking is patronisingly Adoptionistic at best, or, eternally subordinationist at worse. Modalism would tend toward an optimistic view of inevitable evolutionary progress. A “whatever happens was meant to be” pantheism

Table 9.2 Organizational types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wing</th>
<th>Subordinationism and Adoptionism</th>
<th>Trinitarianism</th>
<th>Modalism and Tritheism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transaction</td>
<td>Adult – Child</td>
<td>Adult – Child</td>
<td>Adult – Child</td>
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<tr>
<td>Driving Metaphor</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>Generation</td>
<td>Independence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trust Level</td>
<td>Earned Trust</td>
<td>Mutual Trust</td>
<td>Blind Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact / Goal</td>
<td>Standardization</td>
<td>Incarnation</td>
<td>Reincarnation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Map</td>
<td>Mono-centricity</td>
<td>Poly-centricity</td>
<td>De-coupling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Where God calls a partner into being all are of the same theological status. This would suggest that in all things the mode of inter-organizational communication should be essentially adult to adult once a newer entity has substantiated itself. Communication is two-way not just injected into ignorant receivers. When either partner feels constrained to be unilaterally the expert, or, learner, an organizational heresy looms.

2. The driving metaphor “generation” of the work of the partner agencies rather than either that of the newer partner being liberated “do their own thing,” or, being bound to implement the “common sense” of the parent. A mission organization would not be missional at all if it did not generate imaginative agents. The founding organization comes into its own as these remain in fellowship with the partner and the partner acknowledges their origin with a note of indebtedness.

3. A Trinitarian culture high on mutual trust flows from a shared set of explicit theological convictions about the bona fides of each partner. An adoptionistic mindset only doles out trust when the partner has proven themselves worthy. A Modalist approach turns away from the founding organization as if they/God brought themselves into existence unaided. Mutual trust implies an unfiltered exchange not a “need to know” discourse. It is trust rather than competence that is proven over time.

4. The purpose of the parent is not to direct their energies to uniformalising its organizational offspring. This has the whiff of cohesion brought about by the coercive force of legal constraint rather than shared Spiritual passion. Just as the Trinity is not the Father repeating himself twice confuses essence with identity. Trinitarian organizing implies that each partner is an un-substitutable person who has their own way of seeing, deciding and acting that reflect their cultural setting. The new partner does not have the freedom to deviate from core purpose becoming so enculturated that they uncritically reflect their local cultural norms.

5. A mono-centric model of relating places the responsibility and source of the life juices of the organization in the central nervous system of the organization as if the whole depends on one brain. Such thinking is patronisingly Adoptionistic at best, or, eternally subordinationist at worse. Modalism would tend toward an optimistic view of inevitable evolutionary progress. A “whatever happens was meant to be” pantheism
results in a de-coupled organization. Such auto-generativity results in a less of a distinctive identity not more. The Trinitarian option remains wherever founders and partners share the theological conviction that a polycentric power distribution always was the intentional work of the Spirit.

Conclusion

So, there is a theological warrant in intra-organizational relating, that the relational life of the Trinity may act to curb our natural tendency to polarize toward our own preferred pole; our own psychological preferences. We are liable to caricature other approaches as heretical or worse; just plain incompetent! The church fathers’ reflection on Scripture shows that it is possible to adopt flexible mental models that adequately represent the ineffable Triune community. That same love of God’s revelation should facilitate organizational collaboration that respects the origination, differentiation, initiative, and mutuality in the complex inter-cultural mission agency.

Jeffrey Pugh is a practical theologian specializing in organizational culture change. A former Baptist Pastor and church consultant who for years was postgraduate research dean at Melbourne School of Theology, in 2017 he was appointed as principal at Summer Institute of Linguistics Australia, with the responsibility of developing their graduate and postgraduate language development program. He concurrently teaches theology and leadership studies for various institutions around Australia and South East Asia.
The Holistic Worldview Analysis (HWVA) strategy is a holistic development strategy that engages closely with a community to understand its survival strategy and then works towards strengthening it so that the community is able to solve most of its own problems. While this concept should excite most people by the way in which it engages with the community, building on the ownership and capability they already have; it often doesn’t find common ground with those that believe development is a top down process.

HWVA Explained

The use of the HWVA strategy is part of a larger overarching strategy called the W3P7 strategy which is a holistic and integrated development program developed by the author for Integral mission. The core principle in implementing the HWVA strategy is to work with an identified community and find out what their ‘survival strategy’ is. This is done using the HWVA tool. The HWVA tool consists of first identifying and tracking the community’s revenue stream and secondly looking at the range of problems they encounter. Both the revenue stream and the problems that a community faces fluctuate with the future uncertainties they encounter, so this becomes the third dimension that is explored and understood.

All three of these dimensions go towards developing the HWVA of the community. The HWVA tool was developed by the author in the early 2000s after field testing it in multiple locations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>W3</th>
<th>P7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Works</td>
<td>Strategic prayer for the community (4 level)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word</td>
<td>God’s people on the ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wonders</td>
<td>Prayer for healing of the land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plan of action implemented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Powers of darkness confronted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partnership with the local church</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partnering with God in what He is doing</td>
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countries and contexts. Once the HWVA of the community has been determined, it forms the core of the development program, because the HWVA is a visual snapshot of the ‘survival strategy’ of the community.

The work of engaging with the community in a new area, involves first identifying the community’s own resource persons. These are essentially members of the community that have a special concern for their community. They are ordinary citizens from that community and may or may not have an official position in it, but they are definitely people whom the community values and respects. The process is initially facilitated by an outsider who is well versed with development strategy and participatory development. Ultimately, the community takes over the process. The external facilitator enables the following through active community engagement:

- Identify priorities for development through the HWVA and number them for future tracking. The priority ranking once established at the beginning of the project (baseline), becomes the final code for the rest of the project.
- Help analyze each of the development priorities to see if they are ‘capacities’ or ‘vulnerabilities’ and coding them green (capacity) or red (vulnerability).
- Establishing a development response plan for each development priority and based on the impact it will have on completion, slot it under one of the three impact objectives as appropriate: Promote holistic well-being, prevent disease and mitigate disasters, and provide an appropriate intervention to alleviate an immediate problem.
- Enable the development of a Gantt chart to plan the activities through the calendar year and from which it is very easy to calculate costs and develop a budget.
- Help the community identify and mobilize resources to support the development plan.

Once this core information has been developed, the information is displayed at a prominent place in the community (clinic/office/meeting space) and all members of the community are encouraged to study and understand it. Sometimes the community uses a big banner to display the HWVA, while others have it on a poster, or painted on the wall of their meeting room. Development activities then start off in the community with the core group leading the process and the external facilitator acting as a catalyst and technical support, encouraging the process, and helping solve problems when they arise. Even if the leadership group changes over a period of time (1–3 years), care has to be taken to ensure that the leadership core is populated by active members.

New members are trained by former ones or by the external facilitator on how to carry out the following:

- Livelihood or revenue analysis
- Problem or challenge analysis
- Uncertainty analysis
- Holistic Worldview Analysis (HWVA)
- SSEI (Survival Strategy Empowerment Index)
- CCEI (Corporate Community Empowerment Index)
- VCI (Values Change Index)
- Documentation of progress against plan of action
Philosophy and Development Framework

The core philosophy of the program is the recognition that every community has its own development priorities and that good development practice must recognize this and engage with the community to enable it to carry out its own development priorities. When this is done correctly, there is ownership of the goal and process remains sustainable. When the goals are achieved, and even when the community is moving toward achieving them, the community gets empowered. An important principle in the process of engagement with the community is to always be conscious that the external person facilitating the development ‘is participating with the community in its development priorities’ and not vice-versa. Interventions therefore are only in the areas where there are shortcomings of technology, or resources or skills.

For the first phase of the project, if a program is not a part of the community’s survival strategy (as portrayed by the HWVA) it is not taken up for development. These resources in a rural project are usually land for agriculture and households, water, forests, livestock, grazing fields, etcetera. The community then identifies skills that they have to interact with the stock of resources to produce livelihood in alignment to the stakeholders’ (the original residents of the community) interests. When skills from within the community itself (innermost circle of the HWVA—showing what the community controls) are inadequate to effectively utilize community resources, they enter into informal partnerships with “outsiders” to make up for the inadequacies. This is seen very clearly in the second circle of the HWVA, related to the areas controlled by outsiders.

This process is referred to as an emergent survival strategy, with additions continuing to take place progressively. As this survival strategy emerges, areas develop that the community is unable to find ‘outsiders’ to help. It then adds the ‘supernatural’ to the mix of partnerships to ‘take care of the gaps in the survival strategy’. (The ‘supernatural’ dimension consists of the ‘local gods, spirits and the community’s ancestors.’) Since they have no other options, this becomes the survival strategy of the community and is reflected in its worldview. While this emergent survival strategy may seem ‘strange’ to outsiders, it is a very real thing to the community—a combination of relationships, permutations, and combinations of the empirical and supernatural world to make up their survival strategy. The 4 ‘S’s (Stock of resources, Skill base, Stakeholders interests, and the engagement with the Supernatural in the community) thus complete the integrated and holistic survival strategy of the community that can be seen reflected at a given point of time in the HWVA of the community. Development agencies must recognize and understand this reality of the community to be able to engage with it effectively and address issues of transition.

Core Components and Critical Characteristics

The HWVA is therefore a core component of the process. In launching a program in a new area, the first thing that is carried out is a HWVA. This is done, as mentioned earlier, with the core group who must become very familiar with the technique and share it with the rest of the community. After the HWVA is developed and the development priorities are identified, responses for each of these are identified by the community with support from the agency facilitating the process, and this is then developed into a log frame with activities and outputs.

From the activity list a simple Gantt chart is developed to show when various activities
will take place and from this the budget is determined. The impact objectives for the pro-
gram cover three key areas, namely:

1. Holistic well-being and security of livelihood promoted
2. Diseases prevented and impact of disasters mitigated
3. Appropriate external intervention introduced to solve any immediate problem so that
   the program gets a boost at the start.

While the three impact objectives generically are the same for every program the devel-
opment priorities that result in achieving these extremely generic impact objectives will
vary a great deal based on the needs and context of each community. From the start, the
community is shown how to ‘measure all that matters.’ Like everything else mentioned as
being a critical component of the program, tracking progress and the ability to analyze
progress or the lack thereof is also critical. Each success brings about greater community
engagement and empowerment. The community leaders soon begin to recognize what is
important for their progress and even start learning to say “no” to things that don’t help
them strengthen their survival strategy. They thus become active engagers and planners
rather than passive recipients. The leadership core is also encouraged to be on the look-
out for resources to resource the development plan. It is for this reason that care must
be taken initially to keep the program budget as small as possible so that it operates on
‘demand pull’ rather than ‘supply push’ as with several top down programs. When all these
precautions are taken to ensure that the core components and critical characteristics are
addressed, the program grows and blooms to the fullness of its potential.

**Strategy for Site Selection Process and Identifying Development Priorities**

Site selection is a very important part of the process and this is where alignment takes
place with the facilitating organization’s priorities. If an organization is focused on health,
it should choose to identify its program in areas where there is high disease incidence.
Alternately high poverty, low or sub-standard infrastructure, and places that are generally
marginalized and neglected could be other areas of focus. Such places are also areas where
there are unreached and underserviced people groups. It’s very important to realize that
the context of each community is different hence the response cannot be a cookie cutter
program.

Once an area is identified for a potential project, the most strategic community in the
area is selected, and an initial reconnaissance visit to meet the people is initiated. The
community leaders are met to explain the strategy and concept behind the program. If
the village or community is interested in working with the organization initiating the
program, they are asked to identify a ‘core group’ of persons from among them who are
all residents and key stakeholders in the development of their village or community. This
core group becomes the leadership core or the first interface group with whom the ini-
tiating organization works. The facilitator should be familiar with the strategy and well
versed in participatory development. The first task undertaken as a group (core group and
the external facilitator) is a needs assessment. The group is trained on how to perform the
assessment and then it is carried out in the village.

The participatory tool that is used is referred to as the HWVA. The precursors to this exercise are:

- Problem analysis of the community as a whole
- Uncertainty analysis, which helps understand fluctuations likely to occur in the community’s revenue, changes in the status of the problems that the community faces, and the risks that the community faces with reference to its survival strategy.
- Revenue stream, which analyzes the livelihoods to determine the sources of revenue in the community.

Community development essentially involves engaging with this survival strategy to strengthen it. Since this is what the community has been trying to do as a corporate whole, everything done to strengthen the survival strategy of the community serves to empower it.

Impact and Impact Objectives

The first and most important impact to measure is the extent to which the Survival Strategy of the community has been strengthened. In this example of the HWVA of a community from Slovakia (see figure 10.1), one can see the development priorities listed from 1–12. (This of course will vary in number from project to project, depending on the local context).

On the right the 12 development priorities are indicated with boxes colored either green (representing capacity) or red (representing vulnerability). These are...
determined by looking at the number of ‘seeds’ in each pie segment of the three concentric circles on the left. The innermost circle is what the community can do on its own. The second outer circle is what it depends on from outsiders, and the outermost circle represents the ‘gap’ between what needs to be done and what is able to be done by the community with the help and support of outsiders. So, the seeds in the innermost circle represent the community’s current capacity, the seeds in the outermost circle represent the current vulnerability, and the second circle represents future vulnerability.

To determine whether each sector (represented by the development priorities—in this case 12 of them) is currently a capacity or a vulnerability, calculate the total number of seeds in the inner most circle and compare it to the total of the two outer rings for that sector or pie segment. If the total of the inner most segment is more than the total of the two outer segments, then it is marked as a ‘Capacity’ and shaded green (6, 8, 7, 12). If, on the other hand the total of the outer 2 segments is more than the total of the inner most circle, it is considered a ‘vulnerability’ and marked red (1, 11, 10, 3, 2, 9, 5, 4).

The SSEI (Survival Strategy Empowerment Index) is determined by dividing the number of greens (4) by the total number of development priorities (12). Therefore, $4/12=0.33$ is the SSEI for this particular community. The date when the exercise was conducted gives the status of the SSEI at that particular time. Hence, the SSEI for the above community is 0.33 in that particular year.

The exercise is conducted on an annual basis to check the progress, to see if the number of sectors where the community has ‘Capacities’ has increased. The SSEI for each year becomes a consolidated figure of progress and can be depicted on a graph as shown in the SSEI diagram (figure 10.2), tracking it over the years, and using the base line as a reference point to measure progress.

The progress for each of the development priorities can also be tracked on an annual basis for the length of time the project has been operational. Positive progress is manifested by an increase in the community’s control on that sector, with progressive reduction of the gap and a progressive reduction in the dependence on external support. Since dependence on outsiders beyond the very initial phase is not very conducive to sustainability, while tracking progress, if one sees a tendency for dependence to continue, corrective action by way of changes or modifications in the program is needed.
• Besides the SSEI, the following additional assessments can also be made to track progress:
  • CCEI (Corporate Community Empowerment Index)
  • VCI (Values Change Index)
  • Improvement in access to primary and secondary education
  • General reduction in diseases in the area
  • Improved access to safe water
  • Improved status of sanitation in the community (freedom from Environmental Enteropathy)
  • Accountability standards—such as the Accord network standards of excellence in Integral mission
  • For more details see: 2015 IWMC - Measuring What Matters by Dr. Ravi I. Jayakaran at https://youtu.be/46UTLU70KzA

As representatives of the Lord Jesus on this earth we are responsible to do whatever we do ‘as unto Him.’ This brings Him the glory, and also demonstrates to the community that we love them and care for them because God loves them and cares for them. When this is on track we are in alignment to complete all aspects of the W3P7 strategy.

The Larger W3P7 Strategy

Integral mission is about demonstrating and proclaiming the gospel. One without the other makes it incomplete and ineffectual. As evangelicals, proclaiming the gospel comes easy to us. However, especially when we engage with the poor, the marginalized, and the unreached, if what we proclaim is not backed up by how we demonstrate the love of God, all we say sounds like empty words.

As the W3P7 strategy gets into full action, transformational changes will start happening in the community due to Integral mission. More people will come to know the Lord and be added to the local church in the community. The best part of this will be that the new converts will be disciples whose empirical and spiritual lives will be in balance. These balanced and integral disciples will be best suited to bring others like themselves into the body of Christ. As they grow in numbers and multiply in influence, so does the continuous significant impact of the movement.

Dr. Ravi Jayakaran is the President of Medical Ambassadors International and has decades of experience leading international poverty reduction and development programs. He has provided technical support in 23+ countries on issues of transformational development, integral mission, relief and development, public health, and prevention of trafficking. Ravi is a Catalyst for the Lausanne Movement and on the ACCORD Network and the Chalmers Center boards.

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Ambassadors for the King to the Muslim world must be equipped to give an answer for the hope that lies within (1 Peter 3:15). We are taught that we must contend for the faith (Jude 3), and that we must take every thought against the knowledge of God captive under Christ’s authority (2 Corinthians 10:5). Every missionary to the Muslim world wrestles with how to approach their Muslim friend when confronted with objections that strike at the very authority and core message of Christianity.

Over the years I have identified five major Muslim objections to Christianity as follows: (1) The allegation that the Bible has been changed or corrupted (Tahrif il Lafzi). (2) The doctrine of the Trinity is really tri-theism. (3) The claim that Christ’s deity is committing shirk or attributing deity to something that is not. (4) The doctrine of the crucifixion or suffering of Christ is impossible because God would not allow his prophets to suffer. (5) The doctrine of the atonement is unjust because one must pay for one’s own sins.

Since 1998 I have been engaging with these Muslim objections: first with my Turkish brother-in-law, and then later with my Pakistani brother-in-law. My engagement deepened even more with my move to Turkey in 2002, and became more refined later with a completion of a MA in Muslim studies from Columbia International University. However, it was not until I was introduced to Reformed Presuppositional Apologetics (hereafter, RPA) at Reformed Theological Seminary that I began to see that many of my methods were neither faithful to Scripture nor historical Christian apologetic models that were employed with Muslims.

I remember answering Muslim objections that the Bible has been changed or corrupted using the methods suggested to me in the past. I would spend hours with my Muslim friends explaining the manuscript evidences for the Bible, and I would draw out charts that would explain the canon of the NT. I would have them look at their own Qur’an and show them that the Qur’an said our books were valid, and challenge them to search out all we discussed. Although everything I said to my Muslim friends was true and might sound compelling, it rarely ever led them to further study or a true desire to search out the Scripture.

It was later, after being immersed in the language and culture, that I learned the Muslim culture does not generally emphasize critical thinking, rarely scrutinizes evidences, and generally does not question authorities. If I quoted a verse from the Qur’an concerning
an objection they believed it was a “Christian missionary version” of the Qur’an that I was using and they would ignore what was said. Even if they would ask their Imam about the verse, they were told not to question the Qur’an. They also would not ask me a clarifying question if they did not understand (as one should not interrupt a teacher), and would sit patiently until I was finished.

When I was introduced to RPA I began to realize that I had previously failed in my apologetics fundamentally in two respects: I did not honor the Bible’s view of itself, the biblical God, and I did not get at the heart of the issue, being ultimate authority.

I also realized that missionaries are generally not using a Presuppositional Approach with Muslims (hereafter, PAM) in their apologetics, precisely because this approach has not been written about, articulated, or been made readily accessible to them. Generally syncretistic, historical, and archaeological evidences are often employed to persuade the Muslim.

When I began to understand Reformed Presuppositional Apologetics, I began to apply the principles with Muslims. It was then that, instead of spending literally hours with a Muslim answering the objection to the corruption of the Bible or others, I would spend five to ten minutes and see an immediate connection with the Muslim and understanding of the issues at hand. I also found that this model had a strong biblical framework, was easy to teach, and I was able to better fulfill my task of equipping the saints. After my students learned this model, they would not feel overwhelmed, but rather equipped and encouraged to engage with Muslims.

The most complicated component to this model that I have found is its own name—“Reformed Presuppositional Apologetics.” This in itself may be a reason it is generally not known or used as it sounds highly academic and intimidating.

What is Presuppositionalism?

The force behind this method is that one must presuppose the existence of the Christian God and the authority of Scripture in order for any fact of human experience to be intelligible.1

I believe there are two premises that RPA is based upon: (1) A high view of God and Scripture, which is a commitment of the heart to the Lordship of Christ and his word. and (2) A low view of man and his inability, which recognizes man’s total depravity and spiritual inability.

There are four major features that undergird RPA: (1) There is no neutral ground with a Muslim and all facts must be filtered through the lens of Scriptures. (2) Making use of the sense of the divine that is inherent in the Muslim, yet at the same time recognizing their suppression of truth. (3) Muslim objections are answered in light of the ontological Trinity, and (4) Christianity as defended as a unit based upon the authority of the Scripture.

When applied to Muslim objections I refer to this model as a Presuppositional Approach with Muslims (PAM). The same principles of argumentation from Reformed presuppositionalism are applied to Muslim objections. Presuppositionalism has traditionally been used in the context of atheism, and the first step is to move away from disbelief in God and move towards Christian theism. The first step of the PAM approach is to move away from doubting the infallibility and authority of the Bible.
The Two-Step Approach of PAM

There is a two-step approach to Reformed Presuppositional Apologetics when used with Muslims. Greg Bahnsen summarizes the presuppositionalist approach in his book *Van Til’s Apologetic*, “apologetics is to move beyond the recognition of the presuppositional nature of the disagreement between the believer and the unbeliever and shows whose presuppositions are correct.”

This first aspect of presuppositionalism, negative apologetics, Bahnsen describes as requiring the apologist to take the offense. The offensive is described by both Van Til and Bahnsen as “removing the foundation of the unbeliever’s argument.” Thus in presuppositional apologetics there is a strong focus to reduce the unbeliever’s worldview to absurdity.

The second aspect to PAM is the positive apologetic and that is presenting the faith of Christianity as the only viable option to the Muslim worldview and authority. Bahnsen explains that it is presenting “the Christian worldview to be true from the impossibility of the contrary.”

Step One: PAM Positive Apologetic

The positive apologetic aspect of PAM has three features. PAM primarily focuses its defense by (1) appealing to Christianity’s absolute authority; the biblical God and His revealed word, (2) using the Christian’s testimony and life experience to demonstrate they are living with no contradiction to their authority, and (3) examining historical, archaeological, and scientific evidences that also attest to the truths found in the authority.

The three features of PAM are to be used to show the consistency, rationality, and superiority of the Christian worldview. This is to be done after the Muslim’s foundation has been shown wanting and that in fact, Muslims in many areas have been living according to the Christian worldview. The apologetic or positive side to PAM is to give them the only replacement they can have to their faulty system and present a clear gospel message.
The PAM negative apologetic challenges three areas of the Muslim faith. (1) The Muslim’s ultimate authorities that shape Islam’s worldview and religion are critically examined. (2) PAM assesses the testimony that should be experienced out of strictly adhering to Islam’s ultimate authorities, and points out any contradiction that may lie within. (3) PAM examines historical, archeological, and scientific issues inherent in Islam. These three areas are to be examined and attacked for their inherent inconsistencies.

There are three features of the PAM negative apologetic and each point is to be examined and attacked for its inherent inconsistencies. The focus for PAM in both aspects of negative and positive apologetics however is aimed at the ultimate authority.

![Figure 11.2](image)

The negative aspect of the PAM argument is to evaluate where a Muslim’s worldview collapses on itself. The method seeks to do an internal critique of all three areas mentioned in the negative apologetic. This challenges the Muslim according to their absolute authority, and can be used to demonstrate that their worldview is irrational and incoherent. PAM shows the negative aspects of Islamic teaching and presents to the Muslim the logical conclusions, which must follow if lived out strictly according to their sources.

PAM can appeal to the laws of logic and moral absolutes when speaking to the Muslim especially in regards to their notion of a *tawhidic* God. For example the Unitarian concept of God cannot give account for an eternal, loving, personal, communicating, and relational God. When challenged that God is eternal, loving, personal, and communicating, Muslims would affirm this. However, the question is for God to be personal, communicating, and loving, in eternity past with whom did God love, communicate with and relate to personally? Only plurality in the Godhead adequately answers this question.

PAM posits to Muslims that they are living inconsistently with their primary sources, and in fact, whether they are aware of this or not, they are borrowing from the Christian worldview. After presenting the negative aspects to the Muslim, PAM presents the antithesis to their worldview and explains how for the Muslim to live and think rationally he must adopt the Christian worldview. The *reductio ad absurdum* (reducing their view to absurdity) is to be used in all three areas of the PAM negative apologetic.
Example of the PAM Negative Apologetic

When answering the objection that God’s word has been changed or corrupted I suggest the apologist begin quite forcefully and passionately, for example:

I cannot believe that you would insult God by suggesting that finite, mortal men could change an infinite all-powerful eternal God’s word. You are diminishing the true God’s power, authority, and sovereignty. I cannot believe you would have such a low view of God and high view of man. This is absurd at best and blasphemous at worst. If God has allowed his word to be changed in the past, how do you know with certainty the Qur’an you possess today is trustworthy? How can one know with certainty that God will not allow this again in the future?

A few simple questions can be asked by follow up, concerning the nature of God:

1. Do you believe that God is eternal? 2. Do you believe that God changes? 3. Do you believe that God’s word is separate from himself or a part God’s being? If it is a part of who God is, then it necessarily means that God’s word is eternal. 4. Do you believe that God is all-powerful and infinite? 5. Do you believe that God is all good and wise?

These questions appeal to the sense of the divine in the Muslim (Rom. 1:18–23).

On the mission field the apologist sometimes has only a few precious minutes with a Muslim. In the city of Istanbul with a population of around twenty million a missionary could encounter several Muslims a day: on the boat, on a bus, on a train, in a taxi, or sitting in a tea garden. Since this objection is the most common and most fundamental, and the window of opportunity may be very short, it is imperative that the apologist/missionary be equipped to speak truth to the Muslim and challenge him.

The above argument of the PAM method is very practical and challenging for the Muslim. Of course, time permitting, one could go into the other aspects of the PAM method, which would be extremely helpful. I would suggest that after challenging the Muslim in the areas of their ultimate authorities (the Qur’an and Allah), the missionary then give their Muslim friend a copy of the Bible and encourage him or her to read it.

Example of the PAM Positive Apologetic

The PAM apologetic approach forces the Muslim to either accept the Bible as authoritative, in which case they must submit to its teachings, or reject the authority of the Bible. This makes Reformed Presuppositional Apologetics (RPA), as Van Til said, a defense of Christianity as a unit. The Muslim challenge of biblical authority is the most important objection to answer when speaking to a Muslim. If the Bible is authoritative that necessarily means that the Qur’an is a lie and Islam is a false religion, since their message and morals are antithetical to each other. The Muslim’s system therefore would need to be discarded and replaced so as to come under the authority of Jesus Christ.

If the Muslim decides that he will reject the authority of the Bible, he is faced with the following dilemmas: (1) He must come to terms with rejecting the verses of the Qur’an that assume the opposite. (2) He must deny that God’s words are eternal. (3) He must live in
doubt concerning the validity of his own book. He must recognize that the Islamic God can change, is not good, is not wise, is not sovereign, is not all-powerful, is not absolute, deceives people, and is not trustworthy. If he is intellectually honest he will be forced to search out when the so-called corruption took place and present the evidence.

If the Muslim understands and submits to the authoritative nature of the Bible he will not utterly dismiss the Trinity, the deity of Jesus, and the crucifixion as an atoning sacrifice. The Christian apologist then will take the time to go through Scripture and explain these doctrines and show their centrality to the Bible (Tawrat, Zabur, and Injil) and that this was how God chose to reveal himself and his plan. The fulfilled prophesies concerning Jesus are also compelling and may be used to attest to the reliability and authority of the Bible.

Conclusion

The PAM model is also practical in the sense that it can be explained in two simple steps, that is the negative and positive apologetic, each with three areas. The negative apologetic includes an internal critique of authority, an experiential challenge, and an evidential challenge. The negative arguments presented against the Qur'an, hadith, sirat, Muslim experience, and evidences, reduces the worldview of the Muslim to absurdity. The positive apologetic includes the claim that only the Christian worldview offers a coherent system of faith and practice and is the only alternative to the Muslim worldview. The biblical God and his word are authoritative and harmonize with human experience, laws of logic, morals, and can evidentially be verified.

The Muslim objection that the Bible has been changed or corrupted, is foundational for the Muslim because it is from this false doctrine that all other objections to Christianity stem. Once the authority of the Bible is established, the Trinity, lordship of Christ, the atonement, and other disputed doctrines can be easily explained to the Muslim upon the authority of God's unchanging word, thereby defending Christianity as a unit.

The Muslim, challenged by the presuppositional method, will be presented with a faith that does not rest in the wisdom of men or plausible arguments. The faith imparted will present the biblical God and his word for what they are, the ultimate authority and foundation of the Christian faith. The BMB’s discipleship and theology will also be founded on the premise that Jesus Christ is Lord and his word is authoritative and should be obeyed.

Yakup Korkmaz (pseudonym) has been a church planter in Turkey since 2002. BS Pastoral Studies, Clarks Summit University, MAR, Reformed Theological Seminary, MA Muslim Studies, and PhD student at Columbia International University.

Notes

4. Bahnsen, Van Til’s Apologetic, 108; Cornelius Van Til, An Introduction to Systematic
The primary source for authority for all Muslims in the world is the Qur’an. For Sunni Muslims the second source of authority would be the six accepted Hadith. The third category of literature utilized is the Sirat or the biographical stories of the life of Muhammad. More importantly Muslims tend make up their own version of Islam via folk stories or convenience to fit their life-style and beliefs. The majority of Muslims I have encountered make up their own version of Islam according to what they think Islam should be or their version is a mix and match of philosophies, folk religion, Christianity, and is highly syncretistic. Their version generally resembles nothing of what their primary sources actually teach.

This is not an exhaustive illustration of how PAM is used and only presents a small aspect of the method.

This direct approach may seem offensive to Westerners, however Muslims will only respect people who are passionate about what they believe, and passion in Muslim culture often comes out in “heated” debate. I have been in many conversations with Muslims while my Western friends listen in horror (not understanding Turkish) and thinking a fight could break out at any minute, only to see us (the Muslim and I) embrace each other later.

I suggest that the apologist should bring up the Muslim claim that the Bible has been changed and corrupted first. This breaks the ice and gives you an opportunity to speak the truth about this and give them further resources about the subject. Nearly every Muslim I have ever met with has never even seen a Bible, much less read it. This will be the first time the Muslim will have ever seen a Bible and now they have been presented with valid arguments concerning why they must read it.
Mary Slessor was an impressive woman. Born in 1848 near Aberdeen, Scotland, nothing in her early years would have led one to think she would become such a significant person in mission work in Calabar (Nigeria). Her family was poor, her father an alcoholic, and most of her siblings died very young. Yet somehow amidst all the poverty and tragedy of her early years, Slessor developed an unshakeable faith and commitment to the spread of the Gospel. That faith and commitment carried her through years of mission work that would—and did—overwhelm many others.1

Early Years

By the age of 11, Slessor was already working in the woolen mills in Scotland. Her mother was diligent about taking the children to church every week, and Mary did receive enough education to be able to read before she started work. Once employed in the mills, she attended night school to continue learning basic subjects such as reading, writing, math, history, and Bible.

Slessor came to faith as a young person and quickly showed courage, commitment, and the gift of evangelism. As a teenager, she began volunteering to work with neighborhood children as part of her church’s ministry. She would go out into the nearby slums to evangelize and distribute the church newsletter. The neighborhoods were rough and she frequently was harassed by both youth and adult men who didn’t like the church’s work. Although the opposition was scary, Slessor didn’t let it stop her from sharing the Gospel. She trusted God and learned to be strong and not show fear, even though she felt it keenly. Showing fear, she discovered, led to greater harassment, whereas being strong often led others to back down. It was a lesson that would serve her well when she arrived in Calabar years later.

At the age of 25, Slessor responded to a wave of missionary impulse that swept through Scotland at the news of David Livingstone’s death. By this time her father and most of her siblings had died; her mother was in relatively stable condition with her two younger sisters, and the time seemed ripe for her to go overseas. She specifically requested a posting to Calabar through the sending board of the Presbyterian Church. Although she lacked the middle-class upbringing and education that the Board typically required, they
were impressed by her commitment and her effective local ministry. They agreed to send her out after she went through a training program in Edinburgh. In 1875, at the age of 27, Slessor sailed for Africa.

Arrival in Africa

The last quarter of the 19th century were the days when missionaries to Africa took their coffins with them. A commitment to work in Africa was for most a life commitment, literally. Still, for Slessor as for many others, the early days were filled with the romance of being in a new place and fulfilling her call to mission work. She was impressed with the existing work in Duke Town, where missionaries and national African workers lived and labored together. She thought the country was beautiful and was fascinated by the friendly women and children who welcomed her there.

Her early months were spent getting to know the people, the region, the existing work, and the local languages. She also struggled to make sense of the way people lived and of some of the local practices which were so utterly foreign to her Scottish customs. Fortunately, some of the more seasoned missionaries were exemplary role models of treating everyone, missionaries and nationals, with dignity and respect, and Slessor was able to observe and then adopt some of their ways.

Over time she acculturated to the lifestyle of her adopted people, living among them in hand-made houses of mud and thatch, eating the same food as they did, and generally following their lifestyle and rhythms. She quickly began to convert to less Victorian, more national ways of doing things: she cut her hair short, climbed trees, and ran in petticoats without her skirt. She also traveled to places where women normally didn’t go. Her fierce commitment to the people and to the Gospel propelled her to flout convention if convention would hamper witness.

Her Activism on Behalf of the Powerless

Slessor’s utter commitment to the people and her willingness to speak of God’s love earned her a very high degree of respect from nationals. Early on, she opposed some of the painful rituals that were commonly used to divine guilt and witchcraft. She argued that they were both counter to the Gospel and useless as a means of determining guilt. Instead she proposed the use of an existing truth ritual, which she believed mirrored the Old Testament oath practice from Numbers 5 of drinking bitter water. Along with the oath she included a hearing. In making these arguments, she was preferring one local ritual over another, the one that was least damaging and yet still trusted by the people. Over time, as she maintained her position and listened carefully to the various disputes, people came to trust her and then to seek her out as an arbiter of quarrels.

A particular focus for her was defending powerless and defenseless people. She often took the side of those who had been accused of causing harm to another through evil spells or malicious thoughts. She also took a stand for children who had been discarded by their parents. A particular area of concern was twins. According to local beliefs, twins were evil and were often left to die; the mothers of twins were similarly cast out. Slessor argued that there was nothing evil about twins or mothers who bore twins, and she frequently rescued abandoned babies, twins or not. She believed in the value of all human life and acted consistently upon that belief. Sadly, many of her “babies” did not live long, but she
did raise at least six to adulthood. Her care for the people and her willingness to adopt and raise any abandoned child she found eventually earned her the title “Ma Akamba” or “Great Mother.”

Because of the level of trust and respect accorded her by local people, and her reputation for standing up for the powerless and oppressed, at two points in her life the British government appointed her their representative. Although her role as a British representative raises significant and important questions regarding the practice of colonizing and the role missionaries did or did not play in that effort, it seems clear that in Slessor’s case the choice was good for the people of Calabar. She seemed able to represent them fairly and caringly to the British authorities, and she was sometimes—though not always—able to prevent misunderstandings that could have led to attack by British soldiers.

It seems clear that God was showing her special favor in her work. Perhaps the most well known story was the time she and others of her household were crossing the river in two canoes, with some local boatmen. A female hippo surged up out of the water and attacked her canoe. Slessor grabbed the bamboo pole from one of the boatmen and began hitting the hippo’s back, shouting for it to go away. To everyone’s astonishment, the hippo crossed to the other side of the river and did not return to attack them. Slessor told everyone that it was God who had protected them. Stories and events such as these were common in her life, though not all were quite so dramatic.

Her Struggles and Sufferings

Throughout the course of her life, Slessor struggled with many things missionaries today still face: demand for timely, exact reports, orders from “home” that made little sense on the field; differences of opinion with both colleagues and nationals on how to move forward, and what was appropriate for her as a single woman. Perhaps Slessor’s biggest critics over the years were members of the sending board back in Scotland. They wanted regular reports filled with encouraging stories to share with the people back home; they also wanted an account of exactly how she spent her support funds. Slessor was not particularly good at meeting their requirements. She argued that all of her correspondence to the homeland should count as reports of her work, not just the specific forms the board requested.

Regarding the work on the field, the board was reluctant to permit her to venture into the rural areas alone, but she did it anyway because of the great need she saw there. Some of those at home, as well as some of her local colleagues, were appalled by her decisions to dress more like the local people than a city person in Edinburgh, and her willingness to work with men and chiefs just as much as with women and children. In all of these areas, Slessor was far more likely to follow what she perceived as the Holy Spirit leading her into ministry than what she felt were the dictates of the Board who were far away and didn’t understand the situation on the ground.

Still, in one interesting area she did fully submit to the Board’s authority. Several years into her work in the rural areas, a young male missionary named Charles Morrison arrived in Duke Town to teach. The two of them formed a close friendship and he eventually proposed. They requested permission to marry from the Board, which was effectively denied. The Board refused to re-assign Morrison to the rural areas but required him to continue teaching in the city. As Slessor was unwilling to abandon her fruitful rural work, she reluctantly dissolved the engagement though she remained friends with Morrison and his
family throughout her lifetime. Even in this instance, it seems that her decision had more
to do with following God's leading than obeying the Board. Had Morrison been assigned
to the rural area she would happily have married him; but for her, the calling to rural work
superseded even the calling to marriage—a trait that many single women missionaries
have demonstrated over the last 200 years and still demonstrate today.

Slessor also suffered greatly for her faith and commitment. Her suffering was obvious
through her physical illnesses. She had numerous bouts of malaria, boils, and digestive
strains. The work-related suffering was harder to see but just as challenging for her spiritu-
ally and emotionally: seeing the local people engage in practices that to her were contrary
to the Gospel. From nudity to drinking, to arranged marriages and female genital mutila-
tion to warring and killing, much of what she saw distressed her enormously. Repeatedly
over the course of her life, her faith propelled her into action, often action of the kind she
had learned as an adolescent in the slums of Dundee. Her first line of action was prayer,
and her second line of action was to take a stand for right and for righteousness. The latter
did not always make her popular, but it gained her respect and above all, helped others to
listen when she proclaimed the Gospel.

The final area of suffering for Slessor could be called the pains of non-response from
those at home. Over and over during the course of her life, she begged for more work-
ers to come to Calabar. She wrote letters and she visited churches and mission societies
on her trips back to Scotland. She recruited people to come and work directly with her,
or in the educational and medical ministries of the Presbyterian mission. A few people
came and stayed; a number came and left or died; but to Slessor's mind, there were never
enough workers.

Later in her life she began to castigate the church at home for what she perceived as
their attitude of neglect. They were willing to send money, but to Slessor, money was a
secondary need. The real demand was for people, dedicated to the spread of the Gospel
and committed enough to the cause to accept a different and often challenging way of life.
Such people, she lamented, were scarce. On the other hand, colonizing workers with a goal
of trade and moneymaking were plentiful. Although she wished for more missionaries,
she also evangelized and cared for the single men sent out as engineers and traders.

Her Spirituality

In her final years, Slessor noted two important “life lessons” in her journal. The first, she
said, was to live out the Gospel calling by going and preaching—a lesson she clearly had
taken seriously all her life. The second was to love the Bible. She had learned to read at a
young age, loved reading, and read ceaselessly her whole life. Above all, she read and loved
the Bible. And it had served her well as a source of wisdom as she taught and settled dis-
putes among local people. A third “lesson” that she lived out was prayer: personal prayer,
prayer with her adopted children, prayer at church, and prayer in work. She lamented
that the church at home was not praying enough, otherwise, she was sure, they would be
sending more missionaries to the work!

Slessor's spirituality had her always looking upward, with a heart that yearned for the
eternal. She explained:

In Christ, we become new creatures. His life becomes ours. Take that word “life” and
turn it over and over and press it and try to measure it, and see what it will yield. Eternal
life is a magnificent idea which comprises everything the heart can yearn after. Do not your hearts yearn for this life, this blessed and eternal life, which the Son of God so freely offers?²

Mary Slessor showed her spirituality in many ways, but probably primarily through activism. From her early Christian life in Scotland, through her entire time on mission field in Nigeria, she was characterized by a spirituality reminiscent of an Old Testament prophet. She was not fearless, but she never allowed fear to deter her from following God’s calling on her life. She spoke up and spoke out when she saw behavior contrary to the Gospel. She continued preaching despite open opposition. She took a stand against injustice toward the poor, the powerless, the persecuted, and the discarded of society. And in everything she trusted God to carry her safely through whatever might happen. ³

Leanne Dzubinski, PhD, is Associate Professor and Chair of the Intercultural Studies Graduate Department at Biola University. Prior to Biola, she was a missionary in Europe for 18 years.

Notes

1. Primary source for this article: Jeanette Hardage, Mary Slessor - Everybody’s Mother: The Era and Impact of a Victorian Missionary (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008).
If it be true that second century Christians sometimes formed themselves into burial clubs in order to achieve a type of organization legal under Roman law, then that fact could give the Czechs, the Basques, and other oppressed minorities today some good ideas on how to run an underground church in an unconventional form. The whole matter of unconventional forms of the church reminds one of the incident when Charlie Brown asked Lucy what church she belonged to, and she replied that she didn’t belong to a church but to a coffee house.

The amazing thing looking back over the centuries is that the essential ingredients of Christian worship and fellowship have taken on or taken over so many different kinds of structures. The Jesuits and the Salvation Army operate a structure drawn in part from a military pattern. Some indigenous Pentecostal churches overseas have grown up so isolated from historic ecclesiastical structures that they have adapted for their needs what is apparently a business structure, and it works with startling efficiency. On the other hand, it isn’t any secret that the Roman Church as a whole has prospered, struggled, and in an age of democracy more recently staggered under a governmental pattern borrowed in countless aspects from the civil structure of the Roman Empire. The early Quakers, the Plymouth Brethren, the restorationist Churches of Christ, and others, have been determined to go back to the structure of the “New Testament Church,” which itself was obviously borrowed mainly from the synagogue. In his case, Calvin talked about the New Testament Church, but no doubt unconsciously drew a good deal of his church order from the civil government of the Swiss canton. This was probably the source of the now-rare “collegiate ministry” in the Reformed tradition, where there is no one senior pastor, but a group of equal pastors.

But elastic as the word church is, it is rarely stretched to fit a whole group of now-common structures such as the above mentioned coffee house, the Inter-Varsity Bible study group, the International Christian Leadership “prayer breakfast,” the shipboard Navigator prayer cell, and so on. The fact that Christ is among those two or three that gather together in His Name doesn’t apparently decide the issue: most ecclesiastics will generously acknowledge all these structures as part of Christendom, but not as specifically “church” structures. Thus, out go the second century burial clubs; out go the small groups. And where, pray tell, can you fit in that most curious
and influential Spanish movement called Opus Dei?

Indeed, it is to some extent today the very variety and vitality of all these “non-churchly” structures that leads some of the younger turks among theologians to wonder out loud whether the traditional institution of the church is really necessary. Harvey Cox, in referring to the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship in The Secular City, speaks of “the strength and tenacity of this remarkable organization.” He goes out of his way to object to IVCF’s “indefensible theology,” but he is impressed by its unique structural ability that allows it to live within the university world. In fact, some of these theologians even wonder if we can’t get along entirely without that moss-covered, club structure that conducts mild-mannered and mainly meaningless formal religious rites at the sacred hours on Sunday morning. Where that kind of a description is accurate, the conclusion is hard to avoid. This is why to such people, immersed as they are in a veritable sea of nominality, the phrase church renewal is the mission today.

No, not quite. These same young Turks would assure us that the ultimate mission is to remake society itself. In any case, note that the mission is definitely not to extend the church. These men are so fed up with nominality that more of the same is worse, not better. They would rather slim the church down before, or instead of, extending it. Thus McGavran’s church growth analysis is for them precisely the wrong thing at the wrong time. And, for them and their churches it may well be, unless they discover (1) that McGavran does not merely mean numerical growth by his famous phrase, and (2) he certainly is not talking about multiplying dead churches.

But if neither the nature nor the mission of the church is wonderfully clear these days, what about the various explicitly “mission structures”? If we are not clear about the results desired, how can we be clear about the kinds of instruments needed? Ruben Lores has a stimulating article entitled “The Mission of Missions” in the spring, 1968, issue of the Evangelical Missions Quarterly. He stresses very well the need for truly international and supranational mission structures, but does not actually spell out the precise mission of missions. Replying in the summer issue, C. Peter Wagner points out the need to distinguish between “church-related” missions and “service-related” missions, suggesting that the latter are more readily internationalized than the former. Does the structure of a mission affect its purpose and vice-versa?

It is in fact the very purpose of this article to emphasize that further conversation about the mission of missions must be based upon a clear idea of what the fundamental structures of mission are. As an attempt to stir up more thinking on this subject, I would like to propose as a tentative vocabulary of discussion the use of two terms: vertical structures and horizontal structures. The two words vertical and horizontal come from current discussion of the labor movement. The strife between the AFL and the CIO was in great part due to the fact that the AFL consisted primarily of craft unions which, for example, took in all the carpenters across the United States, no matter what company employed them, whereas the CIO felt it was better to organize all the workers of a single industry, whatever their craft. The craft unions running horizontally across the whole country, specializing in a single purpose, were thus horizontal unions. The industry-wide unions, like the United Auto Workers, which took in all the workers in a given automobile company, running vertically from the man who swept the floors up to the shop foreman, were in turn called vertical unions. With such very different approaches to organization, it is easy to see why the AFL and CIO broke apart and stayed apart for so long. The carpenter working for an automobile company was being wooed by both the carpenters union of the AFL and the
auto workers union of the CIO. Both unions are after the same dues.

One immediately can see the parallels here between the AFL-CIO on the one hand and the IFMA-EFMA on the other hand. The mission agencies of the IFMA (the Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association) run horizontally across the whole country, and even to other countries, expressing the concerns of a mission-minded minority within many different Christian denominations. The EFMA (Evangelical Foreign Missions Association) on the other hand, mainly contains mission agencies that express the mission interest of whole denominations (though of course EFMA includes some horizontal agencies as well, as we shall see below.) One would not be surprised if some of the impediments to greater collaboration between EFMA and IFMA derive at least in part from the structural differences between the horizontal and vertical agencies. Indeed, the marvel is that so much good will and collaboration already exits. Not only is the horizontal a very different kind of an organization, but ultimately is competing for the same dollar of the person within a denomination that often has its own denominational mission. This is a recipe for tension.

Let us go on to make the further distinction between the internal, home-support structure of a mission agency and the structure of the results it is trying to accomplish on the field. For example, the Board of Foreign Missions of the Christian Reformed Church is the major agency expressing the foreign mission interest of that particular Christian “family.” This agency, according to our definition, is a vertical structure at home. It goes overseas to Nigeria and among other things sets up a similar vertical communion—e.g., a church denomination. In this sense it is a vertical—vertical mission because its internal home support structure is vertical, and its field results are vertical.

On the other hand, the Andes Evangelical Mission is horizontal-vertical. In its support structure it reaches horizontally across a number of denominations and countries, but then in its Andean mission field in Bolivia (and now Peru) the primary focus of its attention is that of a single denomination, though it does have a limited interdenominational outreach. It is working in each of these two countries with what are presently the largest Protestant denominations—namely vertical structures. Along with other internally horizontal missions, it has helped create these national churches. It is thus horizontal in internal or home-support structure, but almost entirely vertical in its field results. On the other hand, the Latin America Mission, which has a horizontal support structure, just as does the Andes Evangelical Mission, is almost entirely horizontal in its work, and only as a minor phase of its work in Costa Rica and Colombia does it focus its work on a single vertical result.

Of course, in regard to field results, what we here call horizontal missions are what many people have all along called “service missions” or “functional missions.” Many of such missions are horizontal also in their support structure. Take the American Bible Society or the Missionary Aviation Fellowship, for example. They are horizontal-horizontal missions. Their money and people come from many denominations, and their activities on the field are services to many denominations.

It is really very logical that if the results of a mission are a specific technical service of interest to many different churches, that it be supported by many different denominations in the first place. What is not so likely is the case where a mission would operate horizontally on the field, doing a specific service for many different churches, and yet have a vertical support structure back home.

An example of a mission that is at least in part vertical-horizontal would thus be the one that operates the Spanish language school in Costa Rica, through which three-fourths
of all the missionaries in Latin America have come. This school is the agency of a single U.S. denomination (the United Presbyterian), though it is a valuable service to over fifty other missions. The same church also sponsors other horizontal services, such as schools of all kinds (ranging from missionary children’s schools to technical vocational institutes) which in most cases are clearly intended to be of service to more than Presbyterians. The same is true of some other denominational missions. However, despite the fact that the United Presbyterians operate in a vertical-horizontal way in all these specific programs, the bulk of their work is at least mostly vertical-vertical. Why? Because their internal, home support structure is a single North American denomination (a vertical structure), and their external, field results are mainly national churches, which in our terminology are similarly vertical. Even those missions mentioned will have, no doubt, at least some activity that serves other denominations (e.g., the Southern Baptists have their excellent publication house, Casa Bautista).

The structural profile may become slightly more complex when you diagram a whole association of missions. Whereas the IFMA as a whole looks very much like something halfway, the EFMA membership includes both missions with horizontal home structures and missions with vertical home structures. Some people would thus characterize the EFMA as more “churchly” than the IFMA, since many of its member missions are related officially to denominations as such.

The support structures behind missionaries under five different groupings can be compared in the same way. As yet no effective study has been made of how many missionaries are in vertical or horizontal work on the field. But if we limit ourselves to indicating solely the number involved in the two different kinds of support structures back home, it is not too difficult to categorize them by whole agencies as either denominational or interdenominational, that is, vertical or horizontal. Note that the number of missionaries sent out by denominational missions in the Division of Overseas Ministries (of the National Council of Churches in the U.S.A.) is 97 percent of the DOM total, since the DOM membership and affiliated boards include denominational sending agencies. At the other extreme is the IFMA, where 100 percent of the missionaries are sent out by horizontal agencies.

It is obvious that the major polarization here is between the DOM and the IFMA, and that the major structural combination is the EFMA. (The unaffiliated missions are about half and half, but are not an association.) The present collaboration between the EFMA and the IFMA is thus very significant. There is, in this sense, no doubt that the joint IFMA and EFMA Committee on Cooperation and Comity has the most significant task of any group its size in modern missions today.

The reason to attach such significance to the potential relationship between the horizontal and vertical structures is greatly emphasized by a bit of reflection on the way the present situation came into being. One cannot fail to notice in any review of the history of Christian missions that the Roman Catholic tradition has for the most part harmoniously combined both vertical and horizontal structures in a dynamic balance. As we have mentioned, its overall structure is vertical since it functions as the spiritual government of a community that runs from the cradle to the grave. This structure includes the whole series of different levels, moving up from the parish priest to the diocesan bishop and then in a gigantic jump to the pope himself. It is a fact that the diocese of the Roman Church was originally identical in boundaries to a civil district of the same name in the Roman Empire. Similarly, the College of Cardinals corresponds to the old Roman Senate. This is only one of many indications that the overall structure of the Roman Church is an adaptation
of civil or municipal government to the orderly structuring of the Christian community.

However, very early in Christian history there emerged a quite different structure of overarching importance to the history of missions: the Catholic orders. Unlike the diocesan structure, which was patterned after and complimented by the existing civil structure, the Catholic orders were a complete reconstitution of human society. They were a totally separate way of life. The famous Benedictine rule (or *regula*, from which comes regular priest) was in effect the new constitution of a new society which was at once separate from, and yet at least tenuously subject to, the diocesan structure. It is said that five hundred other orders have drawn on the Benedictine rule in forming their own. When Luther joined the Augustinians, he passed from the secular world into a separate “religious” world. He became thus a “religious” or “regular” priest, rather than a “secular” priest. We still speak of the Army “regulars” who have a long-term vow.

We cannot take time to describe even some of the clashes between these two types of structures, such as the conflict between the Franciscans and the bishops in the Philippines, which was fairly recent, speaking historically. For Protestants the matter of awesome significance is that Luther not only rejected the Roman church but specifically the Augustinian order, and with it the very concept of an order. That is, he not only rejected Roman control over the German diocesan structure, but he entirely abolished the horizontal structures themselves (e.g., the celibate orders) of the Roman tradition. Reflecting as he did the distinctive attitudes of the Teutonic cultural substratum, he spurned determinedly the vows of celibacy, but perhaps unthinkingly eliminated their structural vehicle, which at first glance must have seemed to him inoperable apart from celibacy. Perhaps he threw the baby out with the bath.

This in turn sheds light on something with which Protestant scholars have wrestled anxiously: the near-total absence of Christian missions in the Protestant tradition throughout the first three hundred years following the Reformation. Scholars have devised many explanations, quoting the reasons or the lack of reasoning of the reformers themselves. But surely one monumental factor is simply the total absence of the structural vehicle of missions.

Confirming this hypothesis is the fact that when Protestant missions did finally appear, they appeared without exception as horizontal structures and not as the enterprises of official church or denominational boards. Dozens of horizontal mission societies burst into existence before any denomination as such set up its own official mission board. Furthermore, when such denominational boards did appear, the structure of the situation was not really what we have today. In Europe, according to one analysis, there were state churches and sects, while in the United States there was no state church and (therefore) there were no sects. These early denominations were something new under the sun.

Indeed American church historians point out that many U.S. denominations in their early existence were very much like orders, and thus quite capable of focusing officially on specific mission exploits. The present Presbyterian synod of Pittsburgh derives in part from what in 1802 had a complete synod structure, but refused to call itself a church, going rather by the name The Western Mission Society. When that frontier mission society constituted itself into a second coterminous organization called the Western Foreign Mission Society, the situation was not so much that of a “church” expressing itself in mission as it was the case of an elite Protestant order expressing itself in mission. The comparable Methodist work on the frontier involved circuit riders who, according to Latourette, effectively operated under the same vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.
which we commonly associate with the Catholic orders. Such Protestant “orders” in those
days, though they were indeed emergent denominations, were by no means the nominal,
internally diversified, conglomerate, “respectable” churches of today in which over half of
secular society has membership. They were, in fact, an embattled, even fanatical minority,
a network of highly committed individuals who dragged their first-generation families
with them. The major difference between these emergent denominations and the Catho-
lic orders was that they allowed marriage: this is probably the chief factor in the inevitable
transition from eliteness to nominality. Whereas the Roman orders ostensibly recruit only
members of mature choice, the Protestant denominations have absorbed the children
of their members with the inevitable tendency to give those children the benefit of the
doubt. (Jonathan Edwards was removed from his pulpit as the result of his attempt to stave
off this irresistible process.)

This curious, “community-wide nepotism” within the church is not readily avoided.
Apparently no group of committed families has ever been able to guarantee the purity and
eyear passion of their movement by depending in any great part upon biological contin-
uity. Indeed, where there is a falloff of constant fresh accessions of new members converted
as adults, the rate of dilution of a movement’s original commitment may tend to speed up.
Of course, not just “dilution” takes place over the generations, but a healthy broadening.
Latitude and benefit-of-doubt to new members is not entirely bad. But the whole matter
of an elite horizontal structure eventually “tipping to vertical” is too involved to discuss
further here, aside from noting that this process may account for part of the common
suspicion of vertical structures by the proponents of horizontal structures.

There is a corresponding suspicion of horizontal structures on the part of vertical lead-
ership. The voluntary societies have often run off with the glory. They are where the action
is. Their vivid, dramatic fund-raising threatens vertical support. In part due to their late
appearance, they have been labeled human organizations as opposed to the divine organ-
ism of the (vertical) church. What historians call the “resurgence of the churchly tradi-

tion” occurred during the first half of the last century in the United States and ceaselessly
contrasted the voluntary societies with the true, permanent “ecclesiastical” governments,
which they defined as the church.

Then, too, voluntary societies that are interdenominational (as contrasted to intrade-
nominational societies) will always elicit the suspicions of those who place high value on
denominational distinctives. The widely-lamented fissiparous tendency in Protestantism
is in part a logical development from the fundamental Lutheran proposition that you did
not need to be Roman to be Christian, for it has allowed a wide variety of nations, tribes,
tongues, and peoples and subcultures and cultural strata to have their own churches. It has
in effect sanctioned the diversity of vertical structures. But in so doing, it has put horizon-
tal structures in the bad light of down-playing those precious distinctives in their attempt
to combine people from different home denominations in the same overseas mission.

However, we are driven back to the reformers’ rejection of the horizontal structures.
Even the Catholic tradition has had its problems with them, dissolving the Jesuits as it
did at one crucial point. Perhaps Protestantism has been chary of the order-structure
precisely because Protestantism has lacked the central authority to hold it in harness.
Perhaps we need greater powers of review and evaluation on the part of the vertical struc-
tures. If the horizontal structures would more widely submit to the review of the vertical,
perhaps greater confidence and collaboration could be built up. In secular society, pri-


date enterprise must submit to the review of the civil government. The Food and Drug
Administration watchdogs follow carefully the food processors and the pharmaceutical houses, but they do not otherwise control them. The socialist would let the vertical civil structure control everything. The opposite extreme would be the chaos of unmonitored private firms.

In any case, structurally speaking, perhaps the most significant Protestant schism was not the disconnection of the German and Scandinavian churches from Rome, but rather was that most drastic and seemingly permanent rift between the horizontal and vertical structures. The reaffiliation of merely the Protestant vertical structures, in either the NAE, the NCC, or the WCC is apparently a relatively simple accomplishment by comparison, however marvelous it may seem after embarrassing centuries of division between the geographical and culturally distinct Christian communions within the Protestant tradition. But it may be a more profound and unnoticed problem that the emergence of horizontal structures in Protestantism has not yet by any means resulted in the desired unity or harmony between the separate worlds of these two disparate structures.

The solution for this kind of Protestant schism can only come about through a better understanding of the unique function, the advantages and disadvantages of each of these two kinds of structures. Hardly anyone will dispute the fact that it is better for a single horizontal agency, separate from, but dependent upon, all the denominations, to concentrate upon the specific task and the accompanying technical problems attendant upon the translation and distribution of the Bible. Thus the American Bible Society is one of the oldest and most durable of the horizontal structures and makes a notable contribution to foreign missions. It may be equally logical and impelling that a single horizontal agency like MAF should provide air service for all missions operating in many roadless areas of the world. Yet this newer organization, which has a much more technical and perhaps less “essential” ministry, is not as likely to receive an allocation of funds directly from denominational mission budgets as is the case with the American Bible Society. Would it be better if these agencies were operated under the jurisdiction of the NAE, the NCC, or the WCC? (This is in some ways like asking the question whether the post office or the telephone system should be run as part of the private or the public sphere; and if public, then should it be under U.S. federal or U.N. control?) But the technical factors of political science and sociology in such questions are not entirely understood in the secular world much less in the ecclesiastical world.

Many questions arise. Should the founding of a new church in a given country ideally be the job of a foreign church or a horizontal-vertical mission like the Overseas Missionary Fellowship, which is both international and inter-ecclesiastical?

Another question is whether the final result of missions is merely a healthy national church without any infrastructure of horizontal organizations in that “mission land.” That is, should we consider the mission task done when we have set up a viable denomination? Or, in the interest of the effective proclamation of the Gospel, do we need to make sure that not only in the U.S. but also in the mission lands there are nationally-run, semi-autonomous, horizontal mission structures that will act as the shock troops of both home and foreign missions based in that country? Precisely this is found in the Solomon Islands, where for example, the Anglican Church is greatly aided by the effective home-mission outreach of the Melanesian Brotherhood, which is an intradenominational horizontal structure working with it in harmonious semi-autonomy.¹

Further discussion and mature reflection upon these structural factors may give us greater insight into the situation into which God has led us. Is it desirable that vertical
structures tend to give people the benefit of the doubt and that other structures involve an additional voluntary step into a more active involvement in mission? Even granting that we acknowledge a need for both the cradle-to-grave structure and also the elite structure, it may well be true that because these two types of organization are so different, they will always have to make a special effort to understand each other.

The vertical structure has greater internal diversity and may thus tend to have greater objectivity and overall perspective, but less mobility. It may tend to bureaucracy due to the “distance” between the donor and the final function. It may tend to be a caretaker structure that, again due to great internal diversity, finds it difficult to gain broad support for anything, especially enterprises beyond its immediate internal needs. The church as church finds it difficult to become excited about the spiritual fate of the urban masses in Calcutta.

The horizontal structure tends to have a more specific objective and the direct support of those behind it. It has greater potential mobility and efficiency. But it typically sees only its own goals and therefore needs overall perspective. Citizens of the Kingdom may even need protection against its capacity to oversell its cause. Yet it offers a healthy escape valve for the differing visions of the diverse elements of a heterogeneous church.

Both kinds of structures have the capacity to help or harm each other. Horizontal agencies like the Student Volunteer Movement, Christian Endeavor, Inter-Varsity, and so on, have contributed mightily to the vertical structures, and vice-versa. On the other hand, Henry Van Dusen has accused denominational leaders of moving in on college campuses and dismantling the SVM. Others have watched helplessly while denominational leaders deliberately fought and severely damaged Christian Endeavor. Despite the Protestant bias against the horizontal, John Mackay has had the audacity to honor the Latin America Mission by calling it a “Protestant order.” Perhaps he is especially happy about the LAM’s Evangelism-in-Depth program, which is history’s first “master service mission,” since the year-long “treatment” offered a country by EID boldly coordinates not only all vertical but all horizontal structures in a harmonious matrix of a fabulous potential, which precisely surmounts the Protestant schism.

In this brief presentation many details have had to be left out, and many others remain unresolved. One thing seems clear: the fact that in Protestant missions many of the most significant forward steps in both the strategy of support, and the strategy of overseas operations, depend upon a far better understanding than we now have of the “anatomy of the Christian mission.”

Dr. Ralph D. Winter (1924–2009) was a missiologist and Presbyterian missionary who helped pioneer Theological Education by Extension. He became well known as the advocate for pioneer outreach among unreached people groups, founded the U.S. Center for World Missions, William Carey International University, and the International Society of Frontier Missiology. He was a prolific writer on missiological theory and practice.
Notes

1. Describing the contribution of this structure to a significant change of pace in church growth in the Solomon Islands, Dr. Alan Tippett says, “The most important innovation in this second half-century was probably the establishment of the Melanesian Brotherhood, which made the evangelistic thrust a thoroughly indigenous mechanism, and something quite unique in Pacific Missions.” Alan R Tippett, Solomon Islands Christianity: A Study in Growth and Obstruction (New York: Friendship Press, 1967).
Where are our missionaries?

North American Missionaries Serving Globally

North America

The Country With Most Workers Serving
CANADA:
Workers serving 4+ years: 222
Tentmakers: 202
Overall workers: 453

Central America / Caribbean

Breaking Down The Numbers
SUBREGIONS:
Caribbean (1,793)
Central America (5,980)

The Country With Most Workers Serving
MEXICO:
Workers serving 1–2 years: 93
Workers serving 4+ years: 1,106
Tentmakers: 131
Overall workers: 2,043

South America

Breaking Down The Numbers
SUBREGIONS:
South America (4,305)
Latin America (698)

The Country With Most Workers Serving
BRAZIL:
Workers serving 4+ years: 756
Tentmakers: 115
Overall workers: 1,019

Africa

Breaking Down The Numbers
SUBREGIONS:
North Africa (1,084)
Sub-Saharan Africa (6,339)
Unspecified (1,095)

The Country With Most Workers Serving
KENYA:
Workers serving 1–2 years: 86
Workers serving 4+ years: 535
Non-residents: 130
Overall workers: 841

As long as there are people with no access to the gospel we must continue to send those who would proclaim Christ to the nations. North American missionaries are serving in every corner of the globe – from high mountains to small islands, from the wilderness to the mega-city. We pray the Lord of the harvest will continue to raise up workers who will go!

Breaking Down The Numbers
SUBREGIONS:
Eastern Europe (2,866)
Eurasia (1,235)
Northern Europe (994)
Southern Europe (1,234)
Western Europe (2,276)
Unspecified (735)

The Country With Most Workers Serving
GERMANY:
Workers serving 2–4 years: 60
Workers serving 4+ years: 514
Tentmakers: 217
Overall workers: 868

Breaking Down The Numbers
SUBREGIONS:
Australasia (757)
Melanesia (872)
Micronesia (121)
Polynesia (31)
Unspecified (257)

The Country With Most Workers Serving
PAPUA NEW GUINEA:
Workers serving 1–2 years: 36
Workers serving 4+ years: 654
Non-residents: 43
Overall workers: 792

Breaking Down The Numbers
SUBREGIONS:
Central Asia (687)
East Asia (3,626)
South Asia (1,747)
Southeast Asia (4,120)
Unspecified (1,017)

The Country With Most Workers Serving
PHILIPPINES:
Workers serving 1–2 years: 39
Workers serving 4+ years: 778
Non-residents: 44
Overall workers: 959

As an increasing number of agencies find it inadvisable, mainly for security reasons, to indicate where their workers are located, the global ministry category represents those working in the most difficult, most closed, and most unengaged countries, cities, and people groups. We pray for God’s continual protection of them, and the penetration of his message of hope to the most difficult corners of the world!

The number in each colored circle represents the total number of workers serving in a specific region. The size of the circle is relative to the total number of workers serving globally. Additionally, many regions are divided into subregions to show the number of workers in a geographical area.

This data represents those that participated in the research for the 22nd edition of the North American Mission Handbook which overviews US and Canadian Protestant Ministries Overseas from 2017–2019. Learn more at MissioNexus.org/missionhandbook

INTERACTIVE MISSIOGRAPHIC:
Click the snapshot link after each region name to see more details on where workers are serving in each region.

More infographics at missiographics.com © 2017
As long as there are people with no access to the gospel we must continue to send those who would proclaim Christ to the nations. North American missionaries are serving in every corner of the globe — from high mountains, to small islands, from the wilderness to the mega-city. We pray the Lord of the harvest will continue to raise up workers who will go!

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Data Sources

Where are our missionaries?

Breaking Down The Numbers

SUBREGIONS:
- Eastern Europe (2,866)
- Eurasia (1,235)
- Northern Europe (994)
- Southern Europe (1,234)
- Western Europe (2,276)
- Unspecified (735)

The Country With Most Workers Serving

GERMANY:
- Workers serving 2–4 years: 60
- Workers serving 4+ years: 514
- Tentmakers: 217
- Overall workers: 868

Breakdown of the Numbers

PHILIPPINES:
- Workers serving 1–2 years: 39
- Workers serving 4+ years: 778
- Non-residents: 44
- Overall workers: 959

Breaking Down The Numbers

SUBREGIONS:
- Central Asia (687)
- East Asia (3,626)
- South Asia (1,747)
- Southeast Asia (4,120)
- Unspecified (1,017)

The Country With Most Workers Serving

PAPUA NEW GUINEA:
- Workers serving 1–2 years: 36
- Workers serving 4+ years: 654
- Non-residents: 43
- Overall workers: 792

Breaking Down The Numbers

SUBREGIONS:
- Australasia (757)
- Melanesia (872)
- Micronesia (121)
- Polynesia (31)
- Unspecified (257)

The Country With Most Workers Serving

ISRAEL:
- Workers serving 2–4 years: 5
- Workers serving 4+ years: 40
- Non-residents: 7
- Overall workers: 61

An increasing number of agencies find it inadvisable, mainly for security reasons, to indicate where their workers are located. The global ministry category represents those working in many of the most difficult, most closed, and most unengaged countries, cities and people groups. We pray for God’s continual protection of them, and the penetration of his message of hope to the most difficult corners of the world!
Evangelical Christianity’s explosive growth on much of the African continent cannot be fully understood without paying attention to the leaders God has used to bring this about. The present book breaks ground in the study of leadership in African churches by building on a foundation of extensive empirical research. This research was conducted by a team of trained social scientists, scholars from major African Evangelical theological institutions, and key African church leaders. The study made careful use of both quantitative and qualitative methods: an initial survey administered to over 8,000 participants was followed-up by extensive interviews with a few key local leaders. Care was taken to ensure that African leaders were at the center of the whole process of designing, administering, analyzing, and presenting the findings.

In order to keep the project to manageable proportions, the Africa Leadership Study (ALS) team restricted research to three countries, one representing each of the three major official languages of the continent: Kenya was chosen to represent English-speaking countries, Central African Republic for French, and Angola for Portuguese. Several thousand active Christians in each country were then invited to take a survey that probed their experience of positive Christian leadership. Among other questions, participants were asked to identify the Christian leader who had had the greatest impact in their lives. Respondents thus identified a number of key local leaders, who were then interviewed individually in greater depth.

In this way, the ALS team gathered a significant amount of data for the analysis presented in this book. After an initial chapter describing the purpose of the study and the research methodology, subsequent chapters discuss the different themes that emerged from the team’s analysis of the data. These include findings about the character of leaders identified by survey respondents, insights into the kind of training that shaped them, the importance of “social capital” to successful leadership, the role of leaders in times of war, the place of various Christian organizations and their role in socioeconomic development, and the growing importance of women leaders. One element explored in the survey, with surprising results, was the place of books in the lives of Christians and Christian leaders in Africa. The implications of all these findings for leadership training are presented in another important chapter.

It should be noted as well that the ALS team has made the data, along with other
resources, available for use by other scholars (at www.africaleadershipstudy.org). They explicitly acknowledge the limitations of their study and express the hope that others will build on the work that they have begun. One would hope, too, that this study would provide impetus for biblical and theological reflection on themes in Christian leadership at a deeper level than was possible in this book, given its primary and worthy goal of presenting the results of empirical research.

For Further Reading


I agree with the importance of taking an oral approach to sharing the Good News about Jesus Christ because there are over four billion people in the world who can't, don't, or won't read. Few, if any, of these people, would read scripture, even if it was published in their language. In fact, even after fifty years of literacy instruction among the Tzeltal Mayas, the masses of highly evangelized Tzeltal people remained resistant to reading (67).

Enter Carla and James Bowman. In the 1980s, they began work among indigenous people with a unique assignment in the field of minority language scripture use and promotion. They are founders of Scriptures in Use (1987), an organization focused on global training for people groups of oral tradition. Early in their ministry, they realized that working with local leaders would be key for effective ministry. So the Bowmans sought to identify, train and serve local leaders.

The use of stories and dialogue was proving to be one of the most effective strategies they developed. Dialogue after each story was essential to discovering Biblical truth together as a group. This dialogue also made the scriptures more memorable than a sermon about the passage. Also, the use of dialogue made it easier to discern true conversion.

The Bowmans also realized that some of our Western methods of evangelism are counter- productive when working with minority peoples. For example, asking minority people to come forward to ‘accept Christ’ after seeing a Christian film was counterproductive in a culture where the only time a person is set apart from the group is for tribal ostracism or punishment. In many minority cultures, decisions are rarely made individually, instead, they are made as a group.

I was also enlightened by the authors’ reference to Michael Mamo of Ethiopia. Mamo referred to a Muslim sheik who indicated that holding a Bible leads to opposition but no one opposes stories but listens to the end.

The authors wisely do not dismiss print media or literate methods. Since print is an aid to memorization, some readers are required in order to get an accurate oral form of scripture transferred to oral learners.

As I read through this book, I was hoping to see a curriculum of how the authors trained local people to establish fellowships of believers. But that was not provided and that apparently was not the goal of this book. Instead, the authors basically
narrated their experiences in various people groups throughout the world. The back cover of the book mentioned a new comprehensive, oral communication model. I wanted to see if I could try that model in my area of Southeast Asia. But I could not find out how to follow that model in my area. If this book is ever revised, I would suggest that the authors include an index so that readers can look up topics of interest.

For Further Reading


Samuel Escobar’s analysis in his work *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone* that the new global mission is characterized by “missions from everywhere to everywhere” offers a helpful backdrop to what the editors were aiming to accomplish in *Churches on Mission: God’s Grace Abounding to the Nations*. Transmigration and globalization offer new challenges for not only what we have traditionally considered as sending missions, but also local church ministries in multicultural contexts. The goal of the book is “to bring missiology in closer connection with congregations” (xx). The editors recognize that the local church may be adept at sending missionaries to serve, but the local church does not always welcome foreigners well.

The book is split into four major sections: The Church on Mission in Biblical and Historical Perspectives, Global Perspectives, North American Perspectives, and Practical Perspectives. *Churches on Mission* considers globalization issues from various cultural groups, represented by its various contributing authors. The consideration of global missions is most fully realized in the sections on Global and North American perspectives as each author through narratives, analysis, and research describes the local church participation in mission from within and across cultures in their contexts.

The case studies provide rich insight for other missional churches such as Chapter 7 by Guillermo MacKenzie. He describes St Andrew’s Scot Presbyterian Church and Sin Heng Taiwanese Presbyterian church in Buenos Aires, offering wonderful accounts of the questions raised when churches move from mono to multicultural church congregations.

The Practical Perspectives section offers concrete ways in which laity and church leaders alike can consider their missional efforts. That said, this section needs some development in culturally contextual applications. For instance, Nathan Garth’s Pre-Field Missionary Assessment (Chapter 13) covers characteristics of what a missionary should be evaluated on, but Garth could have also suggested a way to evaluate a missionary’s cross-cultural adeptness. Since the aim of the book is to encourage missions from the local and global perspective, cross-cultural competency should be a vital part of a missionary’s evaluation.

Articles such as Daniel Rodriguez’s (Chapter 10) does well in reorienting the reader’s lens to a more global view of Hispanic Evangelicals in North America. But caution
must be taken because while Rodriguez widens our scope culturally, he encloses the church in what Paul Hiebert might call a bounded set model (See Hiebert’s book, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*). In missiological considerations, this reductive view of Christian solidarity over a local non-Christian neighbor is counterproductive to the missionary’s call.

If the editors were to continue with the aim of the book, I might suggest expanding the section from the Globalized Perspective. It is in this section of case studies that the book most effectively uses various approaches and multicultural questions, thus allowing the reader to compare their own local church context.

For Further Reading


Encountering the History of Missions: From the Early Church to Today
By John Mark Terry and Robert L. Gallagher

John Mark Terry and Robert L. Gallagher, articulating their thesis in the concluding chapter of the book, assert that we can learn from both the successes as well as failures of the efforts of missionaries who have gone before us. As a study of mission history, not only will their book be “instructional” in this sense, but it will also inspire the reader to “imitate their zeal and dedication” to continue the propagation of Christ’s kingdom in the present context.

Terry and Gallagher’s narration of the history of missions draws from an impressive list of over 480 scholarly works that discuss mission endeavors of innumerable laborers in the gospel from the early church on to the present day. They describe and assess the evangelistic methods of Christians from a plethora of groups such as Celts, Orthodox Christians, Dominicans and Franciscans, Jesuits, Pietists, Moravians and Methodists, to name just a few. They also recount the stories of missionaries who served during the Great Century of Protestant missions, as well as the missiological and theological changes in Protestant and Catholic Christianity reflected through the missionary councils and congresses of the 20th century and the impact of the church growth movement on evangelical missions in the second half of the 20th century.

Through their narration of the unique historical background—social, cultural, religious and political context—of each of these groups, as well as biographies of countless Christians whose theology of missions was shaped by their context, Terry and Gallagher offer missiologists, students preparing for ministry, lay and professional church leaders, and missionaries intellectually stimulating insights to ignite their hearts to engage in mission work in their own unique context. While each chapter presents lessons for the reader which emerge from the theology of missions and missionary methods of each particular group, their concluding chapter offers a “retrospective evaluation” of “missionaries’ performance over the centuries.” Some things that missionaries did wrong include: displayed a superiority complex; espoused negative views of other religions; did not adequately separate Christianity and Western culture; propagated denominationalism; failed to indigenize the Christian faith; were paternalistic; made unwise use of funds from the West; and were often too closely connected with the colonial system. Some things that missionaries did right include: loved the people they served; genuinely appreciated local cultures and languages; translated the Bible into indigenous languages; provided education for
the people they served; established clinics, hospitals and medical schools; bridged the East
and West; brought out much needed political and social reform; and planted churches in
just about every country in the world.

Finally, the brief statistics presented in a short section—“What Remains to Be Done”—in
the last chapter highlights the need and lays the burden on the present and subsequent
generations to continue the task of world evangelization. Their engaging and easy-to-read
history of missions will arouse a passion to do just this.

For Further Reading

Ott, Craig, Stephen J. Strauss, and Timothy C. Tennant. Encountering Theology of Mission:
Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues. Grand Rapids:

Terry, John Mark, and J. D. Payne. Developing a Strategy for Missions: A Biblical, Historical,
Globalization is complex, highly debated, and often misunderstood. A number of Christians, acting out of fear, seek to resist globalization. Others, because of its complexity, have given up trying to understand it. Instead, they attempt to ignore this global-sized elephant walking around the room. Bryant Myers in his book, Engaging Globalization, offers a balanced approach to this topic, helping Christians understand the history and effects of globalization and how they can get involved in order to play a constructive role in the globalized world community.

Due to the complexity of his task, Myers breaks his work into six basic sections. He first provides an overview of the book and describes the twin foundations— theological affirmations and complex adaptive social systems—on which he builds his understanding of globalization and how Christians can most effectively engage it. In the following three sections, Myers describes globalization in depth. Its wide net encompasses the domains of technology, economics, governance, culture, and human beings. The author depicts two major eras of globalization. The first era began with the first human beings and continues to the present, being fueled by migration, conquest, and mission. The second era of globalization began in the 1800s and also continues through the present, connecting the nations and people of the world more closely together through advances in technology and a global market system. Myers uses the final two sections of the book to dissect the impact of globalization on the poor and how Christians can influence the shape and effects of globalization as it moves forward.

This book allows the readers to take a step back, see the bigger picture of globalization with all of its many issues, and then discover ways to become actively involved in order to make life-giving contributions. The author combines his academic insights with 30 years of practical experience of working with the poor through his leadership positions at World Vision. He discerns both the positive contributions of globalization and its destructive dark side. He acknowledges some of the missteps of Christian missionaries, but he also corrects the false caricature of missionaries as being insensitive to the needs of the people, noting the contributions that former missionaries made in the struggle for justice. Myers warns of influential conceptual systems or “globalisms” which by themselves fail to understand the complexity of human nature, the use and abuse of power, and the “human hunger for meaning and
morality” (p. 208). The author rightly encourages Christians to step into the globalization process and actively make a difference.

Myers communicates his message clearly. He provides an overview at the beginning of each chapter, presents the content in a comprehensible manner, and offers summaries to conclude each chapter followed by discussion questions. He transforms complicated, though essential, materials into accessible reading for both graduate and upper-level undergraduate students as well as educated Christian ministers and laity. In so doing, Myers provides valuable insights to promote Christian engagement in a highly globalized environment.

For Further Reading


Intercultural ministry is “the defining theological line of the twenty-first century.” So begins this volume of fifteen essays that seeks to answer the question: “how do we build healthy communities that bring us together as next-door neighbors and global neighbors?”

Firstly, while most of the authors appear to believe that Jesus is the only way to the Father, not all do. For most readers of this compendium, this would likely be a basic divergence from evangelicalism. And while most would likely agree that current American Christianity is grappling with how to understand the LGBTQ community, readers should be aware that at least four of the writers in this book feel this is simply a lifestyle to be celebrated. For this reason, and because the scope of the book is limited to American Christianity, the book disappoints.

Having said that, there are some fine individual articles within the book. The book does allow access to voices that many ministers might not normally hear. Several articles by African Americans challenged me to rethink if my local community is doing enough to embrace all peoples in terms of leadership and power sharing. Several authors, notably Katie Mulligan, are deliberately provocative in terms of their approach to their topic. Some might be offended by this tone, but the articles are well written and well thought out. I felt that the strong language was appropriate to the topic, but not all will feel this way.

The best article in the book in terms of building a theological line that will reach the 21st century is the article by Rev. Peter Ahn. He is one of many different of Asian American voices in the book. Rev. Ahn builds the case that the best way to build healthy communities is “to find our commonality in our weaknesses, not our strengths” (151). While some of the other authors seemed to elevate humans, he raises Jesus high so that Jesus can raise frail human beings high. It seems to me that this is the heart of the evangelical message, and he stated it beautifully. Some other authors missed this altogether or didn’t quite hit the mark.

This volume is written primarily from the perspective of intercultural ministry within the United States. However, as an American working in a global context, the issues of power sharing are also being debated on a world stage right now. So, in that sense the book also has global applications, but the readers will have to search for those themselves.
For Further Reading


Clemens Sedmak takes readers on a tour which spans the globe and plums the depths of the human spirit. Along the way, he introduces a diverse cast of novelists, philosophers, clerics, missionaries, and prisoners—from Chinua Achebe and Saint Augustine, Vaclav Havel and Isaiah the Solitary to Corrie Ten Boom and Cardinal Francis Xavier Van Thuen—and explores how they found the inner strength to endure in the “desert of displacement.” The result is a far-reaching, reflection on “sources of resilience derived from within (2).”

Sedmak first makes the case that all humans—and especially those involved in “the missionary experience”—need to cultivate the capacity to be displaced through the development of epistemic (inner) resilience. In Chapter 2, he reviews seminal social science literature on resilience. Then, in Chapter 3, Sedmak provides fascinating case studies of persons who illustrate the capacity to be displaced in the most extreme circumstances. In Chapter 4, he surveys Biblical and Early Christian understandings of personhood and the inner life. Chapter 5 offers three more case studies culled from the Eastern Orthodox tradition, highlighting practices that promote resilience. The book’s final three chapters examine a broad range of resources—with special emphasis on faith, hope and love—that contribute to the development of one’s “spiritual infrastructure.”

One of the author’s aims is to present readers with “an array of examples to do with the very idea of strength from within, resilience from within” (4) and this book meets that goal admirably. As indicated above, Sedmak recounts stories about resilient individuals from different historical contexts, church traditions, and over thirty nations. Amid the better-known narratives, readers will discover new stories and glean insight and inspiration from both. The longer case studies, in Chapter 3, which chronicle the experiences of a political hostage, a terminally-ill journalist, and an imprisoned priest are particularly rich. The author also adeptly employs an inter-disciplinary lens to foster reflection upon The Capacity to Be Displaced. His exploration of the lives and writing of numerous philosophers and writers is particularly refreshing and generative.

This book, however, is not without weaknesses. One of the most glaring is the absence of examples of resilience of Christians from the Global South and Far East. It is unfortunate that a volume in a series entitled “Theology and Mission in World
Christianity” should be so Eurocentric. The author’s review of the social science literature is also disappointing as it lacks precision and rigorous analysis. Additionally, the book’s central argument is obscured by too many examples, metaphors, tangents, and unfamiliar usages of common nomenclature (i.e., “the missionary experience). Finally, Sedmak’s choice to discuss numerous texts and stories from outside the Christian tradition distracts from the book’s stated focus upon Christian resources for strengthening resilience.

In the end, The Capacity to be Displaced is both a fascinating and frustrating read, offering ample opportunity to reflect on the complex relationships between displacement, spirituality and resilience as well as to lose sight of the book’s central subject.

For Further Reading
Mark Anderson has answered a foundational question: ‘Can Christians fully grasp the Qur’anic worldview without becoming Muslims?’ Anderson has, by engaging the Qur’anic faith dialogically (grace) and by analyzing its doctrines thematically (truth) (305).

In the spirit of irenic dialogue, Anderson welcomes the Qur’anic deity as ‘God’ even if each chapter contains disclaimers concerning major doctrinal differences (308). To the question: ‘do we worship the same God’ he resoundingly replies: ‘Yes and no’; (34) and while the ‘yes’ receives the majority of attention, Anderson rejects Muhammad’s claim that the Qur’an is the sequel to the Bible. His closing chapter captures it well: ‘So Close Yet So Far’.

Anderson addresses Muslims as “brothers and sisters,” being sensitive to their truth claims within the Qur’an (11). Any reader not already committed to Anderson’s generous hypothesis will ask constantly, ‘So, of which God is he speaking now: the Qur’anic God or Scripture’s God?’ Given Anderson’s commitment to graciously advocate common doctrinal ground, the text moves seamlessly and dialogically between the Biblical God and the Qur’anic God.

Anderson’s defense of the Qur’anic historic origin debate is refreshing as he rebuts the secular revisionists’ arguments. He is an excellent ‘tour guide’ of the Arab world and Muhammad’s Bedouin ‘God’.

The text treats Muhammad’s worldview as a unified whole. This allows Anderson to address the classical doctrines (God, creation, the fall, sin, salvation, prophets, revelation and Jesus) using a thematic grid. However, Islam’s unified ‘classical’ worldview only crystallized some two centuries after Muhammad’s death. Anderson’s research does not engage Muhammad’s significant evolution in doctrine and self-perception from early Mecca to late Medina. Anderson only engages Islam’s final classical theology as anchored in the Qur’an; and not the tensions of the internal process, and which—I would argue—accounts for all inter-Muslim tensions and violence. But then his book does not address the internal crises within the Qur’an but rather the classical Islam which Christians have faced since AD 632.

Anderson rightfully gives a central role to the treatment of Jesus and he joins most Christian scholars in lamenting how Muhammad not only sidelines Jesus but makes him “weak, unappealing, even freakish” (317). Missiologist Kenneth Cragg would have
agreed with him. Anderson’s final threefold test of the Qur’an (the friendship of God, the free grace of God, and the humility of God) qualifying or not as the Bible’s sequel is so beautifully done that it was inspiring to read.

Like the wedding of Cana, Anderson leaves the best to last in his ‘Christian Responses’. It reads as as marvelous summation of the whole. Anderson ends with three probing yet hard questions (Does the Qur’an really honour Jesus? Why does the Qur’an remarry monotheism to geopolitical violence? Has the Bible really been corrupted?) which Christians must ask their Muslim friends and which he believes can be done with “grace and truth”. Make room on your shelf for this new book. [1]

For Further Reading


As Charles Van Engen explains in his introduction, this book is about “doing mission theology” (xiii). He describes mission theology as “an activity that seeks to discern what God wants to do primarily through God’s people at a specific time, place and context in God’s world” (xxi).

The first chapter introduces the various agents who do mission theology (the first being the Holy Spirit). The following fourteen chapters are based on articles that Van Engen published between the years 1989 and 2010. For that reason, some of the material can come across as somewhat dated—such as when the author writes about a Google search he did on the term “glocal,” which (at that time) resulted in 347 entries (44). That was in 1996, when this article was first published, but when one searches for this term today, Google provides over three million search results.

One of the strengths of Transforming Mission Theology is that it is ecumenical in scope while at the same time maintaining an evangelical perspective as, throughout the book, Van Engen’s primary source for expounding his mission theology is the Bible. Based on this biblical foundation, the author interacts extensively with the work of other theologians and missiologists, sometimes using block quotes several paragraphs in length when quoting scholars like Donald McGavran, James Scherer, Johannes Verkuyl, Tite Tienou, and, above all, David Bosch. Transforming Mission Theology is therefore an invaluable resource to gain a comprehensive overview of mission studies as a whole, which can also be seen by the fact that it features a bibliography of over thirty pages.

Van Engen is to be commended for writing with passion and conviction, sharing his point of view on a variety of issues—such as the importance of contextualization, or the need to plant reproducing churches. Transforming Mission Theology touches on many other topics as well, and the author is aware that much more could be said to further develop these themes, acknowledging that to do so would be “beyond the scope of this book” (4). These themes include Israel’s calling as a missionary nation, the mission of the local congregation, a comprehensive missiology of transformation, and various models of missiological education.

The book is organized in five parts presenting the sources, meaning, methods, and goals of mission theology, followed by three samples in which practical themes like urbanization and migration are explored. That is to say, Van Engen’s concern is
primarily of a theological nature; what is missing is a historical part, and in that sense his approach is different from David Bosch’s magnum opus *Transforming Mission* as well as recent publications like Scott Sunquist’s *Understanding Christian Mission* (2013), which is divided into three major parts (historical, biblical, and practical considerations). Nonetheless, *Transforming Mission Theology* is a valuable contribution inviting both students of missiology and practitioners to think more deeply about the theological assumptions of mission in order to align themselves more closely with the purposes of the *missio Dei*.  

**For Further Reading**
