

# On mission

WHY WE GO

Pyles \* Beach \* Charter \* Downey \* Krishnan  
Le \* G.T. Smith \* Love \* Chui \* Albrecht \* Hearn  
Ashlin-Mayo \* Klassen \* C.Smith \* Harnett \* Tam \* Mah  
Edwards \* Rohrick \* De Ayala \* Reeve \* Bundy



**VOL. 5**

Edited by Ronald Brown  
& Mabilia Justin-Robert Kenzo

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Published in Canada

## Endorsements

*On Mission: Why we Go* is an extremely timely compilation that is both rigorous in thought and accessible in format as it speaks to and wrestles with the importance of a robust theology of mission. Not only is this recommended reading, but perhaps also urgent and required reading for every follower of Christ.

From the very beginning to the very end, the Bible is the story of a missionary God who enters and reconciles a broken and hurting world to Himself. In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus powerfully declares that “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go...” And yet, today, this very concept of “going on mission” can quickly evoke a variety of competing thoughts and emotions and is exactly why this work is perhaps more important than ever. Knowing clearly why we go, how we go, and what issues must be considered as one goes is absolutely crucial in the life of every Christ-follower and their obedience to both His example and command.

I am thrilled to commend this work to you. It is both timely and relevant and does not shy away from challenges before us. Together, would the Lord find us faithful in proclaiming His name until He returns? Come, Lord Jesus.

**Darren Herbold**

My church has a rich history of sending out workers into the harvest field, with the most recent couple being sent cross-culturally only a few years ago. Because of this stellar track record, one might think my church’s mission to the unreached is always red hot, a front-burner issue consuming much of our time and resources. The truth is our missions fever ebbs and flows, and every so often, we need a fresh reminder, a wake-up call that will turn up the temperature once again and reignite our passion to glorify Jesus by making disciples at home and abroad. This book is that call for this season.

Filled with solid mission theology and thoughtful challenges, this work will motivate those who read to remove alien agendas and worldly distractions, to not live for safety and convenience, and to be compelled by the lostness of those dying every day apart from Christ.

My prayer is this book will propel us into workplace cubicles, neighbourhood

homes, and faraway markets with the hope of the Gospel and will fuel our collective desire to make a profound difference in eternity. Let this book reawaken your own heart and that of your church for the highest cause of glorifying God among the nations wherever they may be found.

**Shauna Archer**

Associate Pastor, Living Hope Alliance Church, Regina, Saskatchewan

I read the chapters, feeling as though each one allowed me to sit with colleagues over a coffee and discuss the challenge and possibility of the Great Commission in the 21st century. All chapters ask us to rethink our approach. There is no single way to live the Great Commission as individuals and communities of faith. However, a chapter at a time, I believe the Spirit will speak through this book about how we lead our communities into fulfilling our call to all nations.

**Wendy Lowe**

Pastor, Next Community Church, St Albert, Alberta

I love reading real-life stories, stories of real people who trusted God and prevailed through life's arduous path. People who experienced God's faithfulness as they leaned into Him and saw remarkable fruit for their labours. Oft time in my own life, my flame has been rekindled while reading a story of those who have gone before. This series, ON MISSION, will serve you that lavishly!

And it will give you more, heroic deeds from everyday people who have their roots in deep beliefs and biblical convictions about what pulls our lives forward to the ends of the earth, no matter the obstacles. And delivers a life of joy on the journey. Read, refresh, renew and reinvigorate your heart toward your calling as you soak up these great stories and deep biblical truths.

**Ken Driedger**

Missional International Church Network

The God of the Bible is a missionary God. God's creation of the world and of human beings may well be regarded as the beginning of the *Missio Dei*, the mission of God. It continues on to redemption, restoration and wholeness. God has communicated that *Missio Dei* in the Bible, which makes it a missionary book in its content and intent.

The Church, by nature, is missionary, and mission is not just one of the vital activities of the Church. The Church's self- understanding and sense of identity are inherently bound up with its call to share and live the Gospel to the ends of the earth and the end of time.

Society is constantly under the tyranny of change, creating a world with competing ideologies, conflicting worldviews, contrasting cultures and incompatible religions. Each generation of Christians is called upon to tackle the issues or challenges not faced before or inadequately addressed by previous ones. Each generation needs to re-affirm and restate its confidence in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the most unique and the only Saviour of the world. It must demonstrate the purity and the proclamation of an intellectually credible message of the crucified, risen, ascended and returning Christ. A biblical theology of mission is concerned with the basic presuppositions and underlying scriptural principles determining the motives, message, goals, strategies and the best practice used in all arenas of missionary obedience.

The editors deserve high commendation for compiling this volume by harnessing the expertise and the experiences of so many to help us to be part of the answer to the prayer, “Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as in heaven.”

**T.V. Thomas**

Chairman, Lausanne Global Diaspora Network

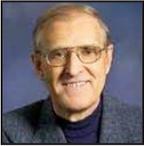
Just reading through the list of chapters and authors stirred my heart to fully dive into “On Mission.” This is a group of leaders and apostolically-oriented individuals who not only understand the mission of God but have dedicated their lives to seeing it come to fruition. They are not writing from a theoretical and intellectual place only but rather as women and men who have chosen to live and proclaim the mission of God.

We so easily live very distracted lives in a very distracting world. There is no shortage of voices and perspectives demanding our attention and our allegiances. This book is brilliantly designed to address those distractions and draws us into the heart of God’s redemptive work of changing stories and destinies around the world. It is a book that will find itself on a very visible shelf to be referred to over and over again as it addresses real questions and real challenges for the real world Jesus gave His life to redeem.

**Ian Trigg**

District Superintendent  
Central Canadian District of The Alliance Canada

## Contributors



**WALLACE ALBRECHT** (PhD, Bethany International University, Singapore) has planted churches, recruited, trained and coached church planting teams for 45 years prior to his retirement in 2010. Wally and his wife Bev live in Toronto, Ontario.



**BRYCE ASHLIN-MAYO** (DMin, George Fox University) served for 25 years as a pastor in The Alliance Canada, most recently as lead pastor of Westlife Church in Calgary. Bryce is currently dean of Theology and professor of Pastoral Theology at Ambrose University in Calgary, Alberta. Bryce has written several books on social media and digital ministry, including *Digital Mission: A Practical Guide for Ministry Online*. [www.bryceashlinmayo.com](http://www.bryceashlinmayo.com)



**CRAIG BUNDY** (DMiss, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School), after pastoring in Chicago for six years, worked in Latin America and North Africa for 34 years with the Alliance in church planting, theological education and mission leadership; then for eight years on the pastoral team at First Alliance Church, Calgary. He lives in Calgary, Alberta.



**JOANNE BEACH** (MTS, Wycliffe College, University of Toronto) has served The Alliance Canada since 2000 in various roles; Women's Ministries national director (2000 – 2006), missions consultant in the Eastern Canadian District (2004-2007), and the director of Justice and Compassion (2007-Present). She has travelled to over 55 countries which has allowed her to experience what God is doing in many different cultures and contexts of ministry. Joanne serves on the Canadian Foodgrains Bank board of directors, which is a partnership of 15 Canadian churches and church-based

agencies working together to end global hunger. Joanne is married to Lee and they live in Ancaster, Ontario.



**LEE BEACH** (PhD, McMaster Divinity College) is the associate professor of Christian Ministry, Garbutt F. Smith Chair in Ministry Formation and director of Ministry Formation at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario, where he teaches courses on pastoral ministry, the church in culture and Christian spirituality. Lee pastored for eighteen years with The Alliance Canada serving churches in Peterborough, Cobourg and Scarborough, Ontario.



**MIRIAM CHARTER** (PhD, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) spent a decade in theological education in the underground church in Eastern Europe and Russia (see her book at [www.reGenerationBook.ca](http://www.reGenerationBook.ca)), seven years in pastoral ministry in Canada and fifteen years in academia in Canada and the USA. Retired in Calgary, she continues to teach and write on missions with a ministry focus on newcomers to Canada. She is an advocate for the next generation of international workers.



**ALFRED CHUI** (DMin, Carey Theological College) has served as the English pastor and lead pastor of North Edmonton Alliance Church. He is currently residing in Richmond, BC, serving as the Chinese language coordinator of Simply Mobilizing Canada, Enlargement Circle Team of Loving Muslims Together, as well as the Volunteer Ministry director of the Chinese Coordination Centre of World Evangelization Canada.



**XAVI DE AYALA** (MDiv, Canadian Theological Seminary) is an international worker with The Alliance Canada. He and his wife served in the Middle East for nineteen years, proclaiming the good news of the Gospel of Jesus and living out God's love among the "cousins," the sons of Ishmael. Both Xavi and his wife are currently serving in a regional leadership role with The Alliance Canada. Their passion is to "make Jesus famous by introducing and inviting those who have no access to Jesus among those where few or none have heard" into a relationship with the Son of God.



**RAYMUR J. DOWNEY** (PhD, Fuller Theological Seminary) pastored for two years in Winnipeg, Manitoba, followed by 26 years in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), serving as an international worker with The Alliance Canada. His responsibilities included theological formation (Bible Institute, TEE and Seminary) as well as field administration. He left the DRC in July 1996 and served in Regina, Saskatchewan, at Canadian Theological Seminary (now Ambrose Seminary, Calgary) as missions professor (1996-98) and then as academic dean (1998-2001). From 2002-2006, he assumed the role of vice president of Global Ministries in Toronto, Ontario. He retired in 2007 and moved to Victoria, BC, where he and his wife, Viola, currently reside.



**BRUCE EDWARDS** (PhD, University of Alberta). In fifty years of ministry, Bruce has served as a theological educator in both Canada and Africa, an international worker in Africa for ten years, and a pastor for over 35 years. He currently serves as acting senior pastor (part-time) at Markham Chinese Alliance Church, Ontario.



**KYLE HARNETT** (DMin, Alliance Theological Seminary) is the founding pastor of Capstone Church, an Alliance church in Calgary, Alberta. Kyle is passionate about spiritual renewal, mission and evangelism, and church planting. Over the past seven years, Capstone Church has planted three churches and anticipates planting many more. Kyle also serves alongside a few other leaders in the Capstone Network, which runs a preaching school and leadership development program and catalyzes church planting in Canada. Kyle lives in Calgary with his wife, Lauren and his three boys, Josh, Caleb, and Nathan.



**DAVID HEARN** (DMin, Alliance Theological Seminary) has served as a local church pastor, a district superintendent in the Canadian Pacific District of the Alliance, and president of The Alliance Canada. He currently resides outside of Kamloops, BC, on a small farm and serves as a mentor to church leaders. He is a champion of spiritual renewal and profoundly optimistic about revival and mission in the days ahead.



**KATHY KLASSEN** (BRE, Briercrest College; BA, Waterloo University) is the director of Renewal and Leader Formation in the Eastern Canadian District of The Alliance Canada. She has served in discipleship, renewal and leader formation ministry for 34 years, on university campuses and rural communities with The Navigators of Canada, in multicultural pastoral ministry in the Greater Toronto Area. She served sixteen years on the pastoral staff at First Alliance Church, Toronto.



**SUNDER KRISHNAN** (MA, Massachusetts Institute of Technology) grew up in India in the capital city of New Delhi. In 1969, he joined the staff of Atomic Energy of Canada. Most of his eleven years there were spent in the safety analysis of nuclear-generating stations. In 1980, Sunder joined the pastoral staff of Rexdale Alliance Church in Toronto, where he served until 2016. Sunder's current focus is teaching the Scriptures and mentoring the next generation.



**THANH TRUNG LE** (DMin, Canadian Theological Seminary; DMiss, Western Seminary) has been the senior pastor of the Edmonton Vietnamese Alliance Church in Alberta since 1986. He has also served as an international coordinator for the Worldwide Association of Vietnamese Alliance Churches (WAVAC) (2004-2012) and was re-elected (2021-present). He has served as a director of the Association of Vietnamese Alliance Churches in Canada (AVAC) (2000-2008) and instructor of the Alliance Theological College in the areas of evangelism, discipleship, and church growth. He co-authored, *Mobilizing Vietnamese Diaspora for the Kingdom* (2014) with Dr. Enoch Wan.



**RICK LOVE** (PhD, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) has served as a seminary professor of the Old Testament in both the Philippines and Canada. Since 2014, Rick has directed Love New Canadians, a ministry that helps churches develop pathways to Jesus for immigrants in their neighbourhoods. Rick and his wife Patti live in Calgary, Alberta.



**RANDALL MAH** (DMin, Fuller Theological Seminary) is currently serving with Wycliffe Bible Translators Canada as a recruiter and mobilizer for missions. He served as both a youth pastor and missions pastor at Richmond Hill Chinese Community Church in Ontario and with Africa Inland Mission in the country of Lesotho. He is a head facilitator for the Kairos course and the Ontario regional coordinator for Simply Mobilizing Canada.



**FRANKLIN PYLES** (PhD, Northwestern University) has served as a church planter in Chicago, a pastor in Detroit, Michigan, Owen Sound, Ontario, and Mississauga Chinese Alliance Church, also in Ontario. He has taught as a professor at Canadian Theological Seminary and McMaster Divinity College and served as president of The Alliance Canada.



**WARREN REEVE** (DMin, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary) served as the first full-time international church pastor of the Bandung International Church in Indonesia, where he founded the Missional International Church Network. Warren subsequently moved to Kuwait to serve as an executive pastor and then senior pastor of the multi-site, multi-service Lighthouse Church. Warren and his wife Debbie are currently planting an English-speaking international church alongside the flourishing French-speaking Martin Luther King Church in Paris, France.



**LISA M. ROHRICK** (MA, Canadian Theological Seminary) spent twenty years in West Africa with The Alliance Canada in community development and church planting using chronological storytelling. She is currently assistant district superintendent, Mission Mobilization for the Canadian Pacific District of the Alliance.



**CHRISTOPHER SMITH** (MDiv, Providence Seminary) has pastored for 18 years in the Canadian Midwest District, where he currently serves as the lead pastor of The Bridge Church in Winnipeg, which he has called home for the past nine years. He was winner of the 2020 Alliance World Fellowship theology prize for his paper, *The Christological Core of Simpson's Pneumatology*. Until recently, he served as the secretary of the board of directors of The Alliance Canada.



**GORDON T. SMITH** (PhD, Ateneo de Manila University) is the president of Ambrose University and Seminary (Calgary, Alberta), where he also serves as professor of systematic and spiritual theology. He is an ordained minister with The Alliance Canada and has served as a pastor in Canada and internationally in the Philippines. Prior to coming to Ambrose, he was the president of ReSource Leadership International. Gordon has several publications, including the two most recent: *Wisdom from Babylon: Leadership for the Church in a Secular Age* (IVPress, 2020) and *Welcome Holy Spirit: A Theological and Experiential Introduction* (IVPress, 2021).



**CYNTHIA TAM** (PhD, University of Aberdeen) is a pastor at The Living Room Church in Toronto and is the national coordinator for disability ministries at The Alliance Canada. She serves as a theological educator in the Alliance Stream at Tyndale University. Cynthia founded Village Eulogia for Families with Special Needs, which helps families affected by disabilities and she remains actively involved in this ministry. Her book *Kinship in the Household of God* was released in October 2021.

## Editors



**MABIALA KENZO** (PhD in systematic theology) and **RON BROWN** (DMin in missiology) were both born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). When Mabilia was finishing secondary school, Ron landed in his village to learn the local language. Later, when



Kenzo completed theological studies, the two worked together nationally in Congo to provide non-formal theological studies (TEE) to lay leaders in towns and villages. Both graduated with MDiv degrees from Canadian Theological Seminary, and both graduated with their doctorates from Trinity International University. Both have taught courses at l'Université de l'Alliance Chrétienne au Congo, where Kenzo was the director for six years; both have taught courses at Ambrose University.

Kenzo was president of the Alliance in the DRC before moving to Montreal to be district superintendent of the St. Lawrence District of The Alliance Canada. Ron worked with The Alliance Canada in four African countries, eventually working as the regional director for Africa before moving to Calgary, Alberta, to be involved in mission mobilization. When together, these two Canadians enjoy African food.

## Acknowledgements

This book has been a team effort. We are so grateful for the editing expertise of Shelby Keith in taking the original writings from a variety of authors and transforming them into more readable chapters for us all.

Our “fellow African” Dan Nel (<https://www.marula.ca>), did the design work for our cover, for which we are grateful.

Gladys Thompson previously worked at The Alliance Canada’s National Ministry Centre in the Communications Department and was the project manager for the trilogy Ron worked on with Charlie Cook. We are thrilled she agreed to come “out of retirement” to bring her considerable talents and experience to consulting, editing, and formatting the interactive PDF.

Alexis Tjart and Ron previously worked together for three years. She is behind the organizing and uploading of books in three languages to the [Global Vault Mission Books website](#) and has prepared the printed book’s formatting.

Our sincere thank you to Shelby, Dan, Gladys, and Alexis. We love working with you.

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# Preface

by Ronald Brown

My mother-in-law was a kitchen theologian. “Every third generation needs a revival,” she always said.

Dr. Arnold Cook, the second president of The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada,<sup>1</sup> published a book in 2000 in which he talked about historical drift and how to detect, diagnose, and reverse the trends of dimming vision, shifting values, and fading passion. The pandemic season forced us to recalibrate how to do church. Regular programming was disrupted. People drifted away from gatherings to a plethora of available online worship experiences. Ministry leaders had to rethink their purpose while income flow was disrupted, and some church buildings sat empty. It became a time of rethinking, revisioning, and reimagining church – a potential refresh moment.

This book is the fifth in a series of ON MISSION books. The first three books are stories of Canadian Alliance message bearers who worked on the frontlines sharing the message of good news through life and word with the nations. Volume four is about how Alliance churches, the sending agency (Global Ministries), and various specialists provide support and care to keep international workers on the frontlines.

This fifth volume speaks to the question, “Why do we go?” Why is the Canadian Alliance so committed to missions? Why do we place workers within least-reached people groups? Why do we raise millions of dollars for missions? Why are we so receptive to new immigrants? Why do some churches sponsor refugees? Why do some of us befriend international students at our local university?

For this volume, Mabiála Kenzo and I invited various Canadian Alliance thinkers and writers to speak to the question, “Why do we go?” Their essays fall into three broad categories: the theology of mission or why we go, followed by the strategic issues of how we go, and then some of the issues around our going.

Those who use computerized technology understand the process of refreshing and rebooting. Our hope is for this book to serve as a reboot for the Canadian Alliance to increasingly join God in His mission to engage the nations, locally and globally, with the Good News of Jesus.

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1. Now known as The Alliance Canada

- We dream of every church member catching a vision of how they can be a message bearer engaging with the nations in their neighbourhood.
- We dream of every Alliance member showing hospitality to a new immigrant.
- We dream of every university student befriending an international student at their local university.
- We dream of every church placing, or partnering to place, a worker within a least-reached people group.
- We dream for each of us to have at least one friend from another country or culture.
- We dream that The Alliance Canada will clearly grasp our mission as a denomination in new ways.

Simply put, this book explains why we go and why we are engaged with the nations of our world both here and there. It is about living out our theology of mission today.

# Introduction

by Mabilia Justin-Robert Kenzo

The Christian and Missionary Alliance (hereafter “the Alliance”) has always insisted on the dual emphasis of mission and deeper life as constitutive of its DNA. In its theology, the Alliance has even developed a specific tradition, which takes mission to be more specific than just reaching the unreached (or least-reached) people with the Gospel. According to this tradition, mission consists in reaching the “most neglected” of the unreached (or the least-reached) people groups. This focus is seen in the Alliance’s propensity to go into “yet unoccupied fields,” “the regions beyond,” or the “unoccupied portions” of the unreached world.<sup>1</sup> One hundred thirty-eight years after the first group of missionaries went to “the regions beyond” under the banner of the Alliance, the same spirit lives on—or does it?

After so many years of missionary engagement and in light of the movement’s undeniable success as well as the new challenges it faces, it is only proper to pause and ask ourselves, “Why we go?” This is the question *On Mission*, Volume 5 seeks to answer. The question is being addressed from different perspectives, which include—but are not limited to—biblical, historical, theological, missiological, and practical perspectives. All the contributors, as “reflective practitioners,” are highly qualified to speak to the issues in depth.

Yet, the explicit intention of the book is not to offer an in-depth treatment of their respective topics. Privilege was accorded to plurality and accessibility. The contributors were asked to follow specific guidelines. There was first the need for authenticity, speaking with one’s voice out of one’s own context and experience. Two of the contributions are in non-Western languages, Chinese and Vietnamese, offering only abstracts to English readers. Then there was the necessity of relevance, ensuring the essays remain pertinent to the book’s central concern. And finally, there was the requirement of simplicity, keeping in mind the educated layperson in our local churches as our primary reader.

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1. Robert L. Niklaus, John S. Sawin, et Samuel J. Stoesz. *All for Jesus: God at work in The Christian and Missionary Alliance for More Than 100 Years*. 1st WingSpread Publishers, Rev. Ed. Camp Hill, PA. WingSpread Publishers, 2011. Kindle, 1981.

The twenty-four contributions in this collection are placed in three different buckets, each bucket approaching the lead question from a specific angle. So, for instance, in a concise yet fresh way, essays placed in the first bucket, **Part A: Why We Go**, address the fundamental question of why we go from a biblical, historical, theological, and missiological perspective. For their part, essays placed in the second bucket, **Part B: How We Go**, deal with issues related to strategies. They offer a fresh look at past and present strategies and, at the same time, explore new possibilities for our time with its unique challenges and opportunities. Finally, the essays in the third bucket, **Part C: Issues about Going**, deal with specific issues arising “as we go” or “while we go.” In one way or the other, all the essays in this last bucket raise the question of the relationship with “the other,” whether the other is the native in the mission field, a person with disabilities, or non-Western sister churches.

Beyond the diversity, there is a common thread holding the essays in all three buckets together. From these essays, we learn how mission is ultimately about God, namely, the Triune God who gives of Himself in love, blesses Abraham to be a blessing, calls Israel, and empowers the Church to be a sign of His love and an instrument to accomplish His desire to reconcile the world to Himself. Mission is primarily *Missio Dei* in the true sense of the term. Nowhere is this fact more evident than in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, whose parting words are the proclamation of His authority, the mandate to make disciples of all nations, and the promise of His continued presence (Matthew 28:18-20).

These themes occur in the essays again and again, and it is justifiably so, for they take us straight to the source of mission, which is the heart of God. The mission, which is primarily *Missio Dei*, explains why the empowerment of the Holy Spirit is crucial for any missionary engagement. Three essays in this collection make this point quite forcefully. The Church is missional not only because it is empowered to do mission; the Church is missional because it participates in the work of the Holy Spirit. Kyle Harnett is quite clear about it: renewal without mission is spiritual infidelity. Far from being a mere repetition of the same old, the essays do indeed innovate in many ways. Some innovate by offering either new arguments or fresh perspectives in treating classical themes; others innovate by bringing new themes to bear on the theology of mission. The latter is the case concerning the place and role of community in thinking about mission in Gordon T. Smith and Lee Beech’s essays. They make a significant contribution to theology (the Alliance theology) lacking in ecclesiology in its beginning.

Finally, the essays in the present collection certainly articulate a sound biblical theology of mission. Yet, at the same time, they do not hesitate to tackle

difficult questions or new challenges. Whether the troubling question of those who, through no fault of their own, have not heard or the other equally difficult questions of hospitality, diaspora, “digital age,” colonialism, or neo-colonialism in the work of mission are not only raised but tackled in an honest and positive way. Each question or challenge is transformed into an opportunity, giving rise to suggestions of (new) strategies for mission. The essays in this collection do not pretend to have the final word on the issues with which they deal. Instead, they are conversation starters in a dialogue that needs to continue.

I am thankful for the privilege accorded me to read each and every one of these essays, at times from the receiving end of the mission work, at other times from a sending perspective of mission. I am a fourth-generation Christian with the Alliance, the fruit of the hard labour of those very missionaries the Alliance (from Canada, the USA, and the Netherlands) sent over the years to the Congo. My family, which counts many firsts (first Christian in the region, first pastor, first National Church president, etc.), has been incredibly blessed by the penetration of the Gospel in the once “region beyond” of the Congo.

Yet, having been raised at a “mission station” and attending boarding school, colonialism and acts of racism were not rare experiences. These unfortunate occurrences have led me to question “why they came.” Working on this collection has been a healing experience of some sort. Each essay offered me a fresh perspective on “why they came.” However, that is not the end of the story. The Alliance Church in Congo has been engaged in transcultural mission from the beginning—with its share of colonial and racist impulses. The essays have challenged me to think hard about why we go, from a sending-church perspective in Congo and Quebec, where I am currently serving. I hope you are similarly challenged as you read through this volume.

## Foreword

by Damien Lee

As international vice president for The Alliance Canada, I have the profound joy of overseeing our global engagements in some of the hardest and darkest regions of the world. Ours is a history filled with men and women who have followed God's call to bring about His Kingdom among the remaining 40 percent of the world's population who have yet to experience the Father's gracious embrace. Any literature galvanizing our Alliance family towards mission among the "least of these" is a worthy consideration, such as the compilation of articles and essays you now hold in your hands.

My journey with The Alliance Canada spans over two decades, three Alliance churches, an MDiv degree at Canadian Theological Seminary, a four-year pastorate, and most recently, a decade as an international worker before stepping into the current role. In that time, my life has been graced with godly men and women who have nurtured and developed me from strength to strength. Over the years, I have frequently commented I stand on the shoulders of "giants" in the Alliance family, a diverse group of leaders used by Jesus to shape and mould me into who I am today. Many of them have put "pen to the paper" you have before you. These men and women have "cut their teeth" on the frontlines of denominational leadership, church ministry, Christian higher education, and cross-cultural missions. We would be hard-pressed to find a group of more seasoned thinkers and practitioners.

For those who would equate the biblical mandate to make disciples of all nations with colonialism, I highly recommend the chapter titled "Is Modern Missions Colonialism All Over Again?" by Lisa M. Rohrick. I will not endeavour to repeat the excellent points highlighted by her. Indeed, confession and repentance are necessary for part of the Church that has advanced the work of missions on the coattails of a colonialist agenda, even as Canadians continue to grapple with and own up to our dark history of the atrocities committed against the Indigenous community.

There are many who would challenge our ongoing global missional engagements based on the current climate of mounting hostility between Protestant evangelicalism and broader Canadian culture. As a counter perspective, permit

me to say this: Our response to erroneous engagement is not disengagement but rightful engagement. Now, more than ever, we as the Canadian Alliance need to look to prophetic exiles such as Joseph, Daniel, Esther, the disciples, and the Apostle Paul, men and women on the margins of their respective cultures, yet in courageous faith leaned into the task of making God known wherever they were.

While our methods and strategies must adapt to the times, our call to multiply disciples globally remains unchanged. Let me also be clear: we are not people of missional strategy with a sprinkling of the spirit; we are people of a missional Spirit who directs our strategies. On that note, we will not be apologetic nor shrink away from a Kingdom mission seeking to bring about transformation, renewal, justice, equality, or hope to any one of the dozens of communities in which our international workers are active. Is it our purpose to influence the cultures of people groups who have yet to encounter Christ? Absolutely, if those cultures are also the ones marginalizing the poor and internally displaced, selling their women and children into the sex trade, or expelling whole people groups based on their race or religion, in Canada or around the world.

I am convinced that it is only by reflecting on the past that we understand the present and can chart a course for the future. I believe the following pages provide a compelling guide on this precise journey for Canadian Alliance missions. Join me as these men and women shepherd our thinking towards rightful engagement in God's mission to save the least of the world.

**Our response to  
erroneous engagement  
is not disengagement  
but rightful engagement.**

Your companion on the way,  
Rev. Damien Lee  
International Vice President

# **PART A**

## **WHY WE GO**

## Chapter 1

# Why Does History Go On and On?

by Franklin Pyles

Does your streaming news feed frustrate you? It frustrates me. Every day, day after day, I learn about a new war, the threat of war, a heartbreaking catastrophe, and the climate becoming more and more unstable; the list seems to go on and on. Is there any hope for improvement? Or, more than improvement, is there any hope for a radical new world? Will things ever get better? Or will they get worse?

Jesus told us He would come again, and the Bible teaches us His return is our hope, our blessed hope. Jesus' return will bring justice to the oppressed and a renewal of the earth, war will be no more, and the nations will come to worship the Lamb.

But, as we consider everything happening day after day, news cycle after news cycle, we might think, "well, someday it will happen; I do hope everything wrong will end and at long last things will be good, but is this something to concern me now?" And for sure, human history goes on and on, it just keeps going, and there seems to be no stopping it, no end in sight.

Why is that? Is not the world's wickedness great enough for God to intervene with judgment? Must people endure injustice century after century? Is not the suffering of people sufficient for God to break into history and deliver? Additionally, how out of control must climate change be before the groaning of nature turns into the promised freedom? The Apostle Peter speaks of those who say, mockingly, "Where is the promise of his coming?" (2 Peter 3:4). As we think of all the trouble and sadness of our world, we might find ourselves asking the same question, not as mockers or unbelievers, but as people who are perplexed, uncertain, and wondering why history goes on and on.

This question is not only asked by Christians but also by the leading thinkers of our time. Marxist thinkers answer that history goes on and on because we are still moving toward a society of economic equality where everyone shares wealth and all people are equal. History will be fulfilled when we arrive at such a point; its constant flux will cease. Others take the opposite view, believing history is moving toward a great catastrophe in war or climate collapse. Such a collapse is not like the Marxist vision of the fulfillment of history; instead, it is the end of civilization as we know it, or perhaps even the end of human life. Yet others

think the question is without meaning, for history has no meaning and will end someday with either a bang or a whimper, “end” meaning the extinction of the universe or at least of our sun. These fatalists do not seem to care; in fact, this fatalism appears to justify them to live only for today and its pleasures.

## How Does the Bible Present the Fulfillment of History?

The Bible presents two answers, which are true together and must be understood with wisdom. The first answer is that Christ will return at a time known only to God the Father, and this might happen at any moment like a thief in the night, and even more, this appearing is near; it is imminent.

The other answer is that certain events must occur before the end of history, before the coming of the Lord.

The first answer is worthy of significant thought and reverent exposition, but this essay, brief as it is, can only touch on it lightly, for it is a holy mystery. Instead, we will concentrate on the question: what things or what single thing must happen before Jesus returns? We will focus on this question because it contains, and I believe, answers the question, “why does history go on and on?”

...what things or  
what single thing  
must happen before  
Jesus returns?

Firstly, we should briefly review how the disciples viewed history. After the resurrection, the disciples asked Jesus, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). The disciples asked this question because they understood the climax of history as the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel by the Messiah. God’s enemies would all be defeated, and God’s people would be at peace. And, to be honest, the disciples had some reason to think in this manner. Isaiah 41:11, 12 says:

“All who rage against you will surely be ashamed and disgraced;  
those who oppose you will be as nothing and perish. Though you  
search for your enemies, you will not find them. Those who wage war  
against you will be as nothing at all.

Perhaps it is a bit of an oversimplification to say this was seen strictly as a political solution, one bound to this planet, for there are also many prophecies of the spread of the knowledge of God among the nations. It seems from the Book of Acts that when they asked the question, and even after the Ascension, the disciples did not fully grasp the spiritual dimension of the coming Kingdom as the key to understanding the fulfillment of the prophecies, the actual end of history. They were full of hope, hope for peace in Israel, and hope for Israel to bow before Jesus the Messiah. And they were prepared to do what was necessary to bring hope into reality. If Jesus was ready, they were ready. “Will you at *this time* ...?”

But the Father had another plan.

The disciples, though, did not understand the Father's plan. He planned to redeem the people of the world from slavery to sin, from the fear of death, the kingdom of darkness, from all these into the kingdom of light, and even more, to spread the fame of God the Redeemer throughout the world so all the ethnic and language groups and families would give Him great and everlasting praise. No, sadly, the meaning of the following saying of Jesus sank gradually into their understanding and hearts.

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14).

As He so often did when He spoke, Jesus here did several things at once; all of those things help us understand the ongoing history of the world and the world's future.

First, Matthew 24:14 is a prophecy. In some ways, it may be the key New Testament prophecy, for many of the other prophecies in the New Testament are further explanations of it. On the other hand, Matthew 24:14, in turn, explains those other prophecies and puts them into a framework, namely, the purpose of the Church and the Coming of the Lord. To fail to understand this is to fall into the trap of trying to understand prophecy as a group of stand-alone predictions but never arriving at either its core meaning or motivation.

For example, there have been multiple attempts to definitively interpret current events in light of various prophecies in the Book of Revelation or to seek to identify the Antichrist. These have all failed, for they are treated like previews of a forthcoming movie. We should not be so self-assured as to say what has happened in the past year is a fulfillment of this or that paragraph in The Revelation or how the actions of such and such a human figure show they are the Antichrist. To do so is not to understand the key to the prophecy found in the verse we are studying, Matthew 24:14.

Instead, the spread of the Gospel tells us what those prophecies in Revelation and elsewhere are actually about. As the preaching of the Gospel continues its ordained march through the ethnic groups of the world, the Gospel has and will continue to meet fierce opposition, which can only be described adequately by the fearsome images of the Book of Revelation. Thus, the Church warned that the prophecy of the inevitable spread of the Good News, though determined by God, will not be either simple or straightforward but will be a work and experience of protracted spiritual warfare—a work and experience of suffering. And for sure, this warfare will have a climax when the Church encounters the Man of Sin, so the question “who is the Antichrist” is not an idle one. But, “who he is” is not the point. The point is that all prophecies are a call to be aware, alert, and to act for Christ in faith and with courage.

This call emerges powerfully from Jesus' words, "...shall be preached," and connects like a hook and eye to Romans 10:14, "... how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" The Lord calls for people to go and announce the Good News of the Kingdom. Hearing this call, throughout history, there have been those who stood up from their comfortable chair and moved out of the security of their own ethnic and/or linguistic group to preach to people in a new place and often in a new language.

But not always. There have been periods in the history of the world and of the Church where not much action took place. The Church became culturally complacent and geographically centred; once Europe was "Christianised," it seemed the Kingdom was present, and Europe was a "Holy Roman Empire."

Still, some heard and understood how Jesus' stirring words applied to them, so they went to new places. Some, like the Nestorians, were borderline in their orthodoxy; many were Catholics, yet, wherever they went, they found people eager to hear and ready to turn their hearts to Christ. But sadly, these efforts were small compared to the enormity of the world that had not yet heard. History continued to go on and on while the Lord prepared for a great movement of the proclamation of the Good News of the Kingdom.

And so it was, true to His word, the Lord again called forth proclaimers to leave their homelands and go, for Jesus' prophecy contains a promise, "...will be preached ... and then..." God will fulfill His promise.

Perhaps it is this promise the Church has most overlooked in the prophecy. Maybe, because we have not entirely believed Jesus' words, the Church slowed down or even stopped its forward push.

In the history of missions, some groups quickly and eagerly responded in faith on hearing the Good News. Others not only resisted the message but fought back. And, to be honest, the Church did not always, like Paul outside of Antioch and Iconium, pick itself up from the roadway after being stoned and go back into the city (Acts 14). Sometimes we let the opposition and even violence of the world's prominent religions discourage us, even deflect us. Now millions, even billions, are still without Christ; reaching them becomes more and more difficult because these countries, where so many without Christ live, actively suppress the Gospel.

Nevertheless, while the nations rage, the prophecy remains, for God will not yield even to the extreme opposition of unbelief; His Word is sure. Thus, our action in mission must be based on this promise:

Now millions, even billions, are still without Christ; reaching them becomes more and more difficult because these countries, where so many without Christ live, actively suppress the Gospel.

God will see the Good News of the Kingdom preached to everyone; believers from every family, language, and ethnic group will arise, and churches will be formed.

Like many prophecies in the Bible, the prophecy contains a tiny picture of the future, a view of the end of history. We must ponder this picture, for to misunderstand it is to go off track, to derail and scatter our efforts in multiple directions. The word I am referring to in Matthew 24:14 is “kingdom.”

## What Is the Impact on How We Preach?

The founder of The Christian and Missionary Alliance, A.B. Simpson, saw the impact of these various interpretations in the missionary efforts of his day, and he was not at all happy. When he went on his tour around the world, chronicled in *Larger Outlooks on Missionary Lands*, he observed missionary methods he believed were well-intentioned but failing because they did not correctly reflect the meaning of the word “kingdom.” Among these were efforts at proclaiming by establishing various social outreaches such as education and hospitals, to name only two. As he toured the world and saw many missions using this method, Simpson concluded these endeavours resulted from a misinterpretation of the Kingdom. This misinterpretation believed the whole world would be converted, and this converted world would be the Kingdom.

Simpson says:

We regard education missions as the natural and logical sequence of a belief in the final conversion of all the world, through the church and the establishment of a spiritual millennium by means of the Gospel.

But we do not believe that this is the Scriptural standpoint of missions; and if we are to do effective work, we surely must understand and work in harmony with the plan of our great Leader.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps echoing Simpson’s view, a young person on a missions trip to a place dominated by one of the world’s large religions emailed me this comment:

Half of our preaching is done merely in showing this love. But I do not think it is enough to only preach the gospel with our actions, although that is vital. There are so many Christian charities and organizations here. Schools, hospitals, etc. But how many disciples are these charities making? Very few. We must preach the gospel first with our actions so that we have moral authority, but then we must also preach it with our words. This is the only way that the fullness of the gospel can be declared. And so we are trying to do this, but again, the work is very slow.

Perhaps this short paragraph from a young leader captures what Simpson had in mind and what he saw as the correct interface between the hope for the Kingdom

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1. *Larger Outlooks on Missionary Lands*, p. 578.

and the preaching of the Good News. An entrance must be made and relationships formed.

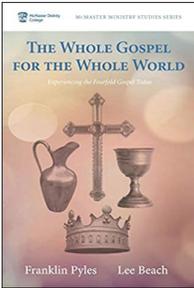
I would add, it is true, that the Kingdom must be modelled. This is what Jesus and what missionaries do in Jesus' name when they perform signs and wonders. But, when signs and wonders occur, there must also be some slow work of building schools and hospitals and helping people start businesses that will lift them from poverty. This is part of what the Kingdom will look like: a Kingdom of peace, justice, and health. People must see the Gospel on some level. They need a concrete example of what love and peace and justice look like, "...but then we must also preach it with our words." Only as people understand the Gospel and are willing to "kiss the Son" will they become true Christians and thus fulfill the promise of the Kingdom as a reign of Christ.

How should we react to Jesus' prophecy recorded in Matthew 24:14? So often, our reaction has devolved into a denominational cliché, half-believed and publicly acknowledged, but in reality, cold and lifeless. Results from development and relief efforts are more visible and easier to report on and raise money for. And yes, the efforts of Christian missions to impact disease, poverty, and education deficits are truly remarkable. But yet, today, as in Simpson's day, billions remain outside the Kingdom. It should tear our hearts.

Let us again turn to the prophecy that the Lord has provided. This prophecy is a roadmap of God's plan for history and explains why history unfolds as it does, going on and on. This incredible view is like standing on a tall mountain. It enables us to see and understand all the peaks and valleys of time, the rise and fall of civilizations, the continued presence of evil and injustice, and the pain and suffering present in every life. Still, it also gives us the long view, far ahead, of beauty and peace we can barely imagine. The prophecy enables us to see the Kingdom as something certain and coming. Because of this certainty, the prophecy spurs us on; it propels us, not as a cliché, but as the final answer to the meaning of our lives and history. Truly our work is a work to bring back the King.

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## Further Reading



***The Whole Gospel for the Whole World: Experiencing the Fourfold Gospel Today*** by Franklin Pyles and Lee Beach.

This book addresses six fundamental ideas that have shaped the Alliance throughout its history: Jesus as our Saviour, Sanctifier, Healer, and Coming King, which are known as the “fourfold gospel,” as well as the concepts of “Jesus only” and world mission. These ideas are at the heart of the C&MA identity. However, there has long been a sense within Alliance circles that these core ideas are not always given the kind of attention they deserve so that they can dynamically shape the movement as it faces the challenges of being the church in the twenty-first century. This volume is a resource for Alliance churches that will help them re-engage with the central tenets of Alliance theology and spirituality in a way that will ultimately inspire greater passion for the cause of Christ in the world as it is uniquely expressed through the Alliance.

## Chapter 2

### A Gospel People Will Read

by Lee Beach

When I reflect on my early spiritual nurture in, what I would call a healthy, vibrant, growing Alliance church in the 1980s, as well as the education I received at Canadian Bible College in the same era, there are three distinct impressions I took with me based on the way I was trained in mission and evangelism. The first was that “mission” should broadly be understood as evangelism. Essentially, engaging in mission mostly meant the verbal proclamation (or sharing) of the gospel message with others. The focus was on providing articulation of the content of the “Gospel,” which was basically the theological concept of the penal substitutionary atonement of Christ, which could be summarized in four “spiritual laws.” Anything else potentially described as part of the Church’s mission, such as relief and development among the poor, caring for people with HIV/AIDS, offering hospitality to neighbours, etc., was deemed as good, perhaps even important work, but was definitely secondary to the verbal proclamation of some key ideas that we called “the Gospel.”

The second impression remaining with me is evangelism is mainly personal. I was trained in “personal evangelism” and given specific tools which would help me share my faith with others. This meant my job was to deliver the message of the good news of the Gospel to people. Delivery could be done one-on-one, in a small group, or even as a preaching event to a larger group. Still, it was mostly something I was personally responsible for as part of my Christian commitment. Whatever form it took, mission, as expressed through evangelism, was essentially a personal endeavour every Christian should be involved in as they took seriously Jesus’ commission to “go” into all the world and preach the Gospel.

The third impression I had was that there is a dichotomy between the Old Testament and the New Testament regarding mission. The distinction between the two testaments is real when it comes to how they present the mission of God in the world; however, my early training in mission left me with a sense there was not too much mission happening in the Old Testament (OT), and a lot of mission happening in the New Testament (NT). If you wanted biblical texts to inform your

theology and inspire the mission of the Church, you had to look to the Gospels, the Book of Acts, and the Pauline epistles to get what you needed. The God of mission was not overly visible in the Old Testament.

Whether these are fair characterizations or not could be open for discussion. Yet, I think they accurately provide a glimpse into how the vision for the Church's mission was cultivated and cast.<sup>1</sup> While this approach has some strengths, it fundamentally misses the biblical foundation of God's mission as a collective task embodied in the communal life of a distinct group of people.

In this chapter, I want to explore how the formation of a missional community is at the heart of the Church's mission because it captures the biblical vision for God's mission in this world. After making a case for this perspective, I will look at some key practices of a missional community based on the epistle of 1 Peter and then conclude with some thoughts on ways church leaders can help to form a missional community.

Certainly, the way we think about and train people for mission and evangelism has changed since the days I have described above. But there is still much room for us to reflect more fully on the idea of mission not being an individual endeavour; instead, it is intrinsically communal. Additionally, the work of church leaders today is to provide a theological foundation and practical vision for what it means to be a missional community in their local context.

...the work of church leaders today is to provide a theological foundation and practical vision for what it means to be a missional community in their local context.

## **God's People as Missional Community**

The foundational biblical idea of God being a God of mission explicitly begins in Genesis 3 as He pursues Adam and Eve after their disobedience in the Garden of Eden.<sup>2</sup> The foundational biblical idea of God choosing to work through a people to accomplish His mission explicitly begins in Genesis 12 with the call of Abram. God calls Abram to go on a journey with Him for the explicit purpose of him becoming

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1. I would argue that they are a fair, although perhaps not comprehensive, way to understand how the evangelical church taught about the mission of the Church in the second half of the twentieth century (and perhaps even before that).
  2. Implicitly the concept of God as a God of mission is rooted in the being of God as Trinity. However, that is a topic that lies outside the scope of this chapter.

the father of a great nation who will be a blessing to “all the families on earth” (Genesis 12:3).<sup>3</sup> From here, the narrative of scripture unfolds the story of God’s work in and through Abram’s offspring, the people of Israel, and subsequently the Church to accomplish His purposes of redemption.

The development of the plot of this story comes to a significant place at Mount Sinai, where God makes clear to His people that they are a unique people, chosen by Him to be “a priestly kingdom and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6). The language of priesthood clearly describes Israel as having a role in mediating the presence and work of God to the world.

This is reiterated and explained further in Deuteronomy 4:6-8 when Moses declares to the people of Israel they must keep the law of God so they may demonstrate to other nations the wisdom of their God and the quality of life resulting from being in relationship with this God. This obligation for the people of Israel to be a witness to the nations continues even after they are banished into Babylonian exile. The prophet Isaiah declares to the exiles they are to be “a light to the nations” (Isaiah 42:6-7).

This brief recounting of some key movements in the history of God’s people as depicted in the OT makes it clear Israel is established to be a missional community, a people who, through their life together, are to show to the world what it looks like to be in a relationship with the one true God.

This challenges the idea there is not much mission happening in the Old Testament. It demonstrates that Israel is a missional people who have been called for the good of the world and are responsible for depicting and declaring their God’s truth and goodness to all people.

This concept forms the foundation for the mission of the Church as well. Jesus establishes a group of disciples whom He commissions to collectively go “and make disciples of all nations...” (Matthew 28:19). The communal nature of the Church’s mission is dynamically described in the Book of Acts 2:42-47, where we read how the early Church in Jerusalem is functioning as a radically inclusive, sacrificial community, impacting the people around them so much the Church sees “day by day” the Lord adding to their number those being saved. The writings of the Apostle Paul and other New Testament letters are written to address the challenges the first-century churches were facing, ultimately to get them to live into their calling as the people of God so they can be the kind of community Jesus intends the Church to be in order to fulfill His mission (see especially 1 Peter 2:9).

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3. All scripture quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

As mentioned earlier, there has been, at times, a dualism created between mission in the Old Testament and mission in the New Testament. The mistake has been to understand mission as only a flickering flame in the OT while it becomes a burning fire in the NT. The distinctives are there, to be sure; the OT depicts a people set up in a particular land who are to use their political and geographical autonomy to develop a distinct nation. An alternative community embodying a faithful covenant relationship with God so the world will see His greatness and the wisdom of His ways and want to join in. On the other hand, a significant emphasis in the NT is the depiction of a sent people. A people who are explicitly going into the world to proclaim the good news of the Gospel of Christ with a definite desire to see men and women embrace this good news and put their faith in the God and Father of Jesus Christ.

In broad strokes, these distinct emphases have been described using the scientific terms; centripetal and centrifugal. A centripetal force draws things toward it. A centrifugal force directs things away from it. An OT theology of mission primarily describes the people of Israel as established to live in a way that draws the nations toward it. A NT theology of mission primarily describes people commissioned to go, to move out into the world to make more disciples.<sup>4</sup>

While there is much truth in this as a broad description of how mission takes place in the eras of the OT and NT, perhaps what we need to acknowledge is these two approaches to mission both encompass the biblical presentation of how God goes about His mission in this world through His people. The mission is always anchored in a distinct people (Israel and the Church), and the group's calling is to embody God's will and ways and declare them to the world. Any faithful expression of mission today will include the act of "going" into the world and engaging with the people to declare the good news of Christ to them. But this "going" will always have its roots in the life of a local group of people who are called to demonstrate the power of the Gospel, offering themselves as a collective witness to the ways of God in this world. The formation and sustaining of this community give any outward initiatives their life and vitality, providing the greatest apologetic foundation for the gospel's integrity by offering a picture of what the transforming work of Christ actually looks like in practice. As Leslie Newbigin said, the Church is the "hermeneutic of the gospel."<sup>5</sup> This means the Church is a way of interpreting and understanding the Gospel. It is to be a living document providing people with a way to see and comprehend the message of

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4. See Michael W. Goheen's use of these terms to describe a biblical theology of mission in *A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011). 39, 115.

5. Leslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989). 222-33.

Jesus, so it makes sense to them and appears attractive, offering a more authentic way to live one's life.

For this reason, those in church leadership have the responsibility to do the work of forming a missional community in the people they work amongst. Just as the Apostle Paul worked and wrote to create such communities and the Apostle Peter did the same, so too must we. For some reflection on how we do

this, we turn to the epistle of 1 Peter, which is addressed explicitly to a series of churches in first-century Asia minor who find themselves as a people living on the margins (1:2, 2:11). Peter wants to encourage the Church to see themselves as people who are to live with the mindset they are communities of people called to embody God's mission in their individual and corporate lives.

...those in church leadership have the responsibility to do the work of forming a missional community in the people they work amongst.

## **Characteristics of Missional Community in 1 Peter**

The epistle of 1 Peter does not provide an exhaustive list of practices that may be employed to cultivate missional community, but there are two significant ones worth exploring briefly here. Primarily the author of 1 Peter is interested in helping the communities he is writing to develop their identity as God's people in the particular place they find themselves. Identity development is crucial to groups and individuals, especially when a group finds itself on the margins of society and strives to establish itself as a community within a cultural hegemony quite different from and much more powerful than its own intrinsic one.<sup>6</sup> First Peter offers at least two practices that must be cultivated so the Church can reflect its unique identity to the world.

### **Holiness Expressed Through Love**

At the core of 1 Peter's thinking about identity is the idea of holiness. Early in the epistle, he quotes Leviticus 11:44 to his audience, "you shall be holy, because I am holy." Holiness is about being set apart, especially as the difference is informed by our relationship with Christ. Ultimately, for Peter, nothing is more central to expressing God's holiness than love. It is the behaviour he calls his churches to cultivate most often. Four times in his short letter, he urges his people to love

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6. Lee Beach, *The Church in Exile: Living in Hope After Christendom* (Downers Grove, Ill: Intervarsity, 2015). 173.

one another (1 Peter 1:22, 3:8, 4:8, 5:14). Of course, this is at the heart of Jesus' words to His disciples regarding how love would be the clearest indicator of their relationship with Him (John 13:34-35). The love of the disciple's community would reflect Jesus' love for them and reflect their connection to the God of love (1 John 4:7-8), and thus be a demonstration of His nature to the world. Jesus also taught the fundamental truth regarding a life pleasing to God rooted in relational holiness centred on love for God and our fellow human beings (Matthew 22:37-40).<sup>7</sup>

When we think about holiness, we often think about specific behaviours we should avoid. Often when the world thinks about the Church, it thinks of all the things the Church is against. However, Peter proposes a positive view of holiness, one rooted in love as the clearest expression of what it means to be set apart as God's people. Church leaders must work at helping their congregations to become loving environments because a community of genuine love demonstrates to the world the holiness of God and makes the good news of Christ tangible to their experience. As already noted, when Jesus told His disciples they would demonstrate their attachment to Him by their love for one another, He was describing exactly what it meant for His followers to be the "hermeneutic of the gospel."

Of course, Christian holiness is multi-dimensional and cannot be defined by one aspect. However, if the Church is to demonstrate the reality of Christ to the world through its life together, it will most certainly involve being a community whose distinctiveness is ultimately characterized by love. Love for each other and love for those outside of the Church. For Jesus, and as emphasized in 1 Peter, this is a primary marker of missional community.

### **Relationship with Outsiders and Insiders**

Part of the practice of holiness marked by love is found in how the Church relates to those outside the Church and to one another within the family of God. In 1 Peter, the missional identity of the Church is played out primarily in the context of social relationships characterized by mutual submission. This concept of relational submission is emphasized within the epistle in several ways, encompassing many human relationships. These include submission to "every human authority" (2:13), slaves to masters (2:18), and wives to husbands (3:1). However, this submission demands reciprocity; His people are to "show proper respect to everyone" (2:17). This injunction applies to everyone; thus, everyone is called to demonstrate respect and give dignity to all people. Husbands are to treat wives as co-heirs of God's grace (3:7), a radical idea in the first century that reiterates the reciprocal nature of the submission 1 Peter calls for. Relationships are to be characterized by

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7. Beach, *The Church in Exile*, 188.

love, humility, compassion (3:8), and mutual service (4:10).

In his instructions to church elders, Peter appeals to them based on his place as “a fellow elder” rather than as an apostle (5:1), indicating an egalitarian view of congregational life. These behaviours are designed to embody a quality of relational life that reflects the distinctive character of the Church. This kind of mutual submission in relationships with people inside and outside the Church is a priority for communities who want to model Christ to the world since Jesus acted in submission and suffered as a result, but His actions resulted in salvation for the world (2:20–25). Relating to all people from the posture of mutual submission is the mark of a missional community.

## **Practices for Forming Missional Community**

These two characteristics of a missional community are not exhaustive, but they represent two foundational behaviours reflecting the intentions of God for His people to demonstrate His character to the world. The work of the missional leader is to help form such communities for the good of humanity, so these communities become gatherings of people who demonstrate how the Gospel has the power to transform not just individuals but whole groups of people and ultimately the world. To help nurture these communities, some specific practices have to take place.

### **Facilitating Mission**

It may seem counterintuitive, but one of the best ways to build a close, meaningful church community is to get people out of the church. Nothing will forge relationships more deeply, encourage prayer, and get love flowing more quickly than putting people together in a situation where they are not sure what to do and are entirely dependent on the support of one another and the Holy Spirit. Mission can act as a catalyst for community because it often brings us into contact with situations and people, which draw us out of our comfort zone and into a context where we need the help of others. Joining a small group at your church does not do this. Going to another worship service will not accomplish this. Having more potlucks won't do it.

**...one of the best ways to build a close, meaningful church community is to get people out of the church.**

Don't get me wrong; I am not opposed to small groups, worship services, or potlucks (especially potlucks); they all have their place in community building and

formation. However, it is when we embark on mission together, going into the world as ambassadors for Christ, seeking to serve our surrounding community, or even going into challenging places to test our patience, our endurance, and our faith, that we tend to bond with those who are engaged in the same experience. We learn to depend on each other, share more deeply, pray more authentically, and find Jesus more tangibly.

The missional leader helps to build a missional community by seeking ways to get their people engaged in mission. Often taking them outside their usual realm of experience and into places where dependence on God and others is essential.

### **Teaching and Modelling**

It may seem obvious, but missional leaders have to prioritize teaching about missional community. Whereas the emphasis in my early Christian nurture was on the individual dimensions of mission and evangelism, the focus needs to shift to the corporate dimensions. Not by completely neglecting how we are all called to mission, and it will have individual expression at times, but rather by recovering an appropriate biblical theology presenting God's idea of forming communities of people to embody His creational intentions for the sake of the world.

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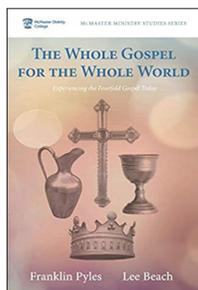
Thus, we need to teach about the call of Abram, the covenant at Sinai, the function of the law in the life of Israel as a nation, the teaching of Jesus and their communal implications, the epistles of Paul as acts of community development, as well as the other epistles too (1 Peter as perhaps the best example). More specifically, teach the Sermon on the Mount, teach through Ephesians with a view to communal application of each passage, and lead a series on Leviticus 19. There may not be a better chapter in the Bible on what it looks like to embody God's holiness in relationship to our neighbour. Consistently teach with a collective vision. Apply to the community, not just the individual. Develop missional community by casting the vision for it explicit in scripture.

### **Conclusion**

My early training in mission, where the individual aspects were emphasized, may have provided some valuable components, giving me perspectives and skills that have served me well in specific ways. However, the heart of mission is not found in one's practice of it; instead, it is found in giving ourselves to the

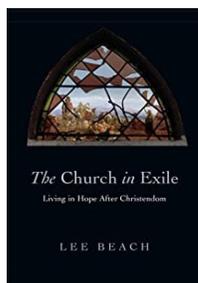
cultivation of a community of people who are committed to experiencing and developing the life of God and His Kingdom in their midst. This is the foundation for the missional enterprise of God’s people. It is rooted in God’s constituting Israel and subsequently the Church to be a people set apart for His purposes, a people who are in a relationship with Him and with one another in a way that depicts His person and enacts His mission of love in this world.

## Further Reading



***The Whole Gospel for the Whole World: Experiencing the Fourfold Gospel Today*** by Franklin Pyles and Lee Beach.

This book addresses six fundamental ideas that have shaped the Alliance throughout its history: Jesus as our Saviour, Sanctifier, Healer, and Coming King, which are known as the “fourfold gospel,” as well as the concepts of “Jesus only” and world mission. These ideas are at the heart of the C&MA identity. However, there has long been a sense within Alliance circles that these core ideas are not always given the kind of attention they deserve so that they can dynamically shape the movement as it faces the challenges of being the church in the twenty-first century. This volume is a resource for Alliance churches that will help them re-engage with the central tenets of Alliance theology and spirituality in a way that will ultimately inspire greater passion for the cause of Christ in the world as it is uniquely expressed through the Alliance.



***The Church in Exile: Living in Hope After Christendom*** by Lee Beach

The people of God throughout history have been a people of exile and diaspora. However, for much of its history, the Christian Church lived with the sense of being at home in the world, with considerable influence and power. That age of Christendom is now over, and that is something for which the Church should be grateful. This book offers a biblical and practical theology for the Church in the post-Christian age.

## Chapter 3

### Bless the People, Bless the Nations

by Miriam Charter

In 1989 a remarkable event took place, forever changing the trajectory of history in Eastern and Central Europe. On November 8, 1989, the Berlin Wall began to crumble, and one after another, countries which had been closed to the West for years experienced revolution, moving toward democracy and freedom. After the revolutions of 1989, I returned to Canada to tell stories of the heroic courage of believers in the face of the harshness of the Communist regime. After each telling, someone was sure to approach me and announce how guilty they felt as they listened to my description of the hardships believers experienced in Communist Europe! “I struggle with guilt when I hear your stories,” they said. “We are so blessed here in Canada. Why do we have so much, and so many in the world have so little?” My immediate response was always, “I don’t tell these stories to induce guilt! I tell these stories to remind you to be thankful! Because indeed, we are so blessed.”

It is a tension thoughtful people will wrestle with every time they watch the evening news. In recent years we’ve watched as Islamist insurgents gain footholds in northern Iraq. We witness the horrors of innocent civilians being executed by ISIS militia at point-blank range in front of mass graves or young girls brutally raped by Boko Haram recruits in the name of God.

As we observe the chaos and *messiness* in which much of the world lives, we are constantly reminded of how incredibly blessed we are. We recognize the horrors many are subjected to, yet there is an uneasy realization of how we are pampered and surrounded with blessings. It is a tension with which we ought to wrestle every day. It is a tension to which we must subject our theological understanding of “blessing.”

I tell these stories  
to remind you  
to be thankful!  
Because indeed,  
we are so blessed.

## Living the Blessed Life in a Messy World

The question before us is, “How do we as Christ-followers live the blessed life in such a dark and *messy* world?” Lessons from the life of Abraham may provide a perspective for a thoughtful believer to make sense of and address the tension created by these two realities in our lives today: the abundant blessings we enjoy and the horrific situations in which so many others in our world live.

### Learning from the Life of Abram

The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” (Genesis 12:1-3)

Abram lived in a *messy* world. Genesis 12:1-3, the “call of Abram,” follows eleven chapters of primeval history narrating the fallenness of human beings, the aftermath of the disobedience of Adam and Eve, and the escalation of evil in the world. The violence of Cain, the vengeance of Lamech, and the degradation of the generation of Noah culminate in the story of the Tower of Babel. Babel stands as a metaphor for people who live their lives in defiance of God, arrogant and disobedient people whose all-consuming thought is to do precisely the opposite of what God has told them to do. Abram lived in the Land of Ur, the land of the moon god, Sin.<sup>1</sup> It was well nigh impossible to find salvation in Ur of the Chaldees. And into the bleakness of ancient history, God speaks to a 75-year-old man. He says, “Abram, I’m going to bless you. But what is more, I will make you a blessing to all peoples.” The call of Abram injects blessing into history,<sup>2</sup> introducing hope. God promises to bless Abram, and through him, all peoples on earth will be blessed.

The call of Abram  
injects blessing  
into history...

Old Testament scholar and missiologist, Chris Wright, suggests redemptive history is introduced with Genesis 12:1-3, and under the sovereign plan of God,

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1. The name of Abram’s wife, Sarai, was later changed to Sarah. Sarratu from which her name came was the wife of the moon god, Sin. Both Ur and Harran were important centres of moon worship. Gordon Wenham suggests that perhaps the family of Terah (Abram’s father) were once involved in such worship (cf. Joshua 24:2, 15). Gordon J. Wenham. *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 1 – 15* (Waco: Word Books Publisher, 1987), 273.
  2. Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006), 213.

it launches the history of God's mission.<sup>3</sup> He makes a strong case for *this* text in Genesis being the "Great Commission," the Old Testament foundation for the text upon which Christ's "Great Commission," recorded in Matthew 28:19-20, is based.<sup>4</sup> Mission might well be summed up in the dual command to Abram, "Go. . . and be a blessing." In retrospect, we know a great deal more than Abraham did of the "whole counsel of God," of the mystery hidden for ages and ultimately revealed in Jesus, the Messiah. Perhaps we might even think of Genesis 12:1-3 as the "gospel in advance" to which Paul refers in Galatians 3:8 because it is truly the Seed of Abraham, Christ, who will be a blessing for the sons of Adam,<sup>5</sup> all the peoples on earth.

### The Universal Scope of the Abrahamic Promise

A variant of the phrase "all peoples on earth," which Wright uses to underline the universal scope, the multinational outworking of God's blessing of Abraham, would be his translation of the phrase as "In you will be blessed all kinship groups of earth."<sup>6</sup> The words used by Christ when He told the eleven to make disciples of "all nations" echo God's words to Abram, saying that through him, "all peoples" on earth would be blessed.

John Piper, in his volume on missions, carefully demonstrates the Septuagint rendering of "all peoples" and "all nations," *panta ta ethne* is best understood as referring not to Gentile individuals but carries the meaning "all the nations" in the sense of "people groups outside of Israel."<sup>7</sup> God's promise to bless the "families" of the earth, says Piper, intends to reach every small grouping of people (ethnic groups).<sup>8</sup> Missionary efforts since the 1970s have

Missionary efforts since the 1970s have focused more on reaching *peoples* than on unreached *territories*.

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3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., 214.

5. Ibid., 212.

6. Ibid., 216.

7. John Piper. *Let the Nations be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1983), 181.

8. Ibid., 170-184. In these pages is one of the most extensive but well-organized teachings from Scripture to be found on the meaning of people groups. Piper uses Ralph Winter's definition of a people group: a significantly large grouping of individuals who perceive themselves to have a common affinity for one another because of their shared language, religion, ethnicity, residence, occupation, class or caste, situation, etc. . . . [It is] the largest group within which the Gospel can spread as a church planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance. (Taken from Ralph Winter. "Unreached Peoples: Recent Developments in the Concept," *Mission Frontiers*, August/September 1989), 12.

focused more on reaching *peoples* than on unreached *territories*. Such a change in terminology is still not fully understood in some local churches. In others, the terminology is meaningful, and people have gladly adopted an as yet *unreached people group*<sup>9</sup> as their target for prayer, giving, and mobilization.

Wright points to the universal scope of the Abrahamic promise as his clinching argument for recognizing the missiological centrality of Genesis 12:1-3. He traces this universality of Abraham's call through the Old Testament, emphasizing how God's purpose with Israel never changed; they would be God's people on behalf of all peoples on earth.

Even in the darkness of the primeval world, God has not forgotten the nations. In verse 3, God says to Abram, "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you." This universal aspect of God's intention for the world beyond the boundaries of Israel can be followed through the Old Testament record into the New and right to the final pages of Revelation, where the leaves of the tree of life are for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:2). It is as though the purposes of God have in view nothing else but the blessing and ultimate redemption of the nations of the earth.

Throughout the Pentateuch, the historical books, and in the majesty of the Psalms, this unending purpose of God can be traced. "May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine on us—so that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations" (Psalm 67:1-2).

It is impossible to ignore the repeated verbal allusions to the text of Genesis 12:1-3, linking the Abrahamic promise with God's salvific purposes for all peoples, a plan for which Israel was central.

In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance." (Isaiah 19:24-25)

Just as the form of the verb, *bless* (*brk*) in verse 25, "The Lord Almighty will bless them," matches the same form as in "I will bless you," in Genesis 12:2, so the phrase "Israel. . .will be a blessing on the earth" in verse 24 matches the phrase

It is as though the purposes of God have in view nothing else but the blessing and ultimate redemption of the nations of the earth.

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9. Winter, *Unreached Peoples: Recent Developments in the Concept*, 12. Ralph Winter defines an "unreached people group" as "a people group within which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians able to evangelize this people group."

later in the same verse, when God says, “and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”<sup>10</sup>

Over and over, this thrust toward the universality of God’s purposes can be traced in Scripture. As one moves into the New Testament, the universality of God’s plan is equally indisputable. Matthew closes his gospel by making explicit what the opening of his book had implied (note he introduces Jesus as “the son of David, the son of Abraham” in Matthew 1:1). In Christ’s commissioning of the disciples in chapter 28, the worldwide extent of the call to discipleship is clear. The words of the risen Christ clarify how the original Abrahamic commission to “Go. . . and be a blessing. . . and all the nations on earth will find blessing through you” (Genesis 12:1-3) can be fulfilled.

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20).

## Top-Line/Bottom-Line Blessing

Missiologists like Don Richardson have arranged the various promises which make up God’s covenant with Abram under two main headings, the *top line* and the *bottom line* of blessing.<sup>11</sup>

### Top-line Blessing

The central theme of Genesis 12:1-3 is “blessing.” The words *bless* and *blessing* “gleam like jewels in an ornamental goblet.”<sup>12</sup> The Hebrew root, *brk*, whether as a verb or noun, occurs five times in these three verses. As with the blessing by God during His creation of the world (Genesis 1-2), in Genesis 12:1-3, the word “bless” includes the concepts of “multiplication, spreading, filling and abundance<sup>13</sup>. . . God’s blessing means enjoying the good gifts of God’s creation in abundance.” Wright is quick to remind us that “material blessings are in themselves tangible expressions of divine benevolence,”<sup>14</sup> a reassertion of God’s original intention for human beings.<sup>15</sup>

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10. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 236.

11. Don Richardson, *Eternity in their Hearts: The Untold Story of Christianity Among Folk Religions of Ancient People* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1981), 123.

12. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 208.

13. *Ibid.*, 209.

14. *Ibid.*

15. In the creation account, after God created humankind, “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number. . .’” (Genesis 1:28). This phrase is often referred to as the cultural mandate; it underlines God’s heart right from creation to bless humankind.

## Why Does God Choose to Bless?

God chose to bless Abram, not because of his faith, obedience, or goodness, not because he was deserving, but simply because blessing is what God does! After all, the promise of blessing comes in verses 2 and 3, but Abram doesn't obey God and set out for Haran until verse 4, after receiving the promise of blessing. Blessing is a gift from the One who loves to give abundant gifts. This, to us who are recipients of blessings today, renders the blessing so much more exquisite because it is given without consideration of merit. There is no other way of explaining why we in the Western world live with such abundance. God is a generous God who chooses to bless His creatures. We dare not think in human terms, suggesting God's selection of the recipients of His blessing is because of something deserving in them.

Israel forgot why they were blessed. In Deuteronomy, God reminds His chosen people why He chose them:

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt (Deuteronomy 7:6-8).

Israel's history is marked by their misunderstanding of why God had chosen them from all the peoples on earth, a mistaken but deep-seated belief they were privileged because of something inherently special in themselves. We recognize this misconception in discussion with many people in the majority world, especially in North America. An irritating spirit of entitlement can often be detected, suggesting, "I deserve these good things!! These are my rights!"

Such attitudes have embodied the spirit of many who live in North America and throughout the Western world, a sense of entitlement because of our privileged past and the sense of how success in national purpose can be explained and even ensured by these privileges. In simplistic terms, it is the belief that we have a right to anything we want because of who we are. Do we deserve the blessings we experience every day in life here in the West? Certainly not! How humbling it is to us, living in this land of security and plenty, to remember we are blessed

**Do we deserve the blessings we experience every day in life here in the West? Certainly not!**

simply because a generous God in heaven exudes blessing and chooses to bless us.

For believers, such blessings directly result from our lineage as believers, our position as children of Abraham. Galatians 3:9 says, “So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. If you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are His heirs to God’s promise.” Biblical authors in books after Genesis refer to God’s covenant with Abram as “the promise” because the promises of the covenant together constitute the one coherent purpose of God.

Richardson challenges the “so called higher critics” who would suggest the Abrahamic Covenant as nothing more than “another example of a petty tribal god whetting the selfishness of an exclusive little clique of followers with exclusive promises of exclusive blessing.”<sup>16</sup> He suggests such critics have elevated themselves so far above the text in their intellectual pride they fail to recognize “in the midst of this flurry of promises regarding the political, personal and social enrichment of Abraham, a qualifying phrase occurs: . . . *and you will be a blessing.*” This phrase, says Richardson, “presages *the bottom line*: . . . AND ALL {PEOPLES} ON EARTH WILL BE BLESSED {THROUGH YOU.}”<sup>17</sup>

### **Bottom Line Blessing**

Richardson’s statement of this bottom line of blessing is powerful:

These words bring a hush upon thoughtful readers. We sense immediately that the God who would speak such words is no petty tribal god. He is a God whose plans are both benign and universal, spanning all ages and cultures. If He retaliates against enemies of Abraham, it is not just to protect Abraham, but to keep the enemies from extinguishing a fire kindled to warm the whole world.<sup>18</sup>

According to Galatians 3:29, “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” As we share in the blessings which have flowed to us through Abraham and then through Christ, we have a corresponding responsibility to pass on this blessing, making disciples of all nations for the glory of Christ and the joy of other peoples. We are blessed to be a blessing.

Reading the Scripture with this *top-line/bottom-line* mindset, we find this *motif* in every single book of the Bible. The *top line* is a blessing. The *bottom line* is responsibility. Not one of us who are children of Abraham can escape the responsibility implicated by the blessings to which we are heirs. How does

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16. Richardson, *Eternity in their Hearts*, 123.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*, 123-124.

it happen? It happens as we who are people of faith, those who are blessed, become the channels of blessing to others. This, in a nutshell, is the only answer to the haunting question posed in this chapter, “How do we, as Christ-followers, live the blessed life in such a dark and *messy* world?”

## **Suggestions for Pastoral Practice**

### **What Does It Mean to Bless Others?**

What does it actually mean to bless someone else? Let me be intentionally practical in suggesting that the benediction—pronounced by a pastor at the end of the weekend services, a benediction received week by week by parishioners—should be understood as a blessing bestowed upon them. When we bless someone, we invoke God’s blessing. We bear witness to the truth of how God’s generosity and power have by no means been extinguished. Based on who we know God to be, we speak of God’s intentions to bless people. We speak His Truth into a life, releasing the blessing of God into their life.

It is not we who give the gifts spoken of in the benediction. In some inexplicable way, we put God’s generosity in motion when we bless another. This is not to suggest a “health and wealth” gospel to which some would like to lay claim. When we bless someone else, we invoke what we understand, by faith, only a gracious, sovereign Lord can give, not because of the recipient’s faith or obedience, but simply because blessing is what God chooses to do.

### **The Two-Fold Impact of the Benediction**

For a pastor who yearns to see God raise His people as a Great Commission local church, the benediction is more than a prayer by which the congregation knows the service has ended. Instead, the benediction may be understood as a well-prepared conclusion to the ministry of the Word for the week, a part of the service for which people wait with anticipation, never wanting to miss out on the blessing or commission the pastor will pronounce over the people. The benediction intersects with and explains the commitment of pastors and people to the nations in fascinating ways. It focuses on each person’s responsibility to fulfill Christ’s final words to “make disciples of all nations.”

### **The Benediction is Personal**

When a pastor pronounces a benediction on the congregation, it is much more than a generalized blessing of people. I, as a congregant, open to the spoken words, realize with wonder that the blessing is for me! It is personal. God’s truth

is declared into each person's individual lives in the congregation, among whom I am one. God is announced as the gracious, sovereign Lord whose intent is to flood His children with gladness and joy. Every time I receive a benediction, I have this sense, as the blessing is pronounced, that my fellow congregants and I serve as witnesses to the truth of how God's generosity and power are upon us. Despondent or discouraged parishioners, on any day, can lift their heads and affirm God's tenacious love will have the final word. The blessing is for them! Like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, writing from Cell 92 during the darkest days of his imprisonment, one can say, "Despite everything, I belong to God."<sup>19</sup> There is a promise for every person who receives the benediction.

The tension the benediction creates within me weekly makes me ask, "Why am I so blessed?" If the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5) is any guide in describing those who are blessed, we must with utmost humility acknowledge the blessing as coming to us, not because of our ingenuity or hard work, but simply because this is what God is like. He is sovereign and omnipotent, always working for our best (Romans 8:28).

### **The Benediction is Instrumental**

As much as the benediction is an increasingly personal experience of blessing, I realize this act of blessing is not simply a wonderful gift I receive into my life and "consume." There is an instrumental dimension to the blessing, enabling God's generosity to others in a mysterious and humbling way. Because we belong to the Lord who blesses, we live as a people who bless. The announcement of blessing by my pastor is instrumental; it enacts God's generosity. As the author Eugene Peterson writes, "Words make something; they don't just say something."<sup>20</sup> Christ's words in John 6:63, 68 suggest the point Peterson makes, as we consider the life-giving power of words spoken in the power of the Spirit. Words of blessing are not mere vapours, thrown into the wind, disappearing into the air as a passing expression of hope-filled goodwill. Jesus' words, "The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life," remind us we belong to the Lord who blesses. With the words of blessing, we join in an inexplicably powerful way in God's healing and restoration, further enabling the eternal purposes of God to bless the world He created, the blessing He instituted after His sixth-day creation of humankind.

We live as people who bless. We live as instruments

We live as people  
who bless.

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19. Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Conspiracy and Imprisonment 1940-1945* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 632.

20. <https://sojo.net/articles/lost-translation-eugene-peterson-and-his-message>.

of His blessing. Any blessing we bestow on another serves as a witness to God, who is generous, but in some mysterious way, it also puts the extension of God's generosity in motion. It is instrumental. Our words of blessing mean something. The benediction of a pastor can be a great source of healing because the words themselves are life.

God's blessing upon Abraham has in view the instrumental involvement of the one on whom He was bestowing the blessing (Abraham). "I will bless you. . . and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." We who are blessed by God, though totally undeserving, live as instruments of God's blessing to others. One must always recognize how, as a pastor blesses the congregation, the ultimate blessing of the nations (peoples) of the earth is in view. At this point, there is an intersection of the pastoral benediction with the culture of a congregation where, over the years, a shared passion for and commitment to Christ's commission to "make disciples of all the peoples" begins to take shape.

### **What Does It Mean to Bless Others? Some Practical Suggestions**

The concept of instrumentality, learned as a recipient of the weekly benediction at the end of each service, may begin to infect parishioners' prayers and their conversations with others. When you sit with someone and share their brokenness, you listen to their expressions of pain, thinking of their need in terms of what you believe to be God's truth for them. Looking them in the eyes, you can boldly declare, in the form of a blessing, what you believe the truth to be. It is not you who bestows the blessing. You are the instrument through whom God will bless this person. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who knew so many years of unjust imprisonment and ultimately death, understood extending blessing even to the one who makes us suffer. His words are one of the finest descriptions of what this concept of "blessing all peoples" might look like for the sake of the world:

You are the  
instrument through  
whom God will  
bless this person.

God does not repay evil for evil, and thus the righteous should not do so either. No judgment, no abuse, but blessing. The world would have no hope if this were not the case. The world lives by the blessing of God and of the righteous and thus has a future. Blessing means laying one's hand on something and saying, Despite everything, you belong to God. This is what we do with the world that inflicts such suffering on us. We do not abandon it; we do not repudiate, despise or condemn it. Instead we call it back to God, we give it hope, we lay our hand on it and say:

may God's blessing come upon you, may God renew you; be blessed, world created by God, you who belong to your Creator and Redeemer. We have received God's blessing in happiness and in suffering. Yet those who have been blessed can do nothing but pass on this blessing; indeed, they must be a blessing wherever they are. The world can [be] renewed only by the impossible, [and] the impossible is the blessing of God.<sup>21</sup>

The blessing of God will ultimately spread throughout the entire earth through the descendants of Abraham. We who are blessed in Abraham stand in a long line of those who willingly become the instruments through whom the blessing will flow. How else will the blessing of Abraham come to all nations unless we accept the responsibility following from being among the recipients of unbridled blessing?

Paul repeatedly spoke of the universal availability of the Gospel as he defined his apostolic mission: "Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake" (Romans 1:5).

This definition of his mission echoes the Abrahamic covenant in Paul's use of the phrase "all the Gentiles." It is the same phrase explained earlier, literally "all the nations," (*panta ta ethne*) he uses in his quotation of Genesis 12:3 in Galatians 3:8, "Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you."

Paul sees Abraham as the model for what should have been *Israel's* response to God but also as the model for *all the nations* who would be blessed through him. It is breathtaking to think the nations of the earth, when the Gospel is received, fall into this great line of those who will be the instruments of the blessing being received by all nations.

## **The Intersection of the Benediction and the Great Commission**

The question before us in this chapter is, "How do we, as Christ-followers, live the blessed life in such a dark and *messy* world?" The concept of the pastoral benediction suggests one response to this question. Sometimes, without consciously understanding how it happens, the benediction contributes to our heart's response to Christ's Commission to "make disciples of all nations." The pastor is blessing us with something we know only God can give, but the words of the benediction unleash the blessing of God into our lives. Many in the

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21. Bonhoeffer, *Conspiracy and Imprisonment*, 623.

congregation may come to understand there is a bottom line following from the top line of blessing; through you, the blessed ones, all peoples on earth will be blessed. The realization of responsibility may light in our hearts a passion for taking our place in that long line of Christ-followers who have become the instruments or channels through whom the blessing might reach to the farthest corners of the dark, confused, and *messy* world in which we live, bringing redemption and healing.

...there is a bottom line following from the top line of blessing; through you, the blessed ones, all peoples on earth will be blessed.

For some of the *blessed* in our churches, their understanding of what it means to become an instrument through whom God's blessing will flow to the nations may mean uprooting themselves from the comforts of home and moving across an ocean to places like Niger, Turkey, or Cambodia to bring *the blessing* to one of the *peoples* of the earth. Some will respond to the call to go and live among one of the least-reached peoples on earth.

For others, it may not involve crossing an ocean. Many of our churches are located in megacities of great ethnic diversity.<sup>22</sup> At times, it seems to us people from among "all peoples on earth" have moved right into our church's neighbourhood. Becoming a channel of blessing will certainly mean blessing those living right in the neighbourhood. And from a church body that acknowledges how blessed they are, there will be people so full of grace, so rich in God's blessing, that it overflows from them to the ethnic groups of a great city or small town receiving immigrants.

The link between the weekly practice of a well-prepared, prayed-over, powerfully-delivered benediction upon God's people and the commitment of the people to the Great Commission can be explained biblically, though the mystery of the connection cannot be fully grasped. There is anecdotal evidence in the stories of people on the pew who have stepped into the chain of blessing by blessing others. As pastors speak truth and blessing into the lives of their people, the recipients, so rich in God's blessing, leave the place of worship to intentionally speak words of blessing to others. They have caught the vision of their church, their home, their school, their place of work becoming a place of giving and receiving a blessing, by their words and deeds. They begin to see the people

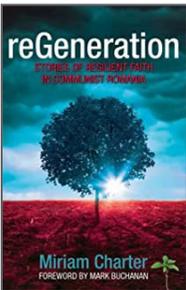
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22. For example, according to the City of Toronto website ([Toronto.ca](http://Toronto.ca)) more than half its population (51.5%) was born outside of Canada; over 180 languages and dialects are spoken; over 30% of Toronto's residents speak a language other than English or French at home. The same is increasingly true of many Canadian cities.

around them in the subway, across from them in the café, in the marketplace, in the hallway at school, in the foyer at church as part of the “all peoples on earth” to whom they can extend a blessing.

The question framing this chapter has been, “How do we, as Christ-followers live the blessed life in a dark and *messy* world?” How do we who are children of Abraham live with the uncomfortable tension which emerges when we recognize how blessed we are but are confronted daily with the reminders of a world with many unreached peoples<sup>23</sup> who have not yet been penetrated by the Gospel and live with tragedy and chaos we cannot ignore? The covenant of God with Abram provides one answer to that tension, “I will bless you. . . and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” The *top line* of blessing lies in God’s promise, “I will bless you.” The *bottom line* of blessing is “and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” Indeed, we are blessed to be a blessing.

## Further Reading



***reGeneration: Stories of Resilient Faith in Communist Romania*** by Miriam Charter.

This is a book of stories about ministry in the underground church of Communist Romania (1980s). It introduces a never-ending story about the regenerative process of true discipleship, which reaches today to the second, third, and fourth generations. These stories will inspire deeper reflection on challenging missional issues that will certainly be encountered by the next generation of international workers. To purchase a copy, contact the author at [miriamcharter@gmail.com](mailto:miriamcharter@gmail.com)

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23. Winter, *Unreached Peoples: Recent Developments in the Concept*, 12. Ralph Winter defines an “unreached people group” as “a people group within which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians able to evangelize this people group.”

## Chapter 4

# A Biblical Theology of Mission: Defined, Analyzed, Applied

by Raymur J. Downey

When he was installed in the Arthur F. Glasser Chair of Biblical Theology of Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary on May 15, 1996, Charles Van Engen gave an address entitled *The Gospel Story: Mission of, in and on the Way*. In his address, he defined biblical theology of mission as “a multidisciplinary field where the Bible is read with missiological eyes and, based on this reading, continually reexamines, reevaluates, and redirects the church’s participation in God’s mission in God’s world.”

“My thesis,” Van Engen added, is “that biblical theology of mission must be centred in Jesus Christ – mission *of* the Way, happen among the peoples and cultures of our world – mission *in* the way, and move forward over time in the faith pilgrimage of God’s people as they anticipate Christ’s present and coming Kingdom – mission *on* the way.” My doctoral research took place in the School of World Mission at Fuller in the early 1980s, and I confess my life was profoundly affected by the Fuller faculty, including my mentor, Dean Gilliland, and professors such as Paul Hiebert, Robert Clinton, Paul Pierson, Donald McGavran, Peter Wagner, and others. Teachers impact lives!

Our family lived for a quarter-century in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where we were primarily engaged in the leadership formation of students who intended to engage in roles wherever God might call them, whether it be in the Congo or elsewhere. My years on the African continent also have had a profound impact on who I am today. My African friends and colleagues, who are many, remind me one may leave Africa, but Africa will never leave you. I must agree! Two of our four children are African born, and all four have been profoundly shaped by their growing up years in Africa.

Biblical Theology of Mission has three main words, including an adjective, “biblical,” and two nouns, “theology” and “mission.” How may these three words be understood, and what is their relationship to one another? These questions will be addressed below in a document entitled, “A Biblical Theology of Mission: Defined, Analyzed, Applied.” Since “biblical” is a modifier of both theology and mission, let’s begin there.

## Biblical – God’s Word

One of the non-negotiables of the evangelical Christian faith is the firm conviction that the Bible is God’s Word, and it provides the supreme and only authority for faith and practice. We are correct, therefore, in assuming if the mission enterprise has any validity, the validity will be found in God’s written Word.

Let me begin with some rather elementary definitions. A simple Bible definition of *mission* is “God gathering out of the nations a people for His name” (Acts 15:14). It is the declaration of God’s glory to all people (Psalm 96:3). The emphasis is on mission as God’s work, hence the Latin term, *Missio Dei*.

A simple Bible definition of *mission* is “God gathering out of the nations a people for His name” (Acts 15:14).

By contrast the plural term, *missions*, refers to the various organizations and structures (many) by which churches engage in God’s mission (one). *Missionaries*, or as they have come to be labelled, *international workers (IWs)*, are ordinary people who take the call seriously to gather a people who bear God’s name from all nations.

For further clarification, one might say *mission* answers the question, “What?” What is God doing on the earth? *Missions* answers the question, “How?” How is the *Missio Dei* being accomplished? *Missionaries* answer the question, “Who?” Who are the human agents that God uses to accomplish the *Missio Dei*?

It is not the purpose of this essay to trace all the biblical references to mission. Not only does missions permeate all of Holy Scripture, but it is the primary theme. It provides the integrating theme of the biblical message from Genesis to Revelation.

The main focus of this section will be to discuss in some detail five all-Bible missional themes, summarized by Jesus in the Kingdom parable of the weeds (Matthew 13). I wish to bracket this amazingly succinct summary of mission theology with a brief reference to two other missional texts, one from the Old Testament (Genesis 12:1-3) and the other from the New Testament (Acts 1:8).

In Genesis 12:1-3, God promises to make Abram a great nation, a nation that would, in turn, bless all peoples of the earth. Christ’s incarnation fulfills the promise to bless all nations through Abram’s seed (cf. Galatians 3:16). The missiological implications of the Abrahamic covenant apply, using the language of a “top-line/ bottom-line” blessing formula where God blesses Abram (top-line) in order for his seed to bless all other nations (bottom-line).<sup>1</sup> God blesses Abram’s family, which becomes the nation of Israel. In turn, all the world’s people groups are blessed through Abram’s seed, Jesus Christ. By extension, those who are blessed by the

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1. [See chapter 3 for more information.](#)

Good News have the privilege to pass on the blessing to others.

The New Testament text, Acts 1:8, represents one of five occurrences of Christ's Great Commission. The other four occur in the gospels, one in each. What is unique about the Acts text is the emphasis is on "being" as opposed to "doing" as the primary missional activity. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will *be my witnesses* in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Though this text is familiar, it is frequently misunderstood and even misquoted. This text does not suggest an "either/or" choice of options, where one can serve either in Jerusalem or Judea and Samaria, or maybe even to the ends of the earth. Nor does it suggest some sort of a progression in time, first Jerusalem, then Judea, and so on. It happens simultaneously everywhere and at all times.

Let us look closely at a significant teaching text, Jesus' parable of the weeds in Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43. It is one of seven parables found in chapter thirteen, the first of the so-called "Kingdom parables." It is one of only two parables in the Gospels for which Christ provided an interpretation. The use of parables signals a time in Jesus' ministry when He moved from synagogue preaching to outdoor preaching, mainly because of growing opposition by the Jewish religious leaders.

Jesus intentionally used parables, a simple story format. One reason for using parables, He tells His disciples, is to distinguish the true from phony followers. Counterfeit followers might listen, but they would easily be confused by the stories, as their false motives were exposed. However, genuine seekers would have their understanding increased. "Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them" (13:12). Here is the parable of the weeds (Matthew 13:24-30):

Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

"The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?'

"'An enemy did this,' he replied.

"The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?'

"'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'"

Later, Jesus explained to His disciples the meaning of the parable (Matthew 13:36-43).

Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."

He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

"As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

In my opinion, this is the clearest and most succinct explanation of a biblical basis for mission in the Scriptures. It has the advantage of being clear, concise, simple and profound all at once. It summarizes major Bible themes in short phrases.

This is a Kingdom parable. God's Kingdom is a central theme running throughout the entire Bible. Kingdom refers to God's reign in people's individual lives, a reign to have its final fulfillment in Christ's visible rule over all creation.

Parables have one central truth as the key to their understanding. The central truth of the parable of the weeds is good and evil exist side by side, often with little apparent difference between them. Ultimately, God Himself will oversee the triumph of good and the defeat of evil in His final Kingdom.

At first glance, this doesn't look to be much more complicated than the plot of many movies, novels, and plays entertaining us today. But don't be fooled. Mission is a much more serious business than mere conflict between good and evil. Let's look quickly at the five major missional themes running through this parable.

- 1. Mission is Christ's principle activity:** Mission is important because of the presence and activity of the Sovereign Sower. Mission is the central task of the Sovereign Lord. It is the Son of Man who sows. Notice, He plants in His own field! Other texts make explicit how not only is He the owner, but He is the maker of everything that is represented by the field, which leads to the second theme.
- 2. Mission takes place in the whole inhabited world:** Mission is important

because the Lord plants seed in the world, the cosmos, the whole of the ordered universe, including the earth with its inhabitants and all creation. The world is the sphere into which Christ brings His Kingdom by preaching the good news. It is people who are found on all six continents. Therefore, the Gospel is to be extended worldwide, even though absolute domination of the world will not be experienced until Christ's return. But it is the final sign before His return (Matthew 24:14). But who will carry the message? The answer leads to the third major theme.

- 3. Mission is done by scattered people:** Mission is important because the seed is planted throughout the whole world. The good seed stands for the sons of the Kingdom. Christians are to be planted throughout the entire inhabited world. They are the day-to-day disciples for whom Christ's global cause becomes the integrating, overriding priority for all they do and all they are.

Christians like medical doctor David Livingstone, who, although he spent most of his life in Africa, only had one known convert to the Christian faith. Yet largely by his efforts alone, Europe was alerted to the urgent need to bring the Gospel to Africa. Livingstone prayed, "Lord, send me anywhere, only go with me. Lay any burden on me, only sustain me. Sever any tie but the tie that binds me to You."

Christians like James Fraser, trained engineer and concert pianist, spent the first seven years of his missionary career in China without one convert. Yet, thousands of Lisu people became Christians in the following years because he was willing to be planted wherever the Sovereign Sower willed.

The bottom line is obedience, vividly illustrated by the Chinese character for the word, a combination of the character for "leaf" and for "river." The leaf falling from the tree into the river goes wherever the river leads it. Obedience is being willing to flow with whatever God is doing in our world, letting Him take us wherever His current would lead us. Elizabeth Elliott calls obedience "the glad surrender." In the imagery of this parable, it is bearing fruit wherever He plants us. But being planted wherever He desires is never easy, which leads to the fourth theme.

- 4. An enemy is in active opposition to the mission enterprise.** Mission is critical because there is an enemy who is doing everything within his power to thwart God's plan. The enemy is identified as the Devil. In

Obedience is being willing to flow with whatever God is doing in our world, letting Him take us wherever His current would lead us.

the parable, there is no logical reason why an enemy would plant “bastard wheat,” so-called because it so resembles the wheat that it is impossible to tell them apart in the early stages. However, when the wheat forms heads, the distinction is clear.

The theme of opposition to God’s rule appears throughout Scripture. The Old Testament largely is a record of the failure of God’s people to overcome the opposition. Here, the enemy is clearly identified as a spiritual enemy. Paul reminded the Christians in Ephesus they were not fighting against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil (Ephesians 6:12).

The weapons we fight with, Paul reminds us, are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds (2 Corinthians 10:4). The ability to recognize satanic opposition as a significant obstacle in presenting the good news helps clarify many mission factors that would otherwise be totally baffling. For instance, Paul suggested sacrifices offered to idols are, in reality, being offered to demons. This puts a whole new slant on dealing with people who practice idol worship.

Nevertheless, we are to remember the world belongs to the Lord. We are engaged in returning to the rightful owner that which belongs to Him. The Kingdom is far from being in a perfect state, but the day is coming when this will occur, which leads to the final point.

- 5. Mission focuses on a triumphant finale.** Mission is important because there is an end in sight when God’s triumph will be declared over all the earth. In this parable, it is the harvest, the end of the age. The reapers are the angels. Look what happens. The weeds are tied up and destroyed by fire. The wheat is gathered into the treasury (barn) of the Sower. God’s rule is always directed towards a future. The day is coming when Christ “hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet” (1 Corinthians 15:24-25).

The all-Bible basis for missions is aptly summarized by this parable, told and explained by Jesus Himself. It underscores a prominent Bible theme running through both the Old and New Testaments: God is building a Kingdom, and this is a summary of what His Kingdom is. Let me repeat the main points.

A Sovereign Lord is planting believers throughout the whole inhabited earth. This seed, however, is growing in very adverse conditions because an enemy, the devil, has maliciously planted people under bondage to him to strangle and thwart any fruit-bearing by the good seed. Often it is difficult to distinguish between the

children of the King and the children of the evil one. But owner rights to the field belong to the Sower alone, and despite appearances to the contrary, all opposition to His authority will finally be overcome. God's rule is always directed towards a future. The role of His servants is simply to bear fruit wherever they have been planted. And the desire of the Master Sower is to plant them over the whole earth so no part of His field will be characterized only by weeds.

A sovereign Lord is  
planting believers  
throughout the whole  
inhabited earth.

## Whole Bible and Mission

Mission is based on the whole message of the entire Bible because biblical theology is primarily a theology of mission, the *Missio Dei*. Mission has existed in the mind of the Godhead from the creation of the heavens and the earth, when God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, in our likeness" Genesis 1:26. God gave them dominion over all of His creation, but there were some bumps along the way, thanks to the humans He created. Adam and Eve fell by listening to the serpent's lie and eating fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, something God had explicitly forbidden.<sup>2</sup> The result was their expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

When they ate the forbidden fruit, God said to the serpent, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel" (Genesis 3:15). A fatal blow to Satanic forces, but a temporary but non-fatal blow to the woman's future offspring, Jesus.<sup>3</sup> This is the first of many Messianic promises in the Bible which occur in both the Old and New Testaments.

The story continues through several different scenarios before a special covenant is established with Abram (Genesis 12:1-4). These events include Cain's murder of his brother Abel, then the Great Flood where only Noah and his family are saved, the destruction of the Tower of Babel (humanity's futile attempt to make a name for themselves), resulting in the confusion of languages (God intended unity in diversity, not unity in uniformity), followed by the scattering of peoples and nations throughout the whole world (Genesis 4-11).

Genesis 12-50 provides a fascinating and entertainingly miraculous drama of the outworking of the Abrahamic covenant, including a host of main characters,

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2. cf. Genesis 2:15.

3. cf. Galatians 3:16.

Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Jacob, Jacob's twelve sons, and my favourite story, Joseph. It is beyond the scope of this study to elaborate on the amazing Old Testament drama tracing the outworking of God's plan accomplished through His fallible prophets, priests, and kings. God's way is not hindered by the use of imperfect people to nevertheless accomplish His perfect plan! Thank God! Then there is the Book of Exodus, starring Moses and Joshua, and later the story of David, a man after God's own heart despite his glaring weaknesses.

## The New Testament and Jesus

When we get to the New Testament, the whole biblical aspect turns up a notch as first Jesus and His followers and then Paul and his companions dominate the drama. The Great Commission spelled out, particularly in Matthew 28:16-20 and Acts 1:8, clarifies the missional aspect of theology. The Matthew account emphasizes the command to "make disciples" by going, baptizing, and teaching. In contrast, the Acts account emphasizes *being* rather than *doing*, meaning *being* witnesses to all people everywhere.

On the Emmaus Road account in Luke 24, how enlightening it would have been to be privy to the risen Christ's review of Old Testament passages beginning with the books of Moses and on the prophets, pointing out everything in the Scriptures referring to Him (cf. 24:25-27). David Bosch states, "theology ceases to be theology if it loses its missionary character."<sup>4</sup> It is the biblical theology of *mission* being highlighted.

One significant document in my personal library is a short book of 70 pages by J. Andrew Kirk entitled "The Mission of Theology and Theology as Mission" (1997). It clarifies many things for me. The title itself gives some indication of the missiological position the author adopts in this, the final of six booklets in the *Christian Mission and Modern Culture* series by Trinity Press International. Kirk defines theology as follows:

It is a reflective, intellectual process carried out by a community of faith whose concern is with God and His relationship to the entire universe. This process gives a privileged place to certain sources of knowledge, namely, the Bible, ecumenical creeds, and other historical confessions of faith. It has two fundamental tasks: to make sense of the whole of life by reference to God, and to be an agent of transformation to the whole of life so that it might reflect God's intentions (1997, 8).

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4. Bosch, 1991, 494.

Further along, Kirk adds,

My thesis is that it is impossible to conceive of theology apart from mission. All our theology is, by definition, *missionary theology*, for it has as its object the study of the ways of God who is by nature missionary and a foundation text written by and for missionaries.<sup>5</sup>

Rereading this relatively brief booklet has been a fresh reminder of how much his study has shaped my own approach to a biblical theology of mission. Kirk concludes with this statement:

What I have been trying to describe is a pattern of learning that consciously operates within four major points of reference: 1) the Christian message, 2) the participant's own pilgrimage, 3) the life and witness of the Christian community, and 4) the society in which she or he will be called to mission in Christ's way...*that authentic theology at the end of the second millennium can only be theology for the sake of mission.*<sup>6</sup>

## The New Testament and Paul

As indicated above, Paul, originally known as Saul, is the second New Testament individual to profoundly impact the mission story. Paul's story dominates the second half of the Book of Acts. The New Testament also includes thirteen letters Paul wrote to churches and to his ministry companions scattered throughout Asia and Europe.

Paul's story does not start well. However, he is introduced to the scene after Stephen's stoning, where he is a willing witness to Stephen's martyrdom (Acts 7). Shortly after this, Saul enters house after house in Jerusalem, dragging off both men and women and committing them to prison. It does not stop there.

He asks and receives letters from the high priest in Jerusalem, addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, Syria, authorizing him and his companions to go there and, if they found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, to bring them back bound to Jerusalem (Acts 9:1). Jesus had other plans for Paul, however.

Just before reaching his destination, Saul falls to the ground, blinded by a light, and hears Jesus' voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (9:4). His companions subsequently lead him to Damascus, where he is told to meet with a disciple named Ananias. A reluctant Ananias, who has already been warned of Saul's mission, is told to go and lay hands on Saul to restore his

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5. Kirk, 1997, 50.

6. Kirk, 1997, 61.

sight. He is reassured in a vision with the words, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name” (9:15, 16). Paul is converted, baptized, and filled with the Holy Spirit. He soon begins to preach in the synagogues of Damascus of Jesus being the Messiah. The rest is history!

Paul becomes a church planter and mentor of ministry companions in settings where he would suffer for the name of Jesus throughout the west Asian and European sub-continent. Paul proves himself as a gifted writer, preacher, and mentor. He identified himself as a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle with a special focus on the Gentiles.<sup>7</sup> In Romans 11:13, Paul identifies himself as an apostle to the Gentiles. In fact, Romans 9-11 is the record of an impassioned *sea change* that occurred in Paul, a proud Jew, opening the door for one and all as never before for the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ to be freely offered to all humanity. It is no small thing, as Paul writes in Romans 15:14-29, especially verses 18-19:

I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done—by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.

Great news for all nations, us included!

## Conclusion

The above study has been a humble attempt to define, analyze, and apply a biblical theology of mission as I perceive it. I have included below a list of books for further study for those who might wish to go deeper into this subject. To God be the glory!

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## Chapter 5

# For the Glory of God

by Sunder Krishnan

I am indebted to a sermon by John Piper for the approach I have taken in this chapter (a member of my congregation gave it to me several years ago—on a cassette tape!). This sermon has stimulated so much of my thinking and subsequent reflection that I can no longer separate my ideas from Piper’s.

In his book “Let the Nations Be Glad!” John Piper writes,

In our worship services God simply doesn’t come through for who he is. He is unwittingly belittled. For those who are stunned by the indescribable magnitude of what God has made, not to mention the infinite greatness of the One who made it, the steady diet on Sunday morning of practical how-to’s, psychological soothing, relational therapy and tactical planning seem dramatically out of touch with Reality—the God of overwhelming greatness.”<sup>1</sup>

With this “out of touch”ness in mind, consider the question why God is concerned for the nations. Now you might say, “That’s a no-brainer— isn’t it His love? Have you forgotten John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...”?”

Yes, certainly love is involved, but is it the “first thing?” As C.S. Lewis argued so well, everything has its proper value. If we put first things first and second things second, we get both the first and second things; but we lose both if we put second things first.<sup>2</sup> Let me illustrate with my grandchildren, one of the great sources of joy in my life. One way I express my joy is to take pictures of them. You know what should be first, my love for them. What should be second is my love for photography. As long as I keep first things first, and my love for them remains far more important than photographing them, I continue to have great joy in them and in photographing them. But if my love for photography becomes more

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1. John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad!* Third ed. (Baker Academic, 2010), 36-37.

2. C.S. Lewis, *God In The Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 280.

important, I will likely get irritated with them when they do not pose for me or they make funny faces, which they do all the time. I could end up getting so frustrated that I lose my joy in them and photographing them. God's love is crucial, but God's love is not first (in the C.S. Lewis sense) when it comes to His concern for the lost and poor of the nations. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to find out what is first in the heart of God because, by then putting it first, we will get God's love, mercy, etc. "right."

Let's begin with the familiar Exodus story of God's deliverance of the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt, which is the dominant Old Testament paradigm of the greater redemption from the tyranny of sin, the salvation and forgiveness in the name of Jesus to be preached to all nations. What was God's motivation there? We read in Exodus 3:7-8,

The LORD said, 'I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey....

It seems like love, after all, is forefront in this declaration. Everything seems to point to love as His primary, even sole, motivation.

Five verses later, God says to Moses,

"I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain" (Exodus 3:12).

So right away, we have a clue of something more going on than just freeing some miserable people from slavery and leading them to a land of milk and honey. He states His purpose in delivering them clearly from the start; those who were once enslaved will worship Me.

Then, in Exodus 6:2-3, God further says to Moses, "'I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the Lord I did not make myself fully known to them,'" implying with what He was about to do through Moses, He was going to reveal yet another dimension of His name. So, underlying the obvious love motive is something bigger, a revelation of a dimension of God not yet known. And in Scripture, whenever people discovered a new name of God (usually revealed by some act of God), they built an altar and worshipped Him.

And then "the gloves come off." The rest of the story is a head-to-head battle between God and Pharaoh. Here is what He says in Exodus 10:1-2,

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his officials so that I may perform these signs of mine among them that you may tell your children and grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and how I performed my signs among them, and that you may know that I am the Lord.”

Further in Exodus 14:4, 17–18, we read the same phrase three times,

“And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD.” So, the Israelites did this.

This is what it is all about when we dig deeper. Yes, God sees their misery. Yes, He is concerned. Yes, He wants to take them to a land of milk and honey. However, the primary motivation behind all of this is God gaining glory for Himself through this Pharaoh so the delivered Israelites can tell their future generations how great their God was and is.

To make sure we do not miss the point, look at the final definitive word of the New Testament on God’s dealings with Pharaoh in Romans 9:17–18,

For Scripture says to Pharaoh: “I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

This whole Exodus event seemed to begin as an act of love, but it gets hijacked by God’s glory along the way! Human beings do this all the time, even in Christian ministry.

Many a pastor starts out with noble motives to build a ministry, to reach the lost and the poor; then, before we know it, a few years down the line, they are seduced by their success, and their churches become a monument to their own glory. When we see this in humans, we are legitimately and appropriately repelled. This is why for human beings, love must always be the first thing—faith, hope and love, “But the greatest of these is love” [v. 13] and “Love never fails” [v. 8], writes the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13. For God, it would seem there is something prior to love, His glory and His fame.

It seems the redeemed Israelites understood this. In Exodus 15, Miriam and Moses lead the people in a song,

...the primary motivation behind all of this is God gaining glory for Himself...

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord: “I will sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. . . . Your right hand, Lord, was majestic in power. Your right hand, Lord, shattered the enemy. In the greatness of your majesty you threw down those who opposed you. . . . Who among the gods is like you, Lord? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?” (15:1, 6–7, 11).

This was the dominant response to their miraculous deliverance from the might of Pharaoh’s armies. Now contrast their song with many of the songs we sing when it comes to our far greater deliverance from the slavery of sin. The first one coming to my mind is, “Oh, how He loves you and me, Oh, how He loves you and me, He gave His life what more could He give? Oh, how He loves you, oh, how He loves me, Oh, how He loves you and me.”<sup>3</sup> True enough.

Question, have you ever wondered why Miriam and Moses did not sing, “Oh, how He loved us slaves in Egypt! Oh, how He loved us slaves in Egypt! How wonderful—He delivered us from Pharaoh! What more could He do? Oh, how He loved us slaves in Egypt”? It would be accurate, but must we not pause to reflect on why they instead chose to sing about God’s greatness, uniqueness, and majesty? This leads to a question, how do we harmonize the obvious motive of God’s love with the deeper and more foundational motive of promoting and exhibiting His own glory. Here is Piper’s helpful insight in my paraphrase from memory: God’s love for us is demonstrated not by His making much of us but by enabling us to make much of Him.

God’s love for us is  
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make much of Him.

Granted, you say, but surely this changes when we come to the New Testament! After all, we have not yet grappled with John 3:16, “For God so *loved* the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Where does it say anything about God being concerned for His glory in our salvation? Love seems to be the sole and sufficient motivation for the coming of Jesus into the world to save us. Maybe everything about God’s glory being “the first thing” was an Old Testament emphasis, but in the New Testament, and forever after, isn’t God’s love the main thing?

Let us dig a bit deeper. John 3:16 says we who believe in Jesus will “have eternal life.” Add to this John 17:3–5, where Jesus tells us what eternal life is,

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3. Kurt Kaiser. *Oh, How He Loves You and Me*, copyright 1975. Word Music.

“Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.”

In this “high priestly” prayer, in the shadow of the cross (which is what John 3:16 is all about), Jesus’ complete preoccupation is not with how much He loves you and me, but with His glory and His Father’s glory.

This same preoccupation occurs again later in Jesus’ prayer, “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world” (John 17:24).

His huge overriding concern was not with the Father’s love for the world but the Father’s eternal love for Jesus and His desire for the world to see His glory. So, with this in mind, if we take the familiar John 3:16 and add it to the not-so-familiar John 17:3, here’s what we get, “God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but increasingly get to know God and Jesus in all their glory and make that glory known to others.”

So (to paraphrase Piper again), God’s love for His people, both in Exodus and in the gospels, is shown not in how He makes much of them but in how He works in their lives so they can learn to see His glory, love His glory, and desire others to do the same.

Let’s approach this from another angle. We know Jesus died to save us from the penalty of sin (justification), the power of sin (sanctification), and the very presence of sin (glorification). So, He came to deal comprehensively with the problem of sin. What, then, is the essence of sin? According to the Bible, all sin is basically an attack on the glory of God. Soon after their deliverance from Pharaoh’s armies, the Hebrew slaves committed idolatry by making and revelling before the golden calf. The Old Testament prophets referred to this (literal) idolatry as the sin of exchanged glory (Jeremiah 2:11).

...all sin is basically  
an attack on the  
glory of God.

Nothing changes when we get to the New. Paul writes in Romans 1:21–23,

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him. . . . Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

Then in Romans 3:23, Paul says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Put this all together, and the heart of all sin is revealed as despising or discounting the glory of God by substituting some created thing as the object we trust to give what we long for. This is why, when Jesus dealt with sin so effectively through His death on the cross, His preoccupation was restoring God’s glory to its rightful place. Every step Jesus took upon Golgotha, suffering under the brutal prodding of the soldiers eager to get this gruesome task over with, the heavy wooden cross grating in His lacerated back, every step, as one author put it, proclaimed the glory of God is worth it. He must have repeated a hundred times on the Via Dolorosa, “... What shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!” (John 12:27–28).

Jesus’ overarching passion in all His suffering was the glory of God.

Many wonderful hymns and modern songs have been written to help us express our gratitude to and adoration of, our Saviour for His saving, sanctifying and glorifying sacrifice. Yet *sometimes*, even the best of them seem to lose sight of this matter of the primacy of God’s glory. For example, the beloved and inspiring worship song “Above All”<sup>4</sup> ends with “He took the fall and thought of me above all.” Did He think of us on the cross? Yes! Did He think of us *above all*? No. As we have seen in our reflections so far, above all, He was thinking about the glory of God. And so, whether we consider the Exodus redemption from Egyptian slavery or that grander, universal, cross-cultural, cross-temporal redemption of sinners, the “first thing” (in the sense that C.S. Lewis spoke of) is God’s glory, not love.

Where then does God’s love fit in? It is impossible to read the gospels and not be continually amazed and deeply touched by the compassion, mercy, kindness, and gentleness, in a word, grace, of the Lord Jesus Christ. Little children are drawn to Him, women were honourably treated and dignified by Him, and the ordinary people heard Him gladly. So, we have to answer the question, where does God’s love, demonstrated supremely in Jesus’ death for us, fit in with this primacy of God’s glory? Let’s see what Scripture tells us about Jesus’ acts of mercy.

For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written: “Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing the praises of your name.” Again, it says, “Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people.” And again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles; Let all the peoples extol him” (Romans 15:8–11).

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4 Paul Baloche and Lenny LeBlanc, *Above All* (song), © 1999. CCLI #2672885.

According to these verses, Christ's acts of love and mercy had as their primary motivation the vindication of God's truth and faithfulness in keeping the promises He made to Abraham to bless the nations so the Gentiles would then *glorify Him for His mercy*.

You and I, as Christ-followers, are asked to show mercy, to give a cup of water in Jesus' name. However, we are not just told to give a cup of water, but to give it in Jesus' name, so He gets the glory. Meaning every act of mercy has behind it the glory of God.

Take another look at the song the Israelites sang to celebrate their deliverance. There is one verse that refers to God's love, "You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed; you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode" (Exodus 15:13, ESV<sup>5</sup>).

God's love is a leading and guiding love, and where is it taking the freshly redeemed people? His holy place. And what will they do when they arrive there? Worship Him. And so, here is how God's love fits in. God's love woos His people and leads them gently to a place where they will worship Him and ascribe to Him the glory due His name. Thus, love, mercy and glory do not compete in God as they might and often do in us, fallen humans. But we have to keep first things first, or we risk missing everything.

And yes, all this is of immense practical significance (lest anyone think we are just splitting theological hairs). When we look at the world's vast suffering (both in extent and depth), what really gives us hope people will receive mercy? Only God's zeal for His glory allows us to be confident of this because we read in Romans 15 that the Gentiles will glorify God for His mercy, and He is committed to the pursuit of His glory. If we insist on making God's compassion prior to God's glory, we undercut the basis of confidence in our hope. We can lay hold of God in prayer and plead with Him to be merciful to the nations, above all because He is zealous for His glory. If we let this sink in, it will revolutionize the way we think about the impossible task before us of global mission, especially when it comes to the enduring motivation to stay engaged.

Most appeals to get ordinary Christ-followers involved, and stay involved, over the long haul in global missions fail because they are based on loving the lost. I recall hearing a speaker some time ago say, "Millions of people are lost without Christ; we need to love lost people and to go tell them about Jesus. Can you hear the thud of a million feet heading into a Christ-less eternity?" All these exhortations are based on truth, but for several years I tried *in vain* to drum up

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5. *The Holy Bible*, English Standard Version. ESV<sup>®</sup> Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by [Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers](#).

genuine love in my heart for lost people. So, it was with great freedom I read John Dawson's observations in *Taking Our Cities for God*. He writes,

Have you ever wondered what it feels like to have a love for the lost? This is a term that we use as part of our Christian jargon. . . . Many believers search their hearts in condemnation (*c'est moi!*), looking for the arrival of some feeling of benevolence that would propel them into bold missions. It will never happen. It is impossible to love "the lost." You can't feel deeply for an abstraction or a concept. You would find it impossible to love deeply an unfamiliar individual portrayed in a photograph, let alone a nation or a race or something as vague as "all lost people." . . . It is not primarily out of compassion for humanity that we share our faith or pray for the lost; it is, first of all, a love for God. . . . Humanity does not deserve the love of God any more than you or I do. We should never be Christian humanists, taking Jesus to poor sinful people, reducing Jesus to some kind of product that will better their lot. People deserved to be damned, but Jesus, the suffering Lamb of God, deserves the reward of His suffering, which would be that none perish, but that all are reconciled to the Father.<sup>6</sup>

This is the only enduring motivation for sustained effort and involvement in the various aspects of our global mission; Jesus, the suffering Lamb of God, deserves the reward of His suffering.

Let me draw this chapter to a close by illustrating how this applies to preaching, the central labour of my life for 36 years in one local church and over five years since my "retirement." John Piper puts it this way,

When the glory of God Himself saturates our preaching and teaching and conversation and writings, and when He predominates above our talk of methods and strategies and psychological buzzwords and cultural trends, then the people might begin to feel that He is the central reality of their lives and that the spread of His glory is more important than all their possessions and all their plans.<sup>7</sup>

The history of revival would bear out Piper's assertion. Many of the great missionary organizations and Christian relief agencies we are familiar with had their birth in the evangelical awakenings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Do you know why? Because what happens first in revival is not a passion for the "lost" or the "unreached," but a deep conviction of our sin, followed by a fresh vision of Jesus our Redeemer and a new wave of gratitude and love for Him.

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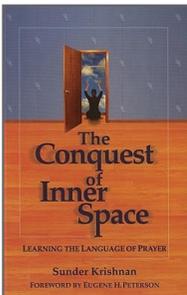
6. John Dawson, *Taking Our Cities for God* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 1989, 2001), 164-165.

7. John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad!* 60, 61.

This realization results in a deepening conviction of how He indeed deserves the reward of His suffering in saving the global lost. The conviction sustains our involvement in the cause.

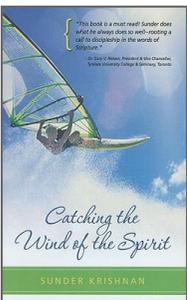
No wonder Moses, leading a ragtag group of people through the wilderness, prayed, “Now, show me Your glory!” (Exodus 33:18). Very few of us have a personal relationship with members of a specific unreached people group. But Christ-followers claim to have a personal relationship with God through Jesus. Let us then attempt to maintain our relationship, especially in prayer and sung worship, continually asking Him to “show us His glory.” Also, because His passion for His glory is infinitely greater than mine and His love for me is shown in His enabling me to make much of Him, I can dare to hope my prayer will indeed be answered, and I will be increasingly motivated to keep playing my part in the drama of global redemption.

## Further Reading



***The Conquest of Inner Space: Learning the Language of Prayer*** by Sunder Krishnan.

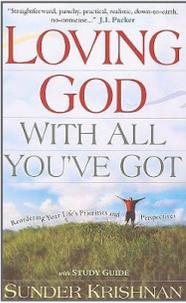
The author explains how we can find inner peace through worship and prayer, fueled by meditation on the law of God. Human beings have done an amazing job of understanding and controlling the world outside of themselves, but conquering our inner space, our disorderly soul, remains as formidable a challenge as ever. By drawing on the treasury of the Psalms, you will learn how the discipline of prayer and regular meditation on God’s Word can help you “conquer” the chaos of your inner space.



***Catching the Wind of the Spirit*** by Sunder Krishnan.

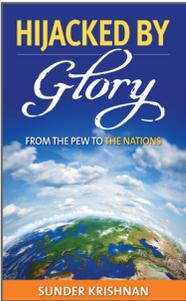
Rev. Krishnan explores eight spiritual disciplines—the sails that we must hoist if we are to catch the wind of the Spirit: Worship, Scripture Meditation, Study, Prayer, Confession, Fellowship, Service and Giving. “The Holy Spirit is much the same as the wind and the sailboat,” says Krishnan. It is the Spirit of God who performs the vital work of transforming each of us into the image of our Saviour and Lord. But in order to be effectively steered and directed by the Spirit, we must embrace the spiritual

disciplines that will help us gradually and progressively be transformed into the image of Christ. Each chapter includes questions for individual or group study.



***Loving God: With All You've Got*** by Sunder Krishnan.

This book will inspire you to develop a deeper intimacy with God through worship, prayer and meditation. More than a book, *Loving God* is a unique, achievable journey that shows you how to love God with your entire being, fully surrendered to Him. This new edition comes complete with a study guide for small groups and Sunday school classes.



***Hijacked by Glory: From the Pew to the Nations*** by Sunder Krishnan.

In *Hijacked by Glory*, Sunder Krishnan revolutionizes the way we think about the seemingly impossible task before us by showing us the true motivation behind missions: a passion for God's glory.

## Chapter 6

# Hội Thánh trong Công Tác Truyền Bá Phúc Âm

Mục sư Lê Trung Thành, D.Min.; D.Miss

The most effective approach to reaching the Vietnamese non-believing diaspora is through human relationship. While the content is the same, the implementation of materials and training must be well thought out with planning and prayers. These proposed tools can help Vietnamese believers to reach out to new immigrants in their communities and to continue the process of forming mature believers through discipleship.

Là những tín nhân Đấng Christ, chúng ta cần hiểu rõ thể nào Đức Chúa Trời, Đấng Tể Trị, thể hiện ý định tốt lành và chương trình cứu rỗi của, Ngài không những cho dân tộc chúng ta mà thôi, nhưng cũng cho tất cả các dân tộc khác, không cùng ngôn ngữ, để từ đó, chúng ta có nếp sống tích cực của một tín nhân Đấng Christ giữa cộng đồng mà Chúa đang đặt để.

Tác giả có dịp nghiên cứu và nhận thấy một số vấn đề và xin được trình bày để chúng ta cùng suy nghĩ và tìm phương thức thay đổi trên căn bản: ‘Sứ Điệp Phúc Âm không thay đổi theo thời gian và không gian, nhưng phương cách truyền đạt sứ điệp ấy cần thay đổi để thích hợp với con người trong bối cảnh hiện tại.’ Những điểm suy nghĩ và cân nhắc:

### 1. Nhận xét:

1.1. Hội Thánh có nhiều nỗ lực trong công tác truyền bá Phúc Âm như chứng đạo, truyền giảng . . . nhưng thiếu sót trong công tác môn đệ hoá các tân tín hữu. Có thể đã hiểu mục tiêu của Đại Mạng Lệnh của Chúa Jêsus là ra đi rao giảng Tin Lành; thay vì mục tiêu chính của Đại Mạng Lệnh là ‘khiến muôn dân trở nên môn đệ của Chúa Jêsus’ (động từ chính) bằng cách: a) ra đi rao giảng Tin Lành; b) báp têm tân tín hữu và c) dạy đạo (các trợ động tự) (dựa vào Ma thi ơ 28:18-20) Vì thế, thường thì Hội Thánh có người tin Chúa chỉ hướng dẫn tân tín hữu học Giáo lý Báp têm và cử hành Thánh Lễ Báp têm cho họ, nhưng ít nhấn mạnh đến việc môn đệ hoá.

1.2. Hội Thánh thường chú trọng và mời thân hữu đến các buổi truyền

giảng vào các dịp Lễ lớn như Giáng Sinh, Thương Khó & Phục Sinh hoặc khi có những diễn giả/ca sĩ nổi tiếng. Nhưng thiếu sót trong việc giữ mối liên hệ mật thiết với các thân hữu trong những ngày tháng còn lại; thế nên thân hữu được mời đến ‘tham dự’ chương trình như đi xem các buổi ca nhạc kịch tổ chức thể tục bên ngoài cộng đồng chứ không đến trong tinh thần để được truyền giảng Đạo Chúa.

1.3. Hội Thánh thường có nhiều sinh hoạt bên cạnh Lễ Thờ Phượng vào Chúa nhật nên đời sống con dân Chúa lại càng bận rộn hơn, không còn thì giờ liên hệ với bạn bè, thân hữu trong tuần, nên khó mời họ đến sinh hoạt với Hội Thánh. Hoặc nếu có những dịp tiện gặp gỡ nhau thì lại không ý thức đây là những cơ hội chia sẻ niềm tin và ảnh hưởng về Chúa cho thân hữu hay bạn bè của mình.

1.4. Sinh hoạt giao tế của tín nhân Đấng Christ chỉ xảy ra giữa vòng con dân Chúa trong Hội Thánh, ít tiếp cận với các thân hữu của mình. Đôi khi mối liên hệ giữa vòng tín nhân Đấng Christ quá thân mật nên khó cho thân hữu có thể hội nhập với.

1.5. Hội Thánh nói chung thường chú trọng đến lãnh vực thuộc linh và thông công, nhưng thiếu lãnh vực truyền giảng qua phương cách đáp ứng những nhu cầu vật thể và tinh thần trong đời sống hằng ngày. Thế nên, Hội Thánh cần nhắm vào mục tiêu truyền giáo toàn diện để có thể đáp ứng nhu cầu từ thể chất đến tâm hồn và tâm linh con người.

1.6. Công Tác Chứng Đạo trong hội thánh thường dành một buổi trong chương trình sinh hoạt hằng tuần như ‘Tối Thứ Năm Thăm Viếng Chứng Đạo’ hay ‘Chiều Chúa Nhật Thăm Viếng Chứng Đạo’... và thường chỉ có Mục sư Quản nhiệm với vài thành viên trong Ban Chứng Đạo Hội Thánh thực hiện mà thôi; còn các tín hữu trong hội thánh dường như không mấy quan tâm đến công tác này, chứ đừng nói chi đến việc tham gia Chứng Đạo, nên ảnh hưởng của Đạo Chúa không lây lan được trong cộng đồng.

## 2. Đề Nghị

Công tác truyền bá Phúc Âm của Chúa Jêsus là trách nhiệm cá nhân của mỗi tín nhân Đấng Christ. Thế nên, Hội Thánh cần thay đổi thái độ và phương cách trong CTTBPÂ để huy động mọi tín nhân Đấng Christ nhận lãnh trách nhiệm và tham dự cách nhiệt thành, như sau:

2.1. **Truyền bá Phúc Âm là trách nhiệm của mỗi tín nhân Đấng Christ** để chia sẻ Tin Mừng với những người khác; bao gồm tất cả những ai tin vào Danh Ngài. Ngoài ra, CTTBPÂ không phải là một vấn đề của năng khiếu hay ân tứ thuộc linh, nhưng đó là một trách nhiệm cần phải được thực hiện bởi tất cả các tín nhân Đấng Christ.

**2.2 Truyền bá Phúc Âm không chỉ là việc làm vào những thời điểm nhất định trong tuần**, nhưng phải là bất cứ lúc nào, bất cứ nơi nào và cho bất cứ người nào mà Chúa Thánh Linh nhắc nhở và ban cho cơ hội hay dịp tiện chia sẻ Tin Mừng. Do đó, CTTBPÂ phải là một lối sống mà trong đó các tín nhân Đấng Christ phải sẵn sàng để chia sẻ Chúa Jê-sus và Phúc Âm của Ngài trong mọi nơi, mọi lúc và mọi người.

**2.3. Truyền bá Phúc Âm là tiến trình chia sẻ Chúa Jê-sus cho người khác**, đây là tiến trình '5 chữ G' mà trong đó bao gồm thời gian từ lúc chuẩn bị tấm lòng thân hữu đến khi trở thành tín nhân Đấng Christ trưởng thành, tham gia công tác truyền bá Phúc Âm cho người khác, như sau:

- a) Giấy đất, nói đến sự chuẩn bị cần thiết cho tấm lòng người nghe trước khi chia sẻ Tin Mừng,
- b) Gieo hạt, nói đến việc trình bày Phúc Âm cách rõ ràng, mạch lạc và thuyết phục
- c) Gặt hái, nói đến việc thân hữu tiếp nhận Chúa Jê-sus vào lòng làm Cứu Chúa và Chủ cuộc đời.
- d) Gây dựng, nuôi dưỡng để được tăng trưởng trở nên tín nhân Đấng Christ trưởng thành,
- e) Gia bội, nói đến tín nhân Đấng Christ trưởng thành nay tiếp nối công tác truyền bá Phúc Âm

Tiến trình CTTBPÂ không đo lường sự thành công bằng số lượng có bao nhiêu người tiếp nhận Chúa Jê-sus. Ngược lại, mỗi dịp các tín nhân Đấng Christ nói về Chúa Jê-sus cho người khác đều là góp phần vào tiến trình đưa dẫn thân hữu đến gần với Nước Trời mỗi lúc một hơn. Một khi các tín nhân Đấng Christ nắm được nguyên tắc này sẽ mạnh dạn càng hơn trong việc chia sẻ Tin Mừng cho thế giới.

**2.4. Truyền bá Phúc Âm là công việc của Chúa Thánh Linh và quyền năng của Tin Lành** hành động trong tấm lòng của những người chưa tin Chúa. Trách nhiệm chia sẻ Tin Mừng của Chúa Jê-sus uỷ thác trên các tín nhân Đấng Christ, nhưng kết quả đến bởi quyền năng của Chúa Thánh Linh hành động trong những người chưa tin để họ mở lòng tiếp nhận Đấng Christ làm Cứu Chúa và Chủ cuộc đời mình. Do đó, CTTBPÂ nhấn mạnh đến một thực tế là "thành công trong việc chứng đạo, đơn giản là chủ động để chia sẻ về Chúa Jê-sus trong quyền năng của Chúa Thánh Linh và mong đợi kết quả đến từ Đức Chúa Trời."

**2.5. Truyền bá Phúc Âm của Chúa Jê-sus Christ là chia sẻ Tin Mừng một cách tự nhiên nhất trong cuộc sống hàng ngày.** Vì vậy, trang bị cho các tín nhân Đấng Christ biết cách làm chứng về Chúa một cách rất tự nhiên, bằng cách chia sẻ "Ba Điều Cần Biết và Một Việc Cần Làm" trong các cuộc trò chuyện với thân hữu. Đây là một phương cách không gây áp lực mà tất cả mọi tín nhân Đấng Christ đều

có thể chia sẻ Tin Mừng trong mọi tình huống cho người khác.

**2.6. Truyền bá Phúc Âm của Chúa Giêsu Christ là nhìn tất cả những người chưa tin nhận Đấng Christ đều là đối tượng để chia sẻ Tin Mừng, không phân biệt chủng tộc hay bối cảnh văn hóa xã hội. Thế nên,** bất cứ ai chưa tin nhận Chúa Giêsu đều cần nghe Phúc Âm cứu rỗi của Ngài. Thế nên, CTTBPÂ không để các rào cản chủng tộc hay văn hóa ngăn cản trong việc chia sẻ Phúc Âm cho họ.

Đối với các tín nhân Đấng Christ ở hải ngoại, chúng ta không chỉ quan tâm để chia sẻ Phúc Âm với người đồng hương mà thôi, nhưng chúng ta có thể nắm bắt cơ hội chia sẻ về Chúa Giêsu với những người khác chủng tộc bằng tiếng Anh hay ngôn ngữ chung tại xứ sở mình đang sống.

### **3. Giới thiệu Phương pháp và các Chương trình Huấn luyện về Công tác Truyền bá Phúc Âm**

Có rất nhiều phương pháp và chương trình huấn luyện về CTTBPÂ rất tốt đã được huấn luyện và thực hành trong vòng các Hội Thánh Việt Nam chúng ta trong suốt nhiều thập kỷ.

Sau đây xin giới thiệu những phương pháp và các chương trình huấn luyện đang có sẵn qua phương tiện internet và zoom, để tín nhân Đấng Christ khắp mọi nơi có thể đăng ký theo học:

#### **3.1. Phương pháp: “Ba Điều Cần Biết và Một Việc Cần Làm”**

Để CTTBPÂ cách hữu hiệu, trước và trên hết, sau khi cầu nguyện khẩn thiết cho thân hữu/hay đối tác chưa tin nhận Chúa, xin Bạn áp dụng mọi phương cách để thiết lập mối liên hệ bằng hữu - Gặp nhau trong tình người để hiểu được tình Trời. Sau đó, trình bày Tin Mừng cứu rỗi qua phương pháp: “Ba Điều Cần Biết và Một Việc Cần Làm” (chuyển đổi từ phương pháp ‘Bốn Định Luật Thuộc Linh’) như sau:

**Điều Cần Biết Thứ Nhất:** Đức Chúa Trời yêu thương và ước muốn có mối liên hệ mật thiết với con người

**Điều Cần Biết Thứ Hai:** Nhưng con người phạm tội cùng Đức Chúa Trời, nên mối liên hệ ấy bị gãy đổ, bị phân cách khỏi Đức Chúa Trời và gánh chịu sự chết đời đời.

**Điều Cần Biết Thứ Ba:** Chúa Cứu Thế Giêsu xuống đời làm người. Đấng Vô Tội chịu hình chết thế tội cho cả nhân loại trên thập tự giá, bị chết và chôn, nhưng Ngài đã sống lại để tha thứ tội lỗi và ban sự sống đời đời cho những ai tin nhận Ngài.

**Điều Cần Làm:** Mỗi người cần phải tiếp nhận Chúa Jêsus cách cá nhân bằng cách đích thân mời Ngài ngự vào tấm lòng làm Cứu Chúa và Chủ cuộc đời.

Tùy theo thời gian có được để Bạn có thể trình bày thêm những câu Kinh Thánh liên hệ (có in trong tập sách “Ba Điều Cần Biết và Một Việc Cần Làm”), nhưng nếu ít thời gian, Bạn chỉ cần chia sẻ những điều trên và những lần gặp gỡ tiếp theo, Bạn có thể bắt nhịp cầu để chia sẻ Tin Mừng bằng cách nhắc nhở hay hỏi thăm đối tác của Bạn nghĩ gì về đề tài Bạn đã trình bày hay hỏi họ suy nghĩ thế nào về quyển sách mà Bạn biếu tặng. Nếu họ sẵn lòng thực hiện ‘Điều Cần Làm’ là mời Chúa Jêsus ngự vào tấm lòng, thì Bạn hướng dẫn họ Lời Cầu Nguyện đề nghị có ghi bên trong; nhưng nếu họ chưa sẵn lòng làm việc đó, Bạn đừng ngã lòng. Hãy nhớ rằng Chứng Đạo hay Truyền Bá Phúc Âm là một tiến trình và điều mà Chúa Cứu Thế Jêsus mong đợi là mỗi chúng ta nói cho người khác biết Ngài, chứ Chúa Jêsus không đòi buộc chúng ta phải làm cho thân hữu tin nhận Chúa. Đây là công việc của Đức Thánh Linh. Hãy bắt đầu chia sẻ Tin Mừng của Chúa Jêsus Christ cho một người nào đó hôm nay.<sup>1</sup>

### **3.2. Chương Trình Huấn Luyện Truyền Giáo Kairos**

Kairos là một khóa học về truyền giáo trong 9 buổi – mỗi buổi dài khoảng ½ ngày- với mục

tiêu giúp giáo dục kiến thức, khuyến khích, và thách thức tín nhân Đấng Christ tham gia tích

cực và ý nghĩa vào công việc truyền giáo thế giới. Khóa học này rất thích hợp để tổ chức cho

hội thánh địa phương, cho cơ quan Tin Lành, hoặc cho một nhóm người có xu hướng đặc

biệt như cho những doanh nhân con Chúa.

Khóa học Kairos sử dụng một số phương cách giáo dục khác nhau: thảo luận trong nhóm

nhỏ, bài dạy ngắn giới thiệu cho mỗi buổi học, thờ phượng, tĩnh nguyện, xem video, làm bài tập trước ở nhà, và tham gia vào các hoạt động được thiết kế đặc biệt cho học viên.

Chương trình học Kairos nhằm vào bốn lĩnh vực chính: Kinh Thánh- Nền Tảng Truyền Giáo, Lịch Sử Truyền Giáo, Chiến Lược Truyền Giáo, và Truyền Giáo Xuyên Văn Hóa

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1. Enoch Wan and Thanh Trung Le, *Mobilizing Vietnamese Diaspora for the Kingdom*, Published by the Institute of Diaspora Studies - IDS-USA, Western Seminary, Portland, OR, 2011, 49-54

### **Cấu Trúc của Khóa Học**

Khóa học Kairos có thể được tổ chức theo một số thời khoá biểu khác nhau cốt để thuận tiện

cho các học viên tham dự. Một số thời khoá biểu tiêu biểu như sau:

- Một buổi tối mỗi tuần, trong 9 tuần – Mỗi buổi học khoảng 2 ½ giờ
- Hai buổi tối mỗi tuần trong 4½ tuần.
- Ba ngày cuối tuần hoặc bốn ngày thứ bảy.
- Luôn một tuần 5 ngày

Các thời khoá biểu khác cũng có thể được chấp nhận nhưng trước tiên phải được chấp thuận bởi người điều hành khóa học.

### **Nội Dung - Học Trình**

Khóa học Kairos duyệt qua bốn lĩnh vực thiết yếu của công việc truyền giáo

#### **I. KINH THÁNH - Nền Tảng Truyền Giáo**

- 1. Mục đích và kế hoạch của Đức Chúa Trời**
- 2. Israel, tuyển dân giao ước**
- 3. Đấng Cứu-thế, sứ điệp; sứ giả**

#### **II. LỊCH SỬ TRUYỀN GIÁO**

**4. Cơ-đốc giáo phát triển lan ra khắp thế giới.** Chúng ta ôn lại sự phát triển của Đạo Chúa từ

#### **III. CHIẾN LƯỢC TRUYỀN GIÁO**

- 5. Chiến lược Truyền giáo**
- 6. Công việc còn chưa làm xong**
- 7. Người Cơ-đốc-cho-thế-giới làm việc với tinh thần đồng đội**

#### **IV. VĂN HÓA và TRUYỀN GIÁO**

- 8. Suy nghĩ về Xuyên Văn hóa**

Khóa học Kairos này được thành hình với chủ đích đặt một nền tảng hiểu biết vững chắc trong đời sống của tín hữu, và trong đời sống Hội Thánh địa phương về sứ mạng truyền giáo cho thế giới. Nền tảng này dẫn đến nỗ lực truyền giáo đầy thú vị và ý nghĩa.<sup>2</sup>

### **3.3. Chương trình Chứng Đạo Sâu Rộng – Thế Hệ Hiện Tại XEE**

Chứng Đạo Sâu Rộng là phương cách giải đáp của Đức Chúa Trời cho sự bùng nổ dân số. Phương tiện nhân rộng chính là hàng ngàn tín hữu cùng mục sư được trang bị để thiết lập các liên hệ trong tình thương và chia sẻ Phúc Âm của

2. Vietnamese Evangelical Missionary Fellowship, 'Khái Quát về Khóa học Kairos' – handout, 2021.

Chúa Cứu Thế cho bạn bè, người thân, đồng nghiệp, và láng giềng một cách tế nhị và hiệu quả. Quyền năng bùng nổ chính là Đức Thánh Linh đang hành động qua Phúc Âm.

Trong phần giới thiệu sơ lược về Chứng Đạo Sâu Rộng – Tài liệu XEE - Thế Hệ Tương lai này gồm 3 phần:

### **1. KẾT NỐI**

Phần này giúp phát triển kỹ năng trong việc xây dựng mối liên hệ để tín nhân Đấng Christ có thể hiệu quả hơn trong việc kết nối với thân hữu và có khao khát chủ động chia sẻ đức tin bất cứ khi nào có cơ hội.

### **2. CHIA SẺ**

Với mục đích đem Phúc Âm đến cho những người trong văn hóa chủ nghĩa hậu hiện đại ngày nay, có hai chủ đề: Cuộc Sống Hiện Tại & Cuộc Sống Đời Sau để đáp ứng nhu cầu của tất cả mọi người đang khao khát muốn có một cuộc sống ý nghĩa và đầy trọn.

Chủ đề Cuộc Sống Hiện Tại chỉ cho thân hữu thấy rằng mối liên hệ với Chúa Giêsu sẽ đem đến sự đầy trọn trong cuộc đời.

Chủ đề Cuộc Sống Đời Sau sẽ giúp tín nhân Đấng Christ chia sẻ rằng Đức Chúa Trời chỉ thực sự chấp nhận bất cứ ai khi người ấy có mối liên hệ với Chúa Giêsu.

Trong khóa huấn luyện CĐSR – Thế hệ hiện tại này, chỉ hướng dẫn học một chủ đề thôi.

### **3. NHÂN CẤP**

Việc nhân cấp để có được những thế hệ tương lai, gợi ý học viên các cơ hội để sử dụng những gì đã học hỏi được để nhân cấp: Thứ nhất, gợi ý một số bước chăm sóc để giúp tín nhân Đấng Christ mới đến với một điểm nhóm nào đó để họ được hỗ trợ và dẫn dắt tăng trưởng. Thứ hai, thách thức tín nhân Đấng Christ chủ động nhân cấp đức tin của mình bằng cách sử dụng những gì học được trang bị lại cho người khác, như Chúa Giêsu đã làm.<sup>3</sup>

#### **3.4. Tài Liệu Yếu Cần Môn Đệ Hóa**

Chương trình Yếu Cần Môn Đệ Hóa là mục vụ của của Đài Phát Thanh Xuyên Thế Giới Canada (Trans World Radio – TWR) với khái tượng ‘những tín nhân Đấng Christ được đào tạo, trang bị, trưởng thành, để tiếp cận và môn đệ hóa những lãnh đạo Cơ-Đốc thuộc thế hệ tiếp nối.’ Thế nên, tài liệu Yếu Cần Môn Đệ Hóa là một công cụ đào tạo môn đồ miễn phí, linh hoạt, đa dạng được phát huy để đáp ứng nhu cầu quá lớn của Hội Thánh toàn cầu về mục vụ giáo huấn và giảng dạy.

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3. XEE.info, ‘Tài liệu XEE-Sách Học viên’. Chứng Đạo Sâu Rộng – Thế Hệ Hiện Tại, 2017. p. 7.

Tài liệu Yêu Cần Môn Đệ Hóa bao gồm 137 bài học trong 18 mô-đun theo chủ đề có thể chuyển tải từ mạng [TWR360 | Yêu Cần Môn Đệ Hóa](http://TWR360.com)). Tài liệu Yêu Cần Môn Đệ Hóa:

- được thiết kế để trang bị cho các mục vụ và cá nhân đang hoạt động tích cực những tài liệu cần thiết để giúp họ môn đệ hóa người khác.
- được nhắm đến các cơ quan Truyền Giáo, Hội Thánh, các Mục sư hoặc Nhân sự Lãnh đạo, cho việc nghiên cứu Kinh Thánh cá nhân, sử dụng trong các Nhóm nhỏ, chuẩn bị bài giảng, và nhiều hơn nữa.
- Mỗi bài học bao gồm một video, nghe và tóm tắt văn bản, cũng như Tài liệu Cho Hướng dẫn viên và Tài liệu Học viên để học thêm.
- được thiết kế linh hoạt đủ để có thể đáp ứng các nhu cầu cụ thể của cá nhân. Có thể chọn từng bài học riêng rẽ, hay sử dụng trọn một mô-đun hoặc học suốt toàn bộ khóa học!

Năm Thứ Nhất:

NHỮNG YẾU CẦN CHO ĐỜI SỐNG CƠ ĐỐC

1. Chúa Jêsus là Ai?
2. Hiểu Biết Về Sự Cứu Rỗi
3. Đời Sống Cơ Đốc và Thế Giới Quan
4. Mối Liên Hệ Của Chúng Ta Với ĐCT
5. Chứng Đạo Nhập Môn
6. Chứng Đạo Dùng Phương Pháp Bốn Định Luật Thuộc Linh
7. Kỳ Luật Thuộc Linh Cơ-Đốc
8. Đức Chúa Trời và Thế Giới Tâm Linh

Năm Thứ Hai:

NHỮNG YẾU CẦN CHO LÃNH ĐẠO CƠ ĐỐC

1. Khám Phá Môn Đệ Hóa
2. Hướng Dẫn Nhóm Nhỏ
3. Các Ân Tứ Thuộc Linh
4. Hội Thánh Và Sự Thờ Phụng
5. Đời Sống Gia Đình
6. Phong Cách Lãnh Đạo
7. Phát Huy Bản Chất Tín Nhân Đấng Christ
8. Sự Tha Thứ Và Sự Hòa Giải
9. Tín Lý Cơ-Đốc Giáo
10. Những Căn Bản Cho Mục Vụ Chăn Bầy

Yếu Cần Môn Đệ Hóa<sup>4</sup> là một Mục vụ của Đài Phát Thanh Xuyên Thế Giới – TransWorld Radio TWR Canada. Muốn biết thêm chi tiết xin liên lạc: 1-888-672-6510

[www.twr.ca](http://www.twr.ca)

[www.discipleshipessentials.org](http://www.discipleshipessentials.org)

[www.yeucanmondehoa.org](http://www.yeucanmondehoa.org)

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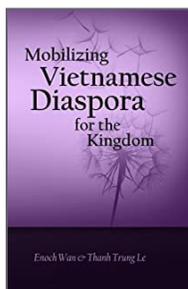
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Người Viết:

*Mục sư Lê Trung Thành, (Tiến sĩ Mục vụ, D. Min. (1996), Canadian Theological Seminary; Regina, Saskatchewan) và (Tiến sĩ Truyền Giáo Học, D.Miss. (2013) Western Seminary, Portland, OR, USA. Ông tị nạn tại Hoa kỳ vào năm 1975 và dời sang Canada và là mục sư trưởng của Hội Thánh Tin Lành Việt Nam Edmonton (C&MA) tại Alberta kể từ 1986 đến nay. Ông là Nguyên Giáo Hạt Trưởng Giáo Hạt Việt Nam tại Canada (2000-2008) và cũng đã từng là Trưởng Ban Điều Hợp Hiệp Hội Truyền Giáo Phước Âm Liên Hiệp Việt Nam Thế Giới (WAVAC) (2004-2012) và tái đắc cử chức vụ trên ( 2021 đến nay). Ông cũng là Giáo sư của Viện Thần học Liên Hiệp (ATC) trong các lĩnh vực Chứng Đạo và Môn Đệ Hóa và Hội Thánh Tăng Trưởng. Ông cũng là đồng tác giả sách **Huy Động Người Việt Viễn Xứ cho Vương Quốc Đức Chúa Trời (Mobilizing Vietnamese Diaspora for The Kingdom)** (2014) với Tiến sĩ Enoch Wan.*



## Chapter 7

# The Spirit, the Church and the Mission of God in the World

by Gordon T. Smith

When we speak of the mission of the Church, the calling to the Church to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19), there are at least two questions to be asked. First, what is our *understanding*, our pneumatology (theology of the Holy Spirit) when it comes to what it means to be the Church on mission? And second, what is our disposition and practice, our way of engaging the work of the Spirit and the mission of God in the world? Ideally, our disposition and *practice* would be consistent with our understanding.

We consider both theology and practice to this end: so our approach to mission is deeply congruent with the ways of the Holy Spirit. So, our way of working and witnessing reflects the powerful presence of the Spirit in the world. So, in both word and deed, we would be the Church profoundly aligned with how the Spirit is active in our world today.

With this in mind, we'll first consider three defining and illuminating texts from the Book of Acts. Then I will identify two foundational theological convictions. Thirdly, I will speak to the question of practice and what it means for the Church to participate in the missional work of the Spirit.

### Three Defining Texts in the Book of Acts

When we speak about the Holy Spirit and the mission of the Church, the Book of Acts takes centre stage. This New Testament book both informs our pneumatology and provides us with a compelling illustration of how the Church participates with the Spirit in God's mission in the world.

#### Acts 1:1-11

We begin with Acts 1 and the iconic words of Jesus, who speaks of His ascension and the triumphant return to the Father, but two things are said before He departs. First, His disciples are invited to be full participants in God's mission in the world. Much is rightly made of concentric circles as Jesus speaks first of Jerusalem, then

of Samaria, and finally the ends of the earth. The profound logic here is captured by the oft-referenced phrase “local and global.” The work of the Spirit will call us to local engagement with a global vision and a global engagement as those who are thoroughly present in our social contexts.

But then, Jesus advises they are to *wait* for the Promised One. It would be sheer presumption for them to engage the mission of God except in response to and in the empowerment of the Spirit of God. They are to wait for the day of Pentecost. On the one hand, this posture of waiting acknowledges the radical dependence of the Church on the Spirit; the Spirit leads, guides, empowers, and ultimately brings the purposes of God to fulfillment. But more, this posture of “waiting” is not merely a pre-Pentecost way of being. Could it be that learning to wait for the Spirit is actually a critical posture for the Church at all times? Waiting for the Spirit to do what only the Spirit can do in the timing of the Spirit? Impatience and over-aggressive strategies or mission initiatives verge on presumption. Indeed, part of the genius of being the Church ‘on mission’ is the capacity for patience, a longing for God to act in situations where the only hope would seem to be divine initiative, but ultimately, we trust in the eternal wisdom and timing of God. We learn to wait. We learn the grace of patience.

### **Acts 2:1-42**

The Day of Pentecost and the events arising from this day are, of course, pivotal to our understanding of the question regarding the Holy Spirit and the mission of the Church. The gift of the Spirit is given – the wind of God. In response, Peter preaches a sermon giving particular focus on the person and work of Christ, concluding with the pronouncement, Jesus is ascended, and now the Spirit has been given. Much can be said of this text, but I will focus on two noteworthy elements of this day for our purposes here.

First, those who heard the proclaimed word were invited to respond and in response, through repentance and baptism, they would know the gift of the Holy Spirit. We then see the parallel in the experience of Cornelius (Acts 10:44) and the Apostle Paul where, for example, Ananias plainly states he has come to Paul to lay hands on him and pray that he, too, would receive the Spirit (Acts 9:17). Thus, we see the individual reception of the gift of the Spirit at Christian initiation, an essential counterpart to water baptism.

Second, we also note, with the ascension and Pentecost, the Church is formed; the people of God, the Body of Christ, and the fellowship of the Spirit. By the Spirit, Christ forms for Himself a people who we read are marked by two fundamental practices, the engagement with the apostles’ teaching and the breaking of bread

(Luke's way of referencing the Lord's Supper). "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayers" (Acts 2:42).

In our consideration of the Holy Spirit and mission, we will speak about the formation of Christian communities, communities of faith marked by common worship, including the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the Table. Note, it was the Word preached within a dynamic fellowship, the joy of a shared life. And it was the Table celebrated within the context of the prayers of the people. Thus, the Church is not merely missional, as we shall see. The Church is a worshipping community and a teaching and learning community. The case can be made we only are missional insofar as we are a worshipping and teaching/learning community.

As a further note, it is also important to highlight how the community had form and structure. Elders were appointed in due time, and leaders were put in place.

### **Acts 13:1-4 and Acts 15:1-35**

We can twin these two texts as the events described in the first lead to or occasion the second, beginning and ending in Antioch. What strikes us here is, first, *immediacy*, the attentiveness and responsiveness to the Spirit's presence and direction in the mission of the Church. The Church, in other words, was responding to an immediate witness of the Spirit.

We see a preview of this throughout the Book of Acts. Philip goes to the Ethiopian, Ananias to Paul, and Peter to Cornelius, each in response to a prompting from God. But then, in Acts 13, it is more corporate; the leadership of the church in Antioch in prayer and worship discerned the call of the Spirit to set aside Paul and Barnabas for missionary service in Asia Minor.

The outcome of this extraordinary move was the Gospel being taken not only to Jews but, as we see at the end of chapter 13, to Gentiles as well. And this led to the question, do the Gentiles need to become Jews in order to become Christians? Much debate ensued, leading to the council held in Jerusalem where Paul and Barnabas spoke of what God has done among the Gentiles (Acts 15:12-21) and the grand conclusion where the elder statesman, James, confirms for one and all "that it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us . . . "for Jewish customs and expectations not to be imposed on new-to-the-faith Gentiles.

Again, what catches our attention is, first, the Church, as individuals or collectively, participates in God's mission in response to the prompting and initiative of the Holy Spirit. If there was any intentionality on this score from the leadership of the Church, what we might think of as strategic initiatives, it was

very much congruent with how the Spirit was guiding and directing the steps being taken.

Secondly, it is noteworthy how boundaries were crossed in the Spirit's prompting and direction. Peter is called and pressed to go to Cornelius and is moved to realize Cornelius is now also a recipient of the promises originally given to Abraham. Paul and Barnabas learn the Spirit is leading them to take the message of the Good News to the Gentile world. And this move, a new venture, or what we might speak of as a new horizon, is endorsed by the council in Jerusalem. And the Church is stretched, becoming more diverse in the process.

## Two Foundational Questions

With these three vital texts in mind, inspired by, informed by, but not limited to what emerges from them, it is appropriate to step back and clarify two foundational convictions. The global witness to the reign of Christ is the fruit of a powerful dynamic between divine and human agency. On the one hand, it is clearly not a one-dimensional human construct; though Christ commissions the early disciples, He does not *delegate* the task of mission to them. Instead, they are invited into the work of the Triune God; they become participants in the drama of God's redemptive purposes. God remains the lead actor from beginning to end.

But, saying this does not diminish or discount the role of the Church. The mission of God in the world is the fruit of a dynamic interplay between divine and human agency. Thus, we are not to speak of "the Holy Spirit and mission" as though it is all of the Spirit. What makes it beautiful or remarkable is the Spirit acting unilaterally without reference to humans or the Church. On the contrary, Acts 13:1-4 beautifully illustrates this. We read of Paul and Barnabas being sent out by the church in Antioch [v. 3], *and* being sent by the Spirit [v. 4]. Which was it? False question; it was both. The Church is called, in the Spirit, to speak and act, to preach and serve. These actions of the Church matter and make a difference. While there will be times the Spirit acts unilaterally, this is the exception and not the norm. Additionally, these unilateral actions are not more evidence of Spirit activity than the regular and routine work of the Church, week in and week out, to preach, teach, and serve in the Spirit.

Consequently, if the mission of God is found in the dynamic interplay of the work of the Spirit and the work of the Church, we have two foundational questions which need to be addressed. Who is the Spirit? And, what is the Church? So much rests on these two questions, our pneumatology (theology of the Spirit) and our ecclesiology (theology of the Christian Church).

## Who is the Holy Spirit?

The appropriate response to this question is two-fold. More might be said, of course, but fundamentally we need to affirm and assert two convictions about the Holy Spirit to shape and inform everything because they are fundamental to our faith. First, the Spirit is one with the Father and the Son, a whole person within the Holy Trinity. We come to this question, the Holy Spirit and the mission of the Church, with a resolve to intentionally sustain trinitarian appreciation of the work of God and view this vision of Father-Son-Spirit as essential to any comprehension we have of and any participation we have in, the work of the Spirit. We live, work, and witness out of a deep appreciation for the work of God, Creator and Redeemer, who as Father, Son, and Spirit brought all things into being at Creation, who continues to sustain all things providentially, and who is now redeeming all things. The only Spirit we know is the Spirit who the Father sent, and in and through the Son is now accomplishing the mission of God in the world.

All things originate in the Father and are mediated through the Son who took on human flesh, was crucified and risen, and is now ascended to the Father's right hand. With the ascension, we have the subsequent outpouring of the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost, the Spirit who now fulfills the purposes of the Triune God in the cosmos.

Thus, we can speak of the Spirit as the *operative* agent in the work or mission of God in the world, from Genesis to Revelation. The Spirit superintends, nudges, calls, anoints, and empowers, even in the life and ministry of Jesus, beginning with the conception in the womb of Mary. And the gospel narratives conclude with the insistence of Jesus for the disciples to wait for the gift of Pentecost because they needed to appreciate the choreography of God's work in the world is affected by the Spirit.

Furthermore, we can and must affirm the *Christocentric* character of the Spirit's ministry. The work of the Spirit only makes sense in light of the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ Jesus. It all points to and anticipates the ultimate triumph of Christ at the consummation of the Kingdom. Jesus, Himself makes it clear when speaking about the Spirit who is to come how the Spirit will glorify Him, meaning Christ Jesus (John 16:14). The will and purpose of both the Father and the Spirit is for us to come to know, love, and serve Christ Jesus, for the reign of Christ to be fulfilled in the world, and for, in Christ, all things to be reconciled to God. Evidence of the Spirit's work in our individual lives is in how we are drawn into union with Christ; "...Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27), "Remain in me, as I also remain in you" (John 15:4).

The defining evidence of the Church being on mission, in the grace and power

of the Holy Spirit, is Christ Jesus being proclaimed and the reign of Christ finding fulfillment in the world. This is the Spirit's agenda, pure and simple. Meaning that we are only genuinely participating in the Spirit's mission in the world when our worship is decidedly and intentionally the worship of the ascended Lord and Christ. If our worship is not clearly and obviously both trinitarian and Christocentric, it inevitably means our engagement or attempts at engagement in the mission of God become skewed, out of alignment with Christ and, in the end, nothing but a human construct. Thus, the Church, which is on mission, actively fosters and cultivates critical theological reflection on what it means to speak of God as triune, equally encouraging and sustaining intentionally trinitarian and Christocentric worship. Each informs the other, of course. Our worship reflects solid theological reflection, and conversely, our study of God (critical reflection) is profoundly informed by our experience of worshipping the Triune God.

### **What is the Church?**

Next, we must consider the churchly character of the work of the Spirit in the missional purposes of God. We can appropriately speak of what we might call an "ecclesial pneumatology" where the witness and work of the Spirit are profoundly intertwined with the life and ministry of the Church. Therefore, any discussion or reflection on the Holy Spirit and the mission of the Church has to ask this question, "What does it mean to be the people of God, the Body of Christ, the fellowship of the Spirit?"

As intimated already, the Church is a worshipping community called into the worship of Triune God. Her worship is grounded in Word and Table (see Acts 2:42) but also in the expression of the fullness of the Spirit as the faith community sings "psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18-19).

Second, the Church is a teaching and learning community, recognizing conversion is not an end but a beginning; those who come to faith in Christ are incorporated into a community where, through the study of and engagement with truth (teaching and learning), those new to the faith grow up in Christ. The mission of God in the world is not complete merely when many come to faith in Christ. The mission of God through and with the Church must involve the forming of faith communities to foster growth in faith, hope, and love. New Christians are not infantilized but rather brought to maturity through teaching and learning.

Finally, the focus of this essay, the Church is a missional community, eager to witness to the reign of Christ both locally and globally, as a vehicle by which the Spirit is drawing all people into fellowship with the risen and ascended Lord. But what must be stressed is this missional engagement is deeply ecclesial, meaning

Christian witness to the ascended Christ is through the formation of vibrant communities of faith, which are also called to participate in the purposes of God in the world.

God is forming for Himself a people, and thus any understanding we have of the Spirit's ministry will be one where we see the Spirit's work in mission as one which leads to the formation of church communities. The mission of the Church is not merely evangelism; rather, it always leads to church communities marked by worship and intentional formation in the faith. And further, these church communities are then also invited into the drama of God's redemptive work, witnessing in word and deed to the reign of Christ. Each church community can learn to be guided, equipped, and empowered by the Spirit and the Church then grows in its capacity to live in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16), pray in the Spirit (Ephesians 6:18), and bear the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

Part of the essential call for faith communities to participate in the mission of God is that they are equipped to do precisely what the church in Antioch was doing, discern how and in what ways the Spirit is active in their situation both locally but also in their participation in the global purposes of God. We can always assume the following, the Spirit precedes, going before the Church, and the Spirit is ultimately who bears the fruit of the work and witness of the Church.

God is forming for Himself a people...any understanding we have of the Spirit's ministry will be one where we see the Spirit's work in mission as one which leads to the formation of church communities.

## **The Church as Participant in the Work of the Spirit**

Now it is important to stress how the work of the Spirit is deeply intertwined with the life and ministry of the Church. However, the work of the Spirit is never limited to the life of the Church. The Spirit is active in the work, in a social or cultural context, long before and quite apart from the witness of the Church. And yet, part of what it means to be the Church is to participate in the missional work of the Spirit in the world.

How does this happen? In what ways might we speak of the Church as intentionally and actively being part of what the Triune God is doing in the world?

## Witnessing in Word and Deed

First, and fundamentally, the Church participates in the work of the Spirit by word and deed. The Church speaks, proclaiming the truth, announcing the Gospel, telling the story of God's redemptive work in Christ, and inviting one and all to respond to the offer of God's salvation; then, further, the Church acts through deeds of mercy and compassion.

We always then hold in dynamic tension the interplay of the work of the Spirit with the proclamation of the Word of God. If we neglect the preaching of the Scriptures, we ignore the Spirit; any verbal declaration only bears fruit when it is anointed and infused by the grace of God through the ministry of the Spirit. The Apostle speaks to this exquisitely when he writes:

For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you *not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit* and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake (1 Thessalonians 1:4-5) (emphasis added).

The power of the Spirit is intimately linked with the Word. What brings change and transformation is not mere inspiring stories; what carries the deep knowledge of the salvation of God is precisely the Word proclaimed in the anointing of the Spirit.

But there is more; what is said, proclaimed, and preached is also necessarily complemented by deeds of compassion and justice. It is interesting to note how when the Apostle Paul referred back to the Council of Jerusalem in his letter to the Galatians. He confirmed the Council had blessed the mission to the Gentiles but then added this aside, "All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along" (Galatians 2:10). Might this be, actually, not merely an aside but something fundamental to how the Church participates in the work of the Spirit in the world? Should every witness and effort to establish church communities among the world's nations include the caveat we remember the poor? It is no wonder Christian mission has always incorporated everything from medical missions to ministry with refugees, the dispossessed, and the homeless.

It is a false distinction when we debate whether mission in the Spirit is about evangelism or social action; it is both/and. Those on mission, in the Spirit, will

We always then hold in dynamic tension the interplay of the work of the Spirit with the proclamation of the Word of God.

attend to the orphan, the widow, the marginalized, the racialized; they will welcome the immigrant and the refugee. Their public witness will take full account of the economic implications of their worship and their witness, as we see so eloquently articulated in Isaiah 58. What gives integrity to the verbal witness is its actions. What gives meaning to the actions is the verbal witness. In both cases, the Spirit goes before, works within, and brings the fruit of this witness.

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### **The Church as the Embodiment of the Gospel**

Second, the Church participates in the work of the Spirit by just being the Church, what some have spoken of as “the Church as the hermeneutic of the Gospel.” This means the Church embodies the Gospel in collectively living out what it means to be the redeemed people of God.

Most notably, it is communities of Christian faith marked by love for one another and by a resilient joy who are living this out. It is hard to overstate how vital Church unity is, both in its local expression (a single congregation) and in its global expression (harmony of the Church across denominational lines). When we are speaking about how the Church participates in the work of the Spirit locally or globally, we need to recognize few things compromise the witness of the Church as badly as division, schism, or quarrelling.

Therefore, those who care about the local and global mission in the Spirit care about the *unity* of the Church. Most if not all the great missiologists of the last century were also ecumenists. There is a profound logic here, if we are on mission with the Spirit, we will, at the same time, “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3) for, as the apostle puts it, there is “one body and one Spirit” (Ephesians 4:4).

Few things so grieve the Spirit as quarrelling and unresolved conflict in the Church. So, within the local church, we learn the skills and capacities for constructive conflict resolution and work at tending our relations. We grow in our capacity to live in love with and for one another and, in the language of Romans 15:7, to “accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” It has been observed how this call to the church in Rome was specific to a congregation facing the real possibility of deep conflict, which, of course, would have compromised the vision the apostle had to bring the Gospel to Spain.

Additionally, mission in the Spirit is not about denominational building or sectarianism; it is about the reign of Christ. And thus, each denomination can and must seek to actively partner with us without competition but rather in collaboration. We actively foster mutual respect, understanding, and shared learning, seeking to transcend our own denominational identity. There is no problem in being intentionally Alliance, Baptist, Methodist, or Catholic. But then, can we speak of our shared witness, locally and globally? Can we serve one another so, for example, our theological seminary happily provides theological formation for those going into ministry within other denominations? Can we learn from one another and support one another in our shared commitment to witness to the reign of Christ in the Spirit? All to this end, as we proclaim the Gospel to the nations, we live and embody the Gospel in our shared life in the Christian community.

### **The Spirit and the Suffering Church**

Finally, the suffering of the Church is a powerful and transformative means by which the Church identifies with the cross of Christ (Romans 8:17). It is noteworthy how persecution and a suffering Church is never a problem or obstacle to the work of the Spirit, whether it is the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7) or how the early Church faced tremendous limitations.

The Apostle Paul routinely witnessed this, speaking of how we are but “clay jars” and persecution and affliction are part of the life of the Church and “death is at work in us, but life is at work in you” (2 Corinthians 4:7-12). And thus, the apostle further speaks of how the Spirit groans with sighs too deep for words, present to the Church in her worship and witness (Romans 8:26-27).

And yet this experience of suffering did not rob them of joy. Not to be missed in all of this is how a palpable joy marks witness and mission in the Spirit, even amid difficulty, trial, and setback. We see this in Jesus, whom we read rejoiced in the Spirit (Luke 10:21), or the shared life of the early Church (Acts 2:46), or through the remarkable witness of the apostle who speaks of how in all of their troubles they were as yet “encouraged” and his “joy knows no bounds” (2 Corinthians 7:4). And then, very specifically, there is also what Paul says to the Thessalonian believers:

You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by

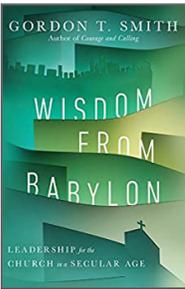
**Not to be missed  
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the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia (1 Thessalonians 1:6-7).

## Concluding Affirmations

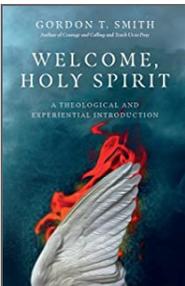
And so we ask: How and in what ways is the Spirit inviting us, locally and globally, to participate in the drama of God’s redemptive work in Christ? Where are we called to speak and act? We bring our talents, energy, gifts, and abilities, offering them for Kingdom service. We do not need to be heroes; we are merely *participants*, as often as not, working behind the scenes in obscurity, as the Spirit goes before us, as the Spirit anoints our efforts, and as the Spirit brings to harvest the fruit of our contributions. Often, we are merely responding to the seeming serendipity, such as the encounter of Paul and Silas with Lydia and the jailer in Philippi (Acts 16). And all along, we are aware we are but a “treasure in earthen vessels” who bring our talent, devotion, time, and energy to the great opportunity to participate in what the Holy Spirit is up to in our world.

## Further Reading



***Wisdom from Babylon: Leadership for the Church in a Secular Age*** by Gordon T. Smith.

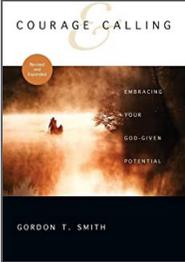
After analyzing the phenomenon of secularization in the West, Smith introduces four sources of wisdom to help guide us through this new terrain: the people and prophets of Judah during the Babylonian exile, the early Church in its pagan environment, contemporary churches across the Global South, and Christian thinkers in post-Christian Europe. He identifies practices and strategies that can give shape to faithful, alternative communities in such a time as this.



***Welcome, Holy Spirit: A Theological and Experiential Introduction*** by Gordon T. Smith.

*Welcome, Holy Spirit* is a much-needed master class with a trustworthy and encouraging teacher. How can we cultivate an understanding of the Holy Spirit that helps us experience the presence of the Spirit in worship, in witness, in joy and sorrow, in seasons of blessing and times of difficulty alike, all the while honouring the fullness of the Trinity? That is the objective of

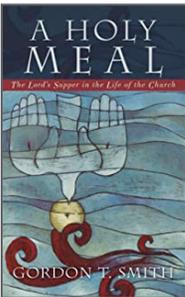
the reflections in this book: an attentiveness to the Spirit, not to replace Christ as the focus of our lives and worship but to bring us truly into the presence of the living and ascended Lord.



***Courage & Calling: Embracing Your God-Given Potential*** by Gordon T. Smith.

God calls us first to Himself, to know and follow Him, and also to a specific life purpose, a particular reason for being. This second call or “vocation” has implications not only for our work or occupation, but also includes our giftedness, our weaknesses, our life in community and what we do day to day.

This new edition has been revised and updated throughout with two expanded chapters and a new chapter on four specific areas of calling.



***A Holy Meal: The Lord's Supper in the Life of the Church*** by Gordon T. Smith.

Gordon Smith shows that we cannot appreciate the Lord's Supper until we understand it. In light of the renewed attention given to the sacraments by all branches of the Church, he examines the historic interpretations and seeks common ground among believers. In the process, he shows how the Lord's Supper can infuse new meaning into the Church as it confronts the forces of postmodernism and secularism.

## Chapter 8

# God's Mission: A Gospel of Justice and Reconciliation

by Joanne Beach

The commission that Jesus gave His followers to go into all the world and preach the Gospel is a mission that continues for the Church today. However, the questions, "What is the Gospel?" and "What is the message we are called to present?" are at the core of the Church's mission today, as they are in any age. This chapter will invite you to consider that the Gospel Jesus calls us to present and embody has far more implications than just spiritual salvation. It invites you to think about the Gospel of Christ as the hope of the world because it addresses every aspect of life in a broken world.

I don't think I have to convince you that the world is full of injustice: violence and oppression, corruption, pain and suffering, chronic hunger, extreme poverty ... the list goes on. Often these injustices exist because of structural evils that may be part of cultural, ideological, or religious systems that are utterly antithetical to God's ways.

There are displaced people around the world who have experienced persecution, war, violence, or human rights violations and have fled their homes with whatever they could carry. According to the United Nations 2022 statistic, globally, there are 84 million people who have fled the safety of their homes and communities, now living internally displaced or as refugees in other countries.

The UN reports that between 20-40 million people globally are trafficked into modern slavery. Millions of these are women and children trafficked into the sex trade.

In many cultures, girls and women are oppressed; livestock is valued more than females, it is not a priority to educate girls, and sons are fed first with more nutritious food than daughters.

There are countless communities around the world that don't have access to clean water or a sufficient food source, places where people die from preventable diseases like malaria. There are areas where there is degradation of the land and

...globally, there are 84 million people who have fled the safety of their homes and communities...

creation through misuse, pollution, and a lack of stewardship for the creation God has called us to care for.

It is not just overseas that these realities exist. In Canada, we have been reminded of the injustice to Indigenous Peoples through residential schools, the 60's scoop, and the Doctrine of Discovery by European settlers over the last several centuries. In Canada, what we would refer to as a developed country, we still have communities that experience extreme poverty, homelessness, chronic hunger, racism, or lack of potable water.

During my ministry with The Alliance Canada as the director of Justice and Compassion, I have travelled to over 55 countries and throughout Canada and heard stories firsthand from many who experience realities like these and my heart breaks. How can a good, just, and loving God allow so much injustice in the world?

When we examine the Scriptures, we find a narrative that reveals a God who deeply loves humanity and all of creation and hears the cries of those in extreme poverty, the oppressed, and those suffering injustice. It breaks the heart of God to see how the world is broken and not functioning as He intended it to.

One of the key ways that God responds to these realities is to create a people for Himself—people (Israel, the Church) who will live in a way that reflects the principles and values of the Kingdom of God to a broken world. As the Church, we must get the message of the Gospel right, a message that calls us to live not only individually but collectively as Christ-following communities that seek to bring healing to all that is broken.

**It breaks the heart of God to see how the world is broken and not functioning as He intended it to.**

The evangelical tradition has taught that to share the Gospel, our starting point must be that people are sinners and are separated from God. In this chapter, we will consider that to accurately proclaim and live out the Gospel, the entire narrative of Scripture needs to be considered. We must begin in Genesis 1 and 2, where the Garden narrative provides us with a picture of how God intended the world to function. There is complete unity, reciprocal respect, and intimacy in the relationship between God and humans, male and female, and between humans and the rest of creation. There is no shame or fear, as symbolized by Adam and Eve's nakedness and walks with God. Adam's responsibility to name all the animals shows God's desire for humankind to care for all living creatures. Genesis 2 is where we see the first commission given to humankind. In the Garden, God gave them the mandate to *abad* (to work, to serve) and to *shamar* (keep, guard, observe) the creation. The Garden story reveals how God originally intended the

world to function. It shows all of creation at peace with God and each other in a space where all spiritual, physical, and relational needs are met.

Sin brought pain, strife, and hostility to all these relationships. Yes, humans' relationship with God but also between male and female, and with humanity's relationship with the land and the rest of creation. Genesis 3 explains how sin brought brokenness and *disharmony* to all these relationships. The Good News of the Gospel is that the work of Christ on the cross offers healing and reconciliation to all these relationships that were broken.

In Colossians 1:15-20, Paul describes this work of Christ, the creator and redeemer of all things.

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together... For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

The word "to reconcile" in Greek is *apokatallassō* which means "to bring back to its original state of *harmony*." The disharmony we read about in Genesis 3 is to be brought back into harmony through Christ's death and resurrection – His victory over sin and death. His work is to "...reconcile to himself all things..." not just people!

In Romans 8:18-22, Paul also teaches that even creation is longing to be free from its bondage to decay:

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

The idea here is that the children of God – humankind, made in God's image, would embrace that first call to serve, guard, and take care of creation.

Craig Sorley, a contributing author in the book, *Creation Care and the Gospel*, says,

Across the globe, communities are facing unprecedented environmental challenges... the assault is mournfully obvious in terms of what is happening to forests, grasslands, water resources, rainfall and

climatic patterns, wildlife and bird populations, and soils. The situation is urgent, if not critical. These problems converge to cause greater hardship for people. They perpetuate poverty, hunger, heightened competition among ethnic groups, civil unrest, disease, and even deaths....<sup>1</sup>

It would take an entire book to discuss the truths in the Scriptures that teach about God's love for and interaction with creation and His original desire that humans would steward and care for it. However, this quote from Sorley reveals that the lack of stewardship of creation (part of the fall of humankind) perpetuates much of the world's brokenness.

Hosea describes how the land suffers as a result of human behaviour.

Hear the word of the Lord, you Israelites, because the Lord has a charge to bring against you who live in the land: "There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. Because of this the land dries up, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea are swept away" (Hosea 4:1-3).

There is a correlation between humankind's actions and the health of the land. When the land suffers, humans suffer, as Sorley points out. Throughout all of Scripture, God calls His people to return to His ways in order to experience healing on multiple levels. He also calls us to care for the vulnerable, the marginalized, the widow, the foreigner, and the oppressed and to address issues of injustice.

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of the land.

One key passage that teaches this is Isaiah 58. In this passage, we see that the people of God are seeking Him and desiring His presence. They are going through the proper religious motions. (Isn't that what we want in our churches as we gather for worship? To know and experience the presence of God?) Yet, Isaiah is rebuking the people of God for having a form of religiosity and spirituality but living selfishly, arrogantly, and in disunity. He then gives them a picture of a true expression of spirituality for the people of God. (Perhaps a reflection of what Jesus would teach about the Kingdom of God.)

"Is this not the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free

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1. Sorley, Craig. "Creation Care and the Great Commission." *Creation Care and the Gospel: Rediscovering the Mission of the Church*. Bell, Colin, White Robert, S. (editors), Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 2016. 72-3.

and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter – when you see the naked to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?” (verses 6-7)

Isaiah goes on to say,

If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, THEN your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your people will rebuild ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called repairer of Broken walls, restorer of streets with dwellings. (verses 9-12)

In other words, if you will be a community that administers justice and mercy, God's transforming presence and power will be experienced by all and in all areas of life. A community where healing and wholeness reign. Another way to state this is that the message to the community of

God's people is: *If you think you have a relationship with Me, and you don't have a relationship with the vulnerable (the poor, the widow, the foreigner, the oppressed, the naked, and the hungry), then you are not truly honouring Me with your worship.*

This continues to be a powerful and sobering message for the Church today. A message that Jesus stressed in His teaching on the Kingdom of God.

In Isaiah chapter 61, Isaiah prophesies a future reality that will be fulfilled in Jesus. As He begins His public ministry, Jesus reads this passage from the scroll of Isaiah as recounted in Luke 4,

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor...Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (verses 18-19, 21).

*If you think you have a relationship with Me, and you don't have a relationship with the vulnerable (the poor, the widow, the foreigner, the oppressed, the naked, and the hungry), then you are not truly honouring Me with your worship.*

This declaration by Jesus must expand our understanding of the Gospel.

Jesus modelled compassion and justice in His ministry. He cared about more than just the spiritual healing of people; He physically healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, offered dignity to the marginalized and fed the hungry. His ministry embodied a Gospel that started with a proclamation, encompassed compassion, and mandated justice – even economic justice through His proclamation of the year of the Lord's favour.

The Gospels highlight how Jesus constantly taught about and described what the Kingdom of God was like. In Luke 9 and 10, when He sent out the 12 and then the 70, He instructed them to go and proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick and cure diseases. The ministry was not just spiritual; a physical care and healing component was also available in the Kingdom of God.

Immediately after the 70 came back to report to Jesus the impact of their ministry, an expert in the law who was nearby and heard these things jumped up and asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus replied to this one who knew the law, "You tell me what is written." The man answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27). Jesus commended his answer. Justifying himself, the man asked, "Who is my neighbour?" Jesus answered by telling the story of the Good Samaritan.

Most readers may be familiar with the Good Samaritan parable, but to summarize it: A man was walking on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho – robbers beat him and left him for dead. A priest (let's envision an Alliance pastor) comes by and sees the man and does nothing. Then, a Levite, a teacher of the law (consider perhaps a theology professor at Ambrose or ETEQ), also comes by and sees the man lying there and does nothing. Then the Samaritan comes along and stops to help. He bandaged his wounds, took him to an inn and paid for the total expenses to see him get well.

Jesus is teaching what is essentially the Good Samaritan Principle: The Samaritan had nothing to do with the assault on the man yet took it upon himself to care for the victim's needs even at personal cost, inconvenience, and possible danger to himself.

Jesus instructs the expert in the law to go and do likewise. If Jesus were teaching this parable to us today, He would also tell us to go and do likewise.

It is clear that loving our neighbour is NOT doing it as a means to an end, when it is convenient, or if they believe what we believe. Carrying out justice and showing compassion is an important spiritual discipline that individuals and churches must cultivate in our lives and ministries if we want to reflect an accurate image of God to the world—a God who is committed to justice, compassion, reconciliation, and healing.

I have a theologian friend who attended a national conference of church leaders in an African country a few years ago. The pastors of this African nation were discussing the fact that while 70-80 percent of people in their country claim to be Christian and attend church regularly, the country remains rife with many issues: corruption on multiple levels, tribal conflicts, domestic abuse, extreme poverty, garbage strewn in rivers and ditches, wildlife endangerment, environmental degradation, still one of the most vulnerable countries with HIV/AIDS ... on and on they listed the realities. They turned to my friend and concluded, “The missionaries brought us too small of a Gospel!”

**“The missionaries brought us too small of a Gospel!”**

Oh, that we in the Alliance family would not be guilty of offering too small of a Gospel to the communities where we minister. As a global family of Alliance churches, we are seeking to be more intentional about cultivating holistic ministries, reflecting the Kingdom of God that will be fully recognized when Christ returns.

The Alliance World Fellowship Guayaquil Manifesto, affirmed in 2021, speaks about compassion as “the outflow of missions to the whole person; mission must integrate faith and life, word and deed, proclamation and presence; to preach the Gospel is to be committed to its demands for justice and peace.”

As we minister in communities where dominant worldviews or belief systems perpetuate oppression, poverty, and injustice, we must live out the values and priorities of the Kingdom of God. A Kingdom where justice prevails, where everything Jesus taught His followers involved living counter-cultural to the way of the world, seeking first His Kingdom.

God is reconciling and redeeming all His creation and calls us to join Him in establishing His Kingdom.

- When the Church engages in caring for the refugee, we are living out the Good Samaritan Principle for those that are hurting and in need.
- When the Church feeds the hungry and ensures that communities have sustainable food sources, we are instilling the principle that there is food for all in God's economy so that no one goes hungry.
- When ministries engage in teaching public health programs, we seek to nurture wholeness and flourishing within communities.
- When ministries seek to empower women through education, savings groups, or skills training, we are introducing the truth that women have dignity and value.

- When churches seek ways to address poverty in their communities, we are communicating the message that there is provision and generosity in God's economy, not scarcity and fear.
- When the Church cares for the widow and the orphan, we are reflecting a loving and compassionate God who hears and sees the cries of the vulnerable.
- When the Church seeks to reach out to rescue people who are victims of human trafficking, we demonstrate that we serve a God who longs for justice to be done.
- When the Church works with smallholder farmers in the Global South to adapt agriculture practices that mitigate the challenges of a changing climate, we are demonstrating that in God's Kingdom, there is provision and land that produces.
- When the Church demonstrates concern for pollution and assists communities in mitigating it, we enable people to recover their calling to steward creation.

Why do we in the Alliance global family want to see local church communities and international missions committed to living out the Gospel in its wholeness? It is because the Church, living out a biblical theology of the holistic message of Christ's work of reconciling all things, is the only hope for the world. It is the only answer to the systemic issues of poverty or injustice. Will our work for justice and community wholeness fix the brokenness completely? No, but as the Church addresses these issues, it is a sign to the world of what we hope for ... for Christ's return to establish His Kingdom in its fullness. His Kingdom is marked by His just, peaceful, and prosperous reign forever.

Jesus taught His followers to pray: "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Let's be challenged to pray this each day and ask, "How can I work to see Kingdom principles done on earth in my sphere of influence?" Imagine if we all lived called to this kind of priority. Imagine if all our local expressions of Christ's Body committed to living out this prayer!

How the Church lives out our faith reflects the hope that we anticipate in the future when the Kingdom of God will come in its fullness. The Church should, in fact, must live into the vision of what will be experienced completely when Christ returns, and all things will be reconciled, renewed, and restored. The Church, as Christ's followers, is to live this reality out now.

We pray, "Come, Lord Jesus, come!" But Jesus is here, abiding in His Church. Let His Kingdom come on earth, as it will someday in its fullness, but until then, let His Kingdom reign in and through us, His Church.

## Chapter 9

# Missions in the Old Testament

by Rick Love

In the New Testament, we read of Jesus giving the Great Commission to go into the world and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ, and then we see how His followers went about fulfilling their part in that mission. But God's plan for missions actually appears throughout the Old Testament as well.

## Creation

The biblical basis for missions begins with creation. God is the Creator of all things (Genesis 1:1)<sup>1</sup> and all people (Genesis 1:26-28; 5:1-2).<sup>2</sup> As a result, everyone on the earth belongs to him.<sup>3</sup> We share common parents. All people belong to one human family.

## All Nations Blessed

God's plan has always been to bless all the peoples of the earth, as announced to Abraham, "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you"<sup>4</sup> (Genesis 12:2-3).<sup>5</sup> This promise was so significant that it was repeated to Abraham on two other occasions (18:18; 22:18), as well as to his son Isaac (26:4) and grandson Jacob (28:14).

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1. Cf. John 1:3, 10; Act 4:24; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 2:10.

2. Cf. Acts 17:26.

3. Psalm 24:1-2; cf. Genesis 14:19, 22; Exodus 19:5; Ephesians 4:6.

4. Wenham rightly points out that though there is disagreement on whether to translate this as "'be blessed,' 'bless themselves,' or 'find blessing,' . . . it does not make much difference to the gist of the passage, which is that through Abraham all the peoples of the world will be blessed" (Gordon Wenham, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Pentateuch* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003], p. 154).

5. God's plan to bless all the families of the earth through Abraham is described by Paul as "the gospel in advance" (Galatians 3:8).

## Israel's Role in Bringing Blessing to the Nations

The people of Israel were God's "treasured possession, . . . a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5-6).<sup>6</sup> These are two of the roles they take in being the instrument chosen by God to bring restorative blessing to all people. They were also called to be "a covenant for the people," "a light for the Gentiles" (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6),<sup>7</sup> and "a banner for the peoples" (11:10).<sup>8</sup>

In the Psalms, Israel's primary role in bringing blessing to the nations is one of proclamation.<sup>9</sup> "Among the nations," they announce what the Lord has done (126:2; 9:11) and describe His rule (96:10). They explain God's law "before kings" (Psalm 119:46). They instruct the nations to praise the Lord (117:1; cf. 96:7, 9; 47:1), to tremble before Him (96:9; cf. 2:11), and to be joyful (100:1; cf. 47:1; Deuteronomy 32:43 ["nations"]).<sup>10</sup>

Israel's role in bringing blessing to the nations also included praising God "...I will praise you, Lord, among the nations..." (2 Samuel 22:50); Psalm 18:49; 57:9; 96:3; 108:3)<sup>11</sup> and, as God's servant, bringing "justice to the nations" (Isaiah 42:1).<sup>12</sup>

## Immigrants and the Mosaic Law

The Lord had a plan to bless the nations because He loves them (Deuteronomy 10:18), "watches over" them (Psalm 146:9), and even provides their "food and clothing" (Deuteronomy 10:18). Throughout the Mosaic law, God's plan to bless the nations is revealed through a series of laws designed to teach Israel the necessity of showing compassion to the disadvantaged immigrants who lived among them. They should have understood this because of their own experience as immigrants living in Egypt.<sup>13</sup>

The Lord had a plan to bless the nations because He loves them...

6. Cf. Deuteronomy 28:9-10 ("The Lord will establish you as his holy people, . . . Then all the peoples on earth will see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they will fear you"). See also Revelation 5:9-10.

7. Cf. 49:3 ("you are my servant, Israel").

8. Cf. 62:10; 5:26; 11:12; 18:3; 49:22.

9. Jonah was told to proclaim to Nineveh the message given by the Lord (3:1-3). Cf. Isaiah 49:1 ("Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations").

10. The nations are described in various ways in these verses, including "all the earth" (Psalm 96:9; 100:1; 117:7); "families of nations" (96:7), "all you nations (47:1); "kings . . . rulers of the earth" (2:11), and "nations" (Deuteronomy 32:43).

11. Cf. Isaiah 66:19 ("They will proclaim my glory among the nations").

12. Cf. Psalm 67:4 ("you rule the nations justly") and 96:10 ("he will judge the people with equity").

13. Exodus 22:21; 23:9; Leviticus 19:34; Deuteronomy 10:19.

God's people are told to love immigrants and treat them as one of their native-born (Leviticus 19:34; Deuteronomy 10:19).<sup>14</sup> They were to show justice (Deuteronomy 1:16; 24:17). If they didn't, they would be cursed (27:19). They were not to mistreat or oppress immigrants (Exodus 22:21; 23:9; Leviticus 19:33)<sup>15</sup> or take advantage of an immigrant they had employed (Deuteronomy 24:14-15).

Immigrants were to benefit from the social assistance of ancient Israel, for they received part of the tithe collected every three years (Deuteronomy 14:28-29; 26:12-13). They were also part of the group allowed to harvest the land left fallow in the sabbath year (Leviticus 25:6) and the gleanings from the edges of the fields, the vineyards, and the olive trees (Leviticus 19:10; 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19-21).<sup>16</sup>

The people of Israel and the immigrants living in their communities were to "be the same before the Lord" and, as a result, were to be treated the same under the law of ancient Israel (Numbers 15:15-16; Leviticus 24:22).<sup>17</sup> The sabbath laws also applied to immigrants who could not be forced to work on Saturdays (Exodus 23:12; Deuteronomy 5:14). Immigrants were to observe the day of atonement and the feasts, just as Israel did.<sup>18</sup>

## Joining Israel

The Old Testament speaks of many immigrants who experienced the Lord's blessing through their incorporation into the people of God. In his genealogy (Matthew 1:3, 5-6), Matthew seems to place a focus on the foreigners who were ancestors of our Lord Jesus, including Tamar, who appears to be a Canaanite (Genesis 38:6, 11 [cf. v. 1-2]), Rahab from Jericho (Joshua 2:1),<sup>19</sup> Ruth from Moab (Ruth 1:4),<sup>20</sup> and Solomon's mother Bathsheba who had been the wife of Uriah the Hittite (2 Samuel 11:3).

Matthew seems to place a focus on the foreigners who were ancestors of our Lord Jesus...

14. Cf. Ezekiel 22:29; Malachi 3:5.

15. Cf. Jeremiah 7:6; 22:3; Ezekiel 22:7, 29; Zechariah 7:10.

16. Cf. Leviticus 25:35, 39-40.

17. Cf. Numbers 15:14, 29.

18. Exodus 12:48; Leviticus 16:19; Numbers 9:14; Deuteronomy 16:11, 14.

19. Rahab recounted to the two spies of Israel what the people of Jericho had heard about the Lord giving the land to Israel and drying up the water of the Red Sea before declaring, "the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below" (Joshua 2:9-11). Cf. Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25.

20. Ruth declared to her mother-in-law Naomi, "your people will be my people, and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16).

Other foreigners who became part of the nation of Israel include Judah's Canaanite wife (Genesis 38:2), many who joined Israel when they left Egypt (Exodus 12:38), Moses' Midianite father-in-law Jethro (Exodus 3:1; 18:1-12 [cf. v. 27]) and his family (Numbers 10:29), Moses' Cushite wife (Numbers 12:1), foreigners who lived with Israel during the days of Joshua (Joshua 8:35), Doeg the Edomite (1 Samuel 21:7), Ahimelech the Hittite (1 Samuel 26:6), Zelek the Ammonite (2 Samuel 23:37), Ithmah the Moabite (1 Chronicles 11:46), Ishmaiah the Gibeonite (1 Chronicles 12:4), Obil the Ishmaelite (1 Chronicles 27:30), Araunah the Jebusite (2 Samuel 24:16), Rehoboam's Ammonite mother Naamah (1 Kings 14:21), Zabad the son of Shimeath from Ammon, and Jehozabad, son of Shimrith from Moab (2 Chronicles 24:26).<sup>21</sup>

## Non-Israelites Blessed Through Association with Israel

The Old Testament talks about many non-Israelites who experienced the promised blessing through their association with, or incorporation into, the people chosen by God. One example is Melchizedek, the king of Salem and "priest of God Most High." He fed Abram bread and wine, blessed him, and received Abram's tithe (Genesis 14:17-20). He described the Lord as "God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth," who had delivered Abraham's enemies into his hand (vv. 19-20).

Balaam reiterated the promise of blessing to the people of Israel. Balaam was a prophet from Pethor near the Euphrates River who was asked by Balak, king of Moab, to put a curse on Israel (Numbers 22:5-6). He replied that he could only do as God commanded (22:18; 23:26; 24:13) and could only speak the words the Lord put in his mouth (22:38; 23:12; 24:13). "The Spirit of God came on him" (24:2), and the Lord "put a word in Balaam's mouth (23:5; cf. v. 16), he heard "the words of God," and saw "a vision from the Almighty" (24:4, 16). Speaking about the Lord, he declared, "God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind" (23:19).<sup>22</sup> Rather than a curse, he pronounced blessings from God for Israel (23:20-21). Intriguingly, he appears to be aware of earlier blessings pronounced by Jacob to Judah ("The people rise like a lioness; they rouse themselves like a lion..." [23:24; cf. 24:9])<sup>23</sup> and by the Lord to Abraham ("May those who bless you be blessed and those who curse you be cursed!" [24:9]).<sup>24</sup>

21. Cf. Abishag from Shunam (1 Kings 1:3).

22. The phrase is used also by Samuel (1 Samuel 15:29; cf. vv. 11, 31). Cf. Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18.

23. Cf. Genesis 49:9, "Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness—who dares to rouse him?"

24. Cf. Genesis 12:3, "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse."

The Lord told Elijah to travel to Zarephath of Sidon to meet a widow who would feed him (1 Kings 17:8-9). She had faith to give Elijah the last of her flour and oil. She was rewarded with a jar of flour not used up and a jug of oil that did not run dry (vv. 12-16). Sometime later, her son became ill and stopped breathing, and she wondered if her son would die as punishment for her sin (vv. 17-18). Elijah asked God to “let this boy’s life return to him,” and he was healed (vv. 21-22). The woman testified to Elijah, “Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth” (v. 24).

Naaman experienced God’s blessing through physical restoration, which led to his testimony of God’s greatness. The “commander of the army of the king of Aram” was healed through the ministry of the prophet Elisha (2 Kings 5:1-14). As a result, he declared, “Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel” (v. 15) and vowed to “never again make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other god but the Lord” (v. 17).

God’s blessing to the nations advanced through the ministry of Daniel and his friends when the people of Judah were in captivity in Babylon. When Daniel was able to explain to Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, the details and meaning of his dream, the king said to Daniel, “Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery” (Daniel 2:47).

The blessing was carried throughout the kingdoms of Babylon and Persia through the decrees made by powerful kings who saw the power of the Lord. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were unharmed in the blazing furnace, Nebuchadnezzar praised God and declared any “nation or language who say anything against” their God would “be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way” (3:28-29).

Later, Daniel interpreted another dream for Nebuchadnezzar, anticipating the king’s madness (Daniel 4:25). Nebuchadnezzar had a dream about a great tree which was cut down (vv. 10-17). He called Daniel to interpret, recognizing that “the spirit of the holy gods” was in him (vv. 8-9, 19). Daniel explained the tree symbolized the king himself, who would be driven away to “live with the wild animals” (v. 25). Daniel warned the king to renounce his sins and to be “kind to the oppressed” (v. 27). A year later, the king boasted of the great city of Babylon he had built as his royal residence by his own “mighty power and for the glory of [his] majesty” (v. 30). His judgment was immediate. He “lived with wild animals,” ate grass like an ox, and was “drenched with the dew of heaven” (vv. 31-33). At the end of the appointed time, the king raised his eyes “toward heaven,” and his sanity was restored (v. 34). He “praised . . . honored and glorified” God and

experienced the restoration of his honour, splendor, throne, and greatness (vv. 34-36). In his right mind, he described the Lord as “the Most High God” and “the King of heaven” (vv. 2, 17, 34, 37). He affirmed God’s sovereignty “over all kingdoms on earth” (v. 17; cf. vv. 35, 37) and the eternal nature of God’s rule (“His dominion is an eternal dominion;<sup>25</sup> his kingdom endures from generation to generation” [v. 34; cf. v. 3]). He acknowledged God’s miracles (vv. 2-3) and also spoke of God’s goodness (“everything he does is right and all his ways are just” [v. 37]).

Daniel was trustworthy and blameless as a representative of God’s people in captivity (Daniel 6:3-5). Government bureaucrats knew Daniel’s only weakness was his reverence for the law of his God and convinced King Darius to decree anyone praying to a god or human other than the king would be thrown into a den of lions (vv. 5-9). Well aware of this decree, Daniel went home and continued his regular practice of prayer and thanksgiving to God with “the windows opened toward Jerusalem” (v. 10). The bureaucrats relayed this information to the king, who felt he had no choice but to throw Daniel into the lions’ den (vv. 13-16). Aware of Daniel’s faith (cf. v. 23), the king said to him, “May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!” (v. 16).

Early the next morning, the king hurried to learn what had happened, asking, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?” (v. 20). Daniel testified, “My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty” (v. 22). The accusers and their families experienced the judgment they had planned for Daniel (v. 24). King Darius wrote a decree of blessing (“may you prosper greatly” [v. 25]) “to all the nations and peoples of every language in all the earth” (vv. 25-27):

I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. “For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions.”

Another king who experienced the blessing of God through his contact with the captive people of Judah was Cyrus, who recognized it was “the Lord, the God of heaven” who had given him “all the kingdoms of the earth” (2 Chronicles

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25. Cf. Daniel 7:13-14 (“one like a son . . . was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed”).

36:22-23). “The Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia,” and he announced God had appointed him “to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah.” He encouraged any of God’s people who desired “to go up” and offered them his blessing, “may the Lord their God be with them” (v. 23). Isaiah recognized God’s calling upon Cyrus, referring to him as “the Lord’s shepherd” and “the Lord’s anointed” (Isaiah 44:28-45:1).

## The Nations Will Seek the Lord

At the dedication of the temple, Solomon anticipated future blessings for the nations. Solomon asked God to listen to the prayers of those from distant lands who come to the temple because of the Lord’s “great name,” “mighty hand,” and “outstretched arm” (2 Chronicles 6:32). He asked the Lord to “hear from heaven” and to “do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you” (v. 33; cf. 1 Kings 8:41-43).

Isaiah spoke of a time of blessing when those from the nations would serve the Lord, love Him, worship Him, and obey Him, for God’s house “will be called a house of prayer for all nations” (Isaiah 56:3-8). Foreigners would not be excluded from God’s people, for the Lord will bring them to his holy mountain “and give them joy in [his] house of prayer” (vv. 3, 7). The Lord will gather both the exiles of Israel as well as “others . . . besides those already gathered” (v. 8).

“...so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you”

Zechariah described “many peoples,” “the inhabitants of many cities,” and “powerful nations” praying to the Lord and seeking him (Zechariah 8:20-23). They will say to each other, “Let us go at once to entreat the Lord and seek the Lord Almighty. I myself am going” (v. 21). The desire to be with the people of God will be so great, the Lord Almighty announces, “in those days ten people from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, ‘Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you’” (v. 23). Even “the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, and to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles” (14:16). The nations who don’t worship God “will have no rain” and will experience plagues (vv. 17-19).<sup>26</sup>

Isaiah saw a time of peace when the nations would be taught by God, obey Him, listen to His decisions, and fashion their weapons into agricultural implements

26. Cf. v. 21 (“on that day there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the Lord Almighty”).

(Isaiah 2:1-4).<sup>27</sup> The nations will find peace when they rally to the Lord (11:10) and join with Israel (14:1). Israel will be a banner for the peoples (11:10; 62:10; cf. 18:3).<sup>28</sup> Nations and kings will come to their light (60:3). As a result, some from the nations would become worship leaders (66:20-21).

## Positive Outcomes for the Nations

Many other positive outcomes arise when the nations encounter the Lord and His people: "...all nations on earth . . . will hear of all the good things" the Lord does for Jerusalem; they "will be in awe and will tremble at the abundant prosperity and peace I provide for it" (Jeremiah 33:9; cf. Psalm 2:11; 67:7; Joshua 2:9- 11).

The Lord relented from His plan to punish the people of Nineveh when their king told them to repent. "Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish" (Jonah 3:8-9).<sup>29</sup>

"The islands will look to [the Lord]" (Isaiah 51:5; 60:9). "Many peoples and powerful nations will . . . seek the Lord Almighty and entreat him" (Zechariah 8:21-22). "Many nations will be joined with the Lord" (2:11), the islands will put their hope in him (Isaiah 51:5; 42:4), and "all nations will . . . honor the name of the Lord" (Jeremiah 3:17; cf. Isaiah 60:9).

"All nations" will travel to Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2-3; Micah 4:1-2; cf. Jeremiah 3:17; Zechariah 8:20, 22). They will become God's people (Zechariah 2:11; cf. Isaiah 19:25) and will be considered to be like "native-born Israelites" (Ezekiel 47:22; cf. Psalm 87:4).

The Lord "will bring justice to the nations" (Isaiah 51:5; cf. 42:4). Israel, Egypt and Assyria will together become "a blessing on the earth" (Isaiah 19:23-24). "The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, 'Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance'" (v. 25).<sup>30</sup> Immigrants will receive an inheritance (Ezekiel 47:22-23), and the Lord's salvation will "reach to the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6; cf. Psalm 67:2; 1 Samuel 17:47). The Lord will pour out His Spirit "on all people" (Joel 2:28).<sup>31</sup>

27. Cf. Micah 4:1-3.

28. Cf. 5:26; 11:12; 18:3; 49:22; 62:10.

29. Cf. Jeremiah 3:17 ("all nations . . . . No longer will they follow the stubbornness of their evil hearts").

30. Cf. Psalm 2:9-11 ("you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. . . . Blessed are all who take refuge in him").

31. Cf. Psalm 67:4 ("May the nations be glad and sing for joy").

Isaiah envisioned the Assyrians and Egyptians worshipping the Lord together with the people of Israel (Isaiah 19:23). God’s glory will be declared “among the nations,” including “Tarshish, . . . the Libyans and Lydians, . . . Tubal and Greece, and . . . the distant islands” (Isaiah 66:19-21). Those instructed to praise God include “the peoples” (Psalm 67:3), those “in the east” and “in the islands of the sea” (Isaiah 24:15), those “who go down to the sea,” “you islands,” “the desert and its towns,” and “the settlements where Kedar lives” (42:10-12).

## The Nations Gain Knowledge

Various outcomes arise as the people of the nations encounter Israel and their God. One outcome is knowledge. God led Israel to cross the Jordan River on dry ground “so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful” (Joshua 4:24). King Solomon prayed the Lord would answer the prayers of the foreigners who come to the temple”, “so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you,” “may know that this house I have built bears your Name,” and “may know that the Lord is God and that there is no other” (1 Kings 8:43, 60).<sup>32</sup> The psalmist prayed, “May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine on us—so that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations” (Psalm 67:1-2).<sup>33</sup>

## Knowledge Through Hardships

At times the knowledge of God coming to the nations arises through hardships. For example, the plagues experienced by Pharaoh and the people of Egypt resulted in their coming to know the Lord is Lord, He is Lord in the land of Egypt; there is no one else like Him “in all the earth,” and “the earth” belongs to the Lord (Exodus 7:5, 17; 8:22; 9:14, 29; 14:4, 18).<sup>34</sup>

At times the knowledge of God coming to the nations arises through hardships.

32. Cf. Zechariah 2:11 (“Many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day and will become my people. I will live among you and you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me to you”).

33. Cf. Habakkuk 2:14 (“the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea”) which appears to be a combination of the ideas found in Isaiah 6:3 (“the whole earth is full of his glory”) and 11:9 (“the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea”).

34. It is difficult to see the blessing of God upon the nations in the Pentateuch texts that speak of God’s command for Israel to destroy the Canaanites. The Midianites were judged because

The people of Jericho were filled with fear when they heard the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, across the Red Sea, and gave them victory over Sihon and Og. They knew the Lord had given them the land (Joshua 2:9-11). As Rahab testified, “the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below” (v. 11).

David’s victory over the Philistines happened so “the whole world [would] know that there is a God in Israel” and so “all those gathered . . . [would] know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord’s” (1 Samuel 17:46-47).<sup>35</sup>

## Positive Mixed with Negative

Not all the results of association with Israel are positive. Some texts envision a future when the blessing for the nations is more opaque or obscure. An example of a prophetic text mixing blessing and some kind of hardship is Isaiah 45. The nations will hear the injunction to turn to God and be saved (v. 22). The Sabeans and those from Egypt and Cush will express their desire to find God (“Surely God is with you, and there is no other; there is no other god”). However, their wealth will be brought to Judah; they will arrive in chains and bow down to both Judah and the Lord (vv. 14, 23).<sup>36</sup>

Isaiah 60 also has a mix of both positive and negative outcomes for the nations. Blessings are found in v. 3 (“nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn”), v. 6 (“Sheba . . . proclaiming the praise of the Lord”), and v. 9 (“surely the islands look to me”). On the other hand, the nations in this

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they had led Israel into idolatry and immorality (Numbers 31:15, 16; 25:1-3). These were crimes punishable by death in the Mosaic law (Numbers 25:16-18; cf. Leviticus 20:10-21; Deuteronomy 22:22; Exodus 22:20). The people of Israel were commanded by God to destroy the Canaanites (Exodus 23:33; Deuteronomy 7:1-2; 20:16-17) for various reasons: a) if Israel made a covenant with them (Exodus 23:33), they might become a snare to Israel (Exodus 34:12), and it might result in the people of Israel engaging in sacrifice to their gods (Exodus 34:15), b) Inter-marriage with them would lead to idolatry which would be judged (Exodus 34:16; Deuteronomy 7:3-4; 20:18), and c) the wickedness of these nations defiled the land (Leviticus 18:21-28). Cf. Genesis 15:16 (the sin of the Amorites was anticipated by God); Deuteronomy 9:4-6 (Israel was given the land, not because of their superior morality, but because of God’s promises to the patriarchs); Joshua 3:10; 11:3; 17:13, 18; 24:11.

35. Cf. Isaiah 49:26 (“I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh; they will be drunk on their own blood, as with wine. Then all mankind will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob”).

36. Cf. Isaiah 66:23 (“all mankind will come and bow down before me, says the Lord”); Philippians 2:10.

chapter bring their wealth to Judah (vv. 6, 7, 9, 11) and experience servitude (vv. 10-11).<sup>37</sup>

The nations also bring their wealth to Israel in Isaiah 18:7 (“gifts will be brought to the Lord Almighty from a people tall and smooth-skinned, from a people feared far and wide, an aggressive nation of strange speech, whose land is divided by rivers—the gifts will be brought to Mount Zion, the place of the Name of the Lord Almighty”) and Psalm 72:10 (“...kings of Tarshish and of distant shores will bring tribute to him; the kings of Sheba and Seba will present him gifts”).<sup>38</sup> Are these gifts given out of thankfulness or as some kind of forced payment?

Isaiah 25 speaks of a time when there will be “a feast of rich food for all peoples” (v. 6). At this time, death (“the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations”) is swallowed up forever as the Lord wipes away “the tears from all faces,” yet “Moab will be trampled” (vv. 7-10). Likewise, Amos 9:11-12 mixes images which are both positive (the nations bear the Lord’s name) and negative (the remnant of Edom is possessed by Israel).<sup>39</sup>

In addition to Isaiah 45:14, 23; 60:10-11; 25:10; and Amos 9:12, other texts talking about the nations serving Israel include Genesis 49:10 (“the obedience of the nations shall be his” [cf. v. 8]); Psalm 2:8-9 (“I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will break them with a rod of iron; you will dash them to pieces like pottery”); 2:10-11 (“you kings . . . you rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear”); 72:8-11 (“May he rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. May the desert tribes bow before him and his enemies lick the dust. . . . May all kings bow down to him and all nations serve him”); and Isaiah 49:23 (“Kings . . . and queens . . . will bow down before you with their faces to the ground; they will lick the dust at your feet”).

## Conclusion

Collectively, the writers of the Old Testament have so much to say about blessing for the nations. They anticipate the grandeur of the New Testament which climaxes in the creation of “a new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1) and “the Holy City, the new Jerusalem” (v. 2). “The glory of God gives” light to the city, “and the Lamb is its lamp” (v. 23). “The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it” (v. 24). “The glory and honor of the

37. Cf. Isaiah 49:23 (“Kings will be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. They will bow down before you with their faces to the ground; they will lick the dust at your feet”).

38. Cf. Psalm 68:29 (“kings will bring you gifts”).

39. Cf. Acts 15:16-18.

nations will be brought into it" (v. 26). And the leaves of the tree of life will be "for the healing of the nations" (22:1-2).

## Chapter 10

萬民福音的使者：由使徒保羅到今日華人教會

# The Messenger for the Gospel to All Nations: from Apostle Paul to the Chinese Churches Today

by Alfred Chui

From being the unreached to being the reached, Chinese Christians have experienced and witnessed God's wonderful plan of salvation. Understanding God's intention of reaching all nations through His redeemed, the Body of Christ, the global churches are called to succeed Apostle Paul to bring the Gospel not only to their kinsmen but to all nations, from everywhere to everywhere. The Chinese churches are no exception.

曾幾何時，華人這個群體在宣教學上被稱為「未得之民」，上帝感

動許多西方的弟兄姊妹，對這個資源豐富、但又不太了解的中國大地上的原住民產生興

趣。事實上，應該說是上帝將祂對華人的愛，放在這些弟兄姊妹的心中，使用他們把福音

帶到中國。今天，中國和海外華人信徒以及教會的數目實在見證了上帝的恩典及應許。因

著亞伯拉罕的後裔耶穌基督，萬族包括華人都要得福（得救）。其實華人只是一個籠統的

名稱，中國的人種有至少超過 50 個族群體，漢族是最大及主要的民族。

亞伯拉罕承接上帝藉他賜福萬族的應許，在異鄉迦南地寄居，他及他的家族

後裔被稱希伯來人。他的孫兒雅各（以色列）及家人因饑荒的緣故，輾轉在埃及定居並增長，成為一個數目龐大的民族稱為以色列民。當摩西帶領他們離開埃及到達西乃山，上帝再次提醒他們關於他們的祖先亞伯拉罕和上帝的約。但是，這次祂用了另外一種表達方式，祂告訴他們，以色列人要成為上帝的子民，在萬民中作祂的祭司，並帶領萬民歸向上帝。所羅門王獻聖殿的禱告顯示，他並沒有忘記以色列國在萬民中的角色。但當以色列在所羅門王兒子羅波安統治下，分裂為南北兩國後，這萬民祭司的身份不但沒有被彰顯，反而被南國的猶太人，因以大衛王正統傳人自居，視自己為上帝揀選的「天之驕子」。耶穌基督曾多次指責這個思想的錯誤及他們的陋習，並故意在他們面前讚賞外邦人的信心。耶穌基督離別門徒時所吩咐的大使命，並非一個臨時的命令，乃是延續上帝早在與亞伯拉罕立約時已定下的心意。

華人和猶太人都曾經歷國土淪亡於外族，而他們中許多本族人亦散居在外國。華人和猶太人都很注重自己的經濟實力和子女教育，極力爭取登上外國社會的中上層。由於歷史上有被欺壓的先例，他們對保衛自己民族的意識特別強。負面方面來說，他們都是比較排外及自我中心的民族。雖然福音藉着不同文化有豐富的表達，但福音本身亦是表達於耶穌基督在十字架上廢了文化衝突的冤仇。使徒保羅在他各書信中不斷強調在基

督裏，所有文化、身份、階級的差異都被放下。羅馬書 9-11 章充分表露保羅心中的矛盾和掙扎。一方面，他是一個不折不扣的猶太人，熱愛上帝的律法及他的猶太骨肉至親，當然希望他們得到救恩。但是，他又看見猶太人對基督福音的抗拒。保羅更明白到這福音的奧秘是要傳給萬民，而他便是特別被差派做這工作的。保羅開始明白上帝深不可測的心意，亦加強了他的信念，就是上帝不會放棄祂的選民。但在以色列全家得救以先，保羅知道他當前的使命是要把福音帶到外邦萬族當中。

難道只是保羅才有傳福音給外邦人的使命嗎？我想不是。在使徒行傳 1:8 中，耶穌基督交托給使徒的使命，是要由本族的耶路撒冷，到猶太全地、撒瑪利亞、直到地極。這裏只是列出不同地域及不同文化群體，並沒有時間順序的意思。而當日使徒使命的延伸，就是今日所有教會，包括華人教會的使命。

我明白華人事工有很大的需要及潛力，我亦明白同文化的福音及門訓事工比較容易開展及有效率，我更明白跨文化事工談何容易，往往不知如何著手，況且華人事工已讓很多同工忙得不可開交，更毋庸說去啟動跨文化事工。但是事工的優先考慮，除了包括能力、資源、環境、時機，還有聖靈的引導及感動。我並不是提議凡華人教會都去轉型

作跨文化事工，也不是說華人事工有什麼不對，我只是覺得海外華人基督徒，譬如在加拿大的華人教會，身處眾多異文化群體中，必定有上帝的心意。在這裡我有兩個提議，首先，我們可以將教會禱告會的代禱對象擴大，為未得之民代禱，可以參考以下網頁尋找資料：

[www.joshuaproject.net](http://www.joshuaproject.net)  
[www.operationworld.org](http://www.operationworld.org)  
[www.cross-roads.org](http://www.cross-roads.org)

我相信禱告能讓弟兄姊妹更敏銳聖靈在跨文化福音上的帶領。另外一個建議，是當我們進行門徒訓練時，刻意培育一群胸懷普世的門徒，明白福音不單是免去永刑的救恩，更是上帝創造和救贖的永恆計劃。上帝邀請所有被救贖的門徒，基督的教會去與祂同工，繼續祂的救贖。這個同工的旅程亦是每一個信徒靈命成長的唯一途徑。一向以來，很多弟兄姊妹都強調先受裝備，再來服事神。這原是一個非常好的心志，但裝備不單是聽道、查經、參加各樣的訓練課程、甚至進入神學院學習，也是在領人歸主，用生命影響其他人跟隨基督的經歷上得到培訓。今天最大的禾場不單是海外的宣教工場，也不只是在教會架構下的傳福音及門訓對象，乃是在已經分散在各處的基督徒所身處的環境中。倘若我們的弟兄姊妹在鄰里、學校、工作地點、社區活動場所中，藉著聖靈力量發揮鹽和光的功效，那麼，無論是在同文化或跨文化的領域裡，大使命就真的邁進一步了。

使徒彼得在五旬節經歷聖靈的大能，開展了耶路撒冷的超級大教會。但他卻未曾領會在聖靈降臨的經歷中，上帝藉著他播下了跨文化傳福音給萬民的種子。當時聚集的都是遍佈全世界的猶太僑民，當他們回到所住之地，福音便在該地萌芽，讓外邦人（跨文化）事工有所發展。這亦提醒我們華人身處異國的角色。彼得當然沒有這想法，畢竟猶太人的福音事工已夠他忙不過來，上帝給他及同工看到這猶太人事工也實在討祂喜悅，只可惜它並沒有成就上帝在使徒行傳 1:8 的心意。這卷書大可以在第 5 章後結束，但卻不然，因為教會的存在是為著完成上帝大使命的浪潮而產生的。為著讓這浪潮繼續，上帝做了 3 件事。第一，大部份耶路撒冷教會的弟兄姊妹因司提反殉道後的逼迫被迫離開耶路撒冷。最不可思議的，是原本負責執事，而不是專職傳道的腓力，竟然在一個猶太人最不願意去傳福音的撒瑪利亞地區，有很奇妙的事工，連彼得也不得不去了解一下。第二，上帝特別揀選呼召了一個逼迫教會的掃羅作跨文化事工的先鋒。第三，上帝用一個異象去令彼得與外邦人哥尼流接觸，並印證了上帝要把福音臨到外邦人的心意。使徒行傳再往下走時，耶路撒冷教會已不再是福音浪潮的中心了，取而代之的是充滿外邦人的安提阿教會，亦是差出第一代宣教士保羅和巴拿巴的教會。最特別的是，使徒行傳最後一章並不是交代保羅上訴凱撒的結果，而是延續福音臨到萬民的伏綫，讓我們看到教會歷史發展到今天，

仍然在繼續上帝對萬民救贖的心意。所不同的是，使徒保羅所開拓的外邦人事工，就是萬民福音事工，它已不再是小部份門徒的托付，而是整個基督教會，包括華人教會要承擔的使命。

我個人有一個想法，當加拿大很多華人教會都面對老化及下一代流失的問題時，也許參與跨文化事工能提供更多合作機會，把我們兩代人的關係提升，亦讓我們的門徒訓練更有方向及更有真實感，教會也與社區有落實的接觸，而不只是華人內聚的宗教活動。

## Chapter 11

### What about People Who Have Never Heard about Jesus?

by Miriam Charter

I met Natasha in southern Russia in 1995. Russia was recovering from seventy years of Communist rule. She had just graduated from university with a degree in English language and literature.

#### Is There a God?

When I met Natasha, she was a new believer in Jesus. Her story raised a challenging question that troubles me even today. I can't forget it.

Natasha grew up in Russia during the harshness of the Communist regime. She had never once heard the name of Jesus, not even as a curse word, until near the end of her university years.

Natasha's childhood education was shaped by scientific atheism in a Marxist system. Her elementary school years were marked by the ruthless indoctrination for which Communist educators were famous. Natasha had an inquiring mind which often got her into trouble at school. She seemed always to be asking the wrong questions.

One day on the way to school, she was suddenly overwhelmed by the beauty of nature around her; southern Russia is a beautiful place. At school, she had been taught all of creation was the result of chance, but as she walked to school, a question popped into her mind, "All this beauty in nature around me could not have just *happened* as the teacher tells us." The thought triggered another idea, "There must at least be some Power, *someone* or something that triggered the evolutionary process."

As she walked along, a voice whispered a dangerous answer to the questions inside her head, "Such beauty could not have just *happened*. Maybe there is a God!"

"There must at least  
be some Power,  
*someone* or something  
that triggered the  
evolutionary process."

## There is No God

When she arrived at school, young Natasha couldn't contain herself. Not knowing any better, she blurted out to the teacher, "Is there a God?" The teacher's face instantly filled with shock and fear. "You must never ask such a question," she quickly replied.

But Natasha's naiveté pushed her to expand on the question, "But, Respected Teacher, the forests were so beautiful this morning! Did God make them?"

Her teacher flew into a rage and announced Natasha would remain after class to write lines, punishment for such an outrageous and unscientific question. After her classmates had left, Natasha stood at the chalkboard, tears running down her cheeks as she wrote one thousand times, "There is no God!"

Several days later, as she walked home from school, the leaves were turning a brilliant gold and red as winter approached. Natasha was once again overcome with a naïve sense Someone must have created the beautiful forests along the pathway that led to her home.

*I know it could not have just happened!* she told herself. *But how?* She remembered the line she had written one thousand times on the chalkboard—there is no God!

Arriving home to the dark little apartment where she lived with her family, she felt like the dangerous thoughts tumbling around in her head would make it explode. She was overcome by an inexplicable sense of *something* she couldn't explain. Not understanding what was happening, Natasha fell to her knees in the living room, lifted her hands above her head and cried loudly, "O God, if there is a God, please show me who you are!"

Ten years passed! Natasha graduated from high school and entered the Kuban State University of Krasnodar. This was during the era of *perestroika*.<sup>1</sup> As the Communist regime fell apart, people experienced freedom of thought and religion for the first time. It was a period of unprecedented openness to new ideas. Foreigners flooded the universities in her city, telling everyone about Jesus.

One day a friend invited her to a Bible study. Nowhere in her English language and literature program had Natasha heard about the book her friend mentioned, the Bible. Intrigued, she went to an English study group with her friend to discuss this unknown book. In the first study, she heard the answer to her childhood

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1. *Perestroika* (meaning "restructuring") was a political movement of reformation within the Communist Party in the Soviet Union during the late 1980s and 90s. It is widely associated with the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and his *glasnost* ("openness") policy reform. He introduced a series of political and economic reforms he thought would kickstart the stagnant economy of the Soviet Union. Instead, his reforms led to the disintegration of Communism as it had been known in the Soviet Union during the seventy years since the Russian Revolution.

question, “Is there a God?” She learned there is a God, and what is more, God has a Son, whose name is Jesus. God loved her so much that He sent Jesus to die and pay the penalty for her sins. Almost immediately, Natasha opened her heart to Jesus and became a committed follower.

### **A Troubling Question**

Natasha’s story raised a troubling question in my mind. I couldn’t get rid of the image of a young girl on her knees in her dark living room, hands raised above her head, speaking to Someone her teacher said did not exist.

The words she cried out, “God, if there is a God, please show me who you are!” haunted me. What if Natasha hadn’t lived long enough to hear about Jesus? What if, for some reason, Natasha had died the night she cried out to God, never having heard of Jesus, never knowing the answer to her question?

I wondered where she would have gone after she died. I certainly believed in heaven. I didn’t want to believe in hell, but I did. Everywhere I went in those days in Russia, a country finally wide open to the Good News about Jesus, I met young Russians who had grown up during the Soviet era, and most had never before heard of Jesus. What is the eternal future of people who still have never heard about Him?

I wondered  
where she would  
have gone after  
she died.

Two years later, I was back in Canada. Every chance I got to speak in church, I told Natasha’s story, ending with the little girl kneeling in her dingy living room in southern Russia, hands raised, crying out, “O God, if there is a God, please show me who you are.”

I would invite listeners to help me think about the question troubling me if Natasha had died that night, would she have gone to heaven? It always started good discussions about whether people who have never heard about Jesus are lost. It was and still is a complex question that raises many other related questions.

### **What Does it Mean to Be Lost?**

What does it mean to be lost? I remember once getting separated from my hiking buddies in the mountains. Totally disoriented, I didn’t know whether to go right or left at a fork in the path. Night was falling, and I was filled with panic. My solution was to find and follow the river; eventually, I’d find a road and some people. But which way was the river? I knew the sun sets in the west, but it was so overcast the sun wasn’t visible. I was lost, far away from anyone who could show me the way. It was a terrifying feeling to know I was lost.

## Are People Who Have Never Heard about Jesus Lost?

When I ask if people who have never heard about Jesus are “lost,” I am asking if they are separated from God. Are they saved? The question raises a ton of other questions. If they aren’t followers of Jesus, will they spend eternity apart from God when they die? Statistics tell us that 2.3 billion people in the world call themselves *Christian*.<sup>2</sup> This means only one-third of all the people in the world have some understanding of who Jesus is.<sup>3</sup> And at least one-third of all the people in the world don’t have easy access to knowing Jesus because there is no one near who can tell them. They live in a place or a culture or language group with no evangelizing church among them. Unless someone goes into their group from the outside, they have no way of knowing Jesus. We who care about lost people talk about people who’ve never heard about Jesus as unreached people groups (UPGs for short.)<sup>4</sup>

Is knowing about or even just acknowledging there is a God enough to save a person from judgment when they die? The question I’m really asking is, what does a person have to know to be saved?

Is knowing about or even just acknowledging there is a God enough to save a person from judgment when they die?

## How Much Does a Person Have to Know to Be Saved?

Natasha moved toward belief in God’s existence by looking at nature. The Apostle Paul believed that God’s existence and power are clearly revealed to everyone through creation. In Romans 1:19-20, he writes the basic reality of God is pretty plain. “. . . what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible

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2. The label “Christian” can be confusing. People who call themselves Christians may be Christian in name only, perhaps church attendee or people who simply hold to some form of cultural or denominational Christianity without understanding who Jesus is. Most sources suggest that roughly 31% of the world is “Christian.”
  3. There are about 7.9 billion people in the world. (2022) <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/>
  4. An Unreached People Group is a group that currently has little access to the Gospel. They are hidden, not in the sense that they are invisible, but in the sense that there is no way, given current conditions, that they can hear the Gospel in their own language in a way that makes sense to them. (A. Scott Moreau, Gary R. Corwin, and Gary B. McGee. *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Survey*. 2nd Edition. 2015 Grand Rapids, MI. Baker Academic, p. 18).

qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood by what has been made, so that people are without excuse.”

The question is whether what is revealed about God through nature (theologians call that *general* revelation)<sup>5</sup> is enough to save a person from spiritual death and eternal judgment. Romans 2:14-16 goes even further in saying the requirements of God’s law are written in the heart of every person. Each one’s innate moral judgment or conscience tells them what God requires of them. Paul says,

When outsiders who have never heard of God’s law follow it more or less by instinct, they confirm its truth by their obedience. They show that God’s law is not something alien, imposed on us from without, but woven into the very fabric of our creation. There is something deep within them that echoes God’s yes and no, right and wrong. Their response to God’s yes and no will become public knowledge on the day God makes his final decision about every man and woman. The Message from God that I proclaim through Jesus Christ takes into account all these differences. (MSG<sup>6</sup>)

Paul suggests that just as Gentiles cannot be saved by keeping the Jewish law, neither are Gentiles saved by the general knowledge they get about God from creation. Using circumcision as the example, Paul said to Jews who put great stock in having been circumcised,<sup>7</sup> proving they had kept all the Jewish laws, all people live under the power of sin:

Circumcision, the surgical ritual that marks you as a Jew, is great if you live in accord with God’s law. But if you don’t, it’s worse than not being circumcised. The reverse is also true. The uncircumcised who keep God’s ways are as good as the circumcised – in fact, better. Better to keep God’s law uncircumcised than break it circumcised. Don’t you see: it’s not the cut of a knife that makes you a Jew. You become a Jew by who you *are*. It’s the mark of God on your heart, not a knife on your skin, that makes you a Jew. And recognition comes from God, not legalistic critics. (Romans 2:25-29, MSG, emphasis in original)

Paul’s conclusion is all human beings, Jew and Gentile, are lost. No one

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5. Theologians speak of general and special revelation. General revelation refers to general truths that can be known about God as revealed through nature. Special revelation is how God has chosen to reveal Himself through miraculous means, the ultimate form of special revelation being the person of Jesus Christ. Another form of special revelation by God, of primary importance, is His Word, the Bible. Special revelation also includes dreams, visions and physical appearances of God.

6. *The Message* (MSG). Copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson.

7. The special meaning of circumcision for the people of Israel is found in Genesis 17 and was imposed on Abraham and his descendants as a token of covenant membership in God’s people.

is righteous, not one of us. No one seems to understand the truth. He says so clearly, “Doing what the law prescribes will not make anyone right in the eyes of God... You see, all have sinned, and all their futile attempts to reach God in His glory fail. Yet they are now saved and set right by His free gift of grace through the redemption available only in Jesus the Anointed” (Romans 3:20, 23-24, VOICE<sup>8</sup>).

When I think about Natasha, I draw hope from the reality of how, to someone who responds obediently to what God reveals of Himself in nature, God will send more light, often through a human messenger. This is pretty special. In fact, the revelation brought by the messenger is what we call *special revelation*,<sup>9</sup> which includes everything God has revealed about Himself through Christ and the

Scriptures. Of course, God’s supreme Messenger or special revelation was His Son, Jesus, who came as a human being to show us who God is. That’s why John 3:16-17 (MSG) says:

“This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn’t go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again. Anyone who trusts in him is acquitted; anyone who refuses to trust him has long since been under the death sentence without knowing it. And why? Because of that person’s failure to believe in the one-of-a-kind Son of God when introduced to him.

...I draw hope from the reality of how, to someone who responds obediently to what God reveals of Himself in nature, God will send more light, often through a human messenger.

## Do People Have to Know about Jesus?

It seems from these verses that what God shows of Himself in nature isn’t what saves someone from the death sentence mentioned in these verses. People have to know about Jesus. John says by believing in Him, anyone can have “a whole and lasting life.” God sent Jesus to reveal His love. It’s comforting to me to see how God sent an American who was enthusiastic about the Gospel to students at the

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8. *The Voice Bible* Copyright © 2012 Thomas Nelson, Inc. The Voice™ translation © 2012 Ecclesia Bible Society All rights reserved.

9. See footnote 6.

Kuban State University of Krasnodar, a messenger who could explain who Jesus is to people like Natasha who were lost. She introduced students to the Bible, which clearly reveals to its readers who Jesus is. No wonder theologians use the words *special revelation* when they refer to the message Jesus brought when He came to earth and also to God's Word, the Bible.

If seeing God in creation isn't enough, what do people need to know and understand about God to be saved from eternal death? They must know God has a Son. Simply put, people must know about Jesus. The solution to the lost condition of people who have never heard about Jesus is a person who God sends, a person Paul says has "beautiful feet," because he goes to tell lost people about Jesus. Paul says:

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" (Romans 10:14-15).

### **Is Jesus the *Only* Way?**

A friend of mine thinks some Christians are narrow-minded, especially those who believe salvation is found only in Jesus. She isn't happy that people like me think believing in God (or a god) is insufficient. My response to this friend is Truth is narrow. We don't consider it to be mathematical prejudice or narrow-mindedness to claim four plus four equals eight rather than ten or twelve or twenty. It's a matter of truth. This is why Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). These are His own words. So, whether it seems narrow or not, Jesus is clearly the only way to God. Truth is narrow.

So, whether it seems narrow or not, Jesus is clearly the only way to God.

### **That's Not Fair!**

One Sunday night, I told Natasha's story to a youth group. The junior high youth had joined the high school group to hear me speak. The younger teens were restless. I was sure they didn't hear much of what the missionary said. The promise of pizza after the Bible study motivated them to sit reasonably quiet for thirty minutes. One of the youngest, about thirteen, sitting in the front row with a baseball cap pulled down over his eyes, squirmed uncomfortably the whole time. He was right in front of me, but I was sure he didn't hear or understand a word I

said, much less care about it.

I finished Natasha's story with the usual, provocative question, "Here's my question for you guys! If Natasha had died that night after she called out to God to reveal himself to her, where would she have spent eternity?" I asked the students to discuss the question in small groups and report to the group in fifteen minutes with Scripture to support their answers.

When the students gathered to report back to the large group, we heard different perspectives on the fate of Natasha, who had never heard about Jesus at the time she cried out to God. They even raised new questions, such as was she saved or unsaved? Do only saved people go to heaven? As I always am, they were troubled how through no fault of her own, Natasha had never heard about Jesus!

Some students used Romans 10:13, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved," to consider Natasha's destiny had she died. They suggested because she had never called on Jesus, the Lord, to save her, she wouldn't have gone to heaven. Others believed she would have gone to heaven because she responded to the light of nature that God had shown her. Another group was quite sure because God is good and knows every heart, He would not have condemned her to hell.

I admitted it was a challenging and troubling question. Sitting in the back row, the pastor cringed when I grinned and suggested they be sure to ask their pastor how he would answer the question. It's a difficult one!

### **Three Views on Those Who Have Never Heard about Jesus**

Traditionally there have been three approaches to answering this difficult question. One view, which people call the "exclusivist view," states without apology Jesus is the only Saviour of the world. Those who hold this view say to be saved, a person must believe in God's special revelation of Himself in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, which is pretty exclusive!

In contrast, the "inclusivist view" agrees Jesus is the only Saviour of the world but argues a person does not have to hear the Gospel<sup>10</sup> to be saved. In other words, if anyone *is* saved, it is because of the death of Jesus. Not everyone will hear the Gospel, but those who respond in faith to the revelation they *do* have will be saved. Inclusivists believe salvation is only in Christ, but knowledge of Christ's work is not necessary for salvation. John Sanders, an inclusivist, says, "people

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10. There are many good definitions of the Gospel. For simplicity, I give one from Scripture: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He rose on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

might receive the gift of salvation without knowing the giver or the precise nature of the gift.”<sup>11</sup>

A third view, called “pluralism,” says all paths are valid, and all lead to God. This view opens the door to believing people who faithfully follow world religions other than Christianity can be saved.<sup>12</sup>

Because I always stick close to Scripture when trying to answer such questions,<sup>13</sup> my head has always led me towards the exclusivist view (see below). But in today’s culture, some say the term “exclusivist” sounds so culturally insensitive, narrow-minded, intolerant, and dogmatic, all being words the culture around doesn’t want to hear. When I discuss this complex issue with people, I often lose my audience before they even engage with me because my answer sounds rather “exclusive.” I keep referring them back to God’s Word, the Scriptures.

The issue raises so many troubling questions. The biggest question for me is whether there is any basis to hope those who do not hear about Jesus in this life will be saved. There are at least nine different ways people who call themselves Christians have answered this question. These responses fall along a spectrum. At one end of the continuum is the position people must hear the Gospel and trust Christ to be saved.<sup>14</sup> At the other end is pluralism, saying all major religions are equally valid, and Christ and Christianity aren’t unique.<sup>15</sup>

### **Is There Any Basis to Hope Those Who Don’t Hear about Jesus in This Life Will Be Saved?**

As I talked with the teenagers during the night, I explained my answer to the question heading this paragraph is “No.” This means I hold to the exclusivist view. I believe, with the coming of Jesus Christ, the focus of faith was narrowed to one man. He was the fulfillment of all the sacrifices and prophecies in the Old Testament. Whether a person lived before Jesus’ death or after, all saving faith points in trust to what Jesus did for us on the Cross. Our faith looks to His death for the sins of all time.

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11. Sanders, John. *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. 1992, pp. 216.

12. A very fine book that gives a great summary of these three views and an excellent response to inclusivism is the book edited by Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson called *Faith Comes by Hearing: A Response to Inclusivism*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008.

13. The Scripture is God’s authoritative Word. I hold as a belief that which agrees with what God has revealed in His Word.

14. James Borland, “A Theologian Looks at the Gospel and World Religions,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33 (March 1990): 3-11.

15. Morgan and Peterson, p. 36.

## A Story from Acts Chapter 4

I told the group a story from Acts 4, which helps determine what one must know to be saved. Peter and John healed a beggar known to everyone, raising suspicion among religious leaders. This gave Peter an opportunity to preach a fine message to the Jewish crowd, telling them it was by the name of Jesus Christ that he and John had healed the disabled man.

As Peter preached, he clearly told the crowd the story of Jesus's death and resurrection. He announced the Good News of how Jesus had died to forgive the sins of each one of them, but he made it clear they had to repent and believe (Acts 3:19). Over and over, Peter and John referred to the power of Jesus' name. They spoke of having faith in His name (verse 16). Imagine, five thousand people believed in Jesus afterwards!

Even though Peter and John spent the night in prison because of their message, they continued the next day to speak about Jesus, who had died and risen from the dead just a few months earlier. Peter again told the crowd there was something about the very name of Jesus, which brings about salvation for anyone who believes in His name. Referring to Jesus, Peter told them, "Salvation is found in *no one* else, for there is no other name under heaven given to [people] by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12, emphasis added).

Peter had just told thousands of religious-minded listeners the story of Jesus. He reminded them of their Jewish history and explained how in Jesus Christ, all of salvation history was narrowed down to one Person. He pointed to Jesus when he said salvation could be "found in no one else." If I were to say a person can be saved without believing in Jesus, it would mean Jesus didn't need to die after all. It would suggest there was some other way. It would make a mockery of Jesus' death.

I reminded the youth during Natasha's childhood that she had never heard the name of Jesus, not once! Through the beauty of creation (*general* revelation), the existence and even the power of God had become crystal clear to her. Creation had prompted her to think about God and cry out to Him to reveal Himself to her. But it's hard to ignore the decisive words Peter used to finish his message, the words in Acts 4:12: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to [people] by which we must be saved."

If I were to say  
a person can be  
saved without  
believing in Jesus,  
it would mean  
Jesus didn't need  
to die after all.

## **That's Not Fair!**

I said to the students sitting in front of me, "Natasha had not yet believed in Jesus—how could she? She'd never heard about Him. So, she was not saved. If I understand Acts 4:12, Natasha would not have gone to heaven because she wasn't saved, and as I understand heaven, it's only for saved people. To be saved, you must believe in Jesus." The room fell quiet.

Suddenly, the young boy in the front row, who I'd assumed hadn't been listening to a word I'd said all evening, rose to his feet, pulled his baseball cap off his head, and yelled in a loud and angry voice, "That's not fair!" He sat down and lowered his head into his hands.

The room became instantly quiet. All eyes were on me. I said three short sentences into the silence, "You are right!! It's not fair! *That* is why I am a missionary!"

## **There Must Be a Gospel Messenger**

My exclusivist view, rooted in Scripture, leads me to say salvation is found only in the work of Jesus. I believe God uses general revelation (God revealed in creation) as one step toward salvation, and it often serves as a preparation for the Gospel.<sup>16</sup> A person might see God in creation, but there must still be a gospel messenger who points them to God's Son, Jesus, who died for them. I say this because I believe the Gospel is the only means of salvation. For this reason, I call myself a "gospel exclusivist."<sup>17</sup>

This is why the Church must focus its best efforts on evangelism and missions. God's "ordinary" way of bringing people to faith in Jesus is by sending the Gospel, usually carried by a messenger to those who have never heard of Him. Seeing God in creation is not enough. This is why I'm an international worker!

Some "exclusivists" believe, as I do, that the Church should focus on sending messengers. They also recognize, as I do, how God might choose to send a special revelation to someone who has never heard the Good News, using an "extraordinary" means. God works in supernatural ways. The Holy Spirit might choose to use a direct revelation from God, a dream, a vision, a miracle, or an angel bringing a gospel message to someone who has never heard the Good News.

I remind myself every day the customary way by which sinners come to know and love God is through a messenger bringing the Good News of what Jesus did in dying for them. So, when I pray for unreached people groups, I always pray God

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16. John Piper. *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993. P. 151-159.

17. I am using the labels developed in Morgan and Peterson's book, p. 26.

will raise up many in the next generation who will go as messengers. But I'm glad sometimes God uses extraordinary ways to bring the message of Jesus to lost people.<sup>18</sup>

## **Is it Just for God to Send People Who Have Never Heard the Gospel to Hell?**

As I work through the spectrum of nine different responses to the sobering question, "Is there any basis for hope those who do not hear about Jesus in this life will be saved?" I see some responders trying, optimistically, to find hope of salvation apart from the Gospel. They ask the sincere question, "Is it just or fair for God to send people to hell who have never heard the Gospel?" They want to widen the doorway of hope to include other ways to salvation.

Inclusivists, which is what we call such people, charge exclusivists like me with unfairness and injustice. Like the young boy in the youth group, they cry out, "It's not fair!" How could it be fair and just for those who have not heard the Gospel, which is necessary for salvation, to be lost forever? There are two faulty assumptions behind their accusation that "It's not fair!"<sup>19</sup>

### **Condemned Because We Are Sinners**

The first mistaken assumption is people are condemned because they have rejected the Gospel. But remember, the people we're talking about haven't even heard the Gospel, so they haven't rejected it. The Bible is completely clear; condemnation isn't based on rejecting the Gospel but on the fact we are sinners.

Romans 5:18 says, "So here is the result: one man's sin [Adam] brought condemnation *and punishment* for all people" (VOICE, emphasis in original). Paul also says God's wrath is revealed against anyone (Jews and Gentiles alike) who rejects God's truth as revealed through creation (Romans 1:18-25). In Romans, Paul argues that just as everyone has an innate knowledge of God, rebellion is also innate. Rebellion is the basis of our guilt.<sup>20</sup>

Natasha's condemnation was because she was a sinner, not because she rejected (or had never heard) the Gospel. Natasha cried out to God. She wasn't

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18. People who believe God sometimes uses special revelations of Himself beyond Christ and the Scriptures might be called "special revelation exclusivists." See Morgan and Peterson, p. 28,29 for a more complete explanation.

19. Morgan and Peterson, pages 241-243 give an excellent, succinct response to the question, "Is it just for God to send people to hell who have never heard of Jesus?" My discussion is based on their response.

20. William Edgar writes a chapter in Morgan and Peterson called *Exclusivism: Unjust or Just*.

rebellious against Him, but she was still guilty before Him. Whenever I thought about this, as I pondered the fairness of God against which the young boy protested, I took hope for people like Natasha who turn to God and cry out, based on the light of general revelation.

Natasha needed Jesus to save her from sin. God could have used extraordinary means (a dream or vision or an angelic messenger) to communicate the Gospel. But freedom to evangelize came to Russia, and with freedom came a messenger who told her about Jesus.

### **A Confusion of Justice and Mercy**

The second mistaken assumption behind the assertion of unfairness is our tendency to confuse justice and mercy. Yes, it is just and fair for God to punish those who are guilty because they are sinners.<sup>21</sup> God wasn't obliged to provide salvation for guilty sinners, but it is merciful and gracious that He did so. As Morgan and Peterson say, ". . . because of his grace and mercy (in a way consistent with his justice), God made atonement for our sins through Christ's death and resurrection. And in grace and mercy, God sends good news to the guilty so they can repent and trust Christ."<sup>22</sup>

The question, "Is it fair that God punishes those who have never heard the Gospel?" must be answered with a "yes." We ask, "Is it fair that millions will never hear the Gospel? My stomach writhes as I respond, "No, it is not." *This* was actually the issue against which the young boy in the youth group protested. He was angry because, without a messenger, Natasha was lost, as are millions today. I don't question the justice of God's punishment of the guilty, but I am troubled that the news of God's mercy has reached so few. It isn't fair!

All of us stand condemned before a holy God, deserving His anger. In this, God is fair. However, perhaps there is greater condemnation for those who live in places in Christianized, developed countries with centuries of Christian history and access to the Bible. Maybe we bear more condemnation than those in areas where the reach of the Gospel is limited. Why? Because we know about Jesus but keep that Good News to ourselves.

### **Perhaps We Are the Problem**

The greatest mystery to me isn't the character of God (His love, His justice or His mercy) or the destiny of lost people. The greatest mystery is why we, who have God's Word and could share the story of Jesus with people who are lost,

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21. Morgan and Peterson, p. 242.

22. Morgan and Peterson, p. 242.

don't go to people who have not heard.

Robertson McQuilkan, who went to Japan to tell lost Japanese about Jesus, asks us why we who know Jesus are busy doing other things, maybe even very good things, but aren't going ourselves or sending others until every single person now alive has heard about Jesus.<sup>23</sup> The problem isn't with God's character but with our obedience to the last command of Jesus, "Therefore go and make disciples of all people, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

The greatest mystery is why we, who have God's Word and could share the story of Jesus with people who are lost, don't go to people who have not heard.

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23. Robertson McQuilkan. *The Great Omission: A Biblical Basis for World Evangelism*. Waynesboro, GA. Authentic Media. 2002. P. 52.

## Chapter 12

# Unreached People Groups: The Church's Dilemma

by Wallace Albrecht

Brown and Kenzo, whose fertile minds conceived the idea for this book, have stated it should be a “light” theology of mission for laity and clergy, answering the question, why do we as a church send and continue to send workers to the nations?<sup>1</sup> If this is to be a “theology,” it must begin with the nature and character of God. So, what is it about God’s character which demands the Church to prioritize its mission to the unreached<sup>2</sup> or the least-reached in today’s world? The question obviously begs a solid biblical foundation.

## THE UPG MANDATE

### Biblical Missiology

A plethora of books has been written on this subject. Space doesn’t allow a thorough treatment. Perhaps a few biblical vignettes that others have overlooked will suffice.

An interesting story emerges in 1 Kings 20-21, helping us to understand the God of the Bible better through the use of contrast. Ben-Hadad, king of Syria, mounts what he hopes will be a magnificent conquest of Ahab and the Samarian kingdom. The odds were stacked in his favour. Ahab’s forces numbered 7,000, while Ben-Hadad’s army consisted of chariots, horses and 100,000 footmen. Despite these uneven odds, Ben-Hadad’s armies were decimated in the first battle.

Ben-Hadad’s war strategists offered an explanation that precipitated a new strategy based on the following reasoning:

And the servants of the king of Syria said to him, “Their gods are gods of the hills, and so they were stronger than we. But let us fight against

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1. This chapter will hopefully fulfill their request and go one step further—consider the how as well.
  2. An unreached people group (UPG) or least-reached people (LRPG) is a people group among which there is no Indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to evangelize this people group without outside assistance. <https://joshuaproject.net/help/definitions>

them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they (1 Kings 20:23 ESV<sup>3</sup>).

On their second attempt, they chose to fight in the plain but suffered another humiliating defeat, just as God predicted through Elijah.

And a man of God came near and said to the king of Israel, "Thus says the LORD, 'Because the Syrians have said, "The LORD is a god of the hills but he is not a god of the valleys," therefore I will give all this great multitude into your hand, and you shall know that I am the LORD'" (v. 28).

Two observations arise from this war chronicle. Like most other ethnic groups of antiquity, the Syrians thought of their gods as regional deities, "the gods of our land." They projected this concept upon the God of Israel, considering Him to be the God of the hill country but not the God of the plains. The true and living God could not allow Himself to be proscribed by a piece of land, a clan, tribe, or ethnic group. He distinguishes Himself as *the God of the Universe*. If God, the creator of heaven and earth, is the universal God, it would be very strange if He were not interested in every nation or *ethne*, as the Greek New Testament puts it.

Secondly, the passion of God of the Bible is to be known for who He actually is, not what finite human minds conceive about Him. Interestingly, the prophet underscored to Ahab how His purpose in allowing him to defeat the Syrians was so "you shall know that I am the Lord." It wasn't just the Syrians who embraced a limited and erroneous concept of God. God chose to teach both the Samaritan king and the Syrian generals the truth of His eternal power and universal Godhead. It is reasonable to conclude that the God of the Bible, the creator of the universe and the nations, longs to be known.

From Genesis to Revelation, the student of the Old and New Testaments encounters the passion and plan of God over and over:

- As early as Genesis chapter 10, the emergence of nations is encountered in Scripture.<sup>4</sup>
- Chapter 11 of Genesis makes it abundantly clear that the creation of ethnolinguistic groups was not just a willy-nilly happenstance but rather God's doing. God was behind the formation of ethnolinguistic groups at Babel. Furthermore, He didn't stop creating people groups in Genesis 11. The psalmist suggests God's creative acts in forming ethnolinguistic groups

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3. *The Holy Bible*, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by [Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.](#)

4. Genesis 10:5, 20, 31-32.

or peoples is a continuing divine art. After reviewing God's promises and purposes in Psalm 102, He asks these things be written so that *people* who are yet to be created might be brought to praise His great Name.

- David saw clearly and often expressed God's plan for the nations. After reading Psalm 9 recently, I concluded this psalm might well be described as David's version of the Great Commission.<sup>5</sup> At the very least, the nations figure largely in this and other psalms.<sup>6</sup>

During the days of preparation for this manuscript, my devotional reading is taking me through the Minor Prophets. The message coming through these inspired oracles is how God is a God of justice and mercy. With both in mind, the Minor Prophets often refer to the nations.<sup>7</sup>

What is incredible to me is the scribes of Jesus' day invested their lives in copying the scriptures, yet missed the point. What on earth were they and the Pharisees reading? It certainly could not have been God's most recent revelations to them through these prophets. These texts are filled with God's interest in the nations both for the purpose of judgment and salvation. It is shocking and appalling how ethnocentric the Jewish leaders were at the time of Christ. When Paul was speaking in his defence in Aramaic before the people on the steps of the Roman barracks (Acts 21-22), they listened until he mentioned the word Gentiles. The crowd broke out in murderous chaos. "Away with him" was their spontaneous demand. How could such blatant racial prejudice breed among the people of the Book?

It is shocking and appalling how ethnocentric the Jewish leaders were at the time of Christ.

Any survey of history will reveal the incredible terror, torture, affliction, and injustice the nations have perpetrated upon one another. God aims to make right

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5. See also Psalm 96:3.

6. See Psalm 22:27-28, 45:17, 46:10, 47:9, 67:1-5, 72:17, 86:9, 102:15.

7. N.B. The outpouring of God's Spirit upon all peoples, Joel 2:28-32; Amos' prophecies of judgment upon Judah, Israel, Samaria and all their surrounding nations, 9:9 & 12 and His promise of restoration; Obadiah's judgments upon Edom, 1:1ff, and the coming Day of the Lord for "all nations" 1:15; Jonah's revival ministry in Nineveh, 3:4-10; Micah's prophetic ministry to "all nations" 1:1, and the good news of the conversion of many nations, 4:2; Nahum's oracle against Nineveh 1:1 and Assyria 1:13; God's command to Habakkuk to consider the nations and pay attention 1:3; Zephaniah's judgments upon Gaza, Crete, Philistia, Judah, Moab, Ammon, Ethiopia, and Assyria followed by a prediction of the redemption of the nations 3:8-10 and Jerusalem's restoration 3:20; God's promise to Judah through Haggai involving the nations, 2:7; Zechariah's prediction of national turning to the Lord and becoming His people, 2:11 and 8:22-23; God's affirmation through Malachi that God's "Name will be great among the nations, 1:11.

what the nations have done wrong. Perhaps no prophetic passage demonstrates this more than Joel 3, which reveals what will take place on “the day of the Lord.”

I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will put them on trial for what they did to my inheritance, my people Israel, because they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land. They cast lots for my people and traded boys for prostitutes; they sold girls for wine to drink. “Now what have you against me, Tyre and Sidon and all you regions of Philistia? Are you repaying me for something I have done? If you are paying me back, I will swiftly and speedily return on your own heads what you have done (Joel 3:2-4).

The God of the Bible is keenly committed to both judgment and redemption. God’s commitment to redeem the nations comes through loud and clear in the preaching of the Old Testament prophets:

“Shout and be glad, Daughter Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you,” declares the LORD. “Many nations will be joined with the LORD in that day and will become my people. I will live among you and you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me to you” (Zechariah 2:10-11).

John makes clear in Revelation 7:9 that God’s purpose and intent is to redeem great multitudes from every tongue, tribe, people, and nation who will stand before His throne clothed in white robes and worshipping Him with palm branches in their hands. It is no wonder Jesus’ parting command to His disciples assigned them to make disciples of *all nations*.<sup>8</sup>

...God’s purpose and intent is to redeem great multitudes from every tongue, tribe, people, and nation...

Because God of the Bible is the God of heaven and earth, Creator and sustainer of all things seen and unseen, and the only universal God unbounded by any territory or region, He legitimately possesses a genuine concern for all nations.

To omit the key texts in the gospels and Acts regarding the obligations of the Church in this Age would constitute gross negligence. The reader may be tempted to skip the following paragraph because these texts are so familiar. Please don’t. They deserve repetition.

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8. In Greek, *panta ta ethne* refers to ethnic groups and not geo-political entities as we understand the word *nation* today.

I've been challenged when using Matthew 24:14 as a part of Christ's mandate to the Church in this Age to take the Gospel to all people groups. They argue that Jesus is answering the disciples' question prompted by His prediction the Jerusalem temple will be destroyed. Since this event took place in AD70, they say the Gospel of the Kingdom must have been preached to all nations by then. Therefore, it is obviously not applicable to the Church today. They also refer to Paul's hope to be sent to Spain by the church in Rome, suggesting if he did achieve his goal and succeed in taking the Gospel to Spain, it had penetrated the then known world (i.e. from India<sup>9</sup> to the western reaches of Europe).

The reference to "this generation" in Matthew 24:34 is taken to support the view Jesus' prophecies in Matthew 24 had all been fulfilled. A closer look at the text makes plain how a pre-fulfillment and a fuller fulfillment were clear in the mind of Jesus when He spoke these words. It is a difficult stretch of interpretation to squeeze the prophecies of Matthew 24:27-31 into the period from AD30 to AD70, and it is an impossible stretch to say the Gospel had been preached in the whole world "as a testimony to all nations" before AD70.

Without a doubt, Jesus' parting command, the mandate to take the Gospel to every ethnolinguistic group and make disciples among them, His mandate for the Church, is in force to the present.

## The Church's Historic Response

Space doesn't allow detailed documentation of the Church's obedience to Christ's parting command over the past two millennia, but a quick overview may add strength to the premise that the Church always understood the mandate Jesus left with His disciples in Matthew 28:19-20. Though the Church's mission vision did rise and wane over the centuries, it was aware every people group ought to be offered this good news.<sup>10</sup>

**The Apostolic Era:** Did the apostles take the parting command of their Lord seriously? When one takes into consideration the New Testament record, other ancient writings, early Christian art, legend, and Church tradition, it becomes pretty clear the apostles (fourteen when adding Paul and Matthias) aimed to take the Gospel to the then-known world at great personal sacrifice and in many cases, martyrdom. Only two apostles' deaths are recorded in the Bible (James and Judas Iscariot). Most of what we know about the other apostles' deaths must be drawn

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9. Non-canonical sources and Church tradition record that both Thomas and Bartholomew had by AD70 reached India with the Gospel.

10. If the reader wishes to get a more detailed history of Christian missions, I'd recommend such authors as LaTourette (1953) or Moffett (1998). For shorter one-volume surveys, Stephen Neill (1964) or Ruth Tucker (2004).

from the aforementioned sources. Multiple accounts of where and how some apostles died produce some ambiguity, but natural death appears on the list of possibilities for only five, namely Matthew, Philip, John, Simon the Zealot and Matthias.<sup>11</sup> Strong evidence leads to the conclusion at least nine died a violent martyr's death.

As Neill observes, the Church of the first Christian generation was a genuinely passionate missionary Church. (1986:21).

**The Middle Ages:** As the Church in the Western World became increasingly interested in political power and wealth, it lost its passion for taking the Gospel across cultural and linguistic barriers. For example, in the mid-13th century, the Polo brothers (Marco's uncles) brought a request from Kublai Khan to the Pope asking for the dispatch of a hundred men of learning devoted to the Christian faith who would be able to teach their faith in various centres in the Far East. Twenty years passed before Rome sent not one hundred but just two monks, one of whom died on the journey. The remaining Franciscan monk, John of Monte Corvina, met with limited success due to the indifference of Kublai Khan's successor and opposition from the Nestorians, who had been active in the East for several centuries.<sup>12</sup>

Two observations can be drawn from this incident. First, the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy felt little urgency in carrying the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Secondly, whatever missionary impetus remaining in the Catholic Church was born by religious orders such as the Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, and others.

**The Modern Era:** A significant stirring in the Protestant segment of Western Christianity was founded upon reformation theology and fanned by the revivals of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The emergence of strong leaders like William Carey and the emergence of faith-mission societies were also a considerable impetus to the task of world evangelization. The first volley of sent-ones (call them modern apostles or missionaries) arrived on the shores of the unreached areas of Asia, Africa, and the Islands of Southeast Asia. Having occupied the most easily accessible places, others became impatient and formed new faith missions to penetrate inland.<sup>13</sup> These efforts are relatively well-known, having been well documented in missionary biography and popular media, and easily accessible to the Church today.

Historically, the transition into a new millennium evokes both fear and a new vision. Some readers may remember the Y2K scare, which permeated the

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11. <https://overviewbible.com/how-did-the-apostles-die/>, December 2021.

12. Neill, 1964:107ff.

13. Thus we have the Africa Inland Mission and the China Inland Mission, etc.

computer world twenty-some years ago. During the final quarter of the 20th century, visionary leaders like Ralph Winter<sup>14</sup> sparked a movement igniting a new passion for reaching every UPG on the planet. He and much of the evangelical church believed Matthew 24:14 quite literally and wondered if it might be possible to finish before the end of the millennium. But first came research, how many UPGs remained? I happened to be assigned by the Alliance Mission in Indonesia to help research its people groups and those in nearby nations to determine how many remained unreached. Both denominational and faith missions worldwide were recruited to do the best job possible with available tools. It was discovered the remaining mission task was formidable. According to Joshua Project's current research, there are 17,431 distinct ethnolinguistic groups, of which 7,399 remain unreached.<sup>15</sup>

Today the effort to reach *panta ta ethne* is shared by churches worldwide. Nations sending the largest group of cross-cultural missionaries are, in order, the United States, Brazil, and Korea. Helping younger churches join in this vast effort is vitally important. In this book, Craig Bundy's chapter provides an encouraging description of Alliance initiatives to help the younger churches become partners in mission.

But one huge problem needs to be addressed. The question of priorities will be dealt with next.

## The Contemporary Church's Dilemma

Two problems are quickly evident when it comes to the Church's response to Christ's Great Commission today, but first, a story. In the late 1990s, the Alliance World Fellowship's quadrennial meeting was held in Hong Kong's North Point Alliance Church<sup>16</sup> (NPAC). While there, I learned this church aimed to maintain its mission giving at 80% of total offerings. When giving to missions dropped below the 80% mark, the pastor called for a season of fasting and prayer to raise awareness and concern for mission, which was the church's stated priority.

It is to be granted that NPAC is not your average church in Hong Kong. The comparison may not be fair, but it is helpful to know how the average North American church divides its giving: Internal: Salaries 50%, Facilities 22%, Operating

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14. R. Winter founded the US Center for World Mission now known as Frontier Ventures.

15. This was the work of the AD2000 and Beyond Movement which initiated this research which was assumed by the Joshua Project in 2005.

16. If you read Chinese you can learn more about NPAC at <https://www.npac.org.hk/service.html>. A look at NPAC English ministry is found at <https://npacem.org/> but here you will only find a limited picture of this church's ministry.

Expenses 13%, Outreach: Local 13%, Outreach: Overseas Missions 2%. The most significant part of the two percent of overseas missions resources goes toward ministry among already Christianized people groups overseas.<sup>17</sup> I share this set of statistics not to generate guilt or embarrassment to the readers or their churches. I don't doubt your church's division of resources is much different from this. But these statistics and the trends in Canadian Alliance churches give cause for dialogue. What barriers contribute to a weak response to Christ's parting command?

### **Missiological Myopia**

What do I mean by missiological myopia?<sup>18</sup> Near-sightedness is not only a physical disorder. In its spiritual sense, it often afflicts families, churches, and denominations. Humans tend to focus on the matters close at hand, their own situation, circumstances, environment, and struggles.

Perhaps an illustration from church history will help bring spiritual myopia into better focus. Church historians of the Protestant tradition tend to celebrate Martin Luther's role in the reformation, and without doubt, there is much to celebrate. His commitment to and love for Scripture was truly remarkable in a day when the Bible was not available in the vernacular and not read by the laity. He also bore a deep and persistent concern for his sin. But the reformation was precipitated mainly by his conviction that Rome was fleecing the German people through the mechanism of indulgences, a sentiment shared by his benefactor Frederick III (Frederick the Wise). In Luther's intense study of the scriptures to find justification for indulgences and other examples of corruption in the Catholic Church, he came upon his "Cloaca" Experience.<sup>19</sup> He just happened to discover the solution to his sin problem in Romans 1:17, "the just will live by faith."<sup>20</sup> We celebrate the rediscovery of the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith but forget the Lutheran reformation gave very little place to Jesus' parting command. This is one example of spiritual myopia.

Fortunately, we have the example of the Czech reformers like Jan Hus, who, sixty years previous to Martin Luther, planted the seeds of the Reformation and was burned at the stake by the Catholic Church for his stand. The Hussites eventually had to flee the intense persecution in northern Czechoslovakia. They walked north into the area of Dresden in Germany and were given land by a Lutheran who had

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17. <https://joshuaproject.net/assets/media/handouts/hard-mission-facts.pdf>

18. myopia: a condition in which the visual images come to a focus in front of the [retina](#) of the eye resulting especially in defective vision of distant objects; 2. a lack of foresight or discernment : a narrow view of something.

19. See Metaxas, 2017: 93ff.

20. Quoted from Habakkuk 2:4 and repeated in Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews 10:38.

been profoundly influenced by pietism, Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf. The flame of Moravian faith was reignited in part through Zinzendorf's care for these wandering saints, and a much less myopic version of Christian faith and practice emerged. The Moravians launched a 24/7 prayer meeting, lasting one hundred years and a missions movement that brought the Gospel to unreached people groups in the Americas, Africa, Asia, and the Islands of Southeast Asia.

When a church or a denomination becomes so focused on its local concerns, such as structures, be they physical or organizational, that its response to Christ's parting command (Matthew 28:19-20) becomes anemic, it becomes decreasingly effective in carrying forward Christ's parting command.

How can a church's elders board and/or the missions committee evaluate their response and determine whether they are doing their fair share regarding the least reached?

### **Relational Disorientation**

Another barrier to fulfilling the local church's role in reaching out to those who have never heard is relational disorientation. If the church leadership decides to increase their commitment to UPGs, their challenge will get tougher. Most church boards or missions committees will be stymied in reaching their goals by relational disorientation. The average layperson sees just about anything beyond their local church as mission. Taking the Gospel to the least-reached ethnic groups in the world is a bit different from taking it to our neighbour. Planting Christ's Church in unreached people groups requires years of language and culture learning, persistent and intensive prayer warfare, and sometimes decades of plowing, sowing, and watering.

Often the person in the pew regards a plethora of ministries as mission. Consequently, they see any of these as fair inclusion in the church mission budget. Their interest usually follows relational lines, Suzie wants to disciple students in the big city university, Sam wants to cook meals for refugees crossing an international border, John and Joan want to provide member care for burned-out pastors and missionaries at their retreat in lake country. These are all good things, but all compete for the dollars that might be spent reaching the Uyghurs in Central Asia or the Fulani in North Africa. How does the church deal with relational disorientation?

### **Fads and Issues**

Mission philosophy is not immune to the pull of new trends and fads. Organizations pop up when the societal sentiments lean in their direction

and appeal to the church to fund their efforts. Of course, poverty relief, racial reconciliation, and others are good causes. Paul appointed Titus and another brother (2 Corinthians 8) to take the offerings of the Corinthian and Macedonian churches to Jerusalem to help Christians there survive the famine.

Should good causes pre-empt a local church from taking the Gospel to the unreached? Maintaining biblical priorities in the mission program of the local church is very challenging. What can a local church do to manage these challenges? What are the options? We can map them out on a continuum:

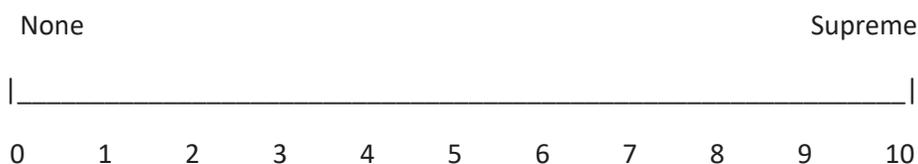


Table #1 – Local Church response to the UPG mandate

Zero would represent the church that chooses not to grapple with the UPG mandate at all. Just go with whatever comes up from the membership. A score of four may represent a church that has decided it will earmark at least 40 percent of its mission fund for ministries actually working among peoples who have little or no access to the Gospel and places where no indigenous church exists. North Point Alliance Church in Hong Kong might deserve a score of eight *if* its generous mission fund is used exclusively for ministries that qualify as fulfilling the UPG mandate. A small or medium church in Canada that raised up one missionary couple whose work is among Tibetans or similar UPG, so all their missions giving supports this one couple (or the mission board through which they are supported) would qualify for a score of ten on the continuum above.

## Conclusion

The point of this chapter is twofold. First, local churches need to be exposed to the plethora of biblical evidence the Great Commission includes discipling the nations, which consists of all of the world's unreached ethnolinguistic groups.<sup>21</sup> Secondly, leadership in local churches needs to determine what portion of their income will be guarded for UPG ministries<sup>22</sup> and how much can be justified biblically for other good causes?

21. Planting churches among them was Paul's method of doing so and is still the best approach today.

22. One way, among others, is to include The Jaffray Project annually in the church calendar.

## Chapter 13

# Energized for Mission

by David Hearn

### **The Power of the Holy Spirit for Global Missions**

“The key to the missionary problem is the missionaries. They believe in the presence of the Spirit of God, but they lack the encounter. There never should be a missionary ministry that is not full of the presence of the Lord!”<sup>1</sup>

### **It is the Power of the Holy Spirit that Energizes the Church for Mission!**

It was one of the most terrifying experiences of my life. On Good Friday, April 22, 2011, my wife Agnes and I were in Saint Louis. We had settled in for a relaxing evening when we heard a loud warning siren, followed by a knock on our door and an urgent request for us to immediately descend to the basement of the place we were staying. As we huddled together with the other guests, an F4 tornado with sustained winds of 265 km an hour was shredding everything in its path! When the tornado finally dissipated, we were allowed to ascend from the basement and go outside. The scene was unbelievable. As we drove closer to the epicentre of the tornado, we saw huge trees ripped out of the ground and tossed like toothpicks; cars and large trucks were overturned, and massive billboards were shredded!

#### ***The power of the wind unleashed is incredible!***

I am struck by the fact one of the symbols of the Holy Spirit is wind. Invisible, unexplainable, unlimited, powerful, and undeniable in impact! The Apostle John records,

“You know well enough how the wind blows this way and that. You hear it rustling through the trees, but you have no idea where it comes from or where it’s headed next. That’s the way it is with everyone ‘born from above’ by the wind of God, the Spirit of God” (John 3:8 MSG<sup>2</sup>).

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1. Murray, *The Key to the Missionary Problem*, 18.

2. *The Message* (MSG) Copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson.

The Hebrew word – *Ruach* (roo-aak), which can be translated as wind, breath or Spirit, is generally understood as a hot, fierce, gusty, and commanding wind! It symbolizes the energizing, transforming power of the Holy Spirit! We see this expressed on the Day of Pentecost when the coming of the Holy Spirit is described as “...the sound like the blowing of a violent wind” from heaven (Acts 2:2).

A.B. Simpson believed that the ministry needed in his day was a ministry of spiritual power and that the power which the Holy Spirit brings is first the power to be, and then the power to do. If this was true in Simpson’s era, how much more do we need to see a fresh unleashing of the Spirit’s power in our day? We are living in a time of immense upheaval and uncertainty. The lingering effects of a global pandemic, economic instability, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which threatens to draw us into World War III, are leaving humanity at an ever-increasing level of vulnerability. The danger for the Church is to embrace the stance of protection and survival at the expense of gospel proclamation and revival. Now is not the time (as if it ever were) to default to “fox-hole” Christianity. Instead, I am convinced the stage is set for a massive move of God’s Holy Spirit to bring the nations to Jesus. It is time to cry out for a fresh encounter with the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

The starting point of missions is not strategy but saturation. Missions always begins with a profound and continuous filling of the Holy Spirit! You see, mission effectiveness is not about being active but about being activated by the Holy Spirit! In the 1924 annual report of the Alliance, the theme was focused on spiritual renewal. The report stated,

“One may be fundamentally sound in doctrine, and yet the testimony and the preaching are as cold as the water that passes through the cold hands and lips of that statue in the fountain; no real, bubbling life that satisfies the thirst of the perishing multitudes. The only satisfying life is the one having the fullness of Jesus and the fire of the Holy Ghost. This is the greatest need of the child of God and the Church of God today.”<sup>3</sup>

John Piper put it this way, “There would be no world evangelization, no world missions, if it were not for the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>4</sup> World mission is not about what we can produce but instead allowing the Holy Spirit to reproduce Christ in us – unleashing His passion and power! Paul writes, “For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me” (Colossians 1:29

3. Annual Report of the Alliance, 1924.

4. Dr John Piper, Sermon Titled, “No Global Mission Without God’s Mighty Spirit,” December 28, 2016.

ESV<sup>5</sup>). Our posture is to RECEIVE the filling, the overflowing of the wind, the Spirit!

In John 20, Jesus gives a powerful mandate to His followers, “As the Father has sent me so I am sending you,” immediately followed by “Receive the Holy Spirit.” Jesus made it truly clear that mission was predicated on being “clothed with power from on high.” He declared, “I am going to send you what my father has promised; BUT STAY in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49).

In Acts 1:8, a clear connection between a posture of receiving and the power to be a witness is presented. “But you will *receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you*, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” The power of the Holy Spirit is not a commodity we possess but a Person who possesses us. Simpson affirmed, “I had to learn to take from Him my spiritual life every second, to breathe Himself in as I breathed, and breathe myself out. So, moment by moment for the spirit, and moment by moment for the body, *we must receive...*”<sup>6</sup> A posture of receiving moment by moment the presence and power of the Holy Spirit is vital to be energized for mission!

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the Holy Spirit is  
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In Acts 13, the church of Antioch launches God’s plan for global missions, a call to go to the ends of the earth! In this launching, we see the energizing power of the Holy Spirit unleashed. This text reveals three aspects or dimensions of the Holy Spirit’s energizing work for missions.

## The Holy Spirit AWAKENS Mission-Focused PASSION

The wind of God is about to blow upon a humble, remarkably diverse, and disconnected group of leaders. We read,

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod, the tetrarch) and Saul (Acts 13:1).

The only thing these leaders seem to have in common is their hunger for Jesus. It was “while they were worshipping the Lord and fasting” that the power of the Holy Spirit was released (Acts 13:1-2). The church leaders were enveloped in an

5 *The Holy Bible*, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by [Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers](#).

6. Excerpt from Simpson’s Sermon, *Himself*.

atmosphere of Spirit-filled worship, drenched in God's presence, fully surrendered to His will, and filled with anticipation for what was next! Mission passion is not about a program but an encounter. This is a stunning moment. The Holy Spirit had set apart five men of diverse backgrounds to change the course of human history! The Holy Spirit had created a unity of mind and heart towards missions! Notice the incredible diversity in these leaders.

1. **Economic diversity** – Manaen was raised in Herod's household (foster brother) and was a wealthy aristocrat.
2. **Religious diversity** – Hellenistic Jew, Barnabas, and Hebraic Jew, Saul (Acts 6:1) and Greeks.
3. **Cultural diversity** – Lucius of Cyrene (North Africa), Barnabas from Cyprus (Greek), Simeon called Niger (Black), and Paul from Palestine.

Holding them together was the power of the Spirit, who broke down the barriers dividing them and created a dynamic unity around Jesus and His mission!

I recall when I was serving as a volunteer chaplain at a Canadian medium-security prison. The inmates were incredibly diverse, coming from different social-economic backgrounds and ethnicities. What was so powerful to witness was as the inmates found Jesus and were filled with the Holy Spirit, the diversity faded and a profound sense of unity and mission emerged. I will never forget being part of a prayer ministry where I stood shoulder to shoulder with a white-collar embezzler and an Irish bank robber who was leading a convicted murderer to Jesus. That is not normal! Exactly! It only happens when the power of the Holy Spirit is released. The Holy Spirit produces missional passion within us.

The Holy Spirit birthed a hunger for more! I wish we could have heard their prayers. We do not know what they were asking for, but two clues may help us discern the focus of their prayer. First, they were fasting. People most often fast when seeking direction with profound intensity and great determination. They were seeking God for what was next, discerning His agenda. The Antioch church was a dynamic church with immense potential, but the Holy Spirit had infused an unsettledness within them, a deep longing for more!

The second clue to what they were praying about was the answer. The Holy Spirit told them to "set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (Acts 13:2). God had birthed a hunger within this leadership team to reach those who did not yet know Jesus. The Holy Spirit will always focus us on Jesus and His mission!

One of our partners in South Asia told the story of a family who was moved by the Holy Spirit to pray for their village. The prayers were so intense that tears and wailing spontaneously erupted. Some neighbours heard the crying and knocked

on the door to see what was happening. The believers shared how they were praying for the families in their village, asking God to protect them from COVID-19 and give them hope. The unbelieving neighbours were so moved they asked if they could stay and pray as well. They prayed together for over two and a half hours. At the end of the prayer time, the neighbours asked which idol they were to pay homage to. The family shared they had no idols. Instead, they worshipped the living Christ. They shared the Gospel, and four family members became believers that night. At the last report, 36 people from the village have chosen to follow Jesus, and the community is being transformed.

The Holy Spirit awakens in the hearts of believers a compelling compassion and deep urgency for those who do not yet know Jesus. Andrew Murray writes, “The Spirit is the origin, the progress, and the success of missions...the mission that originates in prayer and waiting on the Spirit can expect His power.”<sup>7</sup>

## **The Holy Spirit ACCELERATES Mission-Focused BOLDNESS**

We read, “...the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off” (Acts 13:2-3).

When these leaders prayed and fasted and opened themselves up to be used by God in any way He desired, the Spirit responded in a BIG WAY. He infused into the Church a dynamic boldness to reach the nations of the world. The laying on of hands was a profound indication they were united in purpose and standing with each other in daring risk. The outcome of this accelerated boldness to reach the nations was the world turned upside down. Antioch became the jumping-off point for worldwide revival. A dozen new congregations were established throughout Asia. Paul began a ministry of writing that resulted in the composition of half of our New Testament. Antioch was established as one of the central hubs of Christianity in the ancient world.

Come Holy Spirit, fill us afresh with that kind of daring boldness!

One of my last overseas trips was to a country where conflict, civil war, and hardship have limited the advancement of the Gospel. While visiting our international workers in this part of the world, I was introduced to a fearless pastor who dared to follow Jesus and was filled with radical courage. He was born into a crime family, and when he was in his early twenties, his father instructed him to rob a bank with his cousin. The night before the crime, he fell into a deep sleep and was abruptly awakened by a vision of Jesus. He heard Jesus say to him,

7. Andrew Murray, *The Indwelling Spirit: The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Believer*, 147.

“I love you, and I have saved you for me; this is my last call; come follow me!” This young man immediately repented and followed Jesus. The next day he told his cousin he could not rob the bank because he had become a follower of Jesus. His cousin told him he was going to have to kill him. His response was, “Go ahead. I will go to Jesus!”

The Spirit of God infused a passion in his heart to reach his country. He started a network of house churches that exploded into over one hundred in number with over 22,000 followers on the internet.

An encounter with the Holy Spirit always leads to an acceleration of boldness to reach the nations. In Acts 4, we see one of the impacts of the Holy Spirit’s baptism is a boldness to share the Gospel. Luke writes, “After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly” (Acts 4:31). I am always suspect of a believer (or a church)

who boasts of amazing experiences with the Holy Spirit and yet has no vision for reaching the nations! The Holy Spirit is a mission disruptor! I love the way Kreminski puts it when she writes,

“Have we domesticated the Spirit to the extent that we do not experience his ‘wild’ character in our lives? The Holy Spirit does not bring us discomfort and disorientation for the sake of it. Instead he turns us and our plans inside out so that we might be more aligned with the mission of God in our world.”<sup>8</sup>

A few years ago, I spoke at a First Nations family camp. It was such an honour to encourage our Indigenous leaders and their families. On the closing night, we had an amazing campfire experience. Our First Nations director, Howard Jolly, was leading worship with his guitar. We were all singing some of the familiar camp songs we grew up with. One was, “It only takes a spark to get a fire going.” The theme of this song is about spiritual revival breaking out into a powerful witness to the world. I was totally into the worship but was completely unaware of a First Nations woman standing in the shadows just a few feet away. She touched me on the shoulder, and when I turned around and looked at her face, I could see deep distress and pain. I stepped into the shadows with her and listened as she shared a story of abuse, rejection, and pain. She ended her story with the heartfelt plea, “I need Jesus!” I

I am always suspect of a believer (or a church) who boasts of amazing experiences with the Holy Spirit and yet has no vision for reaching the nations!

8 Karina Kreminski, *Taking the Spirit Seriously*, June 4, 2014.

had the joy of leading her to faith in Christ. But the irony of the moment has never left me. She was only a few feet away from the church, singing about revival and fresh fire, and we did not see her. The great danger for followers of Jesus is that we can be so enraptured in the experience of the fire, the power, the miraculous, the ecstatic that we do not see those who are in the shadows only a few feet away.

What is the touch you feel right now? The Holy Spirit accelerates a boldness in our hearts to step into the shadows and bring the fire to the lost and broken.

## **The Holy Spirit Creates ACCESS for Mission-Focused IMPACT**

The Holy Spirit awakens mission-focused passion and accelerates mission-focused boldness with the goal of creating access for mission-focused impact. Saul and Barnabas are sent out into the unknown, utterly dependent upon the Holy Spirit's direction and provision. Luke writes,

“The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus...They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God” (Acts 13:4, 6-7).

The Holy Spirit is the one who stirs our hearts, breaks down strongholds, and prepares the hearts of those who will hear the Gospel! As Barnabas and Saul headed out, being led by the Holy Spirit to Cyprus, they had no idea they would get a hearing before the governor of the island, “he wanted to hear the word of God.”

Greg Finke reminds us, “God is already on the loose out there in our neighborhoods, workplaces, and schools. He is already doing the heavy lifting of working in the lives of those around us. And He invites us to join Him.”<sup>9</sup>

One of the first places I visited when I became president of The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada<sup>10</sup> was Northern Iraq. It was during a time of intense persecution, especially toward the Yazidis

“God is already on the loose out there in our neighborhoods, workplaces, and schools...working in the lives of those around us. And He invites us to join Him”?

9. Greg Finke, *Joining Jesus on His Mission: How to be an Everyday Missionary*, 35.

10. Now known as The Alliance Canada.

living around Mount Sinjar. ISIS was raiding their villages, killing their men, raping their women, and kidnapping their children. It was heart-wrenching to go into the refugee camps and hear the stories of brokenness, pain, and anguish. I felt a deep urgency for our Alliance family to get involved in bringing hope, healing, and access to Jesus to the Yazidi people.

We had no idea how this would happen, but God was already on the move. Over the last several months, during a global pandemic, our Alliance team serving the Yazidis has discovered individuals who have come to faith in Jesus. The Holy Spirit is already at work among the Yazidis! It will only be a matter of time before we see a small gathering of believers in Northern Iraq. We have the privilege of not only witnessing one of the first Christian communities in 1800 years to emerge among a people group plagued by persecution and devastation but also participating in this!

Friends, this is amazing! The great challenge of reaching the nations is overthinking and underperforming. We can get so focused on the logistics that we neglect our call to listen to the Holy Spirit. He is leading; He is opening doors; He is preparing the hearts of those who will hear us. We must follow His promptings and be amazed by His miraculous provisions.

In complete transparency, the past few years of the global pandemic have taken their toll on my mission-focused passion. I have felt lost and immobilized. For the previous eight years in this role, I have been on the frontline, seeing God at work around the world. The last time I spoke, seven people came to Christ. And yet, over the past several months, I have been a Zoom Zombie. The Holy Spirit began to challenge me on my missional drift. I felt a strong word from the Spirit to “Open my eyes...to see the opportunities right in front of me.” The Holy Spirit led me to speak to one of my neighbours. There was an instant connection and openness between us. He shared the pain of his son’s suicide and the recent separation from his wife. He was lonely and very depressed. I shared with him, assuring him he was not alone; Jesus loved him and could heal his hurting heart. It was so obvious God had prepared my neighbour for this conversation. A few days later, I had the joy of leading him to Christ. My mission field was five steps from my door, and I could not see it. The issue is seeing the open doors the Holy Spirit provides and boldly being obedient. Andrew Murray says it this way,

**My mission field  
was five steps from  
my door, and I  
could not see it.**

“The Holy Spirit, who is the mighty power of God, who is the presence of Jesus within you, is with you and in you and for you. The work is His: Depend on Him, yield to Him, wait for Him; the work is His

and He will accomplish it.”<sup>11</sup>

I find it fascinating how the anointing for mission comes in the act of engaging in mission. A false prophet named “Bar-Jesus” (son of Jesus) opposes Saul and Barnabas! But notice what happens next,

Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, “You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?” (Acts 13:9-10).

Paul strikes him with blindness, an indication of his God-given authority as an apostle, and the door is opened for Paul and Barnabas to meet Sergius Paulus, the proconsul of the island (Acts 13:8). This is a powerful picture of the Holy Spirit’s work, and it needs to encourage us. It is not our strength, expertise, or creativity the Holy Spirit needs but our humble dependence on Him. He creates the access, He makes a way, and we need to be attentive to His voice.

In fact, the more honestly we confess our weakness and embrace the power of God’s Spirit dwelling within us, the more confidently we will engage in mission! As Louie Giglio reminds us, “It is not Jesus and me...It is Jesus in Me!”<sup>12</sup> Paul reminds us that we have been made ALIVE WITH HIM; we have been RAISED UP WITH HIM and are SEATED WITH HIM in the heavenly realms! (see Ephesians 2:6).

A.B. Simpson declared, “It is not just life *from* Christ, but the life of Christ—Christ Himself—that the Christian receives.”<sup>13</sup> George Pardington, an influential Alliance theologian, affirms, “It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the Christian life is a Christ-life. It is not an imitation, but an incarnation. We do not copy Christ, we reproduce Him; or, rather, He reproduces His own life within us by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>14</sup>

When I turned sixty, I convinced Agnes to let me go skydiving. My instructor was a guy named Nick from South Africa who was a high-octane thrill seeker. Every jump was like his first! We were connected by a sophisticated harness binding us together as one person. As we reached 10,000 feet in the aircraft, I had this amazing theological insight. I leaned toward Nick and said, “When we jump out of this plane, all your experience, wisdom, strength, and expertise become mine because I am linked to you!” He laughed and said, “And all your liabilities become mine!”

11. Andrew Murray, 148.

12. Louie Giglio, Passion City Church, sermon titled “I’m not Okay, But Jesus is,” October 13, 2019.

13. A.B. Simpson, *Walking in the Spirit*, 61.

14. Rev. George P. Pardington, *The Crisis of the Deeper Life*, The Christian Alliance Publishing Company, 1925.

As we moved toward the door, preparing to jump, I was suddenly gripped with fear and hesitation; I felt out of control. Nick could sense my apprehension, so he gave me one last instruction before we jumped, “Rest your head upon my shoulder!” I had known Nick for less than an hour, yet at that moment, I trusted him with my entire life.

Missional passion comes from a place of radical surrender! It is hearing the voice of Jesus saying, “Rest your head on my shoulder.” It is a daunting challenge to reach the nations with the good news of Jesus, but it begins from a place of rest and trust! Andrew Murray states, “The Spirit still comes as he did then. He stills moves and sends out...let us wait for him and be ready to welcome his call.”<sup>15</sup>

It will not be technique, ingenuity, or expertise moving the Alliance forward. It will be a fresh revelation of Christ’s glory through the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit. Settle for nothing less. Reject all substitutes. Embrace the wind. Be immersed in His presence, catch the heartbeat of Jesus for the nations, and JUMP! The nations of the world await.

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<sup>15</sup> Andrew Murray, 149.

## **PART B**

### **HOW TO GO**

## Chapter 14

### Spiritual Infidelity: Renewal Without Mission

by Kyle Harnett

Lazarus is dead.

These were the words of Jesus about a beloved friend, someone cherished in His heart. Later, the shortest and one of the most memorable verses describes Jesus' emotion—He wept. Those words and His tears displayed His heartache. Those words also described the plan of God to reveal His glory. What would Jesus say if He were to comment on the Church in the West? How would Jesus define us? Are there tears in His eyes about the state of the Church in the Western world? Data suggests not only are Jesus' eyes filled with tears, but those tears are rolling down His cheeks. Jesus weeps for us.

According to Statistics Canada, in 1981, the first year of the Millennial generation, over 90 percent of Canadians identified as Christian. Fast forward a decade, and the number had dropped to 83 percent. At the turn of the Millennium, in 2001, the number dropped again to roughly three-quarters of Canadians, or 77 percent, identifying with Christ. Finally, in 2011, the last census data available for religious belief in Canada showed two out of three Canadians, or 67.3 percent, called themselves Christian.

Alternatively, 'No Religious Affiliation' grew from 7.4 percent in 1981 to 23.9 in 2011. If trends continue, when the next census data comes out, it is nearly certain that Christian affiliation will drop to 55-58 percent of Canadians.

Jesus described the Church, the movement of His disciples, in Matthew 5:14 as the light of the world. In Canada, it seems, the light is dwindling. The same is true in the United States and almost every Westernized country in the world. It seems the Church in the West has lost its saltiness and is now being trampled underfoot—the very warning Jesus gave to us.

In some ways, it seems like the Church is dead. But our God is a God of resurrection. Only

It seems the Church in the West has lost its saltiness and is now being trampled underfoot—the very warning Jesus gave to us.

Jesus can make dead things live. And Jesus loves the Church.

To deal with the implosion of the church in Canada, The Alliance Canada returned to its roots. A.B. Simpson, founder of the C&MA, boldly proclaimed the Church was missing out on her birthright—that everyday Christians could experience profound, rich, soul-filling intimacy with Jesus Christ and could live what Simpson called the *Christ-life*. This type of life was marked by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, victory over sin, joy in the soul, and fire in the heart to reach the nations with the good news of the Gospel.

So, the Alliance pressed into a deeper life. We ran conferences. We recovered ancient biblical practices such as confession of sin, listening prayer, faith for healing, prayers for the filling of the Spirit, and a renewed commitment to the freedom of Christ through deliverance ministries. It was incredible. Stories of life-change in the church started to multiply. Significant healings occurred. Captives were set free. Scores of people described new intimacy with Christ, a sense of being full of the presence of Jesus through the Spirit, and a deeper understanding of being loved by the Father. But a problem was slowly bubbling up underneath this renewal movement.

David Hearn, then president of the Alliance in Canada, was leading the charge on spiritual renewal among the denomination. As part of his pursuit of the deeper life, Hearn completed a doctoral project studying the effects of spiritual renewal on pastoral leaders and its impact on their congregations. The results were fantastic—spiritual renewal increased character, increased a sense of being loved by God, and increased intimacy with Jesus. Significantly. The fruit was delightful! Except there was a fly in the ointment. The one surprising find of Hearn’s work was that mission hardly moved. It barely budged. Renewal and mission seemed to be disconnected.

The same pattern showed up in the church I lead. We had seen dozens of women and men participate in spiritual renewal and deeper life conferences. I saw dozens of healings, people dramatically changed at the character level, and saw many set free from demonic strongholds. It was real. It was beautiful.

The transformation of these lives strengthened the church. Giving went up. Worship became more intense. Prayer increased. And yet, the church didn’t grow. At least not rapidly. And not with scores of people coming to faith in Christ. This story was true for our church and many other churches that had committed themselves to spiritual renewal. The church became more beautiful but more focused on the personal transformation of Christians rather than Jesus’ Great Commission.

Spiritual narcissism had begun to infect the church.

The word narcissist comes from the story of Narcissus. I am not a Greek

mythology buff, but the story and its principles are easy enough to grasp. The myth tells us Narcissus, the son of a river god and a nymph, was born exceptionally beautiful. It was foretold he would live a long life, provided he did not recognize himself. However, one day, tragedy fell upon Narcissus—he caught a glimpse of his reflection in the waters of a spring and fell in love with his image. The legend tells how Narcissus, out of love for his own beauty, died by delighting in his own image. His self-focus led to his demise and death.

The lack of mission springing from spiritual renewal was a shock to virtually every leader in the Alliance who participated in this movement. We assumed more of Jesus would lead to more mission. Spiritual experience would lead to more social concern and evangelism. But it did not. At least not in a way that would see the Gospel break forth in Canada and see millions of Canadians reunited to Jesus Christ, the lover of their soul, the freer of captives, and the creator of every single person on Earth.

Like A.B. Simpson, we believed it is impossible to be filled with the power and presence of the risen Christ and not share the Gospel. And yet, it was happening right before our eyes.

This was a disaster. Spiritual renewal without mission is spiritual infidelity. It is a betrayal of Christ. It receives His gifts and blessings and ignores His purposes.

**Spiritual renewal  
without mission is  
spiritual infidelity.**

Some theories arose about the lack of mission. Some people said, “renewal never really happened,” or a more cynical version declared “it was all hype.” But a handful of conversations quickly dismiss this theory. The testimony of Bible-believing, Jesus-loving Christians will testify to the reality of spiritual renewal today, and Jesus is still filling, healing, and changing Christians dramatically. And doing so with dramatic power.

Another theory arose, “maybe we were less healthy than we imagined.” This may be correct. It is impossible to overestimate how much help we need from Jesus. We need more than we can imagine. However, a quick scan of the gospels and Acts reveals the ability of Jesus to empower tremendously broken people to reshape history.

One other theory emerged. One haunting statement. A sentence sending shivers up and down the spine of every Christian leader, paid or unpaid. It was one question that would direct the course of my life.

*What if we aren't making disciples as Jesus did?*

What if, even in the pursuit of spiritual renewal, or the deeper life, we had missed a central aspect of what Jesus had called us to do? Pursuing spiritual

renewal is undoubtedly part of discipleship or the more updated term disciple-making. It is valid, legitimate, and helpful. But it was not producing the same types of disciples Jesus did.

And then an idea struck like a lightning bolt.

When Jesus made disciples, He used a clear pattern. He would *train His disciples for mission* and *release spiritual empowerment to them*, and *then Kingdom fruit followed*. Like pedals on a bicycle, Jesus would train for mission and give spiritual empowerment to His disciples. It was an iterative, repeating process throughout the New Testament. And I had missed it for most of my life. Maybe you have too. Let's take a quick look at a handful of Scriptures establishing the pattern of Jesus for disciple-making.

In Mark 3:13-15, Jesus ascends a mountain and calls His twelve disciples. Mark notes Jesus wanted them, and their appointment to the group known as 'the twelve' began with the calling to be with Jesus. This is a great reminder to all of us who are called by Jesus—He wants you. He wants me. When Jesus calls us to participate in His mission, He also wants to be with us because He loves us. Because He likes us. Mission alienated from a healthy Christian identity will always be distorted. It will turn into religious works aiming to produce spiritual worth. Healthy mission is motivated by the loving presence of Jesus Christ. We are also told in this Mark text how Jesus sent out these disciples to preach and to have authority over demons. In Mark 3, it is clear that Jesus is choosing people to participate in His mission with spiritual power and authority—the authority to drive out demons and to proclaim the Kingdom of Christ.

Over the following few chapters, we see Jesus explain the parables of what the Kingdom of God is like to 'the twelve' and demonstrate His Kingdom power and Lordship. Jesus, with His disciples, calms a furious storm, sets a heavily demonized man free, raises a dead girl, heals the woman with the issue of blood, and demonstrates to the twelve what Kingdom life is really like. In these chapters, Jesus trains the disciples for mission.

In Mark 6, Jesus sends the disciples out on mission. Mark notes how as Jesus sent the twelve, He gave them authority over impure spirits—Jesus empowers the disciples to live on mission. They experience spiritual power they did not have previously. And the twelve experienced Kingdom fruitfulness. Captives were freed, the Gospel was preached, and many were healed. Training led to empowerment, led to mission, led to fruit.

We see this same pattern with the Church in Luke to Acts. The disciples were selected, trained, empowered, and sent out. Then, after the resurrection, in Luke 24, Jesus told them they would need even more empowerment—a deeper

renewal—to carry out the mission’s next stage. In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit came with power and might upon the disciples, and they saw staggering conversions. A sea of Jews and converts to Judaism heard the Gospel, repented of sin, and were baptized into the church!

Oddly, though, in the midst of mission, the Church hit the roadblock of persecution, and in Acts 4, the followers sought even more renewal. And once more, they were filled afresh with the Holy Spirit. God’s pattern for disciple-making is a dynamic dance between missional training, spiritual renewal, and Kingdom fruit. This was a revolutionary discovery for our church, and my leadership journey and I wanted to put it to the test.

God’s pattern for disciple-making is a dynamic dance between missional training, spiritual renewal, and Kingdom fruit.

As part of my doctoral work, I created a research project to test the theory of how, if we equipped Christians for mission and had them experience Holy Spirit empowerment, we would see long-lasting fruit. In February 2021, I emailed many Alliance lead pastors in Alberta and recruited five churches to participate in the project. The churches involved were of all types: big, small, urban, rural, and suburban. Overall, 36 participants joined the research project.

In April, we kicked off a four-month project which included four mission-training modules and a renewal conference in the middle of the program (Soul Care Equipping Conference, to be precise). At the beginning of the project, we used a Missional Behaviour Survey instrument to test the social concern, incarnational evangelism, proclamation evangelism, missional prayer, and boldness of each member of the group. The results were tepid. Across the churches, some women and men were moderately missional. Some less so. The mission and renewal experiment concluded at the end of June 2021.

And then we waited. And we waited some more. We waited ten weeks to contact any participant in the group about the research project. We wanted every ounce of enthusiasm bias to be removed from the project. Everyone knows after a conference or workshop, there is almost an enthusiasm high. Attend a prayer conference, and you promise to pray two hours a day. Attend a renewal conference, and you’re ready to see the whole world filled with the Holy Spirit. Attend a missions conference, and you’re tempted to sell all you have and go to the far reaches of the globe.

Enthusiasm is beautiful.

But it does not make for good data.

We sent out a follow-up survey in September to see if anything had changed. Had the application of Jesus's model of mission training and spiritual renewal for disciple-making worked? The results came back, and they were staggering.

Missional behaviour had increased by nearly fifteen percent. People felt twenty percent bolder in sharing their faith. Social concern, and care for the poor and marginalized, had grown significantly. Incarnational and proclamation evangelism had come together in harmony. People were prayer-walking their neighbourhoods, inviting people to explore faith, praying for the lost, sharing their finances to expand the Gospel, and were living intentionally to build bridges to Christ. And people met Christ.

One of the best findings was a question asking, "In the past two years, I have led someone to faith in Christ." That score improved by more than 25 percent.

Coming out of the project, a few recommendations emerged for every Christian, which leaders to everyday church members should pay attention to.

## **There is More to Jesus than Meets the Eye**

The first thing we learned from Baby Boomers to Gen Z was this: Jesus is better than we think. There is more fullness, freedom, joy, and fun in Christ than we ever thought possible. Desiring and pursuing the presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit is the great birthright of the Christian. God still moves. Jesus still speaks. The Holy Spirit still heals, saves, and guides.

...Jesus is better  
than we think.

Are we listening?

Are we pursuing the presence of Jesus Christ? Are we distracted from Jesus or delighted by Him? As we follow Jesus through spiritual renewal, using spiritual disciplines, confessing and repenting of sin, and asking for a renewed filling of the Holy Spirit, we will experience good news for our lives. And good news for the world. That has to be shared.

This good news becomes a living testimony to the work of Christ in our lives. It gives us something to share. It prepares us to follow Peter's admonishment to be ready to share the reason for our hope in Christ. It trains us to be good news people.

## **Who and How?**

The Holy Spirit is a missionary. The greatest one who ever lived. And the Holy Spirit speaks to us. The Holy Spirit primarily speaks through Scripture. Often, He will nudge us in our thoughts, feelings, dreams, and conversations with others.

Sometimes, He will use words of knowledge and insight or even prophetic words to get us moving.

But He speaks. He always speaks.

Our God is a communicating God. If you read the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, God is always speaking to human beings in real-time. And God speaks to help people get saved. Acts 8 demonstrates this clearly—the Holy Spirit tells Philip to talk to an Ethiopian eunuch. In ancient times this would be equivalent to a high-ranking political official, like a Secretary of State. The text gives us no clue as to what this sounded like. We do not know if the Spirit spoke to Philip in his thoughts, through a whisper, a loud voice, or even through a vision. But we *do* know this—the Spirit spoke to Philip to get him to share the Gospel.

One of the most helpful tools our participants used was developed from this text. It is simply the question of *Who* and *How*?

This concept is comically easy. Every morning, we asked participants, and we'd ask you, to simply pause before the God of the universe and ask these two questions:

- 1) Who do you want me to point towards your Kingdom?
- 2) How do you want me to do it?

And then obey.

One caution before you commit to praying this prayer. God is God. If He answers this prayer through the Holy Spirit, it is *not advice*. The sovereign Lord of the universe does not give advice. He gives commands. He is patient, kind, and loving. But He does not give advice.

This simple tool sent dozens of women and men out on mission and saw significant Kingdom fruit. Some people didn't hear God perfectly, some didn't hear anything for the first few weeks, some thought they heard God, but the command didn't make sense—someone was missing from work on the day they thought they were to nudge them towards the Kingdom, etc.

And yet, Jesus moved. And people entered the Kingdom. And the good news was preached, presented, and put on display.

Who and How? And obey. It's that simple.

Who and How?  
And obey.  
It's that simple.

## Same Time, Same Place, With Grace

Jesus had a mission field. He knew it with great clarity. Somehow, the Son of Man knew He was called to reach the Jewish people. He also knew He was not called to primarily reach the Gentiles. Jesus certainly blessed those outside His

mission field, but He was laser-focused on fulfilling the call of His Father to His Jewish mission field.

Do you know who your mission field is?

Do you know who God wants you to influence towards Christ? If you don't, sit in prayer and ask the Lord to reveal it to you. Fast and pray until you hear who Jesus wants you to influence towards Christ. Get others to fast and pray with you until you know. Do not miss out on the most incredible opportunity in your life—to set up the meeting between a friend, co-worker, family member, or even an enemy and Jesus Christ. Sometimes, God will give you a specific location, people group, or personality type to reach.

Leading someone to Christ is an irreplaceable gift. It is a sacred trust from the Lord of the universe. Do not miss out.

Once you've received revelation about who you can reach, some practical steps are needed. Suppose Jesus tells you to reach the bartenders of your local pub; how do you go about it? You can't spend all day at the pub unless you're retired...and even then, we probably wouldn't recommend it.

But what would happen if you committed to being at your local pub every Thursday from 7-10 pm. Every week. Without fail. Prayed up, looking for Kingdom opportunities, listening to the Holy Spirit and trusting the Father had a Kingdom assignment for you? What if you did this and brought another to do it with you?

People would meet Christ.

Scripture tells us the eyes of the Lord are looking for someone to show His strength through. God is looking for someone to carry His grace and put it on display, for His glory. Let's partner with Him in His mission.

Your mission field strategy should be Spirit-led, prayer-informed, and Scripture-based. And it will require you to create a routine with the same time, the same place, and marked by God's grace.

In my own life, it looks like this: I consider myself to be the pastor of my local gym. You can find me at the gym every Monday through Friday from 9-10:30 am. Without fail. The number of spiritual conversations, conversions, and friendships I've made is hard to count.

Joining with Jesus on mission and knowing my mission field has been one of the great delights of my life.

Leading someone to Christ is an irreplaceable gift. It is a sacred trust from the Lord of the universe. Do not miss out.

## **Wrap Up**

There is no one and nothing as fulfilling as Jesus Christ. Pursuit of His presence, empowerment, and the filling of the Spirit is the most worthwhile aim we can have.

When we experience His renewing presence, we must go out on mission. Anything less than a missional response is spiritual infidelity. It is spiritual narcissism. And it is killing the Church.

We can partner in mission with Jesus through the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. What a tremendous gift. The Holy Spirit can guide us daily on mission as we ask who and how we might nudge others towards Christ. He will assign us a mission field where our lives will bear much fruit.

If we, the Church, the Bride of Christ, return to the Lord and answer His missionary call in Canada and the rest of the Western world, the tears may fade from Jesus' eyes. The Church will be resurrected in our time, and we will speed the day we see Jesus face-to-face. Let us answer the call of Christ. Let us spread the Gospel with our words and in our deeds. And let us do so in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let us marry mission and renewal together once more for the glory of Christ. Amen.

## Chapter 15

### From Winnipeg to the Nations: There and Here

by Christopher Smith

There is an old joke that gets told on the Prairies about how the land is so flat you can watch your dog run away for three days. Now I've never lost a dog in the Saskatchewan flatlands, but I have driven into Regina at night with a low fuel warning on my dashboard, confident I could make it into town and not realizing how far away the lights of the city in the distance were. The landscape out here has a way of revealing things in the distance long before they become a reality. Which is another way of saying the things we observe today are tidings of the encroachment of tomorrow.

I have the privilege of pastoring the congregation of the first and oldest Alliance church in Manitoba, the original Winnipeg Gospel Tabernacle. She is a congregation with history, legacy, and significance to our shared global mission of bringing access to Jesus to every tribe, tongue, and nation. From this vantage point at the tip of the spear, we have seen remarkable things done in the name of

Jesus. We have seen churches planted, workers sent out, and lives transformed both here and to the very ends of the Earth. But like all Prairie dwellers, we have also seen the future. And unlike the distant lights of civilization miles down the number one highway, the horizon of global missions is right on our doorstep.

*To the ends of the Earth.* This was the rallying cry of our forefathers and mothers. The Gospel had come to us, and Jesus had divinely commissioned us through the Spirit to go into all the world and preach the Gospel. We know the history; we know the names and even some of the faces of those who blazed the missionary trail in the 19th and 20th centuries as a part of our movement. Many of their stories have been profiled in the very pages of this collection. In a very real sense, their zeal for evangelism and their unwavering belief we had a part to play in the work of bringing back the King catalyzed the Alliance to grow and spread

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across North America in those early decades of the movement. What began in New York City couldn't be contained in one location, and by the early part of the 20th century, the Alliance had missionary outposts everywhere. Even in my community of Winnipeg.

In 1907, the first convention of The Christian and Missionary Alliance to be held in Western Canada took place at Zion Methodist Church in Winnipeg. It was a rousing success and resulted in what the *Winnipeg Press* called the most significant offering ever taken in Winnipeg—\$7,000 for the cause of global evangelism. But more exciting than 7,000 dollars was the number 45. Forty-five women and men dedicated their lives to the work of international missions. The fervour for what the Alliance was about had spread Northwest, and people were eager to give and go. *The Christian and Missionary Alliance Weekly* newsletter had this to say about the event:

In the morning Rev. George Stephens of Toronto, occupied the pulpit, and preached an eloquent and inspiring address. His subject was "The Home Base for Missions." He spoke of how the heathen have opened their doors to Christ's missionaries, a fact that laid great responsibility on the churches, for sending the gospel messages to those people. That was the last command of the Saviour, "Go and preach the gospel to all nations."<sup>1</sup>

Such was the fervour for bringing the Gospel to the nations at the beginning of the 20th century in the heart of the continent. But this first conference was not the high point of Winnipeg's missionary zeal—it was only the beginning.

Fast forward to the spring of 1924, and we find a new congregation, Glad Tidings Assembly, started by Pastor H.L. Turner in the heart of the City of Winnipeg. Turner, a missionary himself (and future president of the Alliance), had a passionate calling to see the Gospel go out to the neglected peoples of the world. And while his *ministry* was to the people of the city, his *mission* was to prepare women and men to bring the message of hope to the ends of the earth from the very beginning. As such, this new expression of the church in the heart of Winnipeg became an early, unorganized outpost of the Alliance in Western Canada and the very first expression of our movement in the province of Manitoba. Turner left a year later, and the search was on for the first formal pastor of the congregation, someone who would pick up the torch and continue pressing forward into the mission.

For over a year a handful of loyal friends have been organized as a branch of our society and have been earnestly praying for a pastor, and just as they were almost ready to give up to despair God brought

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1. The Christian and Missionary Alliance, November 7, 1907.

them in touch with Rev. E.B. Fitch of Ottawa. Brother Fitch had been feeling for some time that his ministry was completed in the Ottawa Gospel Tabernacle and the need of Winnipeg came to him as a call from God...The first Annual Missionary Convention in Winnipeg was also held the week of April 17, closing on April 24... The closing services were held in the Gayety Theatre and their first missionary offering reached a total of \$4,800. We recommend this new work to our constituency for prayer that God may make it a center of truth and testimony for the Central Canadian Prairies.<sup>2</sup>

Let's put this in perspective. This church, less than three years old at this point and planted with missionary DNA, calls its first official Alliance pastor and, in the same week, holds its first missionary convention (something that all Alliance churches used to do at least annually) and took up an offering for missions which works out to \$70,600 in 2021 dollars.

A few years later, this congregation shows up again in the historical record with the report of another missionary convention:

**Winnipeg, Manitoba.** The blessing of the Lord attended the meetings with a rising tide of blessing. The missionary offering amounted to \$2,091.73. Fifty young people offered themselves for service.<sup>3</sup>

Three years later, this congregation raised an offering for missions equivalent to \$31,000 in 2021 dollars – but even more than that, *fifty* young people offered themselves for service. Not just for the work of praying, supporting missions, or even simply domestic ministry, but fifty young people pledged themselves to the task of going to the nations! When was the last time any Alliance church had such a response to a call to international service? Most of us probably can't remember one.

...*fifty* young people  
offered themselves  
for service.

My church today isn't what it used to be. The grand old lady of the Alliance in the Prairies is now a small and aging suburban congregation. We have a great legacy, but we lack the resources, both financial and attendance, to make the same sort of impact today. We aren't the missionary sending powerhouse we were in generations past—how can we still be involved? Do we even have a role to play in God's great global mission beyond faithfully sending a persistently larger piece of a smaller pie to the Global Advance fund every month?

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2. *The Alliance Weekly*, May 21, 1927.

3. *The Alliance Weekly*, May 31, 1930.

I know many pastors are asking themselves the same questions. Whether their congregations are 100 years old, 50 years old, or even 20 years old, our training and structures are based on a paradigm belonging rightly to the faithful saints who went before us. And while there is definitely continued value in the model of sending fully-funded international workers to the least-reached people groups of the world, there must be something small and medium-sized congregations can do to contribute to the communities where they have been planted, with the resources they have been given, and the people who God has entrusted to them. And the good news is there are! The call to global missions no longer requires a passport, only the willingness to open our eyes and see the nations have come to us. So how specifically can we do this? Allow me to present three strategies for engaging the nations on our doorstep; these have made a tangible difference in the city where I pastor.

The call to global missions no longer requires a passport, only the willingness to open our eyes and see the nations have come to us.

### **Welcome Newcomers**

It probably won't surprise you to hear Canada is a nation of immigrants. For generations, we have been welcoming and receiving people from all over the world into our society, and the trend is only accelerating. According to Statistics Canada and data from the 2016 census, over twenty percent of the population of Canada are immigrants, immigration accounts for eighty percent of Canadian population growth, and the vast majority of new immigrants coming into Canada today come from regions and people groups to whom we presently send international workers.

When you welcome newcomers to our nation and neighbourhoods, you are building relationships with people who may have never had the opportunity to hear the Gospel or have only known about Christianity through the filter of their suspicious cultures of origin. We don't need to board a plane and travel to the other side of the world to meet people who need access to Jesus; many of them are coming to us!

And before you think this is a novel approach, consider the history of our movement. Before the organized Evangelical Missionary Alliance in 1887, and before the group sent out its first international worker, A.B. Simpson was down at the docks in New York City welcoming immigrants to the new world. The story is well-known and part of our Alliance mythos, but it demonstrates how this approach to missions

is not new but has been a part of our DNA from the earliest days. To welcome the newcomer and build relationships based on mutual respect and inclusion while sharing with them the love of Christ is doing the work of a missionary at home. It is something that even the smallest of churches can participate in.

## Refugee Sponsorship

Another way that smaller churches can make a difference for God's global mission is through the work of refugee resettlement. It may be shocking to hear that in a world beset by so many displaced peoples due to war, famine, poverty, persecution, and the like, Canada is the only nation in the world with a path for private sponsorship of refugees. While other nations may have generous and compassionate quotas and processes for refugees to claim asylum, only Canada gives private citizens and community organizations like our churches the opportunity to be directly involved in the process and to sponsor people of their choosing. This opportunity cannot be squandered in a world closing its borders to religious aid organizations and in which a growing number (an estimated 84 million people in 2021<sup>4</sup>) are forcibly displaced from their homes.

In Winnipeg, an organization led by a local inner-city church has made bringing Christian refugees to Canada their primary mission. The strategy is not only to protect the vulnerable within the family of God but to bring people over who will have a strategic witness to their own people groups within the city once they arrive. The reality is that many newcomers to Canada will seek out and fellowship with people who share their culture, language, and values. How much more effective can we be if the people reaching them with the Gospel can travel in those same circles? It's a strategy to recruit people who will, in turn, reach the same populations we might struggle to connect with. Now refugee sponsorship is not an inexpensive process, but when you compare it to the cost of sending a fully-funded worker couple overseas to do similar work, it's a much more affordable and sustainable strategy for reaching L RPGs. By leveraging our strategic advantage as Canadians, we can effectively bring missionaries to our cities to help us minister to the populations we can't reach on our own.

In 2018, we were able to partner with this

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4. <https://www.unhcr.org/mid-year-trends>

organization and use the Alliance's Sponsorship Agreement Holder status to bring a Pakistani family over to Canada. Today they are reaching back into Pakistan to support their fellow believers undergoing persecution, all the while helping our congregation to understand how they can participate in this critical work as well.

## **Minister to International Students**

If welcoming newcomers is the first opportunity, and strategically sponsoring refugees is the second, then the third would most assuredly be reaching the growing population of international students coming to Canada to study. As of 2019, Canada ranked third globally as the leading destination for international study, with an estimated 624,000 students coming to our country from around the globe.<sup>5</sup> These young people represent the future leaders of many nations and cultures where we don't have a significant witness today. And this moment when they are in Canada represents what may be the only opportunity we have to reach them before they return to their countries of origin, many of which we will struggle to send workers to under the traditional model.

A great example from my local history here in Winnipeg is the story of Bakht Singh. Bakht was an international student who came to Winnipeg to study engineering in 1929. At the time, he was a fierce opponent of Christianity and had no love for the church, but while in Canada, he was befriended by a Christian family, and over time, their witness won him over. When Bakht returned to India after completing his studies at the University of Manitoba, he became what some refer to as India's foremost evangelist, preacher, and Indigenous church planter who founded churches and established Hebron Ministries. He began a worldwide Indigenous church-planting movement in India, which grew to more than 10,000 local churches. All of this because someone befriended an international student.

Ministry to international students can take many forms—from English conversation groups to settlement services, and homestay programs. In my congregation, we have many families who supplement their income by hosting international students in their homes. They practice hospitality, build relationships, and model Christian love to young people who are separated from their families and communities. Every semester it seems I have the opportunity to meet students who have been loved well by my parishioners and who, as a result, have shown interest in knowing about the faith, inspiring and informing their values of hospitality and care.

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5. <https://www.cicnews.com/2020/02/642000-international-students-canada-now-ranks-3rd-globally-in-foreign-student-attraction-0213763.html#gs.xk0tfy>

Sometimes these students are with us for a very short time, sometimes for longer, but every student, even those who will never want to accompany their hosts to a worship service or speak about spiritual things, is a person beloved by Christ who gets the experience of spending time in a Christian home. We believe those experiences are not insignificant, and building these sorts of cross-cultural relationships is a form of mission the church can do even when it is small and under-resourced relative to the traditional missionary model.

These strategies represent what I have seen work in my context. There are undoubtedly more exciting approaches being tried elsewhere. My purpose is not to convince you of the methodology of such an initiative, only to convince you of the possibility and the urgency of having a strategy. Because as we move into the third decade of the 21st century, the cost of sending fully-funded international workers is only going to get more expensive as the pool of resources to send them gets smaller; the danger of sending workers overseas to least-reached people groups will only increase, just as the barriers to Westerners travelling on religious visas grow. And if we stay focused on our past, as glorious as it might be, and rely exclusively on traditional models of mission, we run the real risk of leaving the vast majority of our congregations disconnected and uninvolved in the work of global evangelism. But if we can learn to embrace the mission field at our doorstep, everyone gets to be a missionary. The potential for global impact is not only within reach for our churches today; it is the very reality looming on the horizon of international work for the last couple of generations of the church, approaching from a distance with the certainty of a Prairie sunrise.

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uninvolved in the work of  
global evangelism.

As I look back at our history and ahead to our future in this historic congregation, I note with excitement the different calls we have received to commit ourselves to service in the Great Commission.

During the first Winnipeg missionary conference, George Stephen's message was of how we were the home base for missions. This was where the work began, and what we needed to do most of all was to give, send, and go.

H.L. Turner's call to his new congregation was to catch the vision and take the Gospel to the farthest corners of the globe. And thus, the Winnipeg Gospel Tabernacle was formed to raise up workers to be sent out to the ends of the Earth.

To both of those calls, the congregation responded with enthusiastic participation. So, what can I call my congregation to in my generation? The opportunity, which was on the horizon in ages past, has finally come near. The world which once seemed so far away is now on our doorstep, and the nations we once were sending people out to have arrived in our city. The great dream of getting every woman, man, and child in the church involved in cross-cultural evangelism is now a possibility like never before. Our forebearers saw it coming. The time wasn't right for them—like a dog running away on the Prairie, they saw it in the distance. Our challenge now is to pick up their mantle and continue the work—not in the same way they did it, but for the same purpose and to the glory of the same Christ.

We may be a small church whose glory days are long in the past, but Christ's most significant work through us can still be ahead if we will only look to the horizon and see what's coming.

## Chapter 16

### Always Room for One More

by Kathy Klassen

One of the most accessible forms of mission across the globe is offering another the gift of hospitality. There is a universal symbol for this phenomenon – the pineapple. When Columbus first discovered this exotic fruit in the Caribbean and brought it back to Europe, the royal family, among others, prized it as a delicacy, and it was considered a favourite. If you were a guest at someone’s home and they served you a pineapple, you were most definitely honoured.<sup>1</sup> The beauty of the gospel message is we are all invited to the royal table; places are reserved for men and women from every tribe and tongue, from every ethnicity. For the believer, an invitation to dine is not just mere symbolism of a heavenly royal table yet to be set, but rather it is the intended on-ramp for lost souls to be welcomed in.

While the majority world maintains a high cultural value on hospitality, the Western world has allowed it to wane. Unfortunately, as immigrants come to Canada, they often get caught up in our fast-paced 24/7 urban lifestyle and find themselves letting our individualism water down this great gift.

While the majority world maintains a high cultural value on hospitality, the Western world has allowed it to wane.

Before we go any further, we must define hospitality. While so often the first word which might come to someone’s mind is a casserole or definitely food, this is not the original definition of this word. In Romans 12:13, when Paul instructs the Romans to ‘practice hospitality,’ he uses the Greek word *philoxenia*,<sup>2</sup> defined as the love of strangers, the readiness to share generosity by entertaining in one’s home. He prefaces this with *dioko*,<sup>3</sup> which is the act of aggressively hunting or earnestly pursuing. There is a strong exhortation to be intentional in your pursuit.

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1. Rebecca Rose, *Pineapples, The Symbol of Hospitality*. <https://www.rebeccaroseevents.com/blog/pineapples-symbol-of-hospitality>
  2. Bible Hub – *Strong’s Concordance* – <https://biblehub.com/greek/5381.htm>
  3. Ibid – <https://biblehub.com/greek/1377.htm>

Jesus nails this when invited to the home of a prominent Pharisee, where He notices everyone is focused on getting the preferred seat at the table. Once again, in true Christ-like form, He calls them up higher. They should not be seeking the highest seat of honour, but they should be inviting the poor, the lame and the blind to the table (Luke 14:12-14).

Laura Beth Jones, in her book “Jesus CEO,” observes that at every party Jesus went to, He took on the role of host.<sup>4</sup> Even when He was the invited guest, He would act as host, often choosing to recognize and embrace the ‘least of these’ in the room. Recently while doing some lectio on Matthew 25, I was stunned to see Jesus refer to ‘the least of these’ as “His brothers and sisters.” The marginalized, the poor, the blind, or perhaps in our twenty-first-century world, the international student, the street person, the annoying neighbour, are defined as the Saviour’s siblings. Is this the real message here? God’s heart is for every person to be family, and none would be left out. How would world mission be radically altered if we began to see every person on the bus, on our street, in the mall as a brother or sister? Is this the deeper call of mission, to love our neighbours as we love our families? We would, hopefully, not deliberately leave a relative off the invite list, even if they weren’t our favourite. For the Western world, practicing hospitality means a radical paradigm shift.

Many years ago, I read a book by Edith Schaeffer entitled “Hidden Art of Homemaking.” Schaeffer defined ‘hidden art’ as the art found in ordinary areas of everyday life. “Each person,” says Schaeffer, “has, I believe, some talent which is unfulfilled in some hidden area of their being – a talent which could be expressed and developed.”<sup>5</sup> In her book review, Meredith Curtis describes Schaeffer as one who devoted her life to creating a home to nurture her husband, children, and all the people they ministered to in their chalet in Switzerland. From freshly baked bread to lovely music playing, Edith carefully decorated her house, filling it with art, laughter, beauty, and good books.<sup>6</sup> Schaeffer’s book uncovers various art forms one would readily identify as art: writing, drama, painting, sketching, sculpturing. But then she also includes other activities such as gardening, interior decorating, culinary gifting, and creative recreation. It was a fabulous read.

When we think of mission, it is common to think of extraordinary efforts such as the William Carey’s, the Amy Carmichaels, or the five who were martyred in Ecuador. While those legacies are rich and motivate us all, at times, I believe they also make mission seem unattainable. Schaeffer’s definition of art found in the

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4 Laura Beth Jones, *Jesus CEO* (Hachette Books), 1994.

5. Edith Schaeffer, *Hidden Art* (Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton: Illinois, 1971). Back Cover.

6. Meredith Curtis, *Review of The Hidden Art of Homemaking*, MeredithCurtis.com, Sept. 11, 2017.

everyday areas of life, as ordinary as offering hospitality, somehow invites us all in with curiosity. God created us in His image, giving us the blank canvas of creation to leave our mark. He gave us His creative genes – His DNA. Schaeffer’s call-out on art resembles the Ephesians 2:10 definition of mission – each of us created as God’s masterpiece, with something unique to bring.

It seems in Christendom, the callings and movements of God need to be regularly dusted off. As Paul constantly reminds his readers, we also need to be reminded of and remember the lost art of hospitality. Edith Schaeffer called it out in the early 1980s. Twenty years later, in the book “Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition,”<sup>7</sup> Christine D. Pohl offers a historical overview of how we lost the gift of hospitality and our need to reclaim it.

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Even prior to the early Church, the Jewish culture was to be one that welcomed the stranger. When Peter entered Cornelius’ home to eat with him, he crossed this threshold, welcoming the Kingdom in a new way. The home was key in the early Church. It was a safe place to gather when cultural norms were being defied as Jews and Gentiles gathered together in the name of Christ. “In Christ, there was no Jew or Gentile...” (Galatians 3:28). House churches were the norm, and having people in for a meal was an essential part of the ministry. We see this today in monolingual ethnic churches. Their gathering is rarely an hour long and always includes a meal.

Pohl notes that when the Church went from being persecuted to becoming the religion of the empire in the time of Constantine, hospitality gradually became more institutionalized. It became an honourable thing to invest in, a public service. While this was a good thing on many fronts, it also made the care more impersonal.<sup>8</sup> It expanded to hostels and hospitals in the fourth and fifth centuries, which incidentally get their etymology from the root word ‘hospitality.’ “Poor people and strangers were frequently cared for at a distance and in large numbers. Personal hospitality was increasingly reserved for visiting dignitaries.”<sup>9</sup>

When persecution or devastation enters our world, it is a house of refuge people long for, not an institution. We saw this when 9/11 happened and planes were diverted to Gander, Newfoundland. The cultural hospitality was so memorable

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7. Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids: Michigan, 1999).

8. *Ibid.*, pg. 43.

9. *Ibid.*, pg. 45.

a movie was made of it entitled 'Diverted' and later the Broadway show 'Come From Away.' Local people welcomed strangers into their homes. In 2022, as we watch Ukrainians fleeing from their homeland, running from Russian aggression, many are being welcomed into the homes of fellow Europeans in Poland and other neighbouring countries.

Pohl traces the erosion of hospitality back to numerous historical shifts beginning with the industrial revolution. As people became more affluent, they became less likely to invite in the stranger and instead chose to create institutions to care for the poor. History reveals how, as wealth and comfort increased in a culture, caring for the stranger and the poor became a service offered more at arm's length. Like Paul's admonition to not forget the poor, so Church fathers like Luther, Calvin, Wesley and others called the Church back to her obligation to the poor and to remove barriers separating us from being sons and daughters at one table. Pohl notes, "With urbanization and industrialization, the household has become smaller and more private. It is a cherished retreat from the world into which one admits few strangers. Privacy increases the risk involved in offering hospitality to strangers."

Our Western individualism and technological revolution have also added to the distance between the family and the stranger. Even back in the 18th century, English writer, Samuel Johnson, noted, "as a country becomes more commercial and busier, time becomes precious, and therefore hospitality is not so much valued."<sup>10</sup>

And now, in 2022, twenty-odd years after Christine Pohl's findings, are things any different? In short, materialism and individualism seem to segregate us from the stranger and the poor. Throughout history, there has been a default of erosion affecting our ability to stay up close and personal with the poor and the marginalized, the stranger. Our own fallenness also seeps into our households, resulting in family breakdowns which cause us to hide in shame rather than open the door to another. Perhaps this is why Paul's exhortation in Romans 12:13 to practice hospitality is so profound. We have to be intentional, or it will never happen.

...materialism and individualism seem to segregate us from the stranger and the poor.

Don Everts and Doug Schaupp, in their book "I Once Was Lost," interviewed various post-moderns who had come to faith, hoping to uncover pathways forward. They wondered, with so many leaving the church (the 'none's and the 'dones'), why are these somehow finding their way home? Their research

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10. Ibid., pg. 37.

uncovers five thresholds we need to cross over with a seeker before they are often ready to join the family of God.

The very first threshold is building trust. ‘One of the main things our neighbours who don’t know Jesus need is simply to trust a Christian.’<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, the evangelical community has shamefully lost trust in our world. Having often not practiced what we’ve preached, we have earned the name hypocrite. The lost world can smell a fake a mile away. Scandals and judgmental rhetoric have left us with no seat at the table. Even our outreach has often been more like the sales clerk who pounces on you the moment you enter their store and annoys you to death, so you leave the store, quickly losing interest in purchasing whatever led you there in the first place.

For so many of us, our special hosting events are reserved for friends and family, the very thing Jesus cautions us against. I don’t believe He was calling them to abandon family, but rather to be inclusive not just of the stranger but especially of the marginalized. How hard is it to invite one more to the table? It is very hard in our Westernized world where most of us rarely eat one meal together with those in our homes.

We have no table set to which we could invite a stranger. In his book “The Common Rule,” Justin Earley talks of the need for us to reclaim the mealtime in families. He sets out what he calls a daily rule where he suggests we should begin by prioritizing and disciplining ourselves to have at least one meal a day with those under our roof. He and his wife began to rally other households from their extended family to consider setting aside a more regular connect time, like the proverbial Sunday dinner we see in the TV show *Blue Bloods*. They agreed on a frequency and then did their best to honour it, realizing there would always be times when not all could attend. Once this was put in place, inviting one or two more to the table became easy. As Earley intentionally set the table, he took back ground and enlarged his missional footprint.

Some of you reading may say, but I am single. How does this work when I don’t have anyone in my house to share a meal with? Being single, I understand. What I have learned over the years is like Romans 12:13 exhorts, we need to be intentional. As a single, you have the choice of waiting for others to include you in their gatherings, or like Jesus, we can take on the role of host and get the party

For so many of us,  
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11. Don Everts, Dough Schaupp. *I Once Was Lost*. Intervarsity Press, 2009.

going. One of my favourite things is to put on holiday dinners where I invite the strays – those who have nowhere to go. They are always out there and often more than I can take in. I will never forget two young adults calling me one Christmas day. These two guys I had gotten to know at church, one from Ghana and the other a Sri Lankan, were sitting in a McDonald's somewhere celebrating Christmas and just decided to call me. My heart broke. I immediately invited them over for whatever I had, and since then, they are usually on my list.

I grew up in East Africa with missionary parents, where my home was one of the things I had to sacrifice. Boarding school, an institution of care and homemaking, was where I lived from age six to sixteen. While there were many good aspects to this school, there were an equal number of drawbacks. In my mid-twenties, I recall one day reading Jesus' promise to those who left father and mother and home for the sake of the Gospel (Mark 10:29-31). He promised He would pay it back one hundred-fold. I decided to take Him up on it. I began to claim God would someday give me a home I could share with others. I wasn't sure how it would morph into one hundred homes, but it was worth the ask.

I began by sharing what I had, a two-bedroom apartment with a den. I would take in single missionaries who needed a place to stay and, at one point, a single mother with her kids. As I shared the little I had, God entrusted me with more. It's a long story for another day, but in 2007, I miraculously became the owner of a relatively large home in a well-to-do part of Toronto. I continued to take people in. By God's grace, I have hosted numerous gatherings in the last fifteen years and have had people from over 20 countries staying in my home. Over time I began to hear stories from those who had stayed with me. From residing at 'Sapphire House,' the name I affectionately gave my home, they had caught the vision of having an extra room for strangers and were starting to do the same. Was this the promise being fulfilled one hundredfold? When you take God at His Word, the Kingdom ripple effect takes place. Your little drop of obedience ripples out and affects others into obeying.

While writing this, I have a young Peruvian couple living in the basement, having just moved to Canada to study. My house is the second abode they have lived in during their first two months in Toronto. The first house they lived in was rather impersonal and didn't even include them in their Christmas celebrations. This was quite a shock for them, having come from a country where it would be

One of my favourite things is to put on holiday dinners where I invite the strays – those who have nowhere to go.

unheard of not to welcome others into your celebrations, especially foreigners. Desperate for community, they looked around, and God led them here.

On the street where I live, in the Greater Toronto Area, it took seven years before I could be in and out of certain people's homes on a trust basis. Thanks to my little dog Charlie, and our daily walk, I became visible on the street. I was led to have what I called "friends and neighbours" parties in my backyard or at Christmastime, where I would bring my circles together. I found that everyone wants to bring something, so the feast gets laid out quite naturally. You just have to start. As a single, I found other singles who wanted to help, so I wasn't alone. It became a way to give them a place to serve as well.

When COVID hit, hospitality took a beating. How do you gather people when government restrictions prohibit it? Remember, our God is Creator. I love what Augustine says "The creative power of God is to be found not only in the beginning but in the process of history, amid the currently unfolding human story."<sup>12</sup> Athanasius takes it even further, "God is always doing something new in history, always creating or re-creating a new people, ever restoring that which has fallen to nothing."<sup>13</sup>

As COVID hit, there was an eeriness in the air. The street was sullen. We were cautious to even knock on the door of another's home. The Lord dropped the idea in my mind to distribute a letter with a photo of myself and my puppy on it and a phone number they could call or connect to if they would like to be part of a WhatsApp group on the street to keep tabs on each other. Out of fifty homes, fifteen responded, and throughout Covid, we have kept in touch, finding creative ways to care for one another and even do mission together. The downtown shelters were closed early on, but the homeless still needed feeding. True to the James 1:27 definition of Church, the only churches allowed to stay open during the first stages of Covid were those who were "first responders," those feeding the poor and caring for the marginalized. Some in our little WhatsApp group eagerly contributed towards a weekly sandwich run for the downtown. They would drop off food at my door, and I, with a few others in my home, would put together the sandwiches we delivered weekly. While I am writing this, Russia's invasion of Ukraine is on its twelfth day. Just yesterday, I was able to put a site on WhatsApp where people could give to our church on the ground in Poland, providing care for Ukrainian refugees.

Perhaps the most challenging part of mission is taking the first step. Yet the step is easier than you think. It doesn't have to be across the ocean; it can be just

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12. Thomas C. Oden, *Classic Christianity*, (Harper Collins Publishers: New York, NY 1992) pg. 133.

13. *Ibid.*

one step out your front door.

We must build back the trust we have lost, and it can easily be reclaimed with the gift of hospitality. The starting place is with your own home, where you lay your head. The Scriptures teach the people living around you are ripest for you to reach with the Gospel. If I understand this passage right, God determined the exact time in history each one should be born into, down to the very home they would live in. Why did He do this, because this is the place where they will most find Him (Acts 17:26-27). The people around you are there for a reason, unknowingly waiting for their royal invitation to have dinner with you.

One may quickly say, “but I don’t have the gift of hospitality.” That may well be true, but I believe with all the gifts, just because we don’t have a gift doesn’t mean we are off the hook. I don’t have the gift of evangelism, but this doesn’t excuse me from mission. We are all on mission and can all step into any of the gifts because they are the manifestation of the Spirit through us, the Body. Yes, God has given these gifts to certain people. We don’t all have the same gift, and we excel in different ones. But we can start with what we have, and perhaps we need to pray and ask the Lord to send someone our way who does have the gift.

One might say, “Well, I don’t need a home for this.” Which is true, you don’t, but somehow sitting down around a meal seems to help with the welcoming process. Jesus began His ministry at a wedding feast, it ended on earth with the Last Supper, and it will reconvene in glory at the marriage feast of the Lamb. The table is something we are to congregate around. Before you ever invite someone to church, you should ask them to your home or out for a meal. They must feel safe enough in your presence before they move to the second threshold, which is curiosity, inquiring why you do what you do or believe the way you do. This is the Gospel.

Let me go one step further; what is the real need people have? It is not to be fed. It is to be welcomed. The fundamental goal of hospitality is to invite a stranger in so they feel they are at home. Ken Myers has made an astounding observation about the kind of ministry needed these days. He notes that the kind of atheism in our world today is not a conclusion but a mood. Therefore, you don’t disarm it with an argument but with a presence. What kind of presence do they long for? It is the presence of the loving Jesus, inviting them to come and dine with Him. When you and I invite a stranger to dinner, because of God’s indwelling Spirit, the resident Christ living within us, we are asking them to dine with Him. In an interview with Jerin Thomas

...what is the real need people have? It is not to be fed. It is to be welcomed.

on the re-Kindle podcast, Shawn Tomlinson makes astounding revelations about the power of hospitality in his work with international students.<sup>14</sup> He talks of how his intentional focus on getting to know these students, asking simple questions and just being present with them can tear down a long-held religious barrier they might have about Christians and their faith in twenty minutes. It isn't through winning an argument but by being the loving presence of Jesus.

A lovely lady from West Africa who lived in my home would pray at every meal, "Jesus, pull up a chair and join us." Ever since then, I have prayed the same. And so, I close with a few questions: What is the hidden artistic gift you have? Who lives on your street or in your hallway? Who might the Spirit be nudging you to invite for dinner? What will it take for us to be people who, like Christ, are the hosts where we live and set the table, always making room for one more at His table?

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<sup>14</sup> Re-Kindle Podcast, Episode 37 – *Tips for Making Friends with International Students*.

## Chapter 17

# A Reflective Pathway to a Digital Missiology

by Bryce Ashlin-Mayo

Our world is amid the most significant technological change in four hundred years. Like all important changes, the initial shock wave of impact is always followed by cascading effects that, over time, terraform culture in its wake. In the past, this was true of the Gutenberg printing press in the 15th century with its impact on things like the enlightenment, the reformation, and the scientific method. In the emerging future, this is also true of the Internet, social media, augmented reality, artificial intelligence, cryptocurrency, and the coming metaverse with their effects on society, social constructs, church, government, and economics.

As with all technological advances, the implication for the Church and her ecclesiology and missiology are pervasive. As a result, this is one of the most exciting eras for global missions with immense potential for the Gospel. The opportunity is tremendous, and for the sake of the Great Commission, we should seize it at every opportunity. However, like all good missiologists, we must consider the unintended nature of our actions and not simply “do” because we “can.” We must be cautious of retracing past mistakes in our pragmatic race into the future.

...this is one of the most exciting eras for global missions with immense potential for the Gospel.

## The Calling to Go into the Digital Frontier

Jesus gave the Great Commission to His followers before His ascension. But before the Church embarked on its mission, they were called to wait.<sup>1</sup> Gathered in the Upper Room, they waited until they were filled with the Spirit, and the first thing they did was go on mission as fellow Jews, speaking various languages, gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. The waiting in the Upper Room wasn't primarily about patience; instead, it was a lesson in good missiology.

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1. Luke 24:49.

The people were waiting in obedience for God’s infilling presence, and God was waiting for the nations to be gathered through the Jewish Feast of Pentecost.<sup>2</sup>

Notably, the filling of the Spirit is not just for holy living, spiritual gifts, the abundant life, and the manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit; it is also about the calling to go on mission in God’s timing and with God’s empowerment. The first act of mission by the early Church is an example of the methodology (the “how”) being as important as the message. The Church waited for the Spirit, and God empowered them to speak in the language of the people hearing. God could have given the multilingual/cultural people gathered in Jerusalem the ability to understand the speakers’ language, but God does the reverse. God empowered the Church to speak the language of the hearer. The first act of mission by the Spirit-filled Church is a lesson in good missiology. A lesson we continually forget in our pragmatic and impatient race to act.

As the Church is empowered and sent, its sending doesn’t cease in Jerusalem. The early Church expanded throughout the Roman Empire, utilizing the sophisticated Roman roadways and shipping routes. The Church grew in numerical size and geographic influence, not despite technology but because of it. God providentially used these forms of technology for the early Church’s rapid growth and expansion.

The Church grew in numerical size and geographic influence, not despite technology but because of it.

God has always used technology in His redemptive mission. The first forms of technology reported in the Scriptures were used by Adam and Eve in the garden before the fall as they fulfilled their calling to fill and subdue the earth as they worked and tilled the soil.<sup>3</sup> To do this, they needed technology. Adam and Eve were the first “techies” and used technologies to fulfill their God-given mission.<sup>4</sup>

It is important to note Adam and Eve also employ technology after the fall as they immediately invent a new form of technology, clothing. Using vegetation, they cover their bodies (an extension of their skin) and attempt to hide from each other in shame, just as they try to hide from God.<sup>5</sup> The first technological upgrade immediately follows this, clothing 2.0 and God is the technologist, using animal skin to replace vegetation clothing.<sup>6</sup> These small details in the creation and fall

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2. Acts 2:1-13.

3. John Dyer, *From the Garden to the City: The Redeeming and Corrupting Power of Technology*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011. 50-51.

4. Dyer, *From the Garden to the City*, 50-51.

5. Genesis 3:7

6. John Dyer, *From the Garden to the City*, 71.

story highlight the role of technology and its impact on our lives as people created in the image of a creative God and how technology can be used to advance God's mission of redemption or move away from it.

## **A Tale of Four Boats**

As noted, the Bible has a lot to teach us about technology and its power to extend our reach. Although technology is amoral (we can reach for good or bad things), it isn't ineffectual. This is seen in Scripture in several ways, including the use of the boat. The boat first appears in Scripture as a technology given by God to save Noah and his family from the flood and give humanity a second chance.<sup>7</sup> God, the technologist, uses technology in His redemptive and salvific purpose for Noah's family and, by extension, all of humanity.

This is contrasted with the boat used by Jonah to avoid the call of God to go to Nineveh. Jonah uses the same technology as Noah but in the opposite manner, avoiding God's mission and the future salvation of the Ninevites.

Two different situations with two different boats and two different uses of the same technology. This is the nature of technology. Jonah tried to use it to avoid God's calling, and Noah found deliverance in it.

The tale of boats doesn't end with Jonah or the Old Testament. Paul and the early Church fathers spread the Gospel through the Roman Empire and beyond, which would not have been possible without the Roman road, trading routes, and ships. Paul's experience with boats aside (he was shipwrecked at least three times), the use of ships and roadways by the early Church highlight the use of technology in the mission of God.

The fourth tale of boats is the European colonizers. With the introduction of advanced vessels, the colonial powers, including the Church, brutally exploited this technological power for economic exploitation, cultural annihilation, and political power. Colonialism is a stain on humanity's history and the missionary movement.

These four tales of boats further demonstrate that technology can be used towards God's mission or used away from it. It is also a reminder our methods and motives matter. We need to be thoughtful and reflective as we engage in mission, knowing we can make the same mistakes as in the past. In humility, we must acknowledge we are not only susceptible to retracing wrong paths with new technologies, but those new technologies also allow us to make those same mistakes with greater efficiency.

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7. Genesis 6.

## How Should We Go?

Like all movements into new technology, it often moves so fast that our excitement clouds judgement and pragmatism blinds the lens of healthy critique. Techno-entrepreneurs and techno-missionaries frequently forge ahead in pragmatically fueled ignorance. The rush to digital ministry, accelerated by COVID restrictions, is a success story for the Church and a cautionary tale with predictable outcomes. It is a story with a slightly less unique plot than we often recognize. Digital ministry and mission began as most new technologically fueled movements do, excited pragmatism.

As the Church embraces its digital mission's future (something it must do), it needs to understand the length of the road ahead. Digital is still in its infancy and is not just about live streaming, websites, and social media, but the metaverse, crypto-currency, augmented reality, artificial intelligence, virtual reality, etc. Digital innovation is just learning to crawl.

Thus, as we enter this road as churches, ministries, denominations, organizations, and institutions, what if we forged ahead with a longer view and a more critical approach. I am not suggesting we should cease our missional impulse. Instead, I suggest we move forward with more awareness and a more profound commitment to pursuing healthy digital missiology.

For example, right now, you could use your church's mission's budget for Facebook advertising and have views on your Sunday service from around the world. You could pay to have people watching from India, Peru, Croatia, etc., but is this what missions is? Would this be good missiology? The number of views would look great on a mission's annual report graph, but is this what the Great Commission is supposed to look like? Additionally, you could run a digital discipleship program for people in another country and do one-on-one or small group discipleship without language training (using translation apps), cultural competencies, or travel (using video conferencing software). Still, without culture training, language nuance, and embedded presence, what is possible and efficient soon becomes expedient, ineffectual, and harmful.

Thus, what if we were able to consider some of the potential critiques and potential methodological mistakes regarding online ministry and mission that we now see as evident regarding short-term missions, poor benevolent policies, and

The rush to digital ministry, accelerated by COVID restrictions, is a success story for the Church and a cautionary tale...

colonial mission practices?<sup>8</sup> Although one can never predict every potential outcome of a chosen methodology, there is value in critically reflecting on it in advance.

To aid you and your ministry's missional discernment and methodological discussion on online mission and ministry, the following are some plausible predictions, long view considerations, and essential questions to ask as you forge ahead into the vast digital frontier.

### **The Digital Path Will Soon Become the Default Path**

Most church ministry and missional activities see digital as the add-on to in-person ministry. Hybrid mission and ministry structures are almost always about allowing people online to join something which, by default, is happening in person. This will reverse. Soon digital will be the default way people engage in community, partake in education, and participate in commerce. Some may see this as far-fetched or even dystopian, but that is only because we perceive digital from our current perspective rather than what the digital future is unfolding before us. With changes to digital technology, this will be an increasing part of contemporary culture. This is not to say it will not be problematic. Instead, it will carry a whole host of problems and societal challenges. However, just as we don't pick a physical movie at a movie store or buy a book from a brick-and-mortar bookstore anymore, we will engage with more of life online. As a result, the in-person dynamic will be the add-on to the digital default.

**Essential Questions:** Do your existing ministries and mission endeavours consider the future digital default in your ministry plans or have you ignored or abandoned digital altogether? What are the implications of ministry and mission being centred on affinity-based communities rather than on physical geo-location-based communities? What are the theological implications of a disembodied ministry methodology?

### **The Digital Path is Not Culturally Neutral**

Because something is done on a digital platform, it doesn't mean one can and should ignore the need to make the content and methodology contextual to your community. One of the many online myths is that culture is not a factor online. There is no such thing as "transcultural." This is the classic well-worn path of missional problems. We must muster all our collective intercultural competencies

There is no such thing as "transcultural."

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8. Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert. *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor—and Yourself*. Expanded ed. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2012.

(one of the most essential skills in the future of ministry in Canada) as we pursue online ministry and engage in platforms that make cultural engagement more imperative, not less important.<sup>9</sup> In addition, digital culture is also different from in-person culture. As a result, authority works differently, and community is built uniquely in digital space.<sup>10</sup>

**Essential Questions:** How does your digital ministry consider culture? Does it mistakenly ignore cultural differences assuming a transcultural approach? Does it ignore the uniqueness of digital culture? Are you building intercultural competencies with your church and leadership teams?

### **The Digital Path is Less About Content and More About Community**

The information age does not have a shortage of information.<sup>11</sup> The world has access to more sermons and teaching than ever before, and the implications for access have not made more disciples. The modern literary movement was all about content and content distribution, and although the Internet started based on “Content was King,”<sup>12</sup> Web 2.0 (social media), and now Web 3.0 (AI, Metaverse, etc.) will be more about community and relationships than content.

The world has access to more sermons and teaching than ever before, and the implications for access have not made more disciples.

Digital mission endeavours must then move from giving access to material and making generalized content to creating original content in the community by the community as relationships become the driving force in digital space.

**Essential Questions:** How much of your online ministry focuses on content rather than on community? What if even your content was contextual to your community?

### **The Digital Path is Discriminatory**

The Internet is not created equal. Not everyone has access to digital content, currency, or collectives. Socio-economic status, oppressive regimes, and systemic issues of injustice continue to influence equitable access to online information

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9. This is a key competency we are attempting to build in students through the Faculty of Theology at Ambrose University ([ambrose.edu](http://ambrose.edu)).

10. For more on this, see. Bryce Ashlin-Mayo. *Digital Mission: A Practical Guide for Ministry Online*. Tyndale Academic Press, 2020.

11. <https://www.barna.com/research/new-research-on-the-state-of-discipleship/>

12. Bill Gates is reported to have coined the phrase “Content is King” in 1996. <https://medium.com/@HeathEvans/content-is-king-essay-by-bill-gates-1996-df74552f80d9>

and the digital community. It may be assumed digital access is universal, but this is far from reality for many people in our culture and other countries worldwide. Our North American centralist perspective assumes everyone is experiencing life like we are. This will be one of the justice issues of the future. For example, just as we now lament the suburban church planting movement of the post-war era for ignoring minority groups who had moved into the core of the urban centres, the Church's digital ministry and mission strategy are poised to do the same thing again with its focus on digital engagement, void of a system that gives equal access to all groups and socio-economic levels.<sup>13</sup>

This will be one of the justice issues of the future.

**Essential Questions:** Does your digital ministry and mission endeavours unintentionally discriminate, and how can you think about them in such a way that embraces justice, mercy, and humility (Micah 6:8)?

### The Digital Path is Accelerating

Moore's law states that transistors double every two years with technology.<sup>14</sup> Although different with each technological product, this exponential growth trajectory has been proven across digital technology's advancement. The digital future is not just social media but artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and the metaverse. These advancements will continue to accelerate at an exponential rate. The thought of digital ministry and mission simply being a fad that will fade away is grossly naive. One of the gifts the Church could offer the world isn't a Luddite rejection of technology but an embrace of technology that keeps us human as we use it.<sup>15</sup>

**Essential Questions:** Does your church or ministry see technology and digital ministry as something to embrace (with a critical edge) or something to avoid? What are some essential practices and principles to keep this crucial edge while still embracing the innovation impulse? What does theological reflection look like for digital mission and ministry, and are you regularly engaging in this critical practice?

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13. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2020/november/crete-collective-church-planting-network-thabiti-anyabwile.html>

14. <https://www.britannica.com/technology/Moores-law>

15. Technocritical often holds a variety of meanings and implications. I simply use it here as middle ground between technophile and technophobe; between an ignorant embrace of technology and a fearful rejection of it. Different authors use different phrases to communicate a similar sentiment. For example, Tim Challies uses "Disciplined Discernment." Tim Challies, *The Next Story: Life and Faith After the Digital* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 17. Derek Schuurman uses "Cultivating Responsible Technology." Derek Schuurman. *Shaping a Digital World: Faith, Culture and Computer Technology*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2013, 16.

The digital path is long! We have just entered the start of the digital revolution. Understanding some of the questions to ask as we begin the journey will help us prepare well for the long missional journey ahead and the long-term effectiveness. We will journey it regardless, but anyone who looks at history will tell you it is better to understand the potential unintended consequences before you do.

If the future sees people increasingly engaging in digital space, the Church's future must also include digital. This is a crucial implication of the Great Commission. If people are online, should the Church be where the people Jesus loves are?

If people are online, should the Church be where the people Jesus loves are?

## **When Should We Go?**

I believe we are at a unique inflection point for missions. The uniqueness of digital technology can't be overlooked or ignored. The impulse to go into the digital frontier is the right impulse. Still, it must be paired with a reflective lens willing to wait for God's Spirit, do it in a way that understands culture and context (avoiding the mistakes of the past), and is theologically and missiologically reflective.

This inflection point is also an ignition point, and I see two keys in the ignition switch for launching into God's digital mission. The first is in the hands of those God has called to engage in innovative and creative ministry online, and the other key is in the hands of those God is calling to support and resource this work. Both keys are needed.

God's global work is fueled and on the launching pad in this unique moment in human history, and you have a key. We need to turn our key with faith and obedience. However, doing so without the proper checks and balances or listening to the warning of others and learning from history is destined for disaster. The stakes are high; the power of this form of technology, in my opinion, dwarfs that of the ship or the printing press. The implications of this for humanity and missions are without comparison. Thus, we must listen to those asking good questions and those with prophetic voices. We are entering a time in history when understanding what it means for human flourishing is essential, and as Christians, we have a unique and vital voice in this conversation. We must wield the power of our keys with great humility and wisdom.

## Who Should Go?

Consider how much of your time and relationships are experienced through a digital medium. From email, texting, social media, video conferencing, gaming, messaging, dating, education, shopping, entertainment, and working, more and more of our lives are mediated online. Therefore, the calling to live our lives as witnesses and ambassadors of Jesus and His Kingdom is vital to our engagement with digital technology.

As a result, the digital frontier (a place we are already living large parts of our lives), devoid of the proclamation and demonstration of the Gospel, should be untenable for the follower of Jesus. We are called to go and make disciples of all nations,<sup>16</sup> and we are called to go where people are.

The world is big, and, as a result, Jesus' calling to the disciples to "go" had significant implications. Like Adam and Eve in the garden, followers of Jesus would need to use technology to accomplish God's mission. The Church in Acts uses the Roman road system, ships and shipping lanes, written letters, etc. The Church, throughout history, used the printing press, airplanes, cars, radio, and television. As the Church looks to the future, people have started to live more and more of their lives online; thus, the Church must discern how to use and enter the digital space of web 1.0 (Internet), web 2.0 (social media), and web 3.0 (metaverse).

As people live more and more of their lives online, we must go where people are but how we go is vital. We must go into the digital frontier wisely, but boldly we must go.

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16. Matthew 28:16-20.

## Chapter 18

### Not Needed . . . But Called, Sent and Invited

by Xavi De Ayala

It was early on in our “missionary career.” We were about to complete our formal two years of Arabic language studies, which according to the then vice president of Global Ministries, Wally Albrecht, was the “eternal” language. He then explained it was “eternal” not because it would be the language spoken in Heaven<sup>1</sup>, but because, as he put it, “It will take you an eternity to learn it!”

After two years of slogging through this, we knew by the time we finished our formal language studies, we would only be at a Grade 6 level of Arabic. While I had a relative degree of speaking fluency, I knew my language was still not strong enough to preach in formal Arabic. I had been offered the opportunity once, and after attempting it, despite long hours of preparation, it was such a disaster, and so personally painful I vowed never to do it again.

We also knew once we finished our language study in the upper Middle East, we would move to our permanent posting in the Arabian Peninsula, which at the time was home to 52 million Arab Muslims who were 99.9999 percent followers of the religion of the Prophet.

Based on our grasp of the language, we were beginning to understand what we possibly could and could not do. At the same time, there was a growing realization our initial dreams, thoughts, and lofty aspirations of seeing significant numbers of Gulf Arabs coming to faith and multiple faith communities emerging were not realistic. We knew even if we diligently and studiously kept working at it, we would never really learn the language well enough. Because of this, we also concluded we would never become “insiders” or fully part of the community we were attempting to reach for Jesus. As a result, we started seriously asking if there was still a place for us in the Middle East and, if so, what should our role be? Our hubris bubble had been effectively burst and was replaced by doubt and our first crisis of call.

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1. I am still personally convinced that this would be Mandarin through the sheer volume of Chinese believers.

Contributing to this was something we heard from one of the leaders of the underground Muslim Background Believing fellowship in the Middle Eastern country where we had been undertaking our Arabic language learning. In our meeting with this gentleman, when we asked him whether he felt people like us had a place to serve in the Middle East and, if so, what this role should entail. His response was, “There are not enough of my own people faithfully and boldly loving and preaching the Gospel to the Muslims. So, if you are willing to continue doing this, we still want you here. We also need you to begin the discipleship process to ensure the seekers you are working with are not government informants trying to discover who we are so they could arrest us and shut down our movement. If you are willing to do this, and if need be, get arrested yourself or even kicked out of the country, then once you are sure the Arab Muslims you are working with are genuine believers, you need to be willing to turn them over to us and have nothing more to do with them.”

This was humbling and not what we expected to hear. But we will admit that what this brother told us has informed our ministry and strategy for the rest of the time we have lived and served in the Middle East.

After completing our language studies in the upper Middle East in 2001, we moved to the Arabian Peninsula to join a team recently put together for evangelism, discipleship, and church planting among the Indigenous nationals in the country and region. Our whole team quickly realized that the task was bigger than all of us, including the extended international worker community in the entire region.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, we also learned many of the previous strategies the Alliance and the other mission agencies and international workers had successfully used among different people groups and faith communities (e.g. Muslims in other parts of the world, Hindus, Buddhists, Animists, etc.), were not going to work in the heartland and birthplace of Islam. This caused us to abandon most of these strategies, experiment with new ones, and try to figure out what would work.

The result was many “learning opportunities”<sup>3</sup> of what worked and what didn’t. As a result, our strategies, methodologies, and metrics continued to evolve, pivoting and adjusting when necessary. God was also gracious, enabling us

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2. In the early 2000s, despite over fifty years of modern mission work among the Gulf Arabs, it was estimated that there were most likely still only about 200 individuals from all the different mission agencies and organizations scattered across the seven countries comprising the Arabian Peninsula (Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Yemen) reaching the 52 million Gulf Arabs.

3. The original team leader of the Arabian Peninsula Team told us, “It is only failure if we don’t learn from our mistakes. So, when we try new things, which we need to do, whatever the results are all learning opportunities.”

personally to get into strategic relationships with a national brother and sister and their extended family. We were excited because we felt this husband and wife, Jason and Nancy,<sup>4</sup> were the “man and woman” of peace<sup>5</sup> who could influence the extended family if they themselves came to faith in Christ.

Over the next few years, we met with this family a minimum of once a week. Even though the context of our get-togethers was primarily social, we had numerous opportunities to discuss and present biblical truth. God opened the door for us to present the Gospel innumerable times. We often had lengthy informal Bible studies. One Christmas, we gave every family in this clan a copy of Scripture in Arabic, a *JESUS* video, and a few other evangelistic materials. Jim<sup>6</sup>, the brother of Jason and Nancy (who also became my best friend), even came with his wife and children to our international church to attend and participate in a few of our Christmas outreach services, to hear me preach, and to join our other fellowship gatherings. At least once a week, I would have coffee with Jim. We would have deep conversations during these times where I would often present Scripture stories and truth to him. We often had the opportunity to ask this extended family what they believed and, more importantly, challenge them about what they had learned as truth from their religion and holy book.

Along with this extended family, we also met regularly for a marriage Bible study with another local gentleman and his foreign, believing wife. In their honour and shame culture, some of these friends even prayed the prayer of salvation though we knew they only did this because they didn’t want to shame us. All these activities and engagements continued for over a decade. While we were thankful for all these God-given and orchestrated opportunities, we still did not see any of these friends make a genuine profession of faith and truly choose to follow Jesus.

It was at the end of our third full term. We were getting ready again to return to Canada for our home assignment. At this time, both my wife and I experienced our second crisis of call. We were both exhausted from all the work we had

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4. For security purposes and to preserve this couple’s identity, these are the names we use to refer to them.

5. This is the same strategy that Jesus asked His disciples to pursue when He sent out the twelve (Matthew 10:5-15; Luke 10:4-12). It is anchored in Jesus’ instructions in Luke 10:5-6 when He told His disciples, “When you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you.” This person then who is welcoming of God’s servants and willing to hear and receive their message is what is generally referred to as the “man or woman” of peace. On account of this, the centurion in Acts 10:1-48 is also generally regarded as a “person of peace” resulting in salvation coming into his whole household as recounted in this story.

6. In all of our communication, written or spoken, Jim is the name we use when referring to Jason and Nancy’s brother. This is also for security just like with Jason and Nancy.

done. We were also extremely frustrated because our friends didn't seem any closer to the Kingdom than when we first started, no matter what we tried. While we could not deny the indicators revealing our friends had moved closer to Jesus, they were still nowhere near becoming His followers. They would make statements like, "We now believe Jesus is more than just a man and a prophet because He always answers when you pray to Him." Because of this, they would not hesitate to ask us to pray for them, especially when faced with impossible situations. Because of what they heard us proclaim and explain from the Holy Bible, they also acknowledged our holy book was not corrupted as they had been taught and raised to believe. They even admitted that contrary to what they also believed and what their religion had taught them, they now saw "real" or genuine followers of Jesus as some of the most moral people they had met. Yet, despite all these, they were still not interested in Jesus and what He offered them. This led us to conclude that perhaps Jason and Nancy were not the persons of peace we initially thought. The other difficult fact we had to acknowledge was that it was time to focus our efforts on others. This meant that while we would maintain our relationships with these friends, we could no longer prioritize them in terms of who we invested most of our time.

As a result, my wife and I wondered if God was finished with our service to Him in the Middle East. We both began to seriously ask God whether He was telling us to return to Canada to serve Him there full time or consider perhaps He was leading us to redeploy to another location, another people group, and/or another team. Fortunately, God revealed how He wanted us to return to continue to serve in the Middle East after our upcoming home assignment. He did this through His word, which can be summed up by one line in the chorus of the song by Bob Kauflin, "Out of the Depths," where it says, "When the harvest time is over, and I still see no fruit, I will wait. I will wait for you."

During our final weekend before departing for home assignment, we sang this song at the international church service we were attending. God used this to affirm His call for us to return. But through this, He also gently but clearly reminded us that while He didn't need us, He was still calling us, sending us, and inviting us to join Him in what He was doing. This is what convinced us not only to return but also to continue to serve Him. Through our role in Global Ministries, He also reminded us that not only had He called us but that He had also intentionally "sent" us through the Alliance.

Through the doors He continues to open—doors for ongoing ministry, gospel conversations, demonstrations of His power through us, and opportunities to proclaim and declare Him—it also continues to be obvious He is still inviting us

to join Him where He is already working, especially in the hearts and minds of people He has already been drawing to Himself (John 6:44).

So, if God continues to call us, send us, and invite us to serve Him even when He doesn't need us, then what has He really called us to, sent us to do, and invited us into? Also, how does this line up with what He wants us to do to accomplish what He said in Matthew 24:14, where it states, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come"?

God used our second crisis of call to open up our hearts and minds so we could see and understand how He wanted us to serve Him and reach those with no access to Jesus where few or none have heard. God also used our good friend and long-term ministry partner Kevin, at the time the Middle East regional director of one of the largest international mission agencies in the world. While we were experiencing our second crisis of call, I got together with Kevin. At this time, he had already shared with me he was finishing his role as regional director. When I asked him what he would do after, he told me, "Every morning after I get up, I will simply ask God what He wants me to do, who He wants me to see, and what He wants me to say. After hearing from Him, I will simply obey and do what He told me to do." I left our meeting wondering how much God would be honoured and pleased if I, too, began to live my life and do ministry like this.

Interestingly, a few years later, while attending the *Abide Bear Fruit* global conference in Thailand, in a breakout session that included international mission leaders like Greg Livingstone<sup>7</sup>, Dr. Dudley Woodberry<sup>8</sup>, and Victor Hashweh<sup>9</sup>, each of these leaders said the same thing. One of the delegates asked these gentlemen, "When you are witnessing to a Muslim, what is your go-to verse?" Each of these gentlemen answered, "I don't have a go-to verse. But every day, first thing in the morning, I ask God what He wants me to do, who He

...every day, first thing in the morning, I ask God what He wants me to do, who He wants me to meet, and what He wants me to say.

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7. Greg Livingstone was influential in the founding of Frontiers, a completely Muslim-focused international mission agency.
  8. Dudley Woodberry was raised in Saudi Arabia where he later returned to pastor an expatriate congregation. He is also the author of many books on how to reach Muslims including "On the Road to Emmaus."
  9. Victor Hashweh was also the Arabic voice of Jesus in the *JESUS* film. Because of his gift of evangelism and public speaking, in the Middle East, he was generally regarded as the Arabic Billy Graham.

wants me to meet, and what He wants me to say. Then whatever God reveals to me or tells me to do and say, including who to meet, that's what I do."

Here are gentlemen who have started international missions movements, led numerous people, including Muslims, to Jesus, and started church planting movements among the people groups God called them to, sent them to, and invited them to love and serve. Yet, despite this, they all shared how they simply started with daily abiding in Jesus. For each of these "giants" and their work among Muslims, they did this for no other reason than to pursue ongoing and growing intimacy with their Lord and Saviour, knowing this brought Jesus much pleasure and glory. They also did this to seek His mind and will so they could obey Him and simply do what He is asking them to do. At the conclusion of this historic gathering<sup>10</sup>, all of the delegates signed the *Abide Bear Fruit* Commitment, where we all covenanted to do the following:

1. **ABIDE in JESUS** (John 15:5, Psalm 1:1-3, 1 John 4:16, "He who abides in Me and I in Him bears much fruit. Without Me, you can do nothing.")

We commit to consistently giving Jesus extravagant time and to make abiding in Him our first priority and foundation of ministry.

2. **Be FILLED with the SPIRIT** (Ephesians 5:18, Acts 2:4, 4:8, 4:31, Acts 1:8, 1 Corinthians 1:17-23, 2:1-5, John 1:1, "Be filled with the Spirit... And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit..., then Peter filled with the Holy Spirit..., ...and they were filled with the Holy Spirit and they spoke the word of God with boldness.")

We commit to seeking to be continually filled with the Holy Spirit that we boldly proclaim Christ, the Word of God.

3. **PREACH the WORD** (2 Timothy 4:2, Mark 4:14, Isaiah 40:8, Acts 28:31, 2 Timothy 2:2, Matthew 28:19-20, "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and teaching..., the sower sows the word..., the grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever..., preach and teach..., faithful men who will in turn teach others.")

We commit to faithfully obey, boldly preach, and widely sow the whole Word of God, making disciples among every Muslim people group by lovingly demonstrating biblical truth.

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10. There were over 1,000 delegates that were at this gathering. Most who came were the practitioners and mission leaders of all the Muslim-focused mission agencies and organizations. Twenty-five percent of the participants were also Muslim Background Believers representing almost every single Muslim people group in the world.

4. **INTERCEDE** (Ephesians 6:18, Acts 1:3, Daniel 9:3, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints..., As they ministered to the Lord and fasted..., make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting.”)

We commit to regularly pray and fast with perseverance, individually and corporately, for church planting movements among every Muslim people group.

5. **DIE DAILY** (Galatians 2:20, John 12:24, Luke 9:23, 1 Corinthians 15:31, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who lives but Christ lives in me..., ...unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies it remains alone, but if it does, it produces much fruit..., if anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily..., I die daily...”)

We commit to follow Jesus, taking up our cross daily for the effective engagement of every Muslim people group.

**CONCLUSION:** “In the love of God, by His grace, and for His glory, we commit to God and each other to abide in Jesus, be filled with the Spirit, preach the Word, intercede, and die daily, believing that every Muslim people group will experience a church planting movement.”

So, if God doesn't need us to do anything, much less reach those without access to Jesus, what is He really calling us into, sending us to do, and inviting us into? More and more, I am convinced it is to first and foremost abide in Jesus, making this the priority and foundation of our ministry ahead of strategy, plans, and especially any of our efforts. What Jesus desires more than anything is a deepening intimacy with Him expressed through our giving and spending extravagant time with Him at the start of each day and all day. After this, He calls us, sends us, and invites us to focus on and live out the other commitments outlined in the *Abide Bear Fruit* Covenant: be filled with the Holy Spirit, preach the Word, faithfully intercede, and die daily to self and the world.

After over twenty years of living and serving overseas working among one of the most resistant, most unresponsive, and most hostile religious communities with still one of the lowest numbers of believers, requiring concerted and even more significant work and workers, we have finally understood how even though God doesn't need us, He still chooses to call us, send us, and invite us to Him—to love Him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). He also calls

us, sends us, and invites us to obey and live out the Great Commission simply as an outflow of the Greatest Commandment.

Because of this, the first call of every international worker, or more simply, every follower of Jesus, is to love Him first with all our being. Everything else, including the needs of the lost, even those who have no access to Jesus, is secondary. This is our primary call and privilege to love the amazing God and Creator of the universe. What is truly unfathomable is how this same all-powerful, all-knowing, omnipresent God of the universe desires and allows His creatures to know and love Him. Only when we do this does He call us, send us, and invite us to serve Him, particularly to reach those without access to Jesus.

We recently visited one of our international workers who lives and serves in Europe among one of the most resistant, least-responsive people groups on the continent. Until today, only two percent out of a total population of 47.35 million (according to the 2020 statistics<sup>11</sup>) of this people group are born-again believers.

While there, our teammates, Paul and Silvia,<sup>12</sup> asked us to join them to visit their neighbours Jess and Mary.<sup>13</sup> Jess and Mary had invited Paul and Silvia to come and see a diorama of a nativity scene Jess annually puts together. This specific nativity scene was an exact miniature replica of the small village Jess was born and raised in. What surprised us was when Jess told us to make sure this diorama accurately reflected all the important stories connected to the birth of Jesus, he went and studied the Bible.

This reminded us how even in a country where the majority of people have rejected their Christian-background Roman Catholic roots, where even the mention of the name of Jesus causes people to walk away and refuse to have any relationship with the person speaking of Jesus, and where it has taken many international workers years just to get invited into the home of their neighbours and friends, God was so obviously speaking and drawing this couple to Himself. He was revealing Himself to Jess and Mary through His Word even though in their religion, the priests did not encourage nor teach their adherents how to read the Scriptures. But even as God was drawing Jess and Mary to Himself, He called, sent, and invited our teammates, Paul and Silvia, to live beside Jess and Mary so they could be His instruments to humanly demonstrate to Jess and Mary His deep love and mercy and to tell them about the Good News of His Gospel.

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11. From [datacommons.org](https://datacommons.org).

12. This is not the real of name of these international workers. To protect their identity, we have changed their names to Paul and Silvia.

13. In the interest of confidentiality and to preserve the identity of Paul and Silvia's neighbours, we changed their names to Jess and Mary.

The other clear evidence is that it really is God who orchestrates all these divine encounters, creates these opportunities, and opens up the necessary doors so we could walk through them for Him, as seen in how Paul and Silvia just moved into this neighbourhood, renting the house directly beside Jess and Mary, barely a year ago.

In this country and among this people group, to be invited into this couple's home within one year of meeting their neighbours is unheard of and next to impossible according to most long-term workers. But then again, we do serve the God of the impossible!

All this powerfully reminded us God truly doesn't need any of us. Still, He does call us, send us, and invite us, first to love Him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and second, to invite those who have no access to Him to know Him and receive His offer of grace, mercy, forgiveness, love, and eternal life. He doesn't need us, but He chooses to demonstrate His love for us by calling us, sending us, and inviting us! Thank you, Jesus!!

## **PART C**

### **ISSUES ABOUT GOING**

## Chapter 19

# Is Modern Missions Colonialism All Over Again?

by Lisa M. Rohrick

A friend of mine is a pastor of outreach at his church in a large Canadian city. In a recent conversation with a long-time congregant, he was asked, “Isn’t Christian mission just colonialism all over again?”

A pastor in a different Canadian city suggested to a Bible study group they take the Kairos Course<sup>1</sup> together. The group rejected the idea as being “too colonial.”

International workers back in Canada for home assignments attended a small group at their home church. They were surprised when one of their closest friends asked what the difference is between what they do overseas and colonialism. It was an honest question from someone who has attended church all her life.

Are these people right? Is the Church’s international mission work colonial?

## Colonialism: Definition and Examples

Before we can answer these questions, we must first define colonialism. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines it as “domination of a people or area by a foreign state or nation; the practice of extending and maintaining a nation’s political and economic control over another people or area.”<sup>2</sup> It notes, “While the word *colonialism* is sometimes considered to encompass non-state forms of influence and domination, as by corporate or religious entities, in general use it is more typically understood as an extension of state power.”<sup>3</sup>

The most well-known examples of colonialism include England, France, Portugal, Spain, and other European countries “discovering” the Americas in the 15th century and claiming portions of those continents for themselves. These explorers were not the “heroes” I was led to believe while colouring maps in grade

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1. A course that explores God’s heart for all nations and challenges Christians to meaningful involvement in giving people access to Jesus where He is not yet known.

2. “Colonialism.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/colonialism>. Accessed 21 Dec 2021.

3 Ibid.

school. While their exploits may have been courageous, as I was taught, their deplorable treatment of Indigenous peoples is not to be overlooked. They settled the new lands, dominating the peoples who already lived there while reasoning because the Indigenous people were nomadic, no one actually owned the land. They believed European nations had this right because “the lands being claimed were *terra nullius*—no man’s land—and therefore open to claim.”<sup>4</sup>

In the 19th century, Germany, Belgium, Italy, and the Netherlands joined the other European colonizers, each trying to grab their share of Africa. “Boundary lines between colonies were often drawn arbitrarily, with little or no attention to ethnic unity, regional economic ties, tribal migratory patterns, or even natural boundaries.”<sup>5</sup> European dominance of the African continent was primarily about financial gain. Countless shiploads of natural resources were stolen from Africa for the economic benefit of European countries and their American colonies. Millions of Africans were enslaved for the same purpose.

Similar stories can be told about India, Australia, and much of Asia.

Not only did colonial powers claim the land as their own, but they typically imposed their own languages, laws, taxes, religion, and other aspects of culture on the Indigenous peoples of the countries they colonized.

## **Missionary Involvement in Colonialism**

To return to my earlier question, is the Church’s international mission work colonial? Sadly, missionaries often opened the doors colonial powers walked through. They became a vanguard of European contact with Indigenous peoples. Having learned local languages, they acted as translators and established diplomatic relations between colonizers and local leaders, often sharing the colonizers’ beliefs of European culture being “better” than others.

Closer to home, in recent years, many Canadians have had our eyes opened to our own colonial past in which missionaries played no small part, especially in the residential schools. “The basic idea was that if Indigenous kids were taken out of their traditional home contexts and educated in a setting defined by the cultural majority, Indigenous peoples would gradually cease to exist as distinct entities. If that happened, the government’s treaty obligations to Indigenous peoples would be dissolved, new land would be opened for industry, and there would be no one

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4. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. *A Knock on the Door: The Essential History of Residential Schools*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press. 2016. 35.

5. Richard A. Webster. “Western Colonialism.” Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Western-colonialism/Partition-of-Africa>, accessed 22 Dec 2021.

around to ask questions about who owned the land before Europeans arrived.”<sup>6</sup>

The report of Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission makes it clear the Canadian government intended to eliminate Indigenous languages and cultures. Their main strategy to accomplish this was through residential schools, dozens of which were established across the country. Children were taken away from their parents “not to educate them, but primarily to break their link to their culture and identity.”<sup>7</sup> Many of these schools, marked by poor educational standards,<sup>8</sup> malnutrition,<sup>9</sup> and “an appalling level of physical and sexual abuse of students,”<sup>10</sup> while funded by the Canadian government, were run by churches (primarily Roman Catholic, Anglican, United, Methodist, and Presbyterian).<sup>11</sup>

We cannot deny that missionary work has been associated with colonialism in Canada and worldwide. With their work endorsed by their governments, European and North American missionaries automatically carried with them the power of that state, whether they wanted it or not or even realized they had it. This power was easy to abuse.

## Mission Opposition to Colonialism

Though flawed, the Church’s global outreach has done much good.

Often, colonialists themselves did not want to have missionaries around. In 1792, the British East India Company had a “Stop Carey!” order to prevent William Carey (often referred to as the “Father of Modern Missions”) from boarding a ship to India. “The company threatened to revoke the sailing license of any ship that gave him passage.”<sup>12</sup> Apparently, the company did not want Carey and other missionaries to disrupt its affairs by preaching justice and other biblical values it was not espousing. But India did appreciate Carey and issued a postage stamp in his honour in 1993.

In an article called “Robert Woodberry and the Benefits of Protestant Missions,” Dr. Andrew Spencer of the Institute for Faith, Work and Economics summarizes the findings of sociologist Robert Woodberry and concludes, “the confusion of

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6. Anthony Siegrist, “Colonialism and Mission: 4 Lessons we must Learn from History” Missionalliance.org blog, 6 Dec 2018. <https://www.missionalliance.org/colonialism-and-mission-4-lessons-we-can-learn-from-history>. Accessed 13 Dec 2021.

7. Truth and Reconciliation, 22.

8. Ibid., 57.

9. Ibid., 72.

10. Ibid., 91.

11. Ibid., 24.

12. W. Harold Fuller. *Sun Like Thunder: Following Jesus on Asia’s Spice Road*. Altona, MB: Friesen Press. 2015. 154.

missions and colonialism ... appears to be in error.”<sup>13</sup>

Spencer goes on to explore Woodberry’s findings, the validity of which has been accepted by independent reviewers, and says they are “overwhelmingly positive about the impact of the gospel.”<sup>14</sup> He quotes Woodberry’s argument “that CPs [Conversionary Protestants] were a crucial catalyst initiating the development and spread of religious liberty, mass education, mass printing, newspapers, voluntary organizations,”<sup>15</sup> etc. I would also add missionaries contributed to healthcare and the preservation of Indigenous languages.

Most definitely, sin and abuse have been part of mission history. Yet we see a strong correlation between the advance of the Gospel and the common good for many people who received it. Around the world, millions of lives have been transformed by faith in the Saviour who loves them. We are ashamed of the sin and abuse in our past, but, like the Apostle Paul, we must not be ashamed of the Gospel (see Romans 1:16).

## What Right Do We Have?

The question remains, what right do Christians have to go to other cultures and critique their religions in favour of Christianity?

Simply put, reaching the nations with the Gospel of Jesus Christ is at the centre of the biblical message.

In Genesis chapter 12, God called Abram (whose name was changed to Abraham), promising to make him into a great nation and to bless him. “And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:3). This wasn’t a one-time promise but is repeated multiple times throughout Scripture (see, for example, Genesis 22:17-18; 26:2-4). God’s intention from the beginning was to use His people to bless all the peoples of the earth.

There are many ways God blesses people, but the greatest, most far-reaching way, was by sending His own Son, Jesus Christ, to be the Saviour of the world. Jesus was a direct descendent of Abraham, the One who was promised to him in Genesis 22:18, “...through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed.”

The Apostle Paul takes the guesswork out of this interpretation for us. In speaking of Gentiles being saved through faith in Jesus Christ, he wrote, “Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture

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13. Andrew Spencer. “Robert Woodberry and the Benefits of Protestant Missions.” May 28, 2015. <https://tifwe.org/robert-woodberry-and-the-benefits-of-protestant-missions>. Accessed 7 Jan 2022.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith and announced the Gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you’” (Galatians 3:8).

There are those who would like to believe all peoples are automatically blessed (and saved) simply because Jesus came, was crucified, and raised back to life. But this is not the teaching of Scripture. Nor is it the teaching of Jesus Himself. In explaining His own mission near the beginning of His ministry, Jesus said, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that *whoever believes in him* shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16, emphasis added). Then, the night before His death, He told His disciples, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

In his letter to the church in Rome, Paul further develops this idea. “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?” (Romans 10:13-15). People need to know Jesus.<sup>16</sup>

What right do we have to go to other cultures and introduce them to Jesus? Jesus, Himself, gave us the command. After His death and resurrection, just before returning to His Father, Jesus gathered His disciples and told them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:18-20). We have the right, and responsibility, to take the Gospel to the nations because the one who has all authority has commanded us to do it. But we must do it with humility, recognizing we are prone to sin, including arrogance and blindness to our own cultural bias.

What right do we have to go to other cultures and introduce them to Jesus? Jesus, Himself, gave us the command.

## **Biblical Mission vs. Colonialism**

What, then, is the difference between biblical mission and colonialism?

The first distinction is that colonialism destroys cultures, assimilating them into the culture of the colonizers; biblical mission respects cultures. Jesus commanded us to make disciples of all nations. The word translated as ‘nations’ is the Greek

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16. For a more thorough discussion of how much they must know of Him, see [Chapter 11](#).

word *ethne*, from which we get the English word ‘ethnic.’ This is not about geopolitical countries (of which there are 195 in the world), but about people groups (of which there are over 17,000 in the world), distinguished by things such as language, ethnicity, culture, and religion.<sup>17</sup> This mission will be successful. In his beautiful vision of the throne room of heaven, the Apostle John reports seeing “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:9). Heaven is not a giant melting pot where all people lose their languages and cultural distinctives. Rather, each one will be represented, and each language will be spoken.

God is not interested in merging all people into one culture, not even the culture of the Jews, the ones He chose to be a channel of blessing for all others. Some of the early Christ-followers among the Jews thought non-Jews needed to observe Jewish law and customs in order to be saved. “Certain individuals ... were teaching the believers, ‘Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved’” (Acts 15:1). Circumcision was the sign of the covenant between God and the Jewish people, and all Jewish males were to be circumcised (Genesis 17:10). Jesus introduced a new covenant in His blood (Luke 22:20), but the Jewish believers were slow to let go of the old one. This led to lots of discussion and disagreement, and “the apostles and elders met to consider this question” (Acts 15:6). They concluded that the Gentile believers did not have to become cultural Jews to follow Jesus.

On another occasion, Paul confronted Peter (Cephas), asking him, “How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?” (Galatians 2:14). Paul never imposed his own culture on converts from other cultures. To the Corinthians, he wrote, “... each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them.... Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised” (1 Corinthians 7:17-18). The biblical mission does not elevate one culture over another.

Throughout history, colonialists imposed their languages on the regions they colonized. As a result, English and French are still widely spoken in Africa today. And while English is no longer the official language of India, it is still commonly used for official purposes. While some missionaries do work through translators, many of them learn the language of their host culture. Most workers sent out with The Alliance Canada spend their first two years in their country of service studying the language and culture of the people they are working amongst.

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17. The Joshua Project. *How Many People Groups are There?* <https://joshuaproject.net/resources/articles/how-many-people-groups-are-there>. Accessed 10 Jan 2022.

Among other groups, Wycliffe Bible Translators aim to see the Scriptures translated into every language spoken on earth. “One of the ripple effects of Bible translation is that languages are preserved and strengthened.”<sup>18</sup> SIL, one of Wycliffe’s partner organizations, “recognises the value of individual languages and believes that each language is a unique expression of culture and worldview. SIL is dedicated to coming alongside language communities as they strive to preserve their languages and identities.”<sup>19</sup>

A second difference between colonialism and biblical mission is how colonialism imposes its culture, values and religion on others, while biblical mission only invites.

A second difference between colonialism and biblical mission is how colonialism imposes its culture, values and religion on others, while biblical mission only invites. The world has changed since the colonial era, and Western mission workers no longer have the option of flexing the state’s power, imposing government and religious structures together. International workers no longer walk hand-in-hand with the governments of their sending countries, and the gap between the two is continually widening.

We believe people deserve to hear the story of God’s word and salvation in Jesus Christ to decide for themselves who they will follow. But we will not force them to believe or adopt our religious customs, as some other religions do. Yes, we “implore [people] ...to be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20), but they have the free choice to reject Him.

Even Jesus let people walk away. He forced no one to follow. In John 6, Jesus delivered difficult teaching about being the bread of life. “From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him” (John 6:66). Jesus then asked His twelve closest disciples if they wanted to leave as well, giving them the option. Another time, a wealthy man asked Jesus what he needed to do to be saved. “Jesus looked at him and loved him” (Mark 10:21) and proceeded to tell him he needed to sell everything, give his money away, and follow Him. Hearing this, “the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth” (10:22). There was no coercion or bargaining; the man made his choice. After all, Jesus wants the hearts of His followers, not just their outward submission. Forced love is no love at all.

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18. Wycliffe Bible Translators. *What’s an Endangered Language?* <https://wycliffe.sg/news/whats-endangered-language>. Accessed 10 Jan 2022.

19. Ibid.

One last difference between colonialism and biblical mission I will mention is colonialism is about economic gain at the expense of the colonized. In contrast, biblical mission is about giving what we have freely received, spiritually and physically (see Matthew 10:8). This often includes contributing to the local economy.

One strategy which has grown significantly in recent years is known as “Business as Mission” (BAM). The idea is to run profitable and sustainable businesses in economically poor areas. Local employees earn a good living and learn about the ethical running of a business while at the same time working alongside Kingdom-minded people who may be able to share the hope they have. Other mission initiatives involve teaching trades such as sewing, welding, shopkeeping, carpentry, and many others, giving people tools with which they can earn a living. Workers among refugees and internally displaced people offer education, language lessons, and job-finding skills. These things aim to help people’s economic position instead of exploiting them for their own gain.

The face of modern missions is changing to no longer just be Europeans and North Americans seeking to obey the Great Commission. The global south is taking the lead in many mission endeavours, with no ties whatsoever to colonial advances. The Alliance World Fellowship (AWF) has member churches from eighty-eight countries around the globe, an increasing number of which are engaged in cross-cultural missions. One of AWF’s stated goals is to “facilitate cooperation amongst its members (churches and organizations) as they work to fulfill the Great Commission.”<sup>20</sup> It’s about taking the Gospel “from everywhere, to everywhere.”

The biblical mission is about sharing the Good News Jesus commanded us to share with the world and is not about the extension of political or economic control. Thus, it is entirely separate from colonialism.

## **Dealing with Our Past, Moving Ahead**

Where do we go from here? A friend of mind from the Caribbean nation of Antigua told me he is grateful for missionaries who went to his country, without whom he and his family would not know Jesus. In a conversation about the dark elements of mission history, he said, “We need to correct, but not over-correct.”

We need to correct it. While the biblical mission is not colonial, we must acknowledge there were times in our past when the mission movement more closely followed the cultures and prejudices of its sending countries than the biblical mandate. Sometimes this was intentional, other times out of ignorance. Either way, harm has been done and cannot be ignored.

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20. Alliance World Fellowship. <https://awf.world/ourglobalchange>. Accessed 12 Jan 2022.

It is essential to understand the sins of the past and our own country's complicity in these things. Author Anthony Siegrist, who pastors a Mennonite church in Ottawa, suggests, "The time is coming, if it isn't here already, when people will simply not take seriously a faith community that has not grappled with its past," and, "We must respond to our failures throughout history with confession, rather than defensiveness."<sup>21</sup>

The International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention commissioned the Barna Group to study young Christian adults' perspectives on missions. The resulting report, published in 2020, advises mission organizations not to ignore the past. "Christians aged 18 to 34 are more likely than older adults to express concern about missions' past. One-third agrees that 'in the past, missions work has been unethical.'"<sup>22</sup> They specifically refer to colonialism and want to talk about it and wrestle through what happened. Will we have the courage to engage in these conversations?

Acknowledgment is a good start, but it doesn't necessarily lead to correction. Siegrist suggests "course corrections" to avoid colonization in missions, an important one being, "we must partner with the very people we say we long to serve."<sup>23</sup> A West African proverb tells us the one who lives in a house knows where the roof leaks. We need to be careful not to assume we understand the challenges in our host countries or know the best way forward in a given ministry, but to listen to locals and seek ways to empower them to lead.

In addition to partnering with local believers, we will be less likely to fall into past errors as we recruit a more diverse force of international workers. Very encouraging steps are being taken through the Alliance World Fellowship as more and more partnerships are being established. In the first year of the global pandemic, "twenty-three national Alliance churches ... [worked] together to help vulnerable communities affected by COVID-19 through long-term development projects."<sup>24</sup> In addition, "twenty-one national Alliance churches are partnering in different missionary projects."<sup>25</sup>

A big challenge continues to be in the area of finances since both giver and receiver tend to accept the one who pays is the one who makes the decisions. "Money is power," the saying goes. Radical changes in the global political scene

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21. Siegrist.

22. Barna. *The Future of Missions: 10 Questions About Global Ministry the Church Must Answer with the Next Generation*. Barna Group. 2020, question 2. Webinar, 12 Aug 2020.

23. Siegrist.

24. Alliance World Fellowship. *The Gospel is Advancing Amid the Pandemic*, 6 Jan 2021. <https://awf.world/awf-news/the-gospel-is-advancing-amid-the-pandemic>. Accessed 17 Jan 2022.

25. Ibid.

since the colonial era mean the Church no longer carries the power of the state, thankfully protecting us from committing some of the horrible abuses of the past. But Western workers often receive higher salaries and have access to far more money than their colleagues from other areas of the world. How do we keep from using our finances as a means of control? The dialogue must continue.

We need to correct, but not over-correct. If one is speeding down a highway and heading for a ditch, an over-correction will not prevent an accident but will propel the car into the other ditch! If aligning too closely with colonial powers is one ditch on the road of world mission, the opposite ditch is abandoning the job altogether.

We have been given a task from our Master, the One with all authority. He has commanded us to make disciples of all people groups on earth, and we must not abandon our assignment. But we can change its name and use different vocabulary. In fact, many of us already do. In the twenty years I spent in West Africa with the Alliance, I rarely identified myself as a “missionary,” wanting to distance myself from the misconception of missionaries ruining cultures and stuffing religion down people’s throats. I got far more positive reactions from people if I told them I was involved in community development (which was true). I don’t think the label is important, but the task we’ve been given is crucial. With humility and a desire to learn, we must carry on.

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations [people groups], and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14).

If aligning too closely with colonial powers is one ditch on the road of world mission, the opposite ditch is abandoning the job altogether.

## Chapter 20

# Rethinking *Pray, Give, Go*: Forging Transformational Intercultural Partnerships

by Bruce Edwards

As a young person growing up in a missions-oriented church, I was practically weaned on the mantra “PRAY, GIVE, GO.” It was a simple way to approach missions: All of us can PRAY, most of us can GIVE, and some of us can GO. Working it the other way around, the message was, “God calls all of us to GO. If you can’t GO, then GIVE so someone else can GO. If you can’t GIVE, then you can at least PRAY.” Of course, I am oversimplifying it, but this is how the message came home to me.

## Words Shape Our Thinking

These words had an impact on my thinking about missions.

1. I felt guilty for not wanting to GO.
2. I believed GIVING and PRAYING were less important and secondary to GOING.
3. I believed the real business of missions happened ‘out there’ where the GOERS were.
4. I also believed there were basically two options for me regarding missions: go all in by GOING or sit back and be a silent partner with no hands-on involvement in global evangelization.

Over thirty years ago, Charles Handy wrote, “Words are the bugles of social change. When our language changes, behavior will not be far behind.”<sup>1</sup> The converse of this may also be true; when our language does not change, behaviour also may not change!

Language shaped my youthful thinking about missions, but does our missions language still shape our thinking to the point of trapping us in the behavioural patterns of a couple

...does our missions language still shape our thinking to the point of trapping us in the behavioural patterns of a couple of generations ago?

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1. *The Age of Unreason*, Harvard Business School Press, 1989, p. 17.

of generations ago? Is our missions language actually limiting the creativity we can bring to this Great Commission of the Church? I believe it is. Recently, a representative of a younger generation shared with me that the word ‘missions’ carries so much baggage of colonialism, racism, and abuse that it is a relatively ‘bad’ word for youthful believers today. So, we can struggle to redeem the word or find a new term without the old baggage!

Handy goes on to say, “New ways of thinking about familiar things can release new energies and make all manner of things possible,”<sup>2</sup> and “New imagery, signaled by new words, is as important as new theory; indeed new theory without new imagery can go unnoticed.”<sup>3</sup>

### **Does Our Missions Language Lead To Systemic Condescension?**

When I first heard and read about systemic racism and systemic sexism, my immediate reaction was, “I am certainly not one of those! I am neither racist nor sexist.” But on closer and deeper self-examination, I became aware of some deeply ingrained attitudes that, while not qualifying as blatantly sexist or racist, still unconsciously shaped my thinking and impacted my decisions. Becoming aware of these tendencies is, I believe, the first step to combatting what is a kind of ‘sexism lite’ or ‘racism lite’ we see as innocuous in ourselves but others see as dangerous seeds which could bear hurtful and injurious fruit.

Let’s look at some of the missions language and ask if it needs rethinking for a new generation.

### **What about “Mission”?**

Aside from the baggage mentioned above, the word is task-oriented. It is about a job to do rather than a relationship to be cultivated. Once the ‘mission’ is accomplished, we can return ‘home’ and resume our lives. The implication is that this is a special and perhaps important task, but it is not necessarily ‘normal’ life. Is the ‘mission’ of the Church to plant more churches or to grow the Body of Christ? Planting churches is a task that can be accomplished and then deemed complete, while growing the Body of Christ will not be finished until Christ returns. Growing the Body of Christ must be a way of life more than a mission; it must be ‘normal’ living for the Christ-follower.

The word also fosters systemic condescension. The trajectory of ‘mission’ is from the haves to the have-nots, from the rich to the poor, from the informed to the uninformed; it is taking something ‘good’ to people who do not have that

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2. Ibid., p. 24.

3. Ibid., p. 25.

‘good’ and who we believe need it. We are charged to bring the Gospel to those who have never heard it; however, we must be careful that the way we bring it does not imply that we are superior beings who have ‘arrived’ while they are poor, needy, and somehow ‘lesser’ than we are. Like systemic sexism or racism, we may harbour condescending attitudes, which could be destructive to the message we are preaching.

The incarnation of the Eternal Son of God was a perfect and pure condescension telling the poor and needy they were infinitely valuable to God. Our mission work may tell the ‘poor and needy’ as much about our sense of personal sacrifice as it tells about their value to God.

### **Then There’s “Cross-Cultural”**

In the strictest sense, the term may be acceptable, but common usage in mission language has enough systemic condescension to it that we need to rethink the idea. Cross-cultural refers to stepping out of one culture and entering into another so we can bring something to people from the culture. There is a one-way movement to the idea, which, if we are honest, suggests a superior-to-inferior relationship. It might even be said it implies the receiving culture is somehow deficient.

When my wife and I went to Africa to serve in the ‘mission’ of the Church, we had no anticipation of being enriched by another culture; we only thought of enriching the other culture with our message of salvation through Christ. Our eyes and spirits were gradually opened up to a more two-way intercultural experience, both giving and receiving. We met people who had deep joy despite their meagre possessions. We were challenged to value relationships more than position or influence.

As long as the Church in the developed world sees ‘cross-cultural’ as a predominantly one-way movement, the Church will have a tendency to a smug self-confidence that does not wear well with the people of the rest of the world. If missions is done with a we-know-what’s-best-for-you attitude, there will likely be a limited openness to the message we preach. Changing the language we use can help change the attitude it fosters.

### **Redecorating or Renovating?**

I believe this generation of Christ-followers needs a *renovation* in how missions happens, not just *redecorating*. When we redecorate, we

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change the wall colour and the furnishings, but the structure of the home stays the same. New language can be more of a change of colour and new furnishings than a renovation of the structure itself. In our missions' thinking and work, we need to knock down some walls and open up some spaces for a new way of living as the Family of God.

I do not wish to offend anyone, but terms like UPGs (Unreached People Groups), 10/40 Window, homogeneous units, and even "On Mission: Everyone, Everywhere, All the Time" are more akin to redecorating than renovating. The same agencies continue to make the decisions, recruit the workers, and assign the tasks. So, it's the same structure but with fresh colours and furniture. These terms were all good for a season, getting fresh enthusiasm for the same fundamental 'mission,' though in different parts of the world and different nations. You may change the wall colours and the furniture, but you will soon settle back into the same old routines and behaviours if the structure doesn't change.

### **How Do We Go About Renovating?**

A good renovation needs a good plan, and I confess I don't have one. I have some ideas, but I don't have a plan. A good renovation cannot happen without consulting the people who will live in the renovated building. If we try renovating missions thinking using only input from developed-world churches, we will be showing our systemic condescension. We need input from non-Western Christ-followers as well as Western ones. It will probably be messy, and there will be mistakes along the way, but the new structure may turn out to be amazing and transformational.

A renovation specialist will ask many questions before coming up with a plan. Questions like, what do you want to do in this space? How do you want to feel when you are in the space? What are your dreams about how you will live in this space? Let me share some of my dreams for renovating missions in the Church today.

### **Flattening the Decision-Making Mountain**

My missions experience has always been of a sending agency that determines the plan, raises funds, chooses (and maybe trains) the workers, and sends them out 'on mission.' The local church becomes a source of funds and prospective workers. The funds and the workers get funnelled into the decision-making process and are sent out. The receiving culture has little or no say in what is happening; the workers arrive and set up shop to work. The sending church is informed of what is going on but remains a distant source of cash support, prayer support, emotional support, and sometimes short-term teams for the international worker.

Not too many years ago, it seemed how missions worked was that the international worker went up the mountain to receive instructions from the decision-makers and strategists and then descended the mountain to carry out those instructions. More recently, there are increasing levels of consultation in the process, but for the sending church, it might as well still be the up-the-mountain-down-the-mountain process. The sending church is left back in the last century to do the PRAY, GIVE, GO part of missions. How can we flatten the decision-making mountain and involve the sending church as an active participant, not just a praying and giving silent partner?

### **Not a Missions Task but an Intercultural Partnership**

I realize 'Intercultural Partnership' isn't exactly a bugle call of change, but it begins to frame our mission activity as a relationship of equals, not haves and have-nots. In some ways, I am saying that we need to move from a complementarian view of missions to an egalitarian view of missions. It will not be possible in every situation, but as soon as there is even a small group of believers in the receiving culture, they need to be involved in planning and strategizing for the growth of the Body of Christ in their locality. In some circumstances, it could be two or three churches in a country like Canada partnering with two or three churches in a developing country to send a team into a third country to share the Gospel and watch Christ build His Church there.

...we need to move from a complementarian view of missions to an egalitarian view of missions.

### **The Missions Agency as Relationship Broker and Coach**

As a pastor, I have counselled many couples in the months leading up to their marriage. However, once their vows have been exchanged, it is my job to stand back and let them develop their relationship while being prepared to be a coach and advisor should they ask for help.

When it comes to growing the Body of Christ internationally, I dream of the former missions agency being absorbed into an international association of globally-minded churches (the Alliance World Fellowship could actually become this association) with three functions.

1. **Setting standards and best practices.** To be part of the association, member churches would agree to follow common standards and best practices.
2. **Matchmaker.** The Association would be a relationship broker, bringing

groups of churches together into relationships spanning oceans and continents. For example, three churches in Edmonton, Alberta, could partner with two churches in Lima, Peru, and a team in Spain to grow the Body of Christ in Spain. The partnership would be for a minimum of five years (renewable). The churches in Lima and Edmonton and the team in Spain would work out the goals, budget, and personnel for their joint ministry in Spain.

- 3. Coach.** In an age when we have life coaches, relationship coaches, spiritual mentors, and guides for various aspects of living, the Association could function as a coach for the Intercultural Partnership. The coach would not tell the member churches what to do but would be available to offer wisdom and insight into how to grow the relationship and make it effective. The beauty of this is that the 'specialist' knowledge is readily available today, and we no longer have to go up the mountain to get the advice of the specialists!

Of course, this implies the brokered relationship should be a long-term relationship growing as the various churches in the partnership grow, a relationship in which all the parties enrich each other through working together for the growth of Christ's Church. It would not be a till-death-do-us-part relationship, but longevity would deepen and enrich the relationship, making it transformational for everyone involved.

### **Deep and Narrow, Not Broad and Shallow**

The Builder generation, and to a certain extent the Boomer generation, wanted to be part of a large organization with global aspirations. Success was sometimes measured by the number of international workers deployed and the number of countries in which they were deployed. This broad and shallow approach, totally appropriate for one generation, is probably not for the present one.

Today's generation wants to make a difference that is more personal. An older generation felt they were making a difference by giving a little bit to each of many projects; a younger generation wants to make a difference by giving deeply to one or two projects they can personally follow and pray for. It is a narrow focus with a deep and hands-on involvement.

As a young person growing up, I was acquainted with many missionaries. My parents made a point of having them in our home at almost every opportunity. But that acquaintance did not translate into personal knowledge of those missionaries. What's more, I could easily forget what kind of ministry each of them had.

What would it be like if a young person in a Western church grew up not just acquainted with five or six international workers but knowing them more personally, participating in their ministry, knowing their families, knowing their successes and failures and praying through those experiences with them? This is just one possibility if the young person is in a church engaged in a long-term Intercultural Partnership for the Gospel.

Imagine the impact of a partnership like the Edmonton-Lima-Spain one I suggested above. Short-term teams might be 50/50 Canadian/Peruvian. Teams from the Lima churches might come to Edmonton to train workers for short-term teams. A musical group might come from Spain to minister in Lima and Edmonton. Online prayer meetings could be three-way, depending on timing, and would not be about someone else's ministry but about 'our' shared ministry and 'our' people. I believe this kind of partnership would grow believers who have an international perspective and a commitment to be part of growing the Body of Christ worldwide, not just in their corner of the world.

Imagine the impact if a group of businesspeople in the Edmonton and Lima churches saw an opportunity to develop a business in the city, town, or region where the team in Spain was working. What about people who work from home with a global team connecting remotely? Could an individual from Edmonton or Lima relocate to Spain and continue with their job by working remotely? There are all kinds of possibilities.

### **Shared Ministry Personnel**

It is possible the group of churches in the Intercultural Partnership could share one or two ministry people among them. The three Edmonton churches might jointly hire a global impact pastor who would spend time in each church, keeping the vision alive and coaching the church members involved with the partnership. This pastor would spend four to six weeks each year working with the team in Spain as well as working with the Edmonton churches. They would have a counterpart in Lima, leading global impact there.

For years The Alliance Canada has required prospective international workers to demonstrate their ministry effectiveness by serving at least two years in a 'home' ministry before serving in another country. Would we not develop the global church if we

Would we not develop the global church if we required pastors who serve in Canada to spend at least one year...in ministry in another cultural setting...

required pastors who serve in Canada to spend at least one year (why not two?) in ministry in another cultural setting before taking up ministry in Canada? Another option would be to require Canadian pastors to engage in ministry in another cultural setting for a minimum of four weeks every two years. The Intercultural Partnership would be the ideal setting for this.

### **Shared Ministry Responsibility**

Wherever there is privilege, there is also responsibility. I see it as a great privilege for a group of churches to enter into a working partnership where together they determine, under God, the direction and scope of a ministry, including a budget, personnel, equipment, and other expenses. I believe fundraising changes dramatically when church members look at the partnership and say, “This is our mission. God gave us the vision. We joined together and hired the people. We made the commitment. These are *our* people (*our* family) in Spain (or wherever it is). If we don’t raise funds, they won’t be able to do the ministry. We need to stand with them shoulder to shoulder and ensure they have what is needed to do their ministry.” It is no longer a missions agency making a year-end appeal for funds to support 300 international workers in 50 countries. Instead, it is a group of five or six churches saying, “These are *our* people doing the work God gave us. We have no choice but to find the funds.” This is going deep and hands-on.

### **Speaking of Money**

Setting budgets and planning to share the Gospel in a particular city or region of our globe is no easy task. It requires input from experienced people. But this does not mean the planning and budgeting must be centralized in a missions agency or denominational headquarters. This is where the international association of globally-minded churches mentioned above can coach the Intercultural Partnership on how to proceed.

Just as a first-time homebuyer or investor needs expert advice, the Intercultural Partnership churches will also need guidance. When a group of churches comes together to plan for ministry in another part of the world, their hearts will soon be inextricably linked to the ministry they are doing.

Jesus told His followers, “...where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21). The corollary of this statement is, “Put your treasure where you want your heart to be!” When I donate to a missions agency with 300 workers in 50 countries, my treasure ends up too far away for my heart to be there! On the other hand, when I give to a specific ministry project partnered with my church and four or five other churches, I know where my treasure is invested, and my

heart can follow.

This money question is where ‘deep and narrow’ engagement will reap huge rewards. When I visit the ministry developed by my Intercultural Partnership, I will not only get to know the ministry workers who come from my part of the world but will also develop friendships with local believers. Those relationships will grow over time because the Intercultural Partnership is for a minimum of five years and could be renewed. Those friendships will immensely broaden my sense of what it means to be a Christ-follower, and my commitment to share the Gospel in my home community will also be deepened. On top of it all (dare I mention it?), the ‘deep and narrow’ engagement will likely result in greater funding for what we call the ‘mission’ of the Church than the ‘broad and shallow’ approach would do with young Christ-followers today.

### **Rethinking *Pray, Give, Go***

I dream of being part of a relationship that transforms my youthful understanding of the PRAY, GIVE, GO mantra. I don’t want the question to be, “Will you PRAY, or GIVE, or GO?” Rather, it should be “Will you Pray AND Give AND Go?” And the answer should be, “YES, and YES, and YES! I will do all three as my church partners interculturally with other churches and believers to grow the Body of Christ in our world.” I dream of feeling my church family is not limited to the geographic region where I live, but I have true brothers and sisters in Christ in other parts of the world who have ministered to me just as much as I have ministered to them. And I dream of finding youthful Christ-followers who will carry this vision forward.

## Chapter 21

### Oneness with Diverse Abilities and Disabilities

by Cynthia Tam

It has become customary to speak of fellowship, service, and witness as the three dimensions of the Church's mission. I believe that careful reflection will show that this is a mistake. The basic reality is the creation of a new being through the presence of the Holy Spirit. This new being is the common life (koinonia) in the Church. It is out of this new creation that both service and evangelism spring, and from it they receive their value.<sup>1</sup>

Leslie Newbigin

Living in Toronto city core, many church buildings are turned into condominium apartments, community centres, or sold for redevelopment. The decline of the Church is a reality and a call for us to reimagine the Church in this dramatically changing time. The change in the religious landscape began many years ago. In 1974, Leslie Newbigin returned to the United Kingdom after serving in the mission field and was struck by how much the Western world needed re-missioning. Since then, Newbigin has been a vital voice inspiring and challenging the Church to reconsider what it means for us to be a Church on mission. For Newbigin, a missionary Church embodies the Gospel in our inner life so we can be a "sign, instrument, and foretaste" of the reign of God. Seeing the Church as an eschatological sign and a current reality of the rule of Christ led Newbigin to his passionate concern for the unity of the Church. He alleges the Church's unity is a preview of God's purpose to "unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth (Ephesians 1:10)."<sup>2</sup>

When we think about unity, a common concern is how to bring people with different opinions or backgrounds together; the need to unite people with various abilities is often neglected. Yet, if we look at people in our circle of friends and family, we will see differences in abilities because God has made each of us

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1. Newbigin, *One Body*, 20.

2. Goheen, *Church and Its Vocation*, 63.

unique and has gifted us differently. Regardless of social and ethnic backgrounds, anywhere we go, we will see some people more able than others in physical strengths and mental capacity, while others have visible or invisible disabilities. In this chapter, I want to use this common variability in humanity to demonstrate how the unity of people with all abilities is a significant sign of God's impartial love and a foretaste of God's Kingdom.

## **Ability vs. Disability, Is There a Dividing Line?**

To begin with, we need to consider the concept of disability. With the stick figure in a wheelchair indicating reserved parking or entranceway to buildings, we often associate "disability" with mobility difficulties. Yet, the term "disability" may refer to a wide range of human experiences such as autism, schizophrenia, paraplegia, Alzheimer's, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, multiple sclerosis, cystic fibrosis, and many other medical conditions. Some people are born with a disabling condition. Others acquire a disability from a disease or an accident. Looking at the idea of disability this way, we should realize that all of us can potentially become "disabled;" if not at birth, it might result from aging, sickness, or an accident. It also means disability is a common human predicament all peoples, Christians and non-Christians, might experience in various degrees temporarily, gradually, or permanently. We need to ask then whether the term "disability" is meaningful at all!

From the medical and social service perspectives, giving a medical condition a name is necessary for access to appropriate care and support. However, the naming of the disease and disability is a double whammy. It often triggers a social reaction, prejudice, discrimination, and sometimes leads to abuse.<sup>3</sup> Pushing back as a suppressed group, disability activists advocate for their rights to be recognized and respected. An "us" versus "them" discourse emerged in the process.<sup>4</sup> Being part of society, the Church's division between the abled and the disabled exists. How can or should we avoid the "us" versus "them" scenario and be united as one Body in Christ is a question we must consider.

In 1 Corinthians 12:22-23, Paul says, "On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor..." The words "seem" and "we think" are essential. The indication is that we may easily see people with visible weaknesses wrongly and think they are not essential parts of the Body of Christ. For the Church

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3. Corrigan, "Introduction." Kindle.

4. Solvang, "Emergence of an Us and Them," 3-20.

to be whole, the seemingly weak members should not feel like they do not belong; those who think they are stronger need to recognize that every person is a bearer of God's gift for the common good of the Body (1 Corinthians 12:7). The Spirit is the one who assigns the role to each part of the Body (1 Corinthians 12:11). Therefore, we need every member to be included for the Body to be whole. This interdependent and loving relationship is how the Body can signify to the world that we, people with different abilities, are all loved by God.

If the Church allows disability-related stigma to prevent the participation of people with disabilities, we suffer a considerable loss of the gifts God brings to the Body of Christ. For example, without an accessible environment, the Church would not have benefited from the evangelistic skills of Joni Eareckson Tada, who has quadriplegia from a diving accident.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, as Stephen Bedard has shown us, we might fail to see how a person with autism can be a nurturing pastor and prolific writer.<sup>6</sup>

If the Church allows disability-related stigma to prevent the participation of people with disabilities, we suffer a considerable loss of the gifts God brings to the Body of Christ.

## **Belonging with People with Disabilities as One Body**

If we accept disability as a common human experience, we should expect to see people with disabilities in Christian communities. Moreover, knowing one in five Canadians has a disability should mean many people with various disabilities are in our churches.<sup>7</sup> However, I often heard pastors informing me they only have a few people with disabilities in their churches or none at all. There are many reasons for this. Some disabilities are not visible, and some people with disabilities may not want to reveal their situations publicly. Still, we cannot ignore the reports of unwelcome attitudes experienced by people with disabilities and their families in the church.

The unwelcoming experience may not mean people with disabilities cannot attend church services. On the contrary, in a literature review, Erik Carter finds welcoming persons with disabilities have been "written into more than one hundred position statements and resolutions issued by denominational and

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5. See the biographical information on <https://www.joniandfriends.org/about/our-history/>

6. See Bedard's book, *Autistic Pastor*.

7. Morris, Stuart, et al., "A Demographic."

faith groups over the last few decades.”<sup>8</sup> However, translating the welcoming statement into practice remains a struggle for many congregations. A vital issue with the congregational welcome of people with disabilities, as identified by Carter, is the narrow focus on physical presence while neglecting the importance of relationships. As such, people with disabilities who have been included in the church in terms of being able to attend church services did not find themselves part of their church community.<sup>9</sup> In other words, many churches have opened their doors to people with disabilities but do not find belonging. Many left the church. Some even lost their faith.

Often, the participation of people with disabilities is limited to “special” ministries, which separate them from the main body of the church.<sup>10</sup> As a consultant to churches, Brett Webb-Mitchell finds these ministries are organized *for* people with disabilities as an outreach and service type of ministries instead of being a church *with* them. Ministering *to* is a gesture of the carers exercising power and giving care to the receivers. It indicates a power differential and a divide within the church along the ability line. This gesture diminishes the human dignity of people with disabilities. It also reduces them to a passive role in the church, thus restricting the full provision of gifts by the Spirit.

Moving forward, David Fitch’s idea of ministering to the “least of these” in his book *Faithful Presence* is helpful. Fitch observes that if the church is doing things *for* and *to* people, we join the world that tends to make them into projects to be managed.<sup>11</sup> Conversely, learning from Jesus’ example of intentional engagements with people rejected by society, we ought to see every person, disabled or not, as a person worthy of God’s and our love.

...if the church is doing things *for* and *to* people, we join the world that tends to make them into projects to be managed.

## Person, Not Project

When ministry to people with disabilities is organized as a project, those who manage or volunteer in the program bestow what they think is suitable. As receivers of charity, opportunities for those with disabilities to grow in faith,

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8. Carter, “A Place of Belonging,” 167-8.

9. *Ibid.*, 169.

10. Webb-Mitchell, *Beyond Accessibility*, 116.

11. Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 113.

serve others, and be involved in the church's ministries are often not provided. More importantly, this gesture dehumanizes them, neglecting their value as God's image-bearers endowed with gifts for the common good of the church.

Separated by a divide of givers and receivers, people in a ministry project cannot be united as one Body in Christ. My experience with a church-run support group for families raising children with disabilities illustrates this point. One day, I visited the group and learned that a volunteer was dealing with significant health issues. However, during the prayer time at the group's meeting, she did not share her concerns and ask for prayer support. This volunteer explained that she did not want to add burdens to the people she cared for. While the intent was good, this example shows how people with disabilities are not invited to be part of the community to share others' joy and suffering.

As God's family, Fitch says, we should be sharing a "life with God in a space where people join together as brothers and sisters."<sup>12</sup> When we, people with different abilities, join with each other in the presence of Christ, we submit to the leading of the Spirit, and space would open between us. In this space, we submit to Christ, allowing Him to heal our relationships and experience transformation in our hearts. Being united by the Spirit, we learn to listen to each other and support one another as a family.<sup>13</sup>

## **A Transformed and United Body**

Theologian John Swinton comments on the experience of transformation from engaging people with disabilities in relationships is quite common. Swinton says that when people encounter those with disabilities in friendship, "their priorities are reshaped, and their vision of God and humanness are altered at their very core."<sup>14</sup> He calls these changes a process of transvaluation. In the memoir about her son Arthur, theologian Frances Young describes her years with Arthur as a redemptive experience. But Arthur's life brought changes to more than his mother, his presence in the church left a considerable impact. One year, a couple of students assisted Arthur in attending a world youth fellowship. Young says, "They went as helpers but returned euphoric if exhausted—it had quite literally been a conversion experience in which they had come to quite a new appreciation of what life was all about."<sup>15</sup> Jesus says in Matthew 25 that whoever

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12. Ibid, 114.

13. Ibid, 115.

14. Swinton, "The Body of Christ," 67.

15. Young, *Arthur's Call*, 110.

shows compassion to the least of His people will encounter Christ Himself. No one, when encountering Christ Himself, remains unchanged.

This conversion experience is echoed by Thomas Reynolds, a theologian at the University of Toronto. As Reynolds reflects on his journey of loving and caring for Chris, who has several neurological conditions, including autism, he describes it as an experience of moral conversion. The conversion is needed for Reynolds to fully accept Chris as he is instead of changing him to what Reynolds wants him to be. Even as parents, accepting someone who acts and looks beyond our everyday experience is not easy. Reynolds finds he needs to bring Chris into the presence of Christ and allow the Spirit to draw them together. He says, “the Spirit is the empowering hospitality that builds up this solidarity as a communion of differences.”<sup>16</sup> To love unconditionally as God has loved us, we all need the Spirit to bring us into the hospitality of Christ, allowing Him to help us see each other as God’s beloved child. However, acknowledging the transformative work of the Spirit among us does not eliminate our responsibilities to obey His instructions and make changes in how we share life in the community.

## **Intentional Efforts and Negotiation of Priorities**

Gleaning from Paul’s teaching on the unity of people from different backgrounds, Thomas Ogletree observes the need for us to adopt “a stance of mutual recognition and regard instead of a mere tolerance of human oddities.” Put differently, loving people with all differences goes beyond *tolerating* their presence among us. Our obedience to Christ’s call of love requires us to love one another deeply, recognizing each other as God’s beloved child. The relationship needs to be mutual, respectful, and loving.

Instead of just tolerating the differences among us, reconciliation requires submission to the Spirit’s transformation in our hearts so we can look beyond the apparent differences and see each person as a bearer of God’s image and gifts. On our own, we may be unable to free ourselves from established norms of social order. Coming into the presence of Christ together is necessary for His grace and love to free us from selfish love and enable us to cherish diversity and support each other’s life to flourish.

When we are joined together with people with different abilities, Paul says we need to bestow greater honour to those we think less honourable and treat them with the greatest modesty (1 Corinthians 12:23). When we look at the need to install ramps and accessible washrooms, the desire to bring our siblings with

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16. Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion*, 241.

mobility difficulties into the community will challenge our considerations of financial priority, enabling us to see our needs for these members of the Body as more important than other projects. When we see people who cannot tolerate loud noises in worship services, out of love, we will examine different ways to reduce the sound level, at least in one part of the sanctuary. Instead of asking people with disabilities to make impossible changes, those who can make the accommodations need to do the work.

Instead of asking people with disabilities to make impossible changes, those who can make the accommodations need to do the work.

Bringing people with different abilities together undoubtedly requires effort, but churches who have done so reported how these efforts transformed their church and brought the community together. Ellen and her church's experience are one such example. Ellen is a young woman with a complex condition, including autism, blindness, limited speech and intellectual abilities. When her mother brought her to Red Hill Church, the pastor provided many opportunities for Ellen to be involved in various ministries, such as being an usher, helping in the kitchen, and cleaning up after the church luncheon. These exposures helped Ellen to discern her gifts and interests. In the process, church members were encouraged. Some members who were not previously active asked to be involved with the church's ministries. The result was a heightened sense of community.<sup>17</sup>

Sometimes welcoming people with all abilities may challenge our thinking in doctrines and change our practices. Hartmut Kramer-Mills' experience with Walter, a young man with autism, is an excellent example of how willingness to think outside the box could transform the church. Walter was non-verbal and had extensive personal care needs. When he arrived with his family, the leadership welcomed them and took their discipleship responsibility with Walter seriously. They invested six years in taking him through the baptism, confirmation, and membership process. The leaders learned how to communicate with him and sought expert advice to modify their discipleship curriculum. Although Walter could not express himself with speech and written language, the leaders discerned Walter's strong faith and love for Christ through his actions and participation in church activities. In their decision to accept Walter for membership, the Elders' Board notes, "membership is constituted by God's call and the corresponding confession, but not by the ability to vote."<sup>18</sup> Kramer-Mills comments on how the

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17. Tam, *Kinship*, 58-59.

18. Kramer-Mills, *Walter's Ingress*, 276.

journey of leading Walter into the fabric of community life has transformed their church, helping them put into practice God's heart of inclusivity.<sup>19</sup>

Elsewhere I have discussed the complexity and necessity of accepting people with intellectual disabilities and speech difficulties for the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Table.<sup>20</sup> Here, I only have room to remind us that Christ directs the Church to make disciples of *all nations*, baptizing them and teaching them to obey His commands (Matthew 28:19-20). Therefore, we must do the same with all peoples, regardless of their abilities, as Jesus commanded us.

## Transformed to be Transformative

In Luke 4, the evangelist recorded Jesus' proclamation of Himself as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. In proclaiming Himself as the Anointed One prophesied by Isaiah, Jesus, the long-expected Messiah, came to earth on a mission to usher in God's Kingdom. Alec Motyer explains how in the Isaiah tradition, the good news of the Messiah "embraces personal renewal and restoration. . . release from restrictions imposed by people. . . [and] creation of a harmonious society."<sup>21</sup> As such, Jesus ate with the social outcasts, healed the blind, and touched the leper, bringing many people rejected by society into His community as signs of the coming of God's righteous Kingdom.

Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." (John 20:21). If we believe Jesus' intentional work with the marginalized is a significant sign of the Kingdom, we ought to consider how we, His disciples, should do likewise. Learning from Jesus, who proclaimed the good news in words and deeds, showing particular attention to the outcast, we ought to consider how the Church, as the Body of Christ, should live as the signpost for God's Kingdom in our corporate life. As the Body of Christ, we must embrace all peoples regardless of their abilities, releasing people with disabilities from restrictions imposed by society and striving to be a loving and harmonious community with them.

I began this chapter with an observation of the decline in church attendance. Now, as we are coming to the end of this chapter, I want to return to the topic and point out why loving people with and without disabilities is essential in this regard. Barna researchers David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins explored the issue of young people leaving their church. They assert this generation of believers wants to be "in, but not of the world . . . they are a generation prepared to be not merely

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19. Ibid, 278.

20. Tam, *Kinship*, 129-158.

21. Motyer, *Prophecy of Isaiah*, 500.

hearers of doctrine but doers of faith; they want to put their faith into action, not just to talk.”<sup>22</sup> When we say we love all people and welcome everyone to the church, the way we show our love needs to match our words. It is not enough to open the doors to people who look and act differently; they need to be welcomed into the fabric of our community life.

Imagine what is on display for the world to see when Christian communities worldwide, large and small, are beautiful mosaics of loving families of people with all differences! Leslie Newbigin believes this beautiful picture of the Church’s unity is the hidden mystery Paul teaches in Ephesians. He says,

The church is the place where the deepest and most bitter of divisions . . . is being healed. . . It is the place where those who were strangers to one another, divided by a gulf deeper than even the deepest of divisions that plague our society today, were being made fellow citizens and members of one body.<sup>23</sup>

This sign, Newbigin alleges, is not only shown to humanity but also to “the rulers and authorities in the heavenly place.”<sup>24</sup> A church that eats together, worships together, and serves together with people with disabilities like a family is a stark contrast to the world in which they suffer much injustice. The way people who are vastly different in appearance, social status, gender, and any other humanly defined differences are gathered as one family of God reveals God’s purpose to reconcile broken relationships and restore the world to a state of shalom.

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22. Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 11.

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## Chapter 22

# Mobilizing the Canadian-Born Chinese for Missions

by Randall Mah

After stepping off the plane in Africa, I expected to be a visible minority among the local people in the country of Lesotho. What I observed after meeting many of the families from the various foreign mission organizations and denominations, I was also a visible minority among them. As I began to look back during the application process with Africa Inland Mission, I had only met one other Asian family.

After returning to Canada, in my role as a missions pastor in a Chinese church and then as a mobilizer and recruiter for a mission organization, I wanted to find out why there were so few Canadian-born Chinese (CBC) Christians serving as missionaries. I wanted to discover what barriers were affecting recruiting missionaries among the Chinese churches in Canada (which may also be true for other diaspora churches).

My dream is for more CBCs to be encouraged, mobilized, and sent out as workers for the harvest. Why was I willing to serve as a cross-cultural worker, and why were there not more like me? Like Jesus, who healed ten lepers and only one came back to worship and thank Him, my same question was, “Where are the other nine?”

## From Apathy to Africa

One day, a student was asked, “what is worse, ignorance or apathy?” He replied, “I don’t know, and I don’t care.” This was my attitude. I did not grow up attending church, so I would probably be the candidate voted least likely to become a Christian if there was ever a vote taken. It was not because I was a horrible person; I was from a middle-class family and considered a polite and well-mannered boy. I did not smoke, drink, swear, or date girls during high school. I dressed respectfully, had short hair, did well in school, and played on the school football and badminton teams.

Despite all of this external success, I did have one major problem. As a third-generation CBC, I did not have an identity. Born and raised in Calgary, where there

were not many visible minorities, I felt I was not accepted by Caucasian society nor among the immigrant Chinese. Where did I belong? This led me to search for my roots at a Chinese church in Chinatown. It was there I met other CBCs like myself. I was introduced to and eventually accepted Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord through their love and friendship. I had found my true identity rooted in Christ!

As mentioned, I did not attend church as a child and only started attending during my last year in high school, so I did not have much Bible knowledge. My Christian growth occurred while studying at university through my involvement with Campus Crusade for Christ. Three major influencing factors shaped my spiritual growth: the human element, spiritual disciplines, and practical, real-life learning situations.

Firstly, the human element included staff members and fellow students in my weekly small group Bible study, interaction time during retreats with people from other universities, and the weekly fellowship and worship times. Secondly, my spiritual disciplines were developed through attending Christmas and summer conferences and weekend workshops. Thirdly, my real-life learning situations where I had the opportunity to put into action through different activities such as weekly evangelism times sharing the *Four Spiritual Laws* on campus, leading a weekly small group Bible study, and also through a summer short-term mission trip showing the *JESUS* film along the Amazon River in Brazil.

After graduating from university, I worked in the secular workforce for two years. Unfortunately, during this stage, my spiritual life was waning after my time of growing and life experience during university. I was having difficulty integrating into church life, and somewhere deep within me, I knew there was more to life than just a 9-5 job and living for the weekends. My desire was for more than just a job, a wife, some kids, a house, a car, and the lifestyle of those around me. It was like an urging from within. I wanted to make a difference for eternity.

Each time I attended a missions conference or heard a missions speaker at church, my heart burned within me, and I never let go of the possibility of serving God overseas. I had asked different people and missionaries what steps would be necessary to become a missionary and their answer was I should get some formal Bible training. I distinctly remember conversing with my cousin, who is a missionary. She said I could apply for a Master's degree at a seminary because I already had a university degree, so I applied and was accepted.

It never occurred to me to ask any church pastors or leaders about my decision or plans to attend seminary. They only became aware when I asked one of the pastors to be a proctor for my distance-learning Elementary Greek exam. I felt as if I had not received any direction or encouragement to pursue full-time ministry,

had not been asked about my passion for missions, past short-term mission experience, or even questioned on my call or motivation. Nobody in the church asked or inquired about my spiritual readiness, maturity, preparation, or plans (they were unaware that my goal was to eventually join a mission organization). It felt like I was on my own, and when the church leaders did find out, they were happy a member of their church decided to pursue this direction, and they were somehow taking credit for raising workers, just content with giving their blessing.

The next step in my journey, God sent me to Toronto for several reasons. The first reason was to attend seminary, the second reason was to pursue a missions-minded girl who lived there who eventually became my wife, and thirdly, I was introduced to two of the churches that would be our primary support when we eventually served in Africa. After getting married and graduating from seminary, my wife Rita and I had God's vision for cross-cultural missions. We started to look for mission opportunities, so we attended Intervarsity's Urbana missions conference. There we contacted Africa Inland Mission (AIM), and two years later, we were part of a missionary team in the country of Lesotho and served with AIM for eight years.

After completing our time in Lesotho, having completed my goal to serve as a missionary, my next question was, "after accomplishing my goal, what do I do now?" One of my mentors gave me the illustration of an astronaut. He told me when their lifelong goal of getting to the moon was accomplished, after returning, their responsibility was now to tell others about their experiences and then to help them to achieve this same goal. So now, with my missions adventure with "field ministry" experience, my role is to tell others about my journey and assist others in serving on the mission field. This led me to realize my new role was to mobilize and recruit missionaries. I needed to discover what platform would best enable me to achieve this goal in which I use my experience and giftedness to identify, train, empower, and send CBCs to take my place on the mission field.

## **Why I Consider Canadian-born Chinese Great Candidates For Mission**

Since Canada is one of the most ethnically diverse nations, it is imperative to learn to blend into different cultures every day. Growing up in Canada provides many benefits and advantages. Therefore, at least three reasons CBCs make good candidates for cross-cultural ministry are cultural, practical, and psychological.

The first factor is culture. Growing up in Canada, as a visible minority in a predominantly Caucasian environment, I realized there were times when I was caught between the Chinese and Western cultures. I often did not feel I

belonged and subconsciously was often shifting between the two cultures. After I became a Christian, what I looked like or where I grew up did not matter anymore because my citizenship and heritage became rooted in God! I saw how God had designed and placed me where I was to have the best of both worlds, Chinese and Western. For cross-cultural mission work, as a Canadian, the benefit of the Canadian

“golden passport” enables me to enter any country in the world. Another benefit, being Chinese, I do not bring the “colonial baggage” Caucasian missionaries are associated with when going to previously colonized countries. Another advantage is being able to better recognize and understand various aspects of other cultures. For example, it was easier for my wife, Rita, and I to understand the Basotho people and their veneration of ancestors than it was for our other fellow missionaries because the Chinese also worship their ancestors.

The second reason CBCs make good mission candidates is the practical advantages in human and financial resources. In Canada, each citizen has free medical treatment, education (free up to high school and subsidized university or college tuition), and many job and career opportunities. CBCs are given opportunities unattainable for previous generations of Chinese due to language, cultural, and racist barriers. This is an advantage for cross-cultural missions as CBCs have the chance to go to Bible school or seminary in English or French as these are their mother tongues. In addition, being fluent in English, CBCs can easily join established Western mission organizations. I know missionaries from non-English speaking countries were required to learn English before serving because they needed to be able to communicate with the mission agency.

Another practical advantage is financial. Firstly, children in the Chinese culture would grow up and take care of their ageing parents in prior generations. In Canada, there are many systems to help look after and provide for the care of ageing parents, releasing the children from this primary responsibility. Secondly, in recent years, the Western Caucasian churches and mission agencies have been declining in numbers and finances. In contrast, some of the fastest-growing churches in Canada are the diaspora churches, which is evident among the Chinese churches. They are growing numerically and financially and are now at a point of great opportunity as many established churches have great resources available for world evangelization.

**After I became a Christian, what I looked like or where I grew up did not matter anymore because my citizenship and heritage became rooted in God!**

The third factor why CBCs make good mission candidates is psychological. Growing up in Canada has provided security and a firmly rooted home base in recent generations. Security-wise, few CBCs have ever lacked the basics of life (food, shelter, clothing), have never been threatened by violence (war, slavery, oppression), and have freedom of choice. CBCs also have developed a solid home base. In contrast, when new immigrants leave their ‘motherland’ and come to Canada seeking a better life, Canada is their final destination, making it less likely they would leave to go to another country. For CBCs, Canada is “our home and native land” and our base of operations. This stability allows CBCs the foundation to step out in faith to serve as missionaries to other places in the world.

### **Why So Few?**

So, if CBCs have so many positive attributes as missionary candidates, why are there so few serving in cross-cultural ministry? As I mentioned earlier, when I decided to go to seminary, I thought, just like with my career and educational choices, it did not even occur to me to involve the church or church leaders. Somehow, “my call” was not connected to the church, nor did I ever hear about or encounter anyone

from my church who communicated or showed any interest in this area of my life.

A few years later, I heard two people from my church who were close to me (one was the best man at my wedding, and the other was my first cousin) had decided to go to seminary. While I was happy to hear this, the sad part was that throughout the years, I was not aware they had been considering serving full-time. I wondered why they had never mentioned this desire to me before? How many more “out there” have this same desire yet do not tell anyone, or worse, are not identified or recognized? There seems to be something missing. Why is there a gap between those who make commitments and those who follow through?

One example I can think of is church retreats and missions conferences, where many raise their hands, come up to the front, or fill out a response card, expressing their willingness to serve God full-time. When I inquire with different mission agencies and Chinese churches, I am surprised so few attend seminary or enter into full-time ministry. What happened to all those people, and what were some reasons they did not follow through with their commitment? For every ten

So, if CBCs have so many positive attributes as missionary candidates, why are there so few serving in cross-cultural ministry?

people who commit, somehow, one by one, they are reduced until all but one has left. Where are the other nine?

## **Barriers To Mobilizing Canadian-born Chinese**

There are many hindrances and barriers to mobilizing Canadian-born Chinese for full-time ministry; some tend to have more impact, such as a lack of identity, societal barriers, Chinese church barriers, and mission agency barriers.

### **Identity**

“Who Are We?” in this vast country of Canada. It was difficult to identify Canadian-born Chinese Christians specifically, so I will extrapolate using data from Asian American and Asian Canadian statistics. Asians trace their heritage and roots not just from the continent of Asia, but they are considered to be from twenty countries located in the Far East, Southeast Asia, and the Indian sub-continent.

In 2011, 5.6 percent of the population in the USA was Asian American. In Canada in 2016, South Asian - 1,924,635, Chinese - 1,577,060, Filipino - 780,125, Southeast Asian - 313,260, West Asian - 264,305, Korean - 188,710 and Japanese - 92,920 for a total of about 5,141,015, which made up about 14 percent of the population of Canada.<sup>1</sup>

Of the population in the U.S., 42 percent identify themselves as Christians (Filipino 89 percent, Korean 71 percent, Japanese 38 percent, Vietnamese 36 percent, Chinese 31 percent, Indian 18 percent), and attend church weekly (76 percent vs 64 percent), say their religion is the one true faith (72 percent vs 49 percent), and say the Bible is the Word of God (94 percent vs 92 percent).

An interesting observation is that many students attend the Urbana Missions Conference. Some 40 percent of Urbana attendance in 2015 were Asian American (which most likely also included the Asian Canadians), yet only 7 percent have responded by becoming missionaries.<sup>2</sup> If so many Asians attended Urbana year after year, should there not be more Asians reflected in the response and joining missionary organizations? A lack of identity may have affected the disconnect between the attendance and response of Asian Christians.

### **Societal Barriers and Stereotypes**

A second hindrance is societal barriers and the stereotypes accompanying Canadian-born Chinese. Some stereotypical characteristics are being hard-working,

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1. <https://minorityrights.org/country/canada>

2. *Report On Factors Affecting Asian Americans In Missions* webinar by David Narita.

studious, quiet, self-disciplined, family-oriented, filial piety (respect for elders), and collectivistic. Society perceives this as being inoffensive, harmony-seeking, middle path (moderation), and self-effacing (humble). CBCs are considered to be the “Model Minority,” and in terms of “religiosity,” very “evangelical” compared to the general population. Some U.S. statistics supporting these stereotypes are:

- Highest average income (\$66,000 vs \$49,800 per year)
- Most educated (49 percent vs 28 percent), having more college degrees than any cultural group, consider marriage important (54 percent vs 34 percent)
- two-parent homes (80 percent vs 63 percent)
- parents have a big influence on their children’s education, profession, and marriage partner (66 percent vs no data available).

These stereotypes of the Model Minority contribute to limiting the potential impact on both society and mission agencies. A survey conducted and then reported in an *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* article from 2018 asked, “What characteristics do people look for in leaders?” The answers were self-confidence, assertiveness, self-promoting, problem-solvers, and out-of-the-box thinkers. These qualities do not fit the mould of what we think of the stereotypical Asian American. Like in the business or political world, there are very few Asian Americans because we view them as more worker-like and less leader-like (bamboo ceiling). The same “model minority” label causing people to overlook Asian Americans for leadership roles in the business world makes people think they are not well-suited to missions.

### **Chinese Church Barriers**

Most CBCs are raised in a Chinese church, so there are many cultural dynamics not easily separated. For example, in Chinese immigrant churches, children are raised to be respectful and obedient, never to question authority, express their opinions, or show disagreement. This results in programs and activities that come across as “babysitting and story-telling” at church, resulting in low value being placed on adult English-speaking ministry, English-speaking leadership, and English-speaking pastors. In other words, anyone who is English-speaking is automatically considered to be the child of the church even though many are leaders and CEOs in the corporate world or are now retired senior citizens, yet are still treated as second-class.

I did not realize this as I was not raised going to church as a child. In the high school youth group I attended, I noticed how among the kids who “grew up in the church,” there was little to no care, concern, or awareness of the lost-ness of non-believers. They appeared cliquish and inward-focused, concerned with status, power (pecking order), and comfort (risk averse). It seemed the kids who grew

up in the church were just spoon-fed the Bible stories as they were put downstairs to be babysat while the Chinese-speaking adults were provided real ministry and care. The children are treated as secondary or, in some cases, as people not worthy of being ministered to, let alone empowered or encouraged to take on the discipleship mandate of Jesus. How could they develop a sense of serving the world and being able to commit to serving as missionaries in this environment?

Another Chinese church obstacle to overcome is parental pressure and the need to be successful. As children of immigrants, they are constantly reminded their parents sacrificed so much to provide for their education and new life. Then they feel an obligation and need to repay their parents by becoming successful and having the life their parents never had. The easiest way to measure that success is through good grades and education, high-status and well-paying jobs. Thus, becoming an engineer, doctor, nurse, pharmacist, accountant, businessman etc., is a sign of success. The conflict comes when the idea of becoming a missionary does not reflect success in the parents' eyes, or worse, in the parents' relatives and friends. This is a major dilemma. How do CBCs respond and commit to obeying God when they are told God gave the command to obey their parents?

The conflict comes when the idea of becoming a missionary does not reflect success in the parents' eyes, or worse, in the parents' relatives and friends.

### **Mission Agency Barrier**

After a Western mission organization accepts a Canadian-born Chinese, there are issues specifically more difficult because of the cultural implications. The main barriers are raising support, loss of community, individual calling, and self-promotion. Firstly, the concept of raising support and directly asking for money runs against the Chinese culture as there is shame associated with losing face, " mooching " off others, saying what your family provided for you isn't enough, having to be pitied by others, not to mention embarrassing for family members when they are asked by others what their son/daughter does for a living. Being a religious worker is considered low status and undesirable in the immigrant perception because their concept from their homeland of Buddhist monks who take a vow of poverty and must beg for a living. No immigrant parent wants this for their child.

Secondly, there is a loss of community. Being strongly collectivistic, being part of a family provides both identity and protection from discrimination, which may not

occur on the field. An example of one Chinese missionary who is not accustomed to the North American idea of “fun” ran into difficulties when teammates would have weekly “game nights” playing board games and card games. This Chinese missionary did not understand nor participate in these activities and could not find ways to connect with the rest of the team, experiencing more stress as the activities were a “waste of time” and unproductive.

Thirdly, the concept of a specific individual call is a product of an individualistic approach to identifying missionaries. The collectivistic Asian culture is geared towards duty and responsibility to the group (family, church, etc.) and not following a personal call and chasing their own individual goals and dreams.

Fourthly, the barrier of self-promotion goes against humility and self-deprecation, which makes it challenging to promote and stand up in front of people to share about ministry and the needs (especially financially) in such a public manner. Not only is this difficult to articulate and identify as a problem, but there is a lack of role models and mentors to help navigate and encourage them.

### **Concerns of a Canadian-born Chinese Missionary Mobilizer**

I have concerns about the lack of other Canadian-born Chinese (CBCs) in full-time Christian ministry. My dream is for more CBCs to be encouraged, mobilized, and sent out as workers for the harvest. Although many hindrances and barriers exist for all missionary candidates, the unbalanced number of Asians who attend conferences like Urbana and their response is stark. I believe it is the role of both the church and the mission agency to help identify, nurture, and grow our CBCs to be servants to the world.

## Chapter 23

# The International Church for the Global World

by Warren Reeve

The international church is a *kairos* call to a profound need and compelling opportunity. God is sovereignly and supernaturally planting and building international churches in unparalleled numbers around the globe. The unprecedented diaspora scattering has created cutting-edge potential for the international church to reach every tribe, tongue and nation.<sup>1</sup> The international church is the collection of God's people, diverse in nationality, culture, colour, class, and church background, gathered together in many cities and locations around the globe to worship God, hear from God, and tell others about God.<sup>2</sup>

There are versions of the international church dotted across the Church history landscape. Geographically identified as the church at Antioch, perhaps this body of disciples is more appropriately called the first international church (Acts 13:1-3). It started with Jewish expatriate believers meeting in current-day Syria. They heard and acted on Jesus' Great Commission to be witnesses at home, in the region, in the country, and abroad (Acts 1:8). They invited Greek and Roman Gentiles into the church despite the obstacles of

The unprecedented diaspora scattering has created cutting-edge potential for the international church to reach every tribe, tongue and nation.

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1. Missional International Church Network (2017). *Strengthening the International Church Movement for Missional Impact* (Brochure) Calgary, Canada: Ken Driedger, Ken Paton, Warren Reeve.
  2. Ed Teo, Warren Reeve (2016, April 12). *Why The International Church is Such a Big Deal*. Quick Talk presented at Global Church for a Global World conference hosted by the International Christian Assembly, Hong Kong. Host Pastor Ed Teo and I met to define and describe the international church as succinctly as possible for our joint presentation. The above is a modified version of that discussion. We wanted to communicate God's sovereign genius explaining the kaleidoscope of people collecting in a Church called International.

contrasting nationalities, differing cultures, a mosaic of colour, and mixed classes.<sup>3</sup>

Then the Jewish-Gentile international church sent the Gospel to the least-reached people groups. The first international church was a launching pad for Kingdom movement. Within twenty-five years, Kingdom expansion had spread exponentially. It started in Antioch and then moved to Asia Minor and across to Europe, as far as Rome. The capital super city, Rome, was where the Acts of the Apostles ended the biblical Church history account in Acts 28. However, the movement continued and continues today.

The Jewish-Gentile first international church not only went west but east! In fact, Church history records how the Church, for the first one thousand years after Christ's ascension, was more Asian than European. Philip Jenkins unveiled the little-known history of the Asian church. Nestorian and Jacobite missionaries were commissioned from Syria to the Far East long before any other Christians travelled the Silk Road.<sup>4</sup> These missionaries landed in Mongolia, China, India, and perhaps as far as Vietnam, the Philippines, and Korea.

By 1000 AD, Asia was populated with 17-20 million Christians who could trace their faith back twenty-five to thirty generations.<sup>5</sup> This history only serves to strengthen the understanding and impact of the Acts 13 narrative. The international church then and now is an invitation to the diaspora to join God's accelerated spiritual growth plan and to unprecedented numerical growth, a key to unlocking the nations to engage with the Gospel. The international church of Acts 13 impacted the East on an unprecedented scale and, from the first century, became the Kingdom of God without borders.

### **Leveraging Expatriates in a Global World**

The international church is the Bride of Christ at the crossroads of the scattered peoples of the world, offering a warm welcome in the name of Jesus. The composition of this gathering is multi-national. Within the cities and mega-cities of the world, there is untapped potential inside the

The international church is the Bride of Christ at the crossroads of the scattered peoples of the world, offering a warm welcome in the name of Jesus.

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3. Reeve, Warren. *Unleashing Great Commission Potential through the International Church*, Tira, Joy and Yamamori, Ted ed. *Scattered and Gathered: A Global Compendium of Diaspora Missiology* (Regnum Books International, 2016) 195.

4. Jenkins, Philip. *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa and Asia—and How it Died*. 1st ed. (New York: Harper On, 2008) 70.

5. Ibid.

Christian expatriate community already living overseas, self-funded, planted, and prepared to obey the Great Commission. They are globetrotters who are generally highly educated, entrepreneurial, people of comparable means and full of adventure. However, in certain regions of the world, expatriates are composed of migrants who are historically required for the host country's economic benefit. Ratios in some countries can be as high as four expatriates to each national. Expatriates comprise everyone from street cleaners, maids, and taxi drivers to bankers, surgeons, and lawyers, including everyone in-between. Among most expatriates, there are biblically literate Christians desiring to make an impact for Christ in their corner of the world.

When expatriates are collected in international churches to encounter Christ, are disciplined, and commissioned by Him, there is tremendous leverage for the Kingdom of God. This leverage initiates the communication and demonstration of the Gospel through otherwise impossible relationship networks. Least-reached people from diverse nationalities encounter and engage Jesus in places often presumed to be impossible to reach for Christ. This is happening cross-culturally. Without the international church, these expatriates are left to collide at the intersections of other travelling nomads.

Since one in eight people live away from home today, it is clear to international church leaders that God is sovereignly and supernaturally extending His Kingdom through a diversity of travelling/globetrotting expatriates/internationals meeting host country citizens. Never before in the history of humanity have so many people been on the move. This is a *kairos* moment in history when the nations are meeting in the world's urban centres in the diaspora. The church to reach these people is naturally international, expediting the flow of the Gospel to a globalized world.

This is a *kairos* moment in history when the nations are meeting in the world's urban centres in the diaspora.

## **Varied Cultures Provide Context to Reach People**

The international church is the face of the diaspora. Where there is a gathering of the nations, it follows that there is a cultural mix. First-hand experience could describe the culture mix as a "taste of heaven."<sup>6</sup> The apostle John describes this experience through a vision in Revelation 7:9, "After this I looked, and there

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6. C. L. (2000). Bandung International Church monthly elders meeting. When asked, "what does the international church mean to you?" Cindy Lewis responded, "a taste of heaven."

before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb..." The international church is a tangible picture of this biblical vision on earth. Like a kaleidoscope of colour, it is the splendour of the Kingdom's great multitude gathered into one assembly.

In *Look Who God Let into the Church*, David Packer writes of "tight" and "loose" cultures. He describes the degree to which social constraints are placed upon individuals in certain cultures to behave in a certain way. "Tight" means social norms in behaviour are well-fixed, and everyone within the group is expected to follow them. "Loose" means more flexibility, social standards are not as rigid, either there is no norm, or there is tolerance with deviations from the norm.<sup>7</sup> The international church is a melting pot of tight and loose cultures requiring astute leadership. There are no cookie-cutter solutions when leading the various cultures, which are sometimes in conflict. Ultimately, international church pastors must shepherd and love over and through these different cultural expectations. Authentic love can provide a different opportunity to experience God's love than simply through one culture or one way. Jesus' sacrifice of love penetrates all cultural expectations. So must the shepherd's love of the international church.

God created the diaspora. When the diaspora is brought together from various diverse nationalities, there is an obvious compelling opportunity for the Church to reach the nations. When the international church engages the diaspora through contextualized, incarnational servanthood, missional becomes the norm. Missions is not delegated to a person in a place; rather, missional is a shift in thinking for the whole Church as an active and transformational presence in each culture, equipping one another to serve people within the diaspora. Missional is the mental shift from formulaic and institutional programs to relationships of word, deed, sign, and power. The international church aims to facilitate creative thinking to catalyze active participation in God's mission within the diaspora context.<sup>8</sup>

## **The Diaspora as a Rainbow of Colour**

The international church is a canvas of colour, drawing scattered people into a rainbow of grandeur. If it were possible to assemble the world's international migrants to live in one place, it would be the world's fifth-largest country with

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7. Packer, David. *Look Who God Let into the Church: Understanding the Nature and Sharpening the Impact of a Multi-cultural Church* (Amazon Digital Services, LLC. 2013) 1295 – 1298.

8. Missional International Church Network (2015). Bangkok Conference Book: Graham Chipps ed.

more colour than any country on the planet. However, this global mosaic of migrants does not live in one country; the people are scattered worldwide. In 2016, the rainbow of colours, in descending order, painted across the world's canvas, includes India (15.6 million), Mexico (12.3 million), Russia (10.6 million), China (9.5 million), and Bangladesh (7.2 million).<sup>9</sup> The mandate of the international church is to create a masterpiece by gathering the colours of the nations.

The traditional mission strategy is geographically bound. Seizing the diaspora opportunity through the international church is one way to engage people on the move. Who would consider Australia a mission field? Yet 28 percent of the Australian population is born outside their country. Melbourne boasts the largest Greek-speaking population, next to Greece, in the world. The international church is no longer constrained to “overseas” but today must be understood as a viable and essential deal-breaker for completing the Great Commission. Collecting the colours of the diaspora is to experience the rainbow of the international church.

## **Mixed Classes are a Viable Ministry Partnership**

The international church includes expatriates who have left home for bigger and better. This quest for opportunity exists in people of every occupation in every class. The supposed greener grass on the other side of the fence is a strong incentive for migrating. Sometimes the result is an increase, and sometimes it backfires. Class separation in the international church is often deep and wide, while at the same time, the ambition to succeed can be found in every class.

One challenge for the international church is to teach and motivate all classes toward the reality of God having a bigger and better plan than material success. From Adam came every person from every ethnicity to be placed in a time and a setting. He determined and appointed each expatriate in His *kairos* time to His designated place, so the different classes would “reach out to Him and find Him” (Acts 17:26-27). When expatriates of any class find God's higher migration calling within the diaspora, more people meet Jesus.

The same class levels reach one another with greater understanding even though the interaction may be cross-cultural. For example, a Nigerian diplomat connects with a British environmentalist because both are highly educated. Similar classes naturally understand and relate to one another despite different nationalities, colours, or cultures. A taxi driver reaches out to a street cleaner, and he “finds God.” A banker communicates with a doctor, and a divine encounter

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9. Conner, Phillip (2016, May 17) *Pew Research Center: Global Attitudes and Trends, International Migration: Key Findings from the U.S., Europe and the World*. Retrieved from [pewresearch.org](http://pewresearch.org)

inspires a “reach” to the living God. Class connections and networks are created and discovered, leveraging Kingdom growth.

Conversely, mixed class connections can also expand the Kingdom. Expatriates with greater resources make provisions and create pathways for less privileged expatriates to find their newly discovered diaspora calling. Often the profound “pure belief in Jesus” faith of the less privileged expatriates is profoundly impacting to the complex and sometimes chaotic world of expatriates with greater means. This dynamic is authentic, viable, and presently happening through the international church globally. There is hardly a mission strategy able to make this kind of mixed class partnership so productive for the cause of Christ except through the international church.

## **Centre Set Inclusion Versus Bound Set Exclusion**

The international church is planted by denominations, military, or independently organized believers. When denominational international churches emphasize their own distinctives, contrasted against participating members, those bodies forfeit the best international church potential. When military international churches remain nationalistic, they evolve into an extended chaplaincy service. When independent, organized international churches refuse connection with an outside body, they set themselves up to be isolated and invite possible conflict without objective input. Conversely, having stated these cautions, each specific church background of the specific international church calls for celebration and connection.

When the international church is more centred set versus bound set (more inclusive than exclusive), then health, scope, and impact are increased. Twenty-five years ago, the international church was understood to be primarily American and English-speaking. Today, the international church is emerging into the global Church for a global world. Missiologists Michael Crane and Scott Carter write:

“International Churches around the world are making an invaluable contribution to the church’s mission to make disciples of every nation. Around the world God has used International Church’s as instrumental in sowing seeds of the gospel of Jesus Christ on the frontiers of lostness.”<sup>10</sup>

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10. Crane, Michael and Carter Scott, *Gateway to the Nations: The Strategic Value of International Churches in a Globalized Urban World*, (unpublished paper, August 28, 2014) p.1.

## **From the Past to the Future**

Movements of God are identified when God circulates the same vision to different people in different places simultaneously. Staggered within the last twenty years, God has imparted the similar international church vision to reach the nations for Christ to several servants from several different locations. Below are the known unfolding networks of international churches that have emerged.

1. Fellowship of European International Churches in thirty-eight European countries.
2. China International Fellowship in the most populated nation on earth.
3. International Baptist Convention in Europe, Middle East, Africa, and the Americas.
4. Global International Church Network is a global relational network for International Churches.
5. Missional International Church Network starting and strengthening International Churches (<https://micn.org/>).

## Chapter 24

# Majority World — ‘EmergEd’ Churches and Missions Praxis

by Craig Bundy

The intent of the present article is to celebrate and encourage the missionary role of the churches of the global South and East, otherwise known as the *majority world*. These terms include everyone not identified as part of the traditional West, and they have little to do with respect to the equator. It is also to challenge those churches in the West who might be tempted to rest on their missionary laurels.

Vocabulary is a minefield! The fields of missiology and theology are no exceptions. *EmergEd* in this article refers to those churches active in their essential missionary role in God’s purpose for the Church. The terms *mission*, *missions*, and *missionary* have many connotations. For the sake of simplicity, these three terms are herein used in a very narrow sense. *Mission* refers broadly to the big picture of God’s plan for the Church.

The term *missions* has generally fallen out of use for its vagueness, but herein it refers to those activities directly related to the discipling of the nations in cross-cultural settings among least-reached people groups (LRPGs).

The term *missionary* is used to describe those individuals commissioned and sent by the Church to do the work of missions. These narrow definitions will hopefully assist the reader to focus on the implications for the Church regarding God’s intention that all people groups be represented in worship around His throne:

Revelation 5:9 says, “You are worthy...because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.” Continuing on to chapter 7:9, we find, “...there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb...”

## Theological Bites

What is the role of the Great Commission in God’s overall purpose for human history? Defining *Missio Dei* (the mission of God) is akin to the fable of several blind men trying to describe an elephant. Grabbing hold of just the tail, leg, tusk,

ear, or trunk provides only a limited portion of the overall reality.

One image of *Missio Dei* regarding human history could be of a hospital. Specialties range from neo-natal to hospice care and everything in between. The specialists may see only their own sphere of expertise, but all are essential to the big picture.

Keith Ferdinando suggests imagining four concentric circles (one inside the other) to illustrate how *mission* is used concerning the Church. The outer and largest circle represents the *Missio Dei*. He describes the circles as follows:<sup>1</sup>

1. **The Missio Dei:** The broadest approach is sometimes identified as *Missio Dei*. In its literal sense, the Latin expression simply draws attention to the fact that all Christian mission is God's: He alone initiates, empowers, directs, and blesses all true mission. . . .
2. **The Cultural Mandate:** A second approach defines mission more narrowly: "the church's mission, then, encompasses everything that Jesus sends his people into the world to do. . . ."
3. **Social Action:** A third approach limits the missiological agenda more narrowly still to what is termed "social action," along with proclamation and the making of disciples. . . .
4. **Making Disciples of All Nations:** The innermost of the four concentric circles emphasizes the making of disciples as the essential, exclusive content of mission. . . .

One's spiritual gifting and skillsets may determine which circle they prioritize in personal ministry. Without the innermost circle (#4), circles #3 and #2 have no lasting platform (the Church) upon which to build. Their benefits are temporal, not eternal. Remove circles #3 and #2, and the Church becomes impotent. It has no impact for good in its cultural context. It falls victim to the quip of being *so heavenly-minded it is of no earthly good*. The concentric circle roles must be mutually appreciative for there to be synergy and health in circle #1.

Rather than vacillating back and forth between personal preferences among these circles, a ministry team needs to understand the role of each in God's plan. If past accusations were that some missionaries cared only about saving souls, then it is important that present-day international workers avoid being accused of focusing only on social 'lift' while neglecting evangelism and church planting. Either extreme results in a truncated Gospel.

It is important to note how, in the present article, *missions* refers primarily to circle #4—the discipling of least-reached people groups.<sup>2</sup> The *Church* and

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1. Ferdinando, 2008, 46-59.

2. See [Chapter 12](#) by Wallace Albrecht for a detailed focus on UPGs and LRPGs.

*missions* are not synonymous, but they are inseparable. They are constant travel companions. The Lord of the Church today is the same who also commissioned the discipling of the peoples of the world:

- Genesis 12:3 - "...all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."
- 1 King 8:43 - "...so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you..."
- Psalm 67:3-4 - "May the peoples praise you, God; may all the peoples praise you. May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples with equity and guide the nations of the earth."
- Matthew 28:18-19 - "...All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations..."
- Mark 16:15 - "...Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation."
- Luke 24:47 - "...and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations..."
- John 20:21 - "... As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."
- Acts 1:8 - "...you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."
- 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 - "...God...gave us the ministry of reconciliation... he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us..."

The Church is an organism designed by God to further His purposes in current history. Christ is the undisputed Head of the Church universal, as well as any local church true to its calling. He gets to dictate what the focus of the church should be. He is worthy of the worship of yet unreached people groups. This will happen only as the church maintains its missionary task of discipling those peoples.

As an organism, the Church must reproduce to survive and thrive. If the Church is imagined as a 'mother ship,' then *missions* is the smaller expeditionary force launched from the mother ship to deliver the Gospel to the unreached who are otherwise beyond their reach. Those who respond will form the nucleus of a new church in their own context. The international workers help strengthen the new local body of Christ and then, theoretically, move on to repeat the process elsewhere. International workers are an arm of the Church with a specific assignment to facilitate its reproduction and growth among unreached people groups. Organisms that don't grow or reproduce eventually die.

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*Missions'* vision may be perceived as yeast permeating the overall role of the Church in the world. It is never a single slice of the activity *pie* of church programs one may take or leave as one chooses. It underlies and provides purpose for all church programs and helps them avoid being merely an end in themselves. As theologian Bosch said, "This dimension of the Christian faith is not an optional extra: Christianity is missionary by its very nature, or it denies its very *raison d'être*" (Bosch 2017, 9). The God of Scripture is a missionary God.

Wherever global outreach happens, it has typically been referred to as *missions* because the church intentionally commissioned international workers to go and do the job. A newly planted church carries the same spiritual DNA of the biblical *mission* (*Missio Dei*) as the sending church and must also concern herself with *missions* (reproduction).

Since Christ is the undisputed Head of the Church universal and, by divine right, of all local churches, He is in charge. In the context of ministry practice for His followers, He instructs the Church to pray the Lord of the harvest will thrust more workers into the fields, "for the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few" (Matthew 9:37; Luke 10:2). Crops spoil if not promptly harvested. Christ gets to choose who goes, and the church gets to prepare and commission them. One result of this co-labouring role of the church in missions is the blessing received both by the sending church and those on the receiving end. Christ will receive the people groups of the world as His inheritance,<sup>3</sup> and because Christ-followers are co-heirs with Christ,<sup>4</sup> we need to pay close attention to our investment in the harvest!

In this context of praxis, Ashford writes,

"...one of the most significant challenges facing churches, agencies, and missionaries today is the imperative to allow Christian doctrine to shape their actual ministry practices. Although our evangelical churches have declared their belief that the Christian Scriptures are 'ipsissima verba Dei,' the very words of God, our declaration is not always consistent with our actions. In reality, we sometimes ignore Scriptures when forming our strategies, methods, and practices. It is as if we are saying that what we believe about God is important, but how we practice those beliefs is not. . ." (Ashford 2011, 294)

Bible commentaries and books on theology, as well as missiology, are numerous, but it is rare to find a book that intentionally combines all three. One such helpful resource is missiologist Peter Wagner's commentary on the Book

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3. "Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession" (Psalm 2:8).

4 "... if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. . ." (Romans 8:17).

of Acts entitled “Acts of the Holy Spirit” (Wagner 2000). Since Luke, the writer of Acts, accompanied Paul on some of his missions journeys, and because Luke was an astute observer of detail as they ministered among unreached peoples, Wagner suggests Luke may have intended Acts to be a missions primer for the early Church, and not just a historical account of Church expansion.

## Trends and Logistical Bites

Every Christ-follower and local church results from someone having done the task of missions at some point in history. As recent as 1970, the odds were a missionary from the *Western Church* would have been involved if it happened in the last three hundred years. No longer! For new believers among the least-reached, the odds are switching to it being a missionary from the *global South or East*. According to Koch, “The cross-cultural mission force from the non-Western world may have surpassed the force from the traditional sending countries in the West sometime around 2005”.<sup>5</sup>

Missionaries from both young and old churches in the *majority world* are increasingly being sent out cross-culturally. They are very creative in developing strategies and structures to fit their circumstances to make it happen. No longer is it just ‘from the *West* to the rest.’ It is now from every direction to the rest. The task remaining is vast, but the harvest force is expanding. Missionaries representing many more cultures, skin tones, and languages are getting involved, which bodes well for increased receptivity at the receiving end. As globalization increases, particularly in major cities of the world, there is an increased probability that representatives from some LRPCs reside in the reader’s own neighbourhood.

Partnerships can sometimes be challenging, but they can also be a goldmine for missions. Where there exist common goals for completing the Great Commission, there are great opportunities for synergy in the harvest. Many sending churches are small and may feel unequipped to design a cross-cultural outreach. They may choose to subscribe to the strategy of others who specialize in missions. If available, they can join the outreach of their own denomination or a fraternal group of churches. If this is not an option, they may choose to partner with a

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point in history.

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5. Winter and Hawthorne. 2009, 370.

missionary sending agency willing to come alongside and aid in the process. A growing trend for those going to creative access regions is for the missionary to deploy in a bi-vocational role.

In the writer's experience, a great partnership solution arose where leaders of several Latin American national churches of The Alliance Canada were interested in setting up a sending structure for those who felt called to be missionaries from their churches. They discussed their desire with the Alliance, and a partnership was born which would pair missionaries from Latin America with those from Canada in a setting new to all involved. The intent was all members of the teams would be on equal footing in the process of adaptation and language learning.

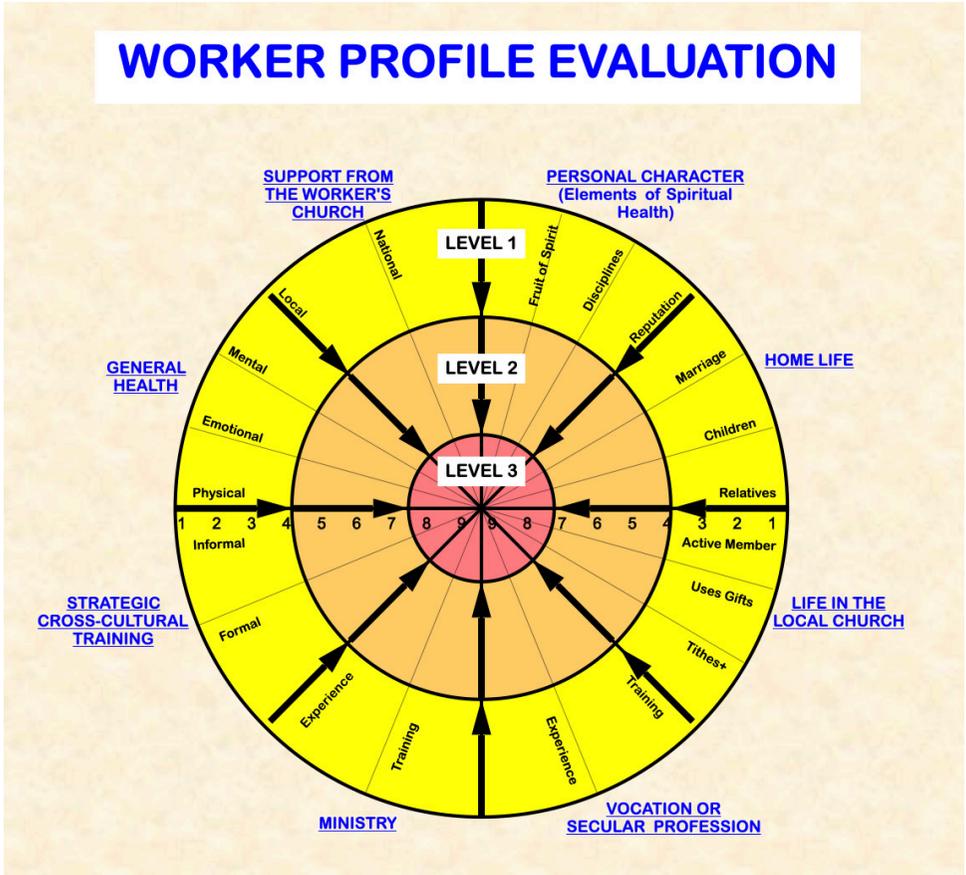
A project called "CANAL" was launched to facilitate the joint process. CANAL worked with each involved national church to help coordinate the selection, training, financing, sending and sustaining of their own missionaries until those national churches felt comfortable handling the process independently. They formed creative partnerships for covering their costs and for promoting the endeavour. The above initial process lasted six years, at which time the respective national churches assumed the responsibilities into the future. As initially conceived, CANAL ceased to be necessary but could also have continued in a redesigned partnership format. Although the formal aspect of the partnership ended, the fraternal aspect continued.

The available models for missionary deployment are numerous, but the critical issues to resolve in the process are relatively few. They include the following:

- Who does God want to send cross-culturally from one's church? How is this discerned and confirmed by the church?
- Does that candidate require additional training? If so, how and where will that be provided?
- How will the selected missionary be financed/sustained in their new assignment?
- What will be the initial budget required onsite?
- What is the goal and strategy that will guide the work of the missionary?
- Who will provide oversight or partnership on location?
- How will new disciples be linked into an existing church, or will a new church be planted with those new Christ-followers?
- What will be the relationship of the new church to the sending church?
- How will the commissioned missionary report back to the sending church?

As daunting as these issues may seem, it is imperative for the sending church to remember that from Christ's perspective, opting out is not a valid choice. The nature of their DNA is to reproduce worshippers of Christ both near and far.

The careful selection of missionary candidates is one of the more challenging of the tasks mentioned above. Along with prayer and fasting prior to the decision, it is helpful to have an assessment tool to evaluate the candidates' spiritual fitness and maturity. Group discernment is important. The CANAL Project created several tools to assist in the candidate selection process. Below is one example of a tool that may be adapted and used to facilitate group discernment.



**Explanation:** The outer topics indicate eight general categories of qualifications. Each of them is divided into sub-categories listed inside the outer circle. The outer ring (LEVEL 1) indicates room for growth. The middle ring (LEVEL 2) indicates good development in any specific category. The inner circle (LEVEL 3) indicates excellent development in a given category. Each interviewer has their own copy of this sheet. Since no candidate is perfect, each interviewer makes an 'x' in each category on their sheet (from Level 1 to Level 3) where they perceive the candidate to be at present.

The compilation of the interviewers' sheets provides a clear picture of how they perceive the candidate's preparation. It also indicates where they jointly think growth is needed. They can then decide whether or not that growth is required prior to deployment or during life-long learning into the future.

At the receiving end, where the missionary lands, there are additional issues of practical importance to consider.

- How will they find a place to live and buy food?
- How would they get resident visas and other required legal documents?
- By what means will they receive financial support?
- How will they learn the local language?
- Where will children go to school, and in what language?
- Where can they access medical assistance if needed?
- What methods will they use to share the Gospel and disciple those who respond?
- How will they gather new believers into a community of faith (church) capable of reproducing itself in its own context, and beyond?

There are many 'informal' missionaries who are not intentionally sent by any local church. They travel as business people and share Christ in the course of their daily schedules. These ambassadors can be very effective and should be encouraged. If possible, they should be trained as any other missionary would be. They are often able to go places where professional missionaries cannot. These business people come from all over the world and are especially numerous from the global East *and* Southeast.

One notable example of *business as mission* or *mission lifestyle* from the global East is China's Back to Jerusalem (BTJ) movement. Enoch Wan says, this ". . . movement is a loose network of diverse efforts which include Christians living within as well as outside China, all working together to send missionaries from China to evangelize and form new fellowships in the towns, cities, countries and ethnic groups between China and Jerusalem. . . . Approximately 90% of the unreached people groups in the world today are living in areas that the BTJ movement is targeting." Many of those involved in this movement are self-supporting and relocate with missionary purpose.<sup>6</sup>

A great example of missions collaboration in the Spanish and Portuguese-speaking world is COMIBAM. Founded in 1987, COMIBAM's translated vision

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6. Winter and Hawthorne 2009, 374.

statement is, *Taking the whole Gospel from Iberia-America to all peoples*.<sup>7</sup> This alliance of missions-minded Latin entities currently represents twenty-five countries. It functions at home to assist in mobilizing, training, sending missionaries, and helping missionaries in the field. They have been greatly instrumental in the growth of vision and missions-related action from their portion of the global South.

Timothy Olonade stated that by 2006, in Nigeria alone, there had been over 5,200 cross-cultural missionaries sent out. This happened when the expatriate missionaries serving in Nigeria had shrunk from nearly 10,000 in 1986 to around 860 in 2006.<sup>8</sup> Many Christian Nigerians have emigrated to the West, and even though they may not be professional missionaries, they often take with them a vibrant witness of the power of Christ.

Filipinos are found throughout the world, and the Christ-followers among them often establish congregations among their own people. Their host countries reap the benefits of their faith in Christ as ministries overflow into their adopted neighbourhoods. They are excellent at networking and often combine efforts to share a vision for reaching LRPGs. One such resource being used effectively to renew missions vision is a dynamic course called *KAIROS—God, the Church and the World*.

Since it is God who invites the Church to partner with Him in the harvest wherever His Spirit is working, it may blossom in the most surprising of locations. Each local church must actively engage in the discernment process of how to move forward with God's commission to the Church regarding missions because, for many LRPGs, there is no neighbourhood group of Christ-followers within their sphere of influence. Therefore, if they are to know Christ, someone from outside must take the initiative to cross barriers of culture and language to reach them. The Holy Spirit will send someone if the church is actively praying the Luke 10:2 prayer for the Lord of the harvest to send more workers. This *someone* could be from anywhere among the young or old churches of the world. Christ is not partial toward the older churches. He knows who will fit the need.

Some churches attempt to interpret the geography of the Great Commission recorded in Acts 1:8 sequentially (their *Jerusalem*, then *Judea*, then *Samaria*, and then to the ends of the earth). In other words, they don't want to focus on their 'Judea' or 'Samaria' until they have finished the task in their hometown or country. While this approach may sound logical, it neither reflects the practice in the New Testament nor the counterintuitive way in which the Spirit of God works.

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7. <https://www.comibam.org/es/junta-de-directores/>.

8. Winter and Hawthorne. 2009, 371.

The reality in the Book of Acts was the Gospel spread simultaneously in many directions, and the task never was completed in Jerusalem. The initial disciples of Jesus did not even begin in their home territory of Galilee. Following Pentecost, they strategically began ministering to the south in Jerusalem.

An additional essential aspect of sending missionaries cross-culturally is how to care for them from a distance. Finances are only one important element of missionary care. The care provided to fellow believers experiencing difficult circumstances at home is the same type of care potentially needed by their missionaries. How can this care be provided from a distance? With whom will they have fellowship, and what will their worship context look like? What will they do in situations of health or political crisis? A lack of foresight in some of these aspects may result in premature attrition among their workers. The home church may be able to help search for potential options available in the target region, but often onsite partnerships and fellowship are crucial for the missionaries' wellbeing.

## Missiological Bites

A conversation occurred, which was eye-opening for this writer. I had already been working in Latin America for twenty years when I attended a gathering of Latin church leaders from Central and South America in the late 1990s. One of the Latin speakers commented North American and European Protestant missionaries of the past century had done many things well. However, they had failed in two key areas. First, they failed to teach the Latin Church how to give. The new Latin converts were often poor, and the missionaries felt it was unrealistic to teach about sacrificial giving.

Second, they failed to teach the Latin Church how to go! Since the Latin churches were in their infancy, the missionaries thought it would be detrimental to their development to teach them to send their own missionaries to the unreached. They wanted to keep the promising leaders at home to lead the churches.

As a result of these two shortcomings, many Latin churches considered foreign missions to be the exclusive domain of the wealthier, Western-sending countries. The Latin churches could multiply in their own context, but missions beyond were the foreigners' responsibility.

Firstly, they were unable to teach the Latin Church how to give...Secondly, they failed to teach the Latin Church how to go!

Western missionaries, with some notable exceptions, had failed to pass on the very missions vision with which they themselves had been sent. They observed the relative poverty of their host culture and concluded the infant churches could not be involved in missions because they were incapable of matching the sending model of the Western church. Nevertheless, God was at work, and Latin leaders soon discovered God was also calling some of them to minister cross-culturally. They had not been taught how to do so.

Young majority world churches began to realize they were missing out on a great blessing by not being taught to give out of their poverty to extend the Gospel to unreached peoples. God's commission to their churches was in no way diminished by their local economy. They merely needed to create new models and get moving. And they did.

Following the challenging initial stages of evangelism and church planting, the natural tendency of many missionaries is to drift into support ministries related to shepherding the new converts and meeting the needs of the society in which they live. Since those physical needs are essential (and sometimes urgent), the initial focus on evangelism gets crowded out. Meeting physical needs often opens doors of receptivity to the Gospel. Still, care must be taken for the Gospel to be steadily and effectively presented or people will die well cared for but without Christ. Where a local church has been planted, the ideal solution is for the church to become the face of social assistance in their cultural context. In this way, the locals will gradually recognize the new church as a valued part of the local culture and not a foreign import. Ideally, this also will enable the missionaries to continue focusing on reaching other LRPGs.

### **Some final observations regarding missions from the majority world:**

- Christ's Great Commission to the Church has never hinged on wealth.
- There are well-qualified missionary candidates throughout the majority world. Since many of them have already learned to thrive under challenging circumstances, they are undaunted by the challenges of working among LRPGs in difficult settings.
- Candidates from the majority world are often already bi-vocational to some degree which may facilitate visa acquisition and budget challenges.
- Candidates from the majority world often grow up in inter-dependent societies with a higher degree of relational orientation. They often adapt quickly to flexible schedules and informal ministry opportunities.
- Existing sending structures and models from the West can sometimes be helpful for the majority world if they allow for adequate flexibility to fit the

local need.

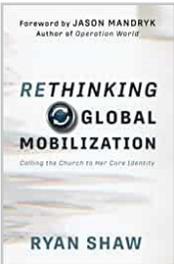
- The Great Commission remains universal in its application to the Church. While churches in the majority world rapidly increase the ranks of the global missionary force, churches in the West need to constantly recommit themselves to the task of missions and not relax before Christ returns.

Regardless of its age, heritage, or geographic location (North, East, South or West), the church that is not acting upon Christ's mandate to disciple the peoples of the world is a church that has not yet emerged. It may have emerged at some point and then regressed into its cocoon, but health and blessing depend upon its re-emergence.

## Resources

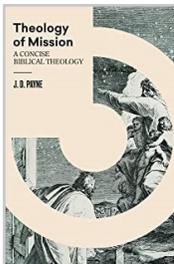
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## Resources



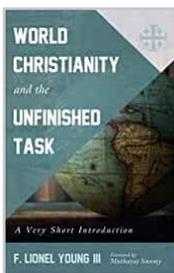
### ***Rethinking Global Mobilization: Calling the Church to Her Core Identity*** by Ryan Shaw

This book affirms God is preparing the global Church for widespread, comprehensive mission mobilization, in every nation of the earth. The growing number of ministries, organizations, national associations, courses and conferences devoted to mission mobilization reveal this growing trend. The book aims to bring definition, understanding, clarity, focus and strategy to this developing move of God.



### ***Theology of Mission: A Concise Biblical Theology*** by J.D. Payne

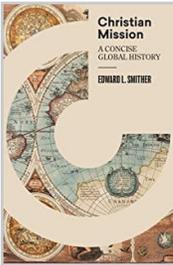
Payne shows that God's mission is on every page of the Bible and is foundational to the Church's own existence. With reflection questions following concise chapters, all readers can consider their place in God's work.



### ***World Christianity and the Unfinished Task: A Very Short Introduction*** by F. Lionel Young III

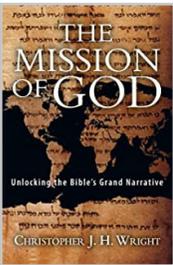
In 1900, more than 80 percent of the world's Christians lived in Europe and North America and nearly all of the world's missionaries were sent out "from the West to the rest." In a dramatic turn of events, Christianity experienced a decidedly "Southern shift" during the twentieth century. Today nearly 70 percent of the world's 2.5 billion Christians live in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, while nearly half of all missionaries are being sent out into all the world from places like Brazil, Ethiopia, and South

Korea. This book is intended to change the way readers think about the Church and challenge the way Western Christians engage in contemporary missions.



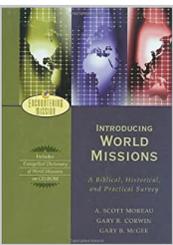
***Christian Mission: A Concise Global History*** by Edward L. Smither

The author weaves together a comprehensive history of Christian mission, from the apostles to the modern church. In each era, he focuses on the people sent by God to the ends of the earth, while also describing the cultural context they encountered. Smither highlights the continuity and development across thousands of years of global mission.



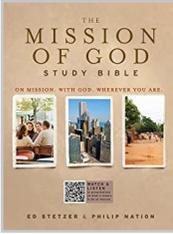
***The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*** by Christopher J.H. Wright

Beginning with the Old Testament and the groundwork it lays for understanding who God is, what He has called His people to be and do, and how the nations fit into God's mission, Wright gives us a new hermeneutical perspective on Scripture. This new perspective provides a solid and expansive basis for holistic mission. Wright emphasizes throughout a holistic mission as the proper shape of Christian mission. God's mission is to reclaim the world—and that includes the created order—and God's people have a designated role to play in that mission.



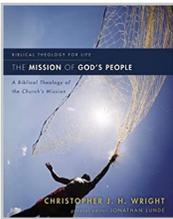
***Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Survey*** by A. Scott Moreau, Gary R. Corwin, Gary B. McGee

This book considers personal and practical issues involved in becoming a missionary, the process of getting to the mission field, and contemporary challenges a mission worker must face. It is based on current research (2013) and includes numerous case studies that consider important issues, as well as sidebars, charts, and maps that provide further details on topics of interest. Altogether, this is an engaging introduction to the work of missions in the contemporary world.



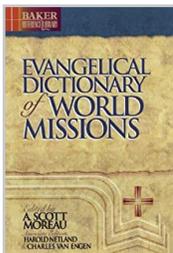
***The Mission of God Study Bible: On Mission With God Wherever You Are*** edited by Ed Stetzer and Philip Nation

The *Mission of God Study Bible* encourages followers of Jesus Christ to see their everyday life from God’s perspective and have His heart for people. It’s a reminder that we live around people in desperate need of redemption and reconciliation with God, which can only be found in Jesus. The mission of God has never been just for specialists; it is for all believers to live out through their daily lives and by sharing the good news of what God has done through the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus. Wherever you are, you are on mission.



***The Mission of God’s People: A Biblical Theology of the Church’s Mission*** by Christopher J.H. Wright

In *The Mission of God’s People*, Wright shows how God’s big-picture plan directs the purpose of God’s people, the Church. Wright emphasizes what the Old Testament teaches Christians about being the people of God. He addresses questions of both ecclesiology and missiology with topics like “called to care for creation,” “called to bless the nations,” “sending and being sent,” and “rejecting false gods.” As part of the “Biblical Theology for Life Series”, this book provides pastors, teachers, and lay learners with first-rate biblical study while at the same time addressing the practical concerns of contemporary ministry. *The Mission of God’s People* promises to enliven and refocus the study, teaching, and ministry of those truly committed to joining God’s work in the world.

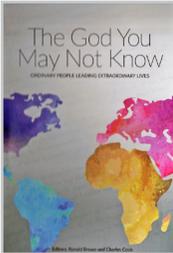


***Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*** edited by A. Scott Moreau

A comprehensive resource containing more than 1,600 references to mission theory and practice, theology, and history.

# Canadian Alliance Missions Engagement

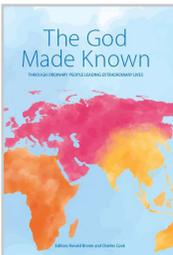
## Books that tell our story



***The God You May Not Know: Ordinary People Leading Extraordinary Lives***, edited by Ronald Brown and Charles Cook.

In *A God You May Not Know*, Ron and Charles provide a compelling collection of true-life stories. This autobiographical material by people who have "been there, done that" is both informative and inspirational. As Alliance missionaries, when they tell their stories, they are telling our story. They provide a window through which you catch a glimpse of our mission.

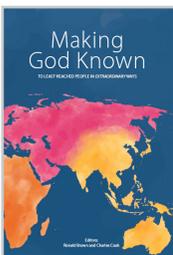
Mel Sylvester, President of C&MA in Canada, 1980-1992



***The God Made Known: Through Ordinary People Leading Extraordinary Lives***, edited by Ronald Brown and Charles Cook.

*The God Made Known* should be required reading for anyone ministering or leading within our Alliance churches, as well as for anyone looking to be inspired and encouraged by God's hand and provision in the joys and deep challenges of reaching out to the nations with the Good News of Christ. How does God work in the world? For some insight, read through the pages of this compelling history.

Clyde Glass, Lead Pastor, Southview Alliance Church, Calgary



***Making God Known: To Least-Reached People In Extraordinary Ways***, edited by Ronald Brown and Charles Cook.

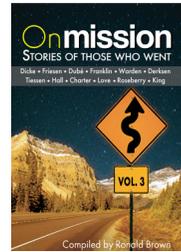
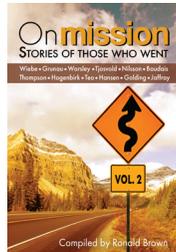
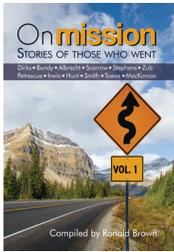
This book tells our story.... As with any good family narrative, you'll also discover connections and explanations about people and initiatives that were previously unknown to you. It is like reading a collection of family stories. This book chronicles how our denomination got the gospel message out to people and places where Christ is unknown. It recounts how it all came together and the people who made it happen in a world where there was war, uncertainty, chaos, and upheaval....

Pamela Nordstrom, Ph.D., Vice President, Academic Affairs, Ambrose University

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## ON MISSION Series

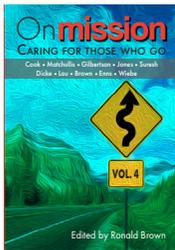


### ***ON MISSION: Stories of Those Who Went, Volumes 1-3***, edited by Ronald Brown

These three books contain the stories of more Canadian Alliance international workers. They celebrate the redeeming work of God and at the same time provide some accountability to the people of God who faithfully provided sons and daughters, finances and prayers, for the mission of God.

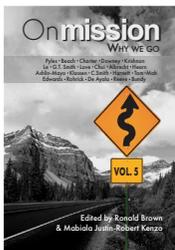
They describe how missionaries in obedience to God's call engaged in His redeeming activities all over the world by going to some of the toughest and most difficult places. They persevered, some under horrible conditions, having survived traumatic events, in order to see communities of faith established amongst least-reached peoples.

Today, we rejoice, that in many nations of the world there are vibrant congregations, small and large, that are living out the Gospel in their communities.



### ***ON MISSION: Caring for Those Who Go, Volume 4***, edited by Ronald Brown

The chapters in this book show how the international worker's sending church, team leader, agency office, and member care provider can all better lean into their roles; namely, being the presence of Jesus walking alongside the workers and "keeping" them as they carry out the Great Commission.



### ***ON MISSION: Why We Go, Volume 5***, edited by Ronald Brown and Mabiola Justin-Robert Kenzo

Today, this very concept of "going on mission," can quickly evoke a variety of competing thoughts and emotions and is exactly why this work is perhaps more important than ever.

Knowing clearly why we go, how we go, and what issues must be considered as one goes is absolutely crucial in the life of every Christ-follower and their obedience to both Christ's example and command.

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# On mission

## WHY WE GO

Today, this very concept of “going on mission,” can quickly evoke a variety of competing thoughts and emotions and is exactly why this work is perhaps more important than ever. Knowing clearly why we go, how we go, and what issues must be considered as one goes is absolutely crucial in the life of every Christ-follower and their obedience to both Christ's example and command.

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go...” - Matthew 28:18-19

- Darren Herbold

Edited by Ronald Brown  
& Mabiala Justin-Robert Kenzo



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