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Perspectives on Healthy Church

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Editor's Note, Spring 2023

Zane Pratt, IMB Vice President for Training

The missionary task is urgent. Healthy churches are an essential component of the missionary endeavor. How do we hold these two together? This edition of the journal addresses the relationship between these two convictions. They each reflect deep theological convictions that undergird this journal. First, the task is urgent. It is urgent because Scripture teaches us that all people on earth are rebels against God who justly deserve condemnation, and the only way anyone can escape that condemnation is to repent and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. As the Apostle Paul makes clear in Romans 10, sinners must hear the gospel to repent and believe, and someone must tell them if they are to hear. This is a matter of life and death for everyone in the world, which makes it inescapably urgent. Second, healthy churches are an essential component of the missionary task. The IMB is unapologetically ecclesiocentric in its missiology. We share the gospel to make disciples. Disciples are made and nurtured in the context of local churches. The New Testament has no concept of Christian believers outside the context of a local church, and it has a great deal to say about the nature, structures, and functions of such local churches. Both of these convictions are foundational to our missiology.

In recent years, these two convictions have been perceived by many as standing in conflict with one another. We are convinced that they must be held together. However, there are a variety of perspectives among us on how to engage the task with urgency while being careful to pursue a rigorously biblical ecclesiology. This edition presents a variety of such perspectives. We have a request of you, reader. Please do not read just one article. If you do, you will get a distorted perspective of the full spectrum of approaches taken within our organization. Read widely. If possible, read them all. Our prayer

is that everyone who reads this edition will be challenged to hold together what Scripture refuses to separate.

FEATURE ARTICLE

The Importance of the Five Roles and the Movement Strengthening Strategist in Networks of Multiplying Churches

Todd Lafferty

As I watched large numbers of believers and churches emerge among Muslims in Indonesia and among Hindus in India, it became clear to me that choosing to be for or against a “movement” was not the issue. If we believe that God can do anything, including bringing about a new work among people groups formerly hostile to the gospel, who was I to question that? Amazing new work emerged among Muslims and Hindus because God opened the hearts of formerly hostile people to place their faith in Him. The question for our missionary teams was, “What will we do to keep up with the pace that God chooses to move among a people group?”

One of the central, and right, concerns expressed over multiplying churches during the past twenty-five years has been the lack of leadership training available in those networks of churches. In this article, I will address that issue and offer suggestions to overcome this deficiency. I advocate for an approach that gives attention to planting healthy churches sustained over time amid networks of multiplying churches, with particular focus on raising up a “Movement Strengthening Strategist” to help with leadership development.

How is it possible to train pastors and teachers within multiplying churches in such a way that the number of pastors and teachers keeps pace with the multiplication of churches? If churches begin multiplying, the missionary should want to find ways to keep pace with the movement and not slow the movement of people coming to faith and churches being formed—all the while aiming to develop healthy churches as God sovereignly saves unbelievers.

This is not a new topic of discussion among missiologists and field practitioners. In the 1890s, a disagreement arose among the missionaries in Uttar Pradesh, India, regarding whether to slow a movement down to adequately teach all those who had been baptized or continue to facilitate the growth of the movement.¹ As the U. P. Mission struggled over this issue and continued to develop their strategy, Robert Stewart argued,

And again, some express the conviction that they ought not to baptize any more applicants for baptism than they are able to afterwards to train properly or care for—in other words, keep Christ’s lambs out of the fold until that fold is enlarged and put in order, so that every member of the flock can be systematically fed and nicely housed—as if these lambs would not do better in the church than in the world anyhow, however imperfect the former might be, or as if the Lord would make a mistake in regenerating people too fast and would not, in His providence and by His grace, make abundant provision for the spiritual nourishment and the highest welfare of all His new-born children.²

Fred Stock, in his book about the same work, *People Movements in the Punjab*, asserts that “quantity, rather than reducing quality, was used by God’s Spirit to create a vital growing fellowship so essential to spiritual depth.”³ Stock affirms that God is interested in numerical growth and that “we are called not just to be faithful, but to win people.”⁴ The goal, according to Stock, should be quality *and* quantity. He argues that “God is not content with a few highly

1 Frederick Stock and Margaret Stock, *People Movements in the Punjab* (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1975), 105.

2 Robert Stewart, *Life and Work in India: An Account of the Conditions, Methods, Difficulties, Results, Future Prospects and Reflex Influence of Missionary Labor in India, especially in the Punjab Mission of the United Presbyterian Church of North America* (Philadelphia, PA: Pearl, 1896, accessed on April 1, 2022 Google Books), 221.

3 Stock, *People Movements*, 219.

4 Ibid.

polished ‘quality’ Christians, but opens His arms to gather in all who will come.”⁵

When a God-ordained network of multiplying churches emerges among a people group, we must do all we can to keep pace with how the Lord is moving among formerly lost peoples. At the same time, however, it is incumbent on the apostolic leader—defined here not as an equivalent to the original twelve apostles, but as one whose “main function . . . is to establish churches in areas that have not been reached by others”⁶—to make certain that leaders are being trained within newly planted churches. To not raise up leaders is often to leave behind works that do not last. In order to train leaders, we must tap into the people gifts and roles given to the church that the apostle Paul clearly articulates in Ephesians 4:11-13.

The Five Roles (Ephesians 4:11)

Scholars such as Harold Hoehner, Wayne Grudem, Clinton Arnold, and Eckhard Schnabel affirm the ongoing role of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers in our day.⁷ Over the past several years, a body of literature has emerged advocating a focus on the fivefold gift mix of Ephesians 4:11. Some call it APEST (Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Shepherd, Teacher), and others the “fivefold” ministry, or “5Q.”⁸ Missionary practitioners and contemporary authors such as Neil Cole, Alan Hirsch, Tim Catchim, Michael Frost, J.R. Woodward, and Dan White have also made contributions toward encouraging all these gifts to flourish in local churches.⁹

5 Ibid.

6 Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Kindle Location 11051). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

7 Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 540-47; Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 119; Clinton E. Arnold, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 257-59; Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 847; Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies and Methods* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 237.

8 See, for example, “5Q” (<https://5qcentral.com>).

9 Neil Cole, *Primal Fire: Reigniting the Church with the Five Gifts of Jesus* (Bonita Springs, FL: Tyndale, 2014), 32-54; Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21st Century Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 42; Alan Hirsch, *5Q: Reactivating the Original Intelligence and Capacity of the Body of Christ* (Colombia, B.C.: 100 Movements, 2017), 93-125; Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st Century* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, Inc., 2003), 165-181; J. R. Woodward and Dan White Jr., *The Church as Movement: Starting and Sustaining Missional-Incarnational Communities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016), 46-51.

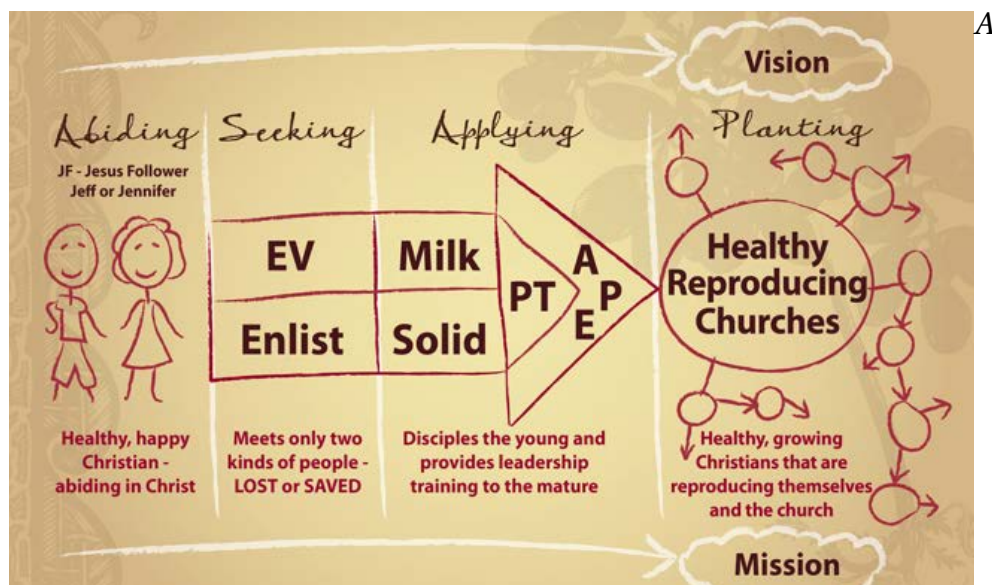
For purposes of this article, I will use the nomenclature “five roles” for these gifts. I believe that it is ideal to have all five roles on the church planting team, especially once churches begin to multiply among a people group. Raising up these leaders takes time, however, and it usually occurs in stages. The apostolically-gifted worker desiring sustainability of churches within a network of multiplying churches must also focus on mobilizing missionaries with other gifts to sustain the emerging churches within that network. For example, missionaries with giftings such as shepherding and teaching are needed to train local pastors and teachers to lead the newly emerging churches.

In South Asia, I also advocated for a new role called the Movement Strengthening Strategist (MSS) to solve the church leadership development problem. This role is not the equivalent of any of the roles listed in Ephesians 4, and I do not intend to suggest I am adding a sixth role to the inspired list; in fact, most MSS team members I know tend to lean toward the pastor and teacher roles.

The Five Roles in Networks of Multiplying Churches

The five roles in Ephesians 4:11 need to be examined more closely to determine the part they play in the growth and health of the network of multiplying churches. To keep this in the forefront of our thinking, we in the ASAP affinity developed a simple strategy with a plan including all five roles. The ASAP diagram provided field leaders with a tool to evaluate strategy plans that new team leaders developed.

The plan, known as the ASAP Plan (Abiding, Seeking, Applying & Planting), included Ephesians 4:11 in the diagram, pointing out the need to identify and develop people in every church around the five roles found in the verse: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.



close up of text on a white surface Description automatically generated

Through our work in the field, we found that apostles, prophets, and evangelists (APEs) keep pushing the movement further and wider while pastors and teachers (PTs) continue to deepen the health of the churches within the movement.¹⁰ The key is holding both perspectives in tension so that one does not overpower the other. The balance between the urgent breadth of gospel sowing and the necessary depth in healthy churches must be sought and maintained. Those five roles serving in concert with one another thus look like this on the field:¹¹



10 Brad Roderick, ed., "ASAP: A Training Manual," (April 29, 2010), 1- 194. The ASAP plan was developed by the Affinity of South Asia Leadership Team and included a simple diagram and a Manual of tools and resources for use in the field.

11 C. Wilson and J. Houk, "Foundations for Emerging Leaders: A Guide for Long-term Discipleship in New Churches" (Unpublished Training Materials, January 2017), 1-45. This section will include portions of the materials included in this forty-five-page training manual.

PTs

The Role of the Apostle

Missiologist and practitioner Don Dent affirmed God's ongoing gift of the apostle in the initial stages of church planting, saying the apostle is the initiator for spreading the gospel and planting multiple, reproducing churches among unreached people groups.¹² The function of modern-day apostles is closely aligned with their name which means, "one who is sent with a message," with the emphasis on the message. As Hoehner concluded, the main function of the apostle is to establish churches in areas that have not been reached by others.¹³ Modern-day apostles are closer to what many Christians refer to as church planters or church-planting missionaries. The church is carrying out the Great Commission of Jesus (Matt. 28:18-20) when the sovereign Lord commissions and empowers missionaries to go and proclaim good news, establish churches, and teach the disciples to obey all that the Lord commands.

Amid a network of multiplying churches, the apostolic leader keeps the breadth and depth of the church planting task in view. He knows that new believers need to be discipled, leaders need to be trained, and the work needs to move forward into new territory. These apostolic leaders pay attention to the overall health of the churches that are emerging amid these networks of new churches.¹⁴ Through prayer and collaboration with his team, the leader knows when to move the work forward among new people groups or expand the work among people groups where disciples and churches are already multiplying.

12 Don Dent, *The Ongoing Role of Apostles in Missions: The Forgotten Foundation* (Edinburgh, U.K.: West-Bow Press, 2019), 2.

13 Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Kindle Location 11051).

14 Nathan Shank, "Generational Mapping: Tracking Elements of Church Formation within CPMs," 26-30. One way to track the health of churches within a network of multiplying churches is to track each church through generational church mapping. Nathan Shank has been a pioneer in North India in applying generational mapping to networks of churches to determine the health and growth of multiplying churches. By doing this the apostolic leader can see not only the big picture of how churches are multiplying in a network, but also how healthy individual churches are.

The Role of the Prophet

What is the role of the modern-day prophet in a network of emerging churches? In no way should we affirm a modern-day prophet speaking a word from the Lord at the same level of inspiration as an Old Testament prophet.¹⁵ Paul enumerates this gift in three other locations where he lists spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:8-10, 28-30). According to Paul, a prophet is one who speaks on behalf of God to strengthen, encourage, and comfort believers (1 Cor. 14:3) as well as to build up the church (1 Cor. 14:4-5).

This gift provides encouragement in the churches being planted, especially in areas of “intense opposition.”¹⁶ Although the work of the prophet is primarily to encourage believers (1 Cor. 14:22), Paul also explains that God can reveal the secrets of the heart of an unbeliever through prophecy, which results in that person turning and following Christ (1 Cor. 14:24-25).

Even though Jesus warns of false prophets (Matt. 24:24), Paul confronts a false prophet (Acts 13:6-11), and Peter and John warn the church of false prophets (2 Pet. 2:1; 1 John 4:1), Paul also exhorts the Thessalonians “not to despise prophetic utterances” (1 Thess. 5:20-22). Paul encourages the Thessalonians to discern that which is good and that which is false or evil (1 Thess. 5:21-22). Paul teaches that the gift of prophecy ought to be eagerly sought due to its ability to edify the community of believers (1 Cor. 14:1).

The role of the prophet within a network of emerging churches might serve multiple purposes. As new disciples are made from people who come to Christ from non-Christian backgrounds, they need someone who can speak truth to them regarding their old way of life. For example, someone might be hanging on to an idol in their home that ought to be cast out. The prophet may point out the gap between the mature man of God mentioned in Ephesians 4:13 and the childish believer tossed back and forth by the waves described in Ephesians 4:14. By doing so, the prophet helps new believers and churches grow and mature so that they, in turn, can make disciples in their community and beyond.

15 John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 161-3. Stott argues that prophets of the canonical kind that received a word from the Lord, are no longer active today. As Stott claims, “nobody can claim an inspiration comparable to that of the canonical prophets, or use the introductory formula, ‘Thus saith the Lord.’”

16 Arnold, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Ephesians*, 431.

The Role of the Evangelist

Runners in ancient times delivered the good news of a military victory or an emperor ascending to the throne. Ambassadors brought home good news of diplomatic victories.¹⁷ Much more importantly, angels brought good news of Jesus' birth to earth (Luke 1:19). Jesus traveled around Judea and Galilee proclaiming the good news (Luke 4:43, 8:1; Matt. 4:23, 9:35). All evangelists share the good news, while some travel to do so. Jesus' disciples are to take the good news everywhere (Mark 13:10, 14:9; Matt. 24:14, 26:13; Luke 9:6).

The gospel of peace with God through Christ's crucifixion and resurrection (Eph. 1:13, 2:17, 3:6, 8, 6:15, 19; 1 Cor 15:3-4) is the message that evangelists share. Even though all Christians are enjoined to share the gospel, there is a special gift endowed upon some in the area of evangelism.¹⁸ It may be expressed in several different ways such as being a gifted evangelistic preacher, explaining the gospel clearly to unbelievers, helping people place their faith in Christ, or engaging in personal evangelism in an effective way.¹⁹

Evangelists are not limited to itinerant preaching, as many are working within established congregations. Paul served as an evangelist and encouraged Timothy to do the work of an evangelist in Ephesus (2 Tim. 4:5). Philip, one of the seven chosen by the apostles to serve the widows in Jerusalem (Acts 6:3-6), is called "the evangelist" (Acts 21:8).

In addition to personally proclaiming the gospel, evangelists equip others for the work of ministry (Eph. 4:12). Practically, the work of the evangelist may cover a wide range of activities like planting churches, training Christians, and strengthening established churches, but his primary role is evangelizing and equipping others to do the same.

The Role of the Pastor/Shepherd

The term "pastor" is rare in the New Testament. Ephesians 4:11 is the only place *poimen* (pastor/shepherd) is used to describe the work of a church lead-

17 Frank Thielman, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 274.

18 Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 163; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God's Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 359. Schreiner argues that evangelists are "especially endowed by God for the dissemination of the gospel." Schreiner states that those who have the gift of evangelism should be committed to that ministry.

19 Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 163.

er. Thielman states that “in Ephesians 4:11 the pastors were probably leaders within the Christian communities who held positions of authority and were charged with the community’s well-being.”²⁰

The shepherding role for a leader is affirmed as Jesus refers to himself as the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-18). Some characteristics of shepherding that Jesus pointed out are (1) knowing people personally and intimately (John 10:3, 14), (2) leading them well (John 10:4), (3) protecting them from thieves, robbers, and wolves (John 10:7-13), (4) and loving them so much that one would sacrifice their life for them, unlike the hired hand who runs away when trouble comes (John 10:11-13, 15).

Jesus extended that role to Peter and the other disciples when he commissioned Peter to feed his sheep (John 21:15-17). Paul also refers to elders as shepherds in Acts 20:28. Shepherds are supposed to help the flock discern and avoid dangerous teaching that comes by way of wolves (Acts 20:28-29). In 1 Peter 5:2, Peter also encourages the leaders who give oversight to be good shepherds of the flock of God: “Shepherd God’s flock among you, not overseeing out of compulsion but willingly, as God would have you; not out of greed for money but eagerly” (CSB).

Within a network of multiplying churches, it is vital to be training local shepherds and caring for the many new sheep who are entering the kingdom at the same time. The missionary church planter or the MSS should therefore shepherd the maturing shepherds, not the sheep. The MSS particularly raises up and equips local shepherds to do the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:12), and that work includes caring for the sheep. If local shepherds are not raised up, the movement may grow dependent on outsiders and thus cripple the health of the emerging churches.

According to Thielman and Stott, the first four roles could all teach doctrine and the basics of the Christian faith.²¹ Nevertheless, Paul mentions the gift of teaching as the fifth gift listed in Ephesians 4:11. He lists it third in 1 Corinthians 12:28, after apostles and prophets. In Romans 12:7, Paul places it third after prophecy and service. He closely ties teaching with shepherding in Ephesians 4:11, and teaching is considered a qualification for one aspiring to serve as an overseer/elder (1 Tim. 3:2, 5:17; 2 Tim. 2:24; Titus 1:9).

²⁰ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 276.

²¹ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 276; Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 164.

Indeed, there seems to be a group who specialized in teaching (1 Thess. 5:12; Gal. 6:6; 1 Cor. 12:28-29; Rom. 12:7; Acts 13:1; James 3:1). These teachers instructed the church in “the teaching” (1 Tim. 6:1). Paul points out the problem of false teaching in Ephesians 4:14 and makes it clear that teachers play a key role to help mature the body of Christ.

As the churches in Asia Minor continued to reach many Gentiles with the gospel, the need for the multiplication of teachers continued to be great.²² The Gentiles did not have the foundation of the Old Testament that the Jewish believers had, so the need to multiply teachers to provide ample training for the Gentiles continued to be critical. The teachers also exhorted the hearers to live in such a way that they lived out the teaching and explanations of the faith.²³

Amid a network of multiplying churches, the transmission of biblical teaching and training must be passed on from one generation to the next. Therefore, the teaching function must consider the prevailing way a people group thinks on various issues and must point them to a biblical worldview. To incorporate this type of training at the grassroots level, elders must also be chosen to lead the churches, as the next section will briefly address.

22 Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, vol. 2, *Paul and the Early Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 1070. Schnabel explains that Paul and Barnabas and teachers “taught a great many people” (Acts 11:26). Schnabel posits that the term “teach” referred to more than “missionary teaching in the synagogues of Antioch, but it may also refer to the instruction of new converts and of the believers in the church—that is, the ‘great many people’ of Acts 11:24 who had been converted through the missionary work of the Jewish Christians from Jerusalem.” Those that were disciplined and taught, it seems, became teachers as well. Thus, the number of teachers multiplied as Paul gave attention to discipling and teaching the believers. Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary*, 419. Schnabel points out “the fact that Paul repeatedly mentions teachers as an integral part of each local congregation” (Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor. 12:28-29, 14:6; Gal. 6:6; Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 3:2). Luke also points out that prophets and teachers had a prominent role in the church in Antioch (Acts 13:1).

23 Arnold, *Ephesians*, 261; Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, vol. 2, 1070. Schnabel asserts that Luke’s comment in Acts 11:27 “describes the instruction of the believers in Antioch who were so active, or prominent, that they attracted the attention of outsiders, including the Roman authorities.” Although Paul saw himself as a missionary, seeking to preach to the Gentiles, he also saw the importance of “teaching new converts and the believers in the Christian community, taking time and energy that might otherwise be spent preaching to and conversing with unbelievers.” Paul saw the importance of equipping the believers to do the work of the ministry once he was no longer on the scene (Eph. 4:11-12). Part of the work involved training and equipping apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers who would be able to equip others also (2 Tim. 2:2).

The Role of the Movement Strengthening Strategist in Networks of Multiplying Churches

When the IMB's affinity of South Asian Peoples created the position of Movement Strengthening Strategist in 2009, we did not equate it with the five positions listed in Ephesians 4:11. At best, the MSS role is a supporting role to the others, but especially for training pastors and teachers.

We were seeing that we were giving little attention to training pastors and teachers in many networks of multiplying churches that were emerging among Hindu peoples at the time. As a result, churches did not continue to multiply, and these networks of churches were not sustained over time. The core task of the MSS role is to address this issue by assisting the missionary team in equipping pastors and teachers within movements of multiplying disciples and churches.

Sometimes the MSS insured that training was passed on from generation to generation of pastors and teachers through those pastors and teachers who received the training. At other times, they found that they also needed to train pastors and teachers in other generations of churches.²⁴ In other words, the pastors who were trained in the first generation of churches did not always pass on the training—and the MSS had to train the second generation, too. Often, they mentored national partners who were gifted in shepherding and teaching into these roles. Many national MSSs now partner with the IMB to do this work across South Asia.²⁵

The MSS must have a mindset of urgency in order to multiply the training of pastors and teachers who may serve as elders in the emerging churches. Elders must ultimately be appointed and trained for the new churches within the network of churches, though the appointment of elders will lag behind the speed of the movement. By leaders appointing elders, the health and sustainability of the churches are more likely to be maintained over time.

One South Asian missionary has taken leadership training materials for pastors and teachers and multiplied it across more than nine networks of mul-

24 Nathan Shank, "Generational Mapping: Tracking Elements of Church Formation within CPMs," *Mission Frontiers* (November–December 2012): 26–30.

25 In a letter dated March 3, 2022, J. H. (full name not used for security purposes) indicated that his team was training two thousand pastors annually across South Asia through national MSSs.

tipling churches. Each of those networks now has national MSSs who have been developed. In 2022, those MSSs jointly held the first “North India MSS Team” meeting, led by two mature Indian MSS leaders. Those leaders had an opportunity to cross-pollinate through multiple networks and discuss key issues during that gathering. Numbers never tell the entire story, but those nine networks are training more than two thousand pastors annually. That number does not count the pastors and teachers who are receiving re-teaching and training by those who receive the training from the MSSs.²⁶

Conclusion

Multiplying leaders is crucial for sustaining a network of new churches. A new network of multiplying churches will not be sustained unless competent pastors and teachers are trained and equipped. The new believers will not grow to maturity, thus hindering the health of the churches. Intentionality is necessary.

As new churches emerge in a network and missionary team members are no longer available to train local pastors and teachers, someone will need to focus on that training so the movement does not falter and ultimately fail. Once local leaders are equipped to train pastors and teachers, the network of churches will ideally grow deeper and wider at the same time, knowing that ultimately it is God who causes the growth.²⁷

My desire over the years, that continues to this day, is to see healthy reproducing churches multiplying in such a way that does not sacrifice urgency for health or health for urgency. These churches instead hold urgency and health in tension in order to move the work forward among a people group or in a city on God’s timetable and for His glory.

Todd Lafferty was elected executive vice president of the International Mission Board in February 2019. He and his wife, Susan, were appointed in 1991 as career IMB missionaries to a large South Asian city, where he was pastor of an international church and, later, a strategy coordinator. From 2000-2003, he

26 J. H.*, email message to author, April 21, 2022, *full name not used for security purposes. J. H. has served over fifteen years in South Asia and currently serves as an IMB Cluster Leader in South Asia.

27 Mikeal Parsons, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing House, 2008), 203. Parsons posits that the appointment of the elders (Acts 14:23) and their subsequent empowering to lead within those new churches led to healthy, vibrant churches.

served as a candidate consultant, based in Richmond. The Laffertys returned to the mission field in 2003, and his roles included strategy associate in the Pacific Rim region, interim regional leader of Pacific Rim, and the affinity group leader for South Asian peoples. Lafferty most recently served as pastor of mobilization for Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala. He is a graduate of the University of New Mexico and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and earned a Doctor of Missiology from Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary.

PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLE

An IMB Trustee's Perspective on Recent Events in South Asia

Andrew M. Davis

God created the heavens and the earth as a radiant display of his glory. God also has scripted and is executing the salvation of sinners from every nation on earth as an even greater display of his glory. We will spend eternity in heaven displaying, seeing, learning, and studying the glory of God as the basis of our ever-increasing praise. In the meantime, it is the greatest privilege of our lives to be called out of Satan's dark kingdom to take part in the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth.

I am completing my ninth year as a trustee of the International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). These nine years have greatly enriched my understanding of and appreciation for the amazing labors of our brothers and sisters serving the Lord so faithfully all over the world. As part of that role, in March of 2022, I had the privilege along with two other trustees to travel to Rajasthan, India, to meet with key field personnel to learn more about the mighty works of God in South Asia. In this brief article, I want to give some of my perspective on what I found.

The Cause for Inquiry

Every year, the IMB publishes a document called the "Annual Statistical Report" (ASR). It presents data culled from the eight affinities into which the

IMB has organized its work throughout the world. The 2020 ASR¹ presented some extraordinary data which caused a number of the trustees to begin enquiries. The following is a table I organized from the ASR:

Affinity	New Believers	Baptisms	New Churches Planted
American	17,290	164	9
Central Asian	2,009	762	30
Deaf	189	135	10
East Asian	6,656	3,270	230
European	950	419	78
NAME	1,097	218	61
South Asian	100,566	76,904	17,772
Southeast Asian	4,165	3,097	105
TOTAL	132,922	84,969	18,295

Table 1. 2020 ASR

It is obvious that there is a remarkable work reported from the South Asian affinity. Simply put, 17,772 out of 18,295 churches planted by IMB missionaries worldwide were planted in that one affinity. That's 97.1%! It was not long before some key leaders in the SBC, along with some of the trustees, began asking probing questions about this data.

The Backdrop: Church Planting Movement Methodology

Many of these questions came from the history of Church Planting Movements (CPMs) in mission work.² CPM methodology combines an explosive growth of individual converts with a rapid proliferation of local churches connected with these conversions. While that may well seem desirable to Christians who yearn for the Great Commission to be fulfilled, many of these CPMs have historically involved questionable (at best) methodologies. Anecdotal, some of the more toxic of these methodologies are 1) pressure for explosive evangelism/conversion numbers; 2) faulty reporting of such num-

1 International Mission Board, Annual Statistical Report: Reporting on 2020 Data (Richmond, VA: International Mission Board, 2021). The IMB publishes a similar report each year. These reports can be accessed at <https://www.imb.org/research/annual-statistical-report/>.

2 The Church Planting Movement missiological paradigm emerged in the last decade of the 20th century into the first decade of the 21st century. The influence of this paradigm is far reaching in modern missions practice. See R. Bruce Carlton, Strategy Coordinator: Changing the Course of Southern Baptist Missions (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 175-208.

bers; 3) altering of the gospel message to make it more appealing to the target group; 4) use of unconverted nationals in the work; 5) financial payment of nationals; 6) financial rewarding of numerical goals being reached; 7) hostility to careful doctrinal instruction of converts (i.e. discipleship) in the name of rapid multiplication; 8) truncating of pastoral ministry (preaching, teaching, shepherding, counseling, family ministry, care for the sick, etc.) so that all focus can go to evangelism. So, it seemed reasonable for these concerned trustees, representing concerned SBC churches, to do an inquiry.

Perhaps an explanation of the role of “trustee” would be helpful here. The word “trustee” implies a role of fostering a high level of trust among the donor churches of the SBC. The churches give two precious commodities to the IMB: people and money. The SBC has set up a system whereby their donor churches can be confident these two precious resources are being spent wisely. The trustees are a part of that system.

In this sense, trustees serve somewhat as loving “building inspectors” of the work done on the field. In 1 Corinthians 3, the Apostle Paul spoke of his own role as the planter of the local church at Corinth, and the church itself as a building (1 Cor. 3:9), and he gives a serious charge to those who come after him to continue the work: “By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds” (1 Cor. 3:10). The foundation he laid was the pure gospel of Jesus Christ, crucified (1 Cor. 2:2) and risen (1 Cor. 15:4). There is no other foundation that can be laid, for any other foundation is a false gospel. Paul then goes on to speak in that famous passage about others later building on his foundational work using gold, silver or costly stones versus those who build using wood, hay, or straw (1 Cor. 3:12). This clearly refers to the ongoing evangelism and discipleship done in Corinth by later preachers/leaders who came after Paul. He warns that Judgment Day will test the quality of each person’s work (1 Cor. 3:13-14).

Using that analogy, it seems reasonable for trustees to see themselves as “building inspectors” of the work done by missionaries, checking the foundation, framing, wiring, plumbing, siding, roofing, etc. to make sure it is up to code. Done with love and humility, this work falls within the purview of a trustee’s role, inspiring donor church confidence.

The Indispensable Role of Healthy Churches in the Great Commission

Foundational to my official inquiries into the works of God in South Asia was my understanding of salvation, the Great Commission, and the role of healthy churches. First and foremost, salvation. I believe the Bible makes it clear that salvation is a process: justification, then sanctification, then glorification. The true gospel is preached, sinners repent and trust Christ, and they are justified by faith (Rom. 3:23-25). All their sins, past, present, and future are forgiven. They are instantly given a position of perfect righteousness through faith in Christ. Next, they begin the sanctification journey of growth into Christlike maturity. Paul commands the Philippians to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God at work in them both to will and to do his good will (Phil. 2:12-13). Paul says that Timothy should grow and develop in his ministry of the public reading of scripture, preaching, and teaching, because if he does he will save both himself and his hearers (1 Tim. 4:13-16). Paul is not saying Timothy is not yet a Christian... but just that his own salvation is not yet finished! And the ongoing preaching of the Word of God is essential both to his own completion of the salvation journey and that of his hearers. This journey is completed for each Christian in glorification, which occurs at death or at the Second Coming of Christ.

That is precisely why healthy churches are essential to the completion of the Great Commission. Whether in a bazaar in Jaipur, a coffee shop in London, or a corn field in Kenya, if a sinner genuinely repents and believes in Christ at the words of a missionary, that sinner's salvation journey has just begun. Without healthy churches, including elders faithfully preaching and teaching the whole counsel of God's Word (Acts 20:27), these converts will eventually fall away under the relentless assault of the world/flesh/devil. Jesus' own articulation of the Great Commission includes "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19). That comprehensive teaching resulting in comprehensive obedience is the essence of healthy church ministry.

What was necessary for us as trustees after the 2020 ASR was to be sure as best we could that those 100,566 new converts reported in South Asia were each in healthy churches, and that the 17,772 new churches planted were healthy

as defined by our *Foundations* document.³ That was the work of “building inspection” I felt led to do.

Opposing a False Dichotomy: Speed vs. Depth

Part of my critique of the toxic elements of CPMs listed above is what I perceive to be a false dichotomy between speed in evangelism and depth of discipleship. Some practitioners emphasize conversion over discipleship. Their sentiment seems to be that no time for theology or deep discipleship exists because people are dying and going to hell every day without Christ. This type of thinking is extremely short-sighted and dangerous. And, it is an unbiblical dichotomy. First, Jesus himself settled in the Great Commission whether or not comprehensive teaching of obedience to all aspects of his doctrine would be part of it. Any missionary who short-cuts thorough discipleship in the name of rapid evangelism is being disobedient to the Lord based on the Great Commission alone.

However, this whole thing is a false dichotomy. No one in the history of the church has been as zealous to win souls as the Apostle Paul. He is the one who prayed that the gospel would spread rapidly (Greek *trecho*... to “run”) in 2 Thessalonians 3:1, and he burned with a constant zeal to take the gospel to the regions yet unreached (Rom. 15:20). He considered his life worth nothing to him if only to finish his race and complete the task of testifying to the gospel (Acts 20:24). No one in history has burned so hot for the spread of the gospel.

Yet, no one did such careful and meticulous doctrinal instruction as the Apostle Paul. The whole book of Romans is his brief summary of the doctrine he would have taught the church at Rome if God had allowed him to

3 International Mission Board, *Foundations*, v. 4 (Richmond, VA: 2022). In my time as a trustee, I had the privilege of serving on the Search Committee that resulted in Dr. Paul Chitwood being presented to the trustees for their approval of him as President of the IMB. During that search process, I continually rang the bell for the candidate to be zealously committed to the Foundations document originally published in 2016 by the IMB's leadership in Richmond. Thankfully, the other members of the Search Committee shared this conviction. This Foundations document spells out plainly the twelve characteristics of a healthy church, and it clearly advocates that healthy churches in this pattern are essential to the entire missionary enterprise. As a member of that Search Committee, I said “The ultimate goal of the IMB is individuals who stand holy before God through faith in Christ on Judgment Day. The penultimate goal is healthy churches to ensure those individuals arrive holy on that final day.” I thank God that Dr. Chitwood clearly articulated his commitment to the Foundations document and to the planting of healthy churches all over the world. Hence, I could gladly join the entire Search Committee in presenting him as our candidate to the trustees, and he was approved on that basis in 2018.

be there physically. That 432-verse book has given birth to literally billions of words of careful theological analysis over almost twenty centuries. Paul did deep, thorough doctrinal instruction, even to the point of multiple times teaching the Thessalonian churches about the “man of sin” (Antichrist) who would reign at the time of the Second Coming of Christ (2 Thess. 2). That is a doctrinal detail that Paul felt worth going over again and again with these Christians. Paul would have been aghast at CPM versions that truncated sound theological instruction in the name of speed of evangelism.

The challenge for all missionaries is to combine Paul’s zeal for the lost with his zeal for sound doctrine. That results in a life of hard labor for fruitful missionaries, but it is the calling. Trustees are not wrong to urge missionaries to hold to both, and to do loving “building inspections” to make sure that the solid foundation of Christ crucified and risen is being developed by the sound construction techniques of preaching/teaching the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27) and the careful shepherding of souls. In fact, Paul’s charge to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:17-36 is really a handbook for sound pastoral ministry all over the world.

My Trip to India

So, what did I find? First, I must be practical. I and the two other trustees who flew to India and traveled to Jaipur, Rajasthan, were in that city for only five days. We were there at the very beginning of a process of internal inquiry led by the Affinity Group Leader Nathan Shank. He and I had excellent conversations based on the scriptures listed above and many others about the essential role of sound New Testament church ministry for the final salvation of all these converts. My confidence in the future of the work in South Asia is ultimately in God, but I do trust Nathan Shank’s heart, as well as the field personnel and national leaders in Rajasthan who have been instruments in a remarkable work of God unlike anything else reported all over the IMB.

Through the use of SIM cards that Indian people could put into their smartphones, clear gospel presentations were being made and converts were coming in like wildfire. The presentations of the gospel led people step-by-step through many Bible chapters in the Old Testament and the Gospels, leading to a clear understanding of the person and work of Christ. On those same SIM cards were all the doctrines needed for healthy church life according to the Foundations document, and many sincere efforts were being made to ensure that each of the churches named in different parts of the state of

Rajasthan did in fact have the patterns of healthy church life described in that document.

Of course, these reported churches were new and growing. Like the Corinthian church itself, there will always be aspects of dysfunction in all local churches. Many of the 17,772 churches reported in the 2020 ASR will likely die; that happens all over the world. But as far as the IMB field personnel can influence, all of these churches are seeking to grow in the twelve characteristics of healthy churches. The national leaders are daily saturating themselves in the Bible by these SIM cards and are training their own disciples in biblical truth as well. Based on these observations, the work inspected is not being driven by a false dichotomy of rapid evangelism at the expense of deep discipleship.

The numbers are so explosive, though, that it is hard to know what is going on in every place. The work is bigger than anyone can oversee. It requires ongoing shepherding and inquiry by the field leadership to be sure they continue to develop in healthy ways. One hundred thousand new converts represent a vanishingly small percentage of the overall population of India (well over 1.4 billion), but even so it is far bigger than the IMB's field personnel can monitor in detail. The best they can do is keep training the national leaders in these New Testament principles. I have confidence that they will.

A Closing Exhortation

My final exhortation to the IMB, including its Richmond leadership and all the trustees, is to remain committed to both passionate urgency in evangelism and careful doctrinal instruction in discipleship. The IMB must make the Foundations document central to the training of missionaries before they are sent, and to the ongoing evaluation of their work on the field. And, the trustees must be faithful to do the work of loving and skilled building inspectors in the spirit of 1 Corinthians 3. Doing so is not disrespectful to the hardworking missionaries on the field, but it is essential to the role of trustees in giving a high level of confidence—trust—to the donor churches of the SBC that their investment of the precious elements of people and money is spent well for the eternal glory of God in the salvation of people in every nation on earth.

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Making the Most of the Gathered Church:

How A Church's Liturgy Shapes Spiritual Formation and Growth

Anthony Witten

Introduction

We planted a church in a megacity several years ago. Every context provides unique opportunities and challenges for planting new churches. Our megacity presented the challenge of limited time.

Many young professionals were open to the gospel and willing to engage with life in a new church. However, they simply had no extra time in their lives to devote to new things. As a church planting team, we needed to be wise regarding the commitments we asked from our new church members. We strategically assessed how best to utilize the limited time they possessed to promote spiritual formation and maturity. The Sunday gathering is the primary commitment for our church. for these believers. We discovered that a theologically robust liturgy would allow us to maximize our time together. I do not think any of us foresaw the impact it would make. As this article will show, our church is benefitting from our intentional use of our liturgy.

What is Liturgy?

Baptists may be uncomfortable with the term *liturgy*, but we need not be alarmed at this word. Liturgy refers to the order, structure, and routine of a worship service or public gathering of a church. Every church has a liturgy. So, “the question is not whether a church will be liturgical but to what degree a church will reflect on and take into consideration the deep foundations, rhythms, and structures that undergird its worship habits.”¹ As Great Commission Baptists, our missionary endeavors “can be enhanced and furthered by a more reflective, theological, and missional engagement with the latent liturgical character of our worship.”²

Our Liturgy

We structured our liturgy around the biblical metanarrative.³ The biblical metanarrative is the story of God redeeming for himself a people from every tribe, tongue, and nation through Christ to his glory: “The story of human history, from beginning to end, is the story of worship.”⁴ Taylor Worley agrees, “the story that best serves the gathered believers and the lost in their midst is the gospel itself, for we all benefit from revisiting the gospel together.”⁵ The movements in our time of gathering follow the major headings of the gospel narrative: creation, fall, redemption, and restoration.⁶

Creation

During the section headed creation, we worship the Creator. Our worship typically begins with a call to worship read from Scripture and prayer. Then our worship team leads us in singing three or four songs. During the singing, we also include a time of congregational reading of a passage of Scripture.

1 Taylor B. Worley, “Baptists, Corporate Worship, and the Christian Tradition” in *Baptists and the Christian Tradition: Towards an Evangelical Baptist Catholicity* (Nashville: B&H, 2020), 170.

2 Worley, “Baptists, Corporate Worship, and the Christian Tradition,” 171.

3 Our leadership team thought we were clever for devising our liturgy, only to find out later that other churches were moving in this direction. Chad Ashby, “Good Liturgy is Theology in Action,” *Southern Equip*: <https://equip.sbts.edu/article/good-liturgy-is-theology-in-action/>, accessed 12 December 2022.

4 Jonathan Gibson, “Worship: On Earth as It Is in Heaven” in *Reformation Worship: Liturgies from the Past for the Present* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2018), 20.

5 Worley, “Baptists, Corporate Worship, and the Christian Tradition,” 176.

6 Stephen Wellum, “The Story and Message of the Bible,” *The Gospel Coalition*: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-story-and-message-of-the-bible/>. Accessed 12 December 2022.

The Fall

When we transition to the fall, we focus on the need to confess truth and sin. During this time of our gathering, we are led to confess truth by reading from a historic confession of faith or systematically working through an evangelical catechism.⁷ Then we are led to confess sin and engage in a time of prayer and confession.

Redemption

We then turn to focus upon redemption. We read aloud the passage of Scripture to be preached. Then a preacher preaches a gospel-centered expository message. We follow the message with a brief song of response and transition to the Lord's Table. We celebrate that Lord's Supper every week. We believe it is the appropriate response of the church to celebrate the message of redemption.

The Lord's Supper requires participation by the entire body and makes use of all our senses as we look to Christ's substitutionary atonement with thanksgiving. Each week we emphasize a different perspective offered in the Lord's Supper so that the practice does not grow stale.⁸ We cycle through looking inside, around, back, forward, and up. These focused looks allow us to appreciate and reflect upon the salvation won for us through Christ. This salvation was won in the past for a new people, is secure in the present, and guarantees a future celebration.

Restoration

We then have a brief hinge in our liturgy which straddles the *redemption* and *restoration* sections. Before we enter the restoration portion of the gathering, we direct the church to shift around and make small groups of 3-5 people. For ten minutes, these small groups discuss three questions provided by the preacher. These questions allow the church to process what they heard and begin to enjoy fellowship in the Word.

During our restoration portion, we focus on how our church can pursue and live out the salvation we celebrated in the Lord's Supper. Many churches call

7 Over the last two years we have followed *The New City Catechism* with minor adjustments to suit our baptistic ecclesiology. The Gospel Coalition, *The New City Catechism Devotional: God's Truth for Our Hearts and Minds*, ed. Collin Hansen (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017).

8 John S. Hammett, *40 Questions about Baptism and the Lord's Supper* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2015), 305-307.

these *announcements*. We want to emphasize that our announcements are really informing the church how we can pursue God's design for our lives together. We also use it as a time to hear testimonies from our church and from new candidates for church membership. Upon a candidate's testimony, the church will affirm them into membership. We conclude this time with a commissioning for the gathered church to scatter into the city to live out the Great Commission.

Four Ways Liturgy Fuels Our Church's Growth and Health

As noted earlier, our church is reaping benefits from the use of our liturgy. This purposeful liturgy provides a framework for spiritual formation, equips believers with gospel language, prioritizes church health, and promotes participation in gospel ministry.

Liturgy provides a framework for spiritual formation.

Since our liturgy follows the biblical metanarrative, we are constantly rehearsing the story of Scripture. Bryan Chapell astutely asserts, "Structures tell stories."⁹ The structure of our liturgy tells the story of Scripture. This structure provides framework for spiritual formation because it is Scripture that is forming disciples corporately.

The liturgy we use emphasizes the role of the Scriptures in forming mature Christians. Whether we are reading short or long passages of Scripture, singing songs informed by Scripture, hearing the Scripture preached, or discussing what we heard proclaimed, Scripture is given a prominent place in our liturgy. Bonhoeffer writes: "As a whole the Scriptures are God's revealing Word. Only in the infiniteness of its inner relationships, in the connection of Old and New Testaments, of promise and fulfillment, sacrifice and law, law and gospel, cross and resurrection, faith and obedience, having and hoping, will the full witness to Jesus Christ the Lord be perceived."¹⁰ The prominence and intentionality of reading Scripture in the liturgy is creating a church that loves the Word of God.

9 Bryan Chapell, *Christ Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 15.

10 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, translated by John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper One, 1954), 51.

John Hammett admits that Baptist churches would do well to give more prominent place to Scripture in public gatherings: “Aside from the sermon text, Scripture is seldom read in many Baptist churches.” He adds, “A careful, thoughtful reading of Scripture serves both to honor God and to edify believers by exposing them to the whole counsel of God.”¹¹ Whether reading a portion of Scripture or committing to preach through books of the Bible, our church is intentionally depending upon God’s Word to shape and form us as his people.

By incorporating historical confessions, creeds, and catechisms, we ensure that our church is not cut off from faithful brothers and sisters in the faith who have preceded us. Hesselgrave agrees, “The biblical text needs to be read and interpreted in dialogue with the confessional tradition—that is, with the way in which the Scriptures have been understood in the church down through history. No one person is an island. Neither is any church.”¹² Allison concurs:

“To voice a common confession of faith as the church assembles together and in continuity with the church throughout the ages stimulates and demonstrates the unity of the body of Christ.”¹³ Allison also suggests that “confession of the common faith provides a hermeneutical framework for the church and its members.”¹⁴ So, whether we are reading or preaching Scripture or affirming the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3), we are committed to a liturgy that provides a framework for spiritual formation.

Liturgy equips the Christian with gospel truths.

Since our liturgy follows the biblical metanarrative and allows the Scripture to permeate our public gathering, our liturgy is also gospel heavy. The gospel takes center stage as we rehearse the story of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. By revisiting the gospel weekly, our church demonstrates the centrality of the gospel in the life of the believer and in the life of the church.

11 John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 241.

12 David J. Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally: North American and Beyond*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 223.

13 Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 137.

14 Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 140.

Again, Chapell believes the structure of a liturgy is crucial for local churches. He argues:

Analogous to church architecture, the order of worship (another way of describing the liturgy) conveys an understanding of the gospel. Whether one intended it or not, our worship patterns always communicate something. Even if one simply goes along with what is either historically accepted or currently preferred, an understanding of the gospel inevitably unfolds. If a leader sets aside time for Confession of Sin (whether by prayer, or by song, or by Scripture reading), then something about the gospel gets communicated. If there is no Confession in the course of the service, then something else is communicated—even though the message conveyed may not have been intended.¹⁵

We wanted to be sure our church's liturgy was governed by God's intention for church formation rather than by trying to meet some felt needs. By structuring the liturgy around the gospel, we intentionally sought to avoid miscommunicating the reason we gather as a church.

An emphasis on liturgies which emphasize the gospel is as old as the Protestant Reformation. Mark Earngey informs: "because the reformers understood the important interplay between how worshipers pray (*lex orandi*) and how worshippers believe (*lex credendi*), they saw liturgy as a powerful means by which to communicate theology."¹⁶ Further, "If the patterns of prayer aligned with the truths of Scripture, then these would renovate and reinvigorate the theological convictions among the Reformation churches."¹⁷ The liturgies of churches following the Reformation served a catalytic role in thrusting the right preaching and understanding of the gospel across Europe. Earngey describes the liturgies' impact following the Reformation:

The often ingenious, and always careful, crafting of words in the liturgy permeated the hearts and lives of the worshipers.

¹⁵ Chapell, *Christ Centered Worship*, 18.

¹⁶ Mark Earngey, "Soli Deo Gloria: The Reformation of Worship," in *Reformation Worship: Liturgies from the Past for the Present* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2018), 26.

¹⁷ Earngey, "Soli Deo Gloria: The Reformation of Worship," 26.

The liturgies were soaked in Scripture, and thus they did not return void. What they often did return were transformed congregations, confident in Christ and courageous in good works. Through the liturgies of the Reformation, evangelical doctrine was as much caught in public worship as it was taught in published writings.¹⁸

The careful and intentional structure of our liturgy equips our church to be ready to share the gospel. I remember one Sunday after church when a young man approached me about his efforts to share the gospel with a co-worker. I asked questions regarding what he thought he should share. He came to the realization that the gospel template of creation-fall-redemption-restoration was the story he could share with his colleague. I did not need to provide much counsel after he came to conclusions on his own in our conversation by reflecting on our church's liturgy. Our liturgy equipped him to do the work of an evangelist.

Liturgy prioritizes church health.

Healthy churches flourish where they are planted. These churches become launching pads for equipping healthy disciples, healthy church growth and church planting. Many characteristics of healthy churches can be fueled by a gospel-saturated liturgy.¹⁹

Foundations rightly identifies the local church as the context for biblical discipleship.²⁰ Our liturgy promotes intentional investment in one another's lives for the sake of Christian maturity. Discipleship is expressed through the learning and obeying of Christ's commands. The "one another" passages highlighted in the New Testament give some direction to what discipleship in the church looks like. These passages focus mainly on disciples of Jesus being in unity with one another, loving one another, and exercising humility

18 Earngey, "Soli Deo Gloria: The Reformation of Worship," 27.

19 See, International Mission Board, "12 Characteristics of a Healthy Church" in *Foundations*, v. 4 (Richmond, VA: 2022), 80-83.

20 "While discipleship happens in a variety of settings, God provides the local church as the necessary setting and the primary relationships for the full measure of biblical discipleship this side of Pentecost. If there is no local church, it necessarily requires church planting." *Foundations*, 57.

with one another.²¹ In gathering and following this liturgy, we can pursue many of the characteristics of a healthy church.

Our liturgy provides space for other aspects of a healthy church to flourish. Biblical leadership is on display. Leaders exercise shepherding and teaching gifts as the liturgy's content is constructed week to week. Biblical preaching and teaching are prioritized as space is provided for the preaching of gospel-centered, expository messages. The regular observance of the biblical ordinances promotes church health. As noted, the Lord's Supper is observed on a weekly basis. Baptism is announced when new believers profess faith.²² The church worships in singing, praying, reading scripture, and hearing testimonies. Biblical fellowship is intentionally structured in the liturgy. Members discuss God's Word during the gathering. They stir up one another for love and good works. Biblical prayer is modeled for the church. The time devoted to prayer demonstrates what healthy prayer is and provides a framework for prayer in a disciple's daily life.²³ Our gathering ends with a commissioning. This commissioning is clear directive to our church to scatter into the world to be witnesses for Jesus until we return to meet again the next Lord's Day.

One of our church's ministry leaders had concerns about the repetitive nature of our liturgy. She particularly had reservations about the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper. She had always been told at other churches that they celebrated the Lord's Supper only sporadically so that it would not lose its meaningfulness. After our church was a few years old, she reported that she loved how we walked through our worship service—especially observing the Lord's Supper every week. She told me that weekly observing the Lord's Supper fueled a love for Christ and served to remind her that she was not alone in her walk with Christ. An entire church was covenanted together to walk alongside one another to pursue Christ together.

21 Jeffrey Kranz, "All the 'one another' commands in the NT" [overviewbible.com, https://overviewbible.com/one-another-infographic/](https://overviewbible.com/one-another-infographic/), accessed 28 January 2023.

22 Due to the limitations of the facility we rent for our gathering time, we have to conduct baptisms at different times and in different locations. So, we are not able to incorporate baptism into a normal gathering time. However, we do hear a baptismal candidate's testimony, the church is able to affirm the testimony and the baptism to come and we can pray for the candidate. Ordinarily we depart immediately from our gathering to a place where we can perform the baptism. Typically, the whole church comes for the baptism as they are able.

23 A typical time of prayer focuses on an ACTS model: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. During the time of supplication, we pray for another church in our city, pray for government leaders, and pray for people in our own congregation. This model is usually followed. The model is a helpful template as we disciple new believers because we can always point the example they hear on a weekly basis.

Liturgy promotes participation in place of performance.

When our church gathers, we do so to participate together in the gospel whether through singing, praying, listening, reciting, or dialoguing. We are not simply being entertained, but we are participating in the gathering of the saints for the worship of God. Many churches in our context have talented men and women who perform during a worship service for the good of a congregation, but they often require nothing from the congregation in response. The gathering is centered upon a *come-and-see* approach. By utilizing a liturgy, our church emphasizes the idea of everyone participating in the worship of God and promoting the gospel together.

In fact, I hesitate to call our gathering a worship service because we do so much more than worship. Timms and Chester remind us:

The goal of our meetings should be to encourage one another to worship God—not just then and there, but throughout the week. We meet to “stir up one another to love and good works” (Hebrews 10 v 24). That is the criterion by which to judge all contributions to our gatherings. Even our corporate singing is to be judged by this criterion (Colossians 3 v 16). And the job of the person leading the meeting is to provide a framework in which we can exhort one another to serve God and proclaim His glory to the nations.²⁴

Our liturgy emphasizes the participation of everyone. It is normal for us to serve the church while we gather.

When the church embraces participation in the gospel rather than being passive recipients of a staged performance, they are on their way to be the church God created her to be. Chris Abner writes:

At the moment a new church is planted she is all God designed her to be, but she has not yet achieved all her creator’s expectations. Churches are expected to grow, mature, and multiply. A flourishing church grows where she is planted. She matures

24 Steve Timms and Tim Chester, *Gospel-Centered Church* (The Good Book Company: 2002), 24, epub.

and bears witness to the gospel in the community surrounding her and to the nations. A church that flourishes will ultimately multiply by sending gospel workers to establish new churches in new locations among new communities. The aim of every church planter should be to establish churches that can flourish where they are planted.²⁵

Utilizing a liturgy that promotes participation equips church members to go out into the world and engage in gospel ministry. Participating in the liturgy service provides opportunities for members to gain confidence in the gospel and the God who saved them. We have seen the use of this liturgy serve as a launching point to send workers into the harvest and plant new churches.

For example, a young couple was just sent out by our church to be part of a church planting team. Their participation in the gospel in our church equipped them to lead out in establishing a new church. We pray many more following this young couple.

Conclusion

What our church planting team once viewed as an obstacle in our efforts to plant a church—that is, the lack of time people have—became an opportunity to rediscover the value of intentional liturgy in our church's public gathering. The use of liturgy maximized our time together and became an indispensable component to the health and growth of our church.

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25 Robert Christopher Abner, "An Embryonic Ecclesiology Enabling Church Planting Movements to Flourish," (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019), 50-51.

The Role of Women in Healthy Church Formation

Madeline Arthington

“Does a church owe its women English lessons for their personal growth?”

I listened as this question ignited a heated discussion among the women’s ministry team from my Central Asian church, and I realized it reflects a deeper debate about the role of the church in the development of women. But perhaps the question most worthy of consideration is not about the development of women but rather, what is the role of women in the development of the church?

The IMB’s Foundations document identifies twelve characteristics of a healthy church: evangelism, discipleship, leadership, preaching & teaching, membership, ordinances, worship, fellowship, prayer, accountability & discipline, giving, and mission.¹ For over ten years, I have been a member of a local Central Asian church in a large metropolitan city. I believe the church—not just my local church but truly the church universal—would be transformed if its women grasped the inestimable role they play in healthy church formation.

¹ International Mission Board, *Foundations*, v. 4 (Richmond, VA: 2022), 67-70.

Women Who Fulfill Their Creation Role as They Help the Church

The role of women in the church is anchored in the unique role of women as determined by God in creation. Genesis 3 says, “Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper for him as his complement’” (Gen 2:18). This helper role isn’t about subservience to men or being less-than. The word for helper, Ezer, is used throughout the Old Testament about God himself as he helps his people;² for example, “Israel, trust in the LORD! He is their help and shield. House of Aaron, trust in the Lord! He is their help and shield. You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD!” (Ps 115:9-11). Women reflect the character of God’s powerful help to his people when they support and build up the church.³

Using Foundations twelve characteristics as a guide, below are twelve examples of how women can help the church based on my experience in a Central Asian congregation. From a church planting perspective, my thoughts are limited. I’ve served in only one country with one language. My context has always been Muslim and is driven by honor and shame. But I hope my reflections encourage women to actively pursue the health and growth of their local church.

Women Who Articulate the Full Message (Evangelism)

Foundations states that biblical evangelism means presenting “the full message of holiness and love of God, the sinfulness of every human being, the atoning sacrifice and victorious resurrection of Jesus for our sins, and the necessity of repentance and faith.”⁴

My little church boasts some bold women. These women aren’t afraid to be known as followers of Christ, even if it means risking their relationships, careers, or reputation. Their faith encourages and challenges me. But, I have

2 Bible Study Tools Hebrew Lexicon, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/nas/ezer-2.html>, accessed March 13, 2023.

3 Theology of Work Project, “Women Workers in the Old Testament” <https://www.theologyofwork.org/key-topics/women-and-work-in-the-old-testament/#god-created-woman-as-an-ezer-kind-of-helper-genesis-218>, accessed March 13, 2023.

4 IMB, *Foundations*, 68.

rarely heard a local woman articulate the whole gospel clearly, even when I know they understand it. They often focus on an ambiguous love they received from Jesus while leaving out less palatable truths like sin, substitutionary sacrifice, and repentance that leads to a new life.

Most of these women are the only believers in their households.⁵ They are mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters of Muslims dead in sin. The women in our churches must be able and willing to articulate the gospel clearly if their loved ones are to understand and believe.

The church is the training ground for gospel fluency. Women who disciple women should encourage, teach, and model the complete proclamation of the gospel. Women leading new believers through baptism lessons should help them learn how to weave the full gospel in their personal testimony. The church will be blessed as Spirit-filled women articulate the full gospel.

Women Who Disciple Women in Intimate Topics (Discipleship)

A Christian disciple dies to oneself and surrenders to the authority and rule of God. There is no area of a woman's life that gets a free pass on the authority of God. As we teach women to obey Christ in all areas, we must not neglect sexual ethics. Many issues fall under this topic, but I want to highlight just one here: abortion.

The organization, Passion for Life, reports that only 3 percent of abortions worldwide happen in the United States.⁶ Within the Muslim world, there is a general agreement from one Islamic passage⁷ that a fetus receives a soul at 120 days. One part of discipleship among women is to instruct women on issues of life: the value of every human, life that begins at conception, and God's purposes in marriage, sex, and children.

Central Asia women who come to Christ might not automatically hate abortion or grieve the millions of babies lost through abortion, abortifacients, and in vitro fertilization. Most of them have never thought twice about it.

5 Janelle P, Global Christian Relief, "10 Specific Prayers for Christians from a Muslim background," <https://globalchristianrelief.org/christian-persecution/stories/10-specific-prayers-muslim-background-believers/> accessed March 14, 2023.

6 Passion for Life, <https://www.passionlife.org/our-work/>, accessed March 13, 2023.

7 Sunnah, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:6594>, accessed March 13, 2023.

This is an area of Christian living often neglected in my context. Women who teach other women how to surrender to Christ in intimate matters will help the church reflect God's care for life.

Women Who Influence Elders for Good (Leadership)

Women in the church can have a powerful influence for good on pastors and elders. As they accept their God-given role as helpers, women can make pastors better pastors. Truth be told, some women know the Bible better than their elders—they can support those elders through theological conversations and resources for further study. Some women may have a gift of encouragement—they can affirm the good in elders and speak well of them to others. Women can pray for their elders. Women can also encourage their elders by serving joyfully in the church.

Public recognition and titles are important in my cultural context. This can be ugly when people who are not recognized leaders demand a title to validate the ways they want to serve. Women who serve in the church with a joyful, quiet strength will not only qualify themselves for leadership as deacons but also influence their elders for good.

Women Who Know the Word (Preaching & Teaching)

One way women can support biblical preaching and teaching is to know the Word themselves. A friend once likened a good Sunday sermon to a banquet that someone else prepares and serves you. What a feast! But that meal won't last a whole week. Her point was that we need daily sustenance to sustain and give health.

To build on this analogy, what if we ate only junk food throughout the week? Eating addictive junk food, like a feel-good verse taken out of context, feeds a craving for the next quick high through junk. It's not actually nourishing us. In fact, it causes harm.

We need to cultivate a palate for nourishing meals—deep Scripture study—in order to appreciate the true feast of a biblical, expository sermon. In many cultures, women are less likely to pick up and study a book because of poor literacy or a cultural lack of interest in the written word. It doesn't have to be like that. One dear sister in my church learned to read so she could study the Scripture.

As women know the Word, they are also equipped to teach other women. One of the most gifted teachers in my local church is a woman. She knows the Word, teaches other women in the church, is involved in theological writing and training, and submits to the church's biblical understanding of male eldership.

When women know the Word, they have discernment in active listening to the public preaching and teaching of the church. With the help of the Spirit, the Word will fall on ready soil and bear much fruit, and this will help the church.

Women Who Love the Body (Membership)

The young woman sat across from me in a crowded cafe and smiled warmly. "I haven't abandoned God. I just felt judged at church and needed to take a break. You should be glad—I'm much happier now," she said. Unfortunately, she was not the first to stop attending church because of hurt feelings, entitlement, or worldly enticements.

Biblical membership involves men and women who are committed to assembling together and practicing the biblical "one another" commands, even when it's hard. Many former Muslims react strongly to anything hinting at rules. They appreciate Christian love and freedom in Christ, but any sense of Christian obligation reminds them of Islam's dark demands.

A culture of reactive emotionalism also contributes to many women taking a break from attendance if they feel someone has injured or offended them. A missions scholar from Union School of Theology reports:

In answering the question regarding their reasons for leaving the church all interviewees mentioned the topic of community in some way, whether as a need for belonging (L3), a desire for caring relationships (L1 and L2), a fear of losing people close to you (L4), a need for strengthening relationships (L5), a fear of being rejected after having been away from the church

for several months (L7), a struggle with over-sensitive people leading to hurt feelings (L8).⁸

Yes, we must obey the Scripture's command to gather (Heb 10:25). Women especially should understand the heart of church membership is rooted in love, not rules—loving the church as the body of Christ and committing to work through difficulties together in the pursuit of Christian unity. Women who love the body will persevere through challenges and ultimately build up the church.

Women Who Find Healing in the Cross (Ordinances)

The gospel is not one and done as we watch it fade into the distance of our lives. It permeates the daily moments of our Christian experience and speaks into our relationships, jobs, hopes and dreams. The cross is for those who know they are sinners in need of grace, forgiveness, and restoration.

Over the years, I've regularly noticed Central Asian believers who abstain from the Lord's Supper. Among the women, sometimes they feel off spiritually, so they abstain. They're angry at someone else in the church, so they abstain. They feel hurt by someone else, so they abstain. At first, it seems commendable, like they're taking sin seriously. But I fear in many cases they miss the opportunity for healing through participation in the Lord's Supper.

Bobby Jamieson, an elder at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC, addressed his congregation about when to abstain. He urged the members in most scenarios to repent and partake. He says the Lord's Supper is the opportunity to "receive and experience the benefits of Christ's death."⁹ In taking the Lord's Supper, believers proclaim that Christ is already theirs by faith, yet they also welcome Christ, his forgiveness, and his peace all over again.

The Lord's Supper allows the church to renew its commitment both to Christ and to each other. Jamieson says the Lord's Supper "draws a straight

8 Author name withheld for security, "A STUDY OF ATTRITION IN A MUSLIM-BACKGROUND CONGREGATION OF PROTESTANT (EVANGELICAL) BELIEVERS IN [CITY NAME]." Unpublished dissertation, Submitted to Union School of Theology / Chester University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MTh Theology in Scriptural Context. November 2016, 21.

9 Bobby Jamieson, "When Should I Abstain from the Lord's Supper?" Capitol Hill Baptist, October 16, 2022, <https://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/sermon/when-should-i-abstain-from-the-lords-supper/> accessed March 13, 2023.

line between proclaiming the Lord's death and loving the Lord's people."¹⁰ Tom Ascol, in his article *Worthy Partaking: Examining the Heart*, reminds us that the biblical warning against taking the Lord's Supper in an unrepentant manner is serious¹¹—but the impetus is toward repentance. Every Lord's Supper is an opportunity to repent of sin, turn to the Lord, overlook sins of others, and receive healing from the cross.

We take communion weekly at my church. What an opportunity! As women run to the cross for healing, they strengthen the unity of the church.

Women Who Testify of God's Goodness (Worship)

The Foundations document folds the testimonies of God's people into the definition of biblical worship.¹² In the Bible, James didn't tell us anything new when he said the tongue is powerful and able to bless and curse (James 3:5-12). In my cultural context, women especially are known for their gossiping tongues. They eat each other up like a banquet, not even aware that their words are "deadly poison."

What a powerful shift to encounter a community of women in the church who use their words for good! This indeed is a part of acceptable worship: a sacrifice of praise and lips that acknowledge his name (Heb 12:28, 13:15). I've found that just as gossip feeds more gossip, praise feeds more praise among those with changed hearts. When we hear testimonies of praise to God, our perspective shifts. Gossip becomes distasteful. We look at life with spiritual eyes and offer our own testimonies. Many of the women in my church regularly offer this acceptable worship—they spur me on to praise and bless the whole church.

Women Who Lean In (Fellowship)

One common practice in my country is a concept best described as taking offense. It usually involves some sort of silent treatment or withdrawal from relationship. This withdrawal can be temporary to punish and teach a lesson, or it can be a full severance of relationship. It happens among friends, in

¹⁰ Jamieson, "When Should I Abstain from the Lord's Supper?"

¹¹ Tom Ascol, "Worthy Partaking: Examining the Heart," <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/worthy-partaking-examining-heart>, accessed March 13, 2023.

¹² IMB, *Foundations*, 63.

marriages, and even through social media friending and unfriending. Darby Strickland says, “People with a strong sense of entitlement are so invested in their own felt needs that the primary reason others exist is to fulfill these demands. When others fail to do so, they penalize them.”¹³ In Central Asia, this entitlement is not unique to women, but some women perfect this offense-taking almost to a profession. It can involve emotional manipulation reflecting the curse of sin on women at its purest level.

Women who lean in, however, reflect the love of Christ who bears and forbears. Women who lean into relationships—caring for one another, using Scripture to encourage and challenge, pursuing peace, and bearing each other’s burdens—these women reflect the gospel itself. And when this happens across ages, social status, and ethnicities in the context of the church, it is a powerful testimony to a watching world. Women who lean in reflect the essence of biblical fellowship.

Women Who Pray for the Church (Prayer)

One of my roles in Central Asia is that of prayer strategist. I collaborate with a team of church planters across Central Asia who have a heart for prayer. The vast majority of these people are women. Deduce what you may about men and prayer (Paul does, after all, tell men to pray in 1 Tim 2:8), but the reality is that women seem to be uniquely drawn to this most intimate of spiritual disciplines.

What a gift and opportunity for women to harness this strength and use it to pray for the church: its elders, deacons, growth, sermons, holiness, and unity. Many of the women in my Central Asian church love to pray. They pray desperately because they know they need help, and they believe God will hear them and do something about it. Godly women who pray specifically for the health of the church will make an impact, for we know “the urgent request of a righteous person is very powerful in its effect” (Jas 5:16).

13 Darby Strickland, “Entitlement: When Expectations go Toxic,” https://www.ccef.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Entitlement-When_Expectations_Go_Toxic_Strickland-1.pdf p. 20, accessed March 14, 2023.

Women Who Warn Each Other (Accountability & Discipline)

One of the most challenging temptations in my context for believing women who come to Christ relates to love and marriage. The single women especially struggle with lack of Christian marriage prospects, pressures from Muslim family to marry, and the realities of prime childbearing years slipping away. Even the most dedicated believer can fall when she meets that one who promises to love her and respect her Christian faith.

This is just one critical area of need for women as we exhort, encourage, and warn each other. When women lean into each other's lives, they can often spot the warning signs of temptation and weakness before they grow into sinful decisions. Accountability never goes well, however, unless the other areas of a healthy church are in place, specifically a surrender to the authority of the Word and a healthy culture of fellowship. Women who exhort and prod each other into holiness will bless the church and help avoid many instances of church discipline.

Women Who Support the Church (Giving)

While all are called to give generously to the support of the ministry, it's interesting to note the women mentioned in the New Testament as generous benefactors. Susanna and Joanna supported Jesus from their own possessions (Luke 8:1-3). Phoebe was a patron of many, including Paul (Rom 16:1-2). Lydia gave out of her own wealth including the use of her own home (Acts 16:14). Yet it's not just rich women who are mentioned. It's a nobody widow who Jesus commends for her sacrificial gift: "all she had to live on" (Mark 12:44).

People in my country are suffering financially. The economy is failing, and many struggle to buy food. Even so, those who give to the church reflect an understanding that their money is not their own. Everything in their lives belongs to God, and he will bless a cheerful giver (2 Cor 9:6-7). As a rich American, I often feel awkward interacting with women in my church about finances. But ultimately, we can and should reflect the cheerful giver whether we are a rich Susanna or a poor widow. Women who give generously will support the growth of the gospel through the ministry of the local church.

Women Who See the Vision (Mission)

Revelation gives the ultimate vision in missions: a “multitude from every nation, tribe, people and language, which no one could number, standing before the throne and before the Lamb” (Rev 7:9). I’ve noticed it’s hard for believers in my context to get their mind outside their own people because of the spiritual needs around them. In my church, we pray regularly for the lost—for our neighborhoods, neighbors, relatives, and even for the country as a whole—but rarely talk about the nations. Among the women in my church, they are desperate for God to save their husbands, parents, and children.

The Revelation 7 vision showcases the glory of God in a way that transforms our small worlds. It lifts us out of our limited perspective and puts us on the front row of God’s purposes and plans. When women see and get this big vision, it doesn’t replace their prayers for their families. It enhances them and gives space for these little visions to grow into God’s big plan. Women who pray and watch and wait for God to accomplish his big plan among the nations will help the church stay true to God’s purposes—and, who knows, maybe even themselves one day leave home to serve among the nations.¹⁴

Women Who Persevere

I’ve got a long way to go in fulfilling my own role as helper in the church. My own ego, agenda, and laziness creep in and distract me from a God-given role. In that conversation about English lessons I noted in the introduction of this article, I expressed indignation cloaked in a devotion to the biblical understanding of church. But the reality of my self-righteous indignation had nothing to do with biblical purity—I just plain don’t like teaching English. Maybe this is a way I can lean into relationships and support the body. So, with a renewed mind, I’m coming back to the conversation and praying the Lord will show me what it truly means to help the church, for the glory of God and the good of his body. I hope you do the same.

14 Shanee S, “Coworkers: A Biblical Study on Women in Missions,” 2019, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ih-V5tQQVJ4VL0RbKHe6Y65BHG5gW2Ik/view>, accessed March 14, 2023.

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Congregationalism for a Church Plant in the Confucian Culture

Paul Luo

Introduction

Culturally, I am a Chinese Christian who grew up in a Confucian cultural context. Theologically, I am a Baptist who is convicted that congregationalism is the most biblical form of church polity. Out of my love for the Chinese church, I intend to identify three challenges arising from a Confucian worldview that could potentially hinder church health. Out of my desire to see churches grow toward health in the Confucian context, I intend to meet those Confucian challenges with a congregational solution. In this article, I will build a congregational case for a church plant in the Confucian context to illustrate the elder-led and congregation-rule model of church governance beneficial for the development of churches in East Asia. This article consists of two sections. In section one, I will identify three cultural challenges for churches in the Confucian context. In section two, I will build a case for planting a congregational church in the Confucian context by offering some contextualized solutions to answer the aforementioned challenges. This article will land on the intended conclusion: congregationalism is not only applicable for starting a church in the Confucian context but also beneficial for the long-term health of churches in East Asia (EA).

Confucian Challenges for the EA Church

Does congregationalism work in the Confucian context? Once the two benchmarks of congregationalism are understood, namely autonomy and democracy,¹ many Chinese believers would say no due to its cultural incompatibility.² To further this conversation, three major challenges in Confucian culture³ need to be identified at first.

Paternalistic Leadership

Paternalism simply indicates some limitation on the freedom or autonomy of an agent for any reason. In terms of policy, paternalism stands in contrast with personal choice—paternalists tend to control, intervene, and restrict individual choices.⁴ To be fair, Confucianism is a softer version of paternalism as an approach to government. Originally, the Confucian paternalism was not about hard control or coercion. Instead, Confucian paternalism assumes people do not know what is best for themselves and therefore are not likely to act in their own best interests if they are left to their own choices. As a result, the properly informed and organized authority knows what is best for people, and therefore makes better decisions on their behalf.⁵ Gradually, however, Confucian paternalism was led to a submissive attitude to authority of all types in Chinese culture from students to their teacher, citizens to their king, and children to their parents.⁶ Inevitably Confucian paternalism

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- 1 James Leo Garrett, Jr., "The Congregation-Led Church: Congregational Polity," in *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity*, eds. Chad Brand and Stanton Norman (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2004), 157–58.
 - 2 Nearly every Chinese believer and pastor that I have talked to about congregationalism in their context gave me the similar pushback: Will Chinese believers confront their pastors for their wrongs? Do Chinese really understand and practice democracy? Would Chinese be courageous enough to break their "face" culture to make decisions that are more biblically sound rather than culturally appropriate? At a first glance, Chinese Christians are hardly convinced that congregationalism would work in their Confucian context.
 - 3 I am not demeaning Confucianism in which I was brought up. I merely intend to analyze three Confucian challenges which could impede a healthy development of churches in EA.
 - 4 Sigal Ben-Porath, "Paternalism, (School) Choice, and Opportunities," in *Paternalism: Theory and Practice*, eds. Christian Coons and Michael (Michael E.) Weber. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 247.
 - 5 Sarah Flavel and Brad Hall, "Exemplary Paternalism: A Consideration of Confucian Models of Moral Oversight," *Brill: Culture and Dialogue* 8 (2020): 223.
 - 6 Alan Kam-leung Chan and Sor-hoon Tan, *Filial Piety in Chinese Thought and History* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 1–2.

yields a few ramifications to the EA church. First, church leaders tend to have the “final say” for church decisions since Chinese believers would naturally submit to their pastoral authority by the influence of Confucian paternalism. Secondly, the chance for power abuse among EA churches is probably higher than that in the Western church since the EA church leadership is less regulated due to the Confucian tradition.⁷ Thirdly, it is not easy for church members to offer their advice to church leaders since the paternalistic authority should not be challenged.

“Face” Culture in Confucian Collectivism

A second byproduct of Confucianism is the “face” culture which is paramount in every aspect of EA society.⁸ Essentially, Chinese *mianzi* (face) functions as an ethical system in the collective culture. Every Chinese person seeks acceptance, approval, affirmation, recognition, and praise from other people by gaining *mianzi*.⁹ The *mianzi* culture that is built upon Confucian humanism prompts every Chinese person to seek a better “self” by the judgment of their community.¹⁰ This “harmony-driven” *mianzi* culture steers Chinese people to avoid confrontations at all costs.¹¹ The *mianzi* culture can impact the EA church in several ways. First, while it is always good to pursue harmony in Christ, *mianzi* makes it hard for EA believers to confront sins found in other believers, let alone the practice of church discipline. Secondly, *mianzi* culture sometimes stand in the way of the church body to seek God’s will corporately. For example, a majority of the church may agree on a questionable proposal, but a minority in the church body may remain silent because of their

7 Besides the issue of paternalistic leadership in Chinese house churches, LI Jin (a Chinese author) also points out Chinese church leaders are susceptible to power abuse and financial corruption due to the lack of supervision since Chinese house churches are not registered at the government. See his helpful article “Not Ruling Over But Feeding the Sheep: Thoughts on the Boundaries of Authority and Power in the Chinese Church,” in *ChinaSource*, 21:2 (Summer 2019), 8–9, 13. <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/chinasource-quarterlies/leadership-ethics/>.

8 Face culture is commonly known as *mianzi* culture 面子文化 in Chinese.

9 Jackson Wu sees honor is about gaining face and shame is about losing face. See his “The Gospel with Chinese Characteristics: A Concrete Example of Cultural Contextualization,” *Global Missiology* 1:11 (October 2013), 6. <http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/article/view/1248/2872>.

10 Wei-ming Tu, *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation*, SUNY Series in Philosophy (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985), 52–55, 60.

11 It does not mean that Chinese seldom engage conflicts. It means Chinese people prefer to avoid a direct conflict or confrontation to save each other’s face unless a confrontation is inevitable. Once Chinese engage a confrontation, the “face” is torn and animosity is built.

instinct for maintaining “harmony.”¹² Thirdly, *mianzi* also makes it difficult for an EA believer to inform or even confront his/her pastor/elder in cases of problematic teaching or conduct unless the problem is obviously heretical or immoral.

Lack of Experience in Democracy and Autonomy

At the influence of Confucianism, people in EA are accustomed to submitting to authority of various kinds. That coupled with the political restrictions for democracy in EA, people in that cultural context naturally fall short of the mentality of “democratic participation” and “autonomous rule”. The lack of experience and imagination in democracy can limit EA believers’ understanding of what they could do should they possess the democratic power for making autonomous decisions. In sum, the three identified Confucian challenges could be roadblocks to health of the EA church and congregationalism. Without addressing these cultural obstacles, there is little chance to see congregationalism succeed in EA. In the following space, I will answer those Confucian challenges while building my case for a congregational church plant in the Confucian context.

Building the Case for a Congregational Church Plant

This case is built with two aspects: the qualities of a congregational leadership and the expectations of a new congregation. Each aspect provides some practical guidelines to address the Confucian challenges while advancing the congregational agenda.

The Qualities Needed in Congregational Leadership

Biblically qualified leadership is essential to every church. This is most certainly true in a congregational church plant in EA where church leadership

12 It is often a superficial harmony at best. Chinese people place such emphasis on “face” that the minority often chooses silence instead of objection.

often falls short of the biblical qualifications (1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9).¹³ Unlike strategies that set a low bar for the church leadership in hopes of a rapid and reproducible momentum for church planting,¹⁴ a congregational church plant requires solid leadership at the beginning which will encourage ongoing self-governing, self-propagating, self-supporting, self-teaching, self-expressing, self-identifying, and self-theologizing.¹⁵

Able to Lead by Solid Teaching and Modeling¹⁶

Church planters need to meet the biblical qualifications for church leadership to begin the new church plant because they initially function as pastors/elders for the new church plant.¹⁷ At least one man on the church-planting team needs to be a gifted Bible teacher/preacher and have some level of theological

13 I am not demeaning the quality of Chinese church leadership in general. I simply want to point out the much needed theological training for church leaders in midst of the exponential growth of the Chinese church especially from 80s to 90s. David Aikman reports that theological training of various levels started growing in Chinese villages and cities since 2000. See his *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing Inc., 2003), 140–43. Still, the need of theological education in China is enormous. Bruce Baugus sees the high demand for any kind of evangelical theological education in China. See his “A Report of the State of Reformed Theological Education in China,” in *China’s Reforming Churches: Mission, Polity, and Ministry in the Next Christendom*, ed. Bruce P. Baugus (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), 273.

14 David V. Garrison, *Church Planting Movements: How God is Redeeming a Lost World* (Monument, CO: WIGTake Resources, 2004), Kindle Edition. Garrison defines CPMs as a rapid multiplication of indigenous churches planting indigenous churches that sweeps through a people group or population segment (location 245). Garrison confesses that new believers take the church leadership over from the church planters immediately upon their baptisms (locations 799–879).

15 J. D. Payne and David J. Hesselgrave argue that if a church-planting team does a good job of developing leadership, the church will continue to be vital without the church-planting team with their asserted seven “selves.” Similarly, the writer sees the seven “selves” as a natural result of a healthy congregational leadership. Jervis David Payne and David J. Hesselgrave, *Discovering Church Planting: An Introduction to the Whats, Whys, and Hows of Global Church Planting* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 122.

16 The ability of teaching Scripture is essential and distinct for church leadership as other qualities in 1 Tim 3:2–7 and Titus 1:6–9 are commonly shared by deaconship (1 Tim 3:8–13). Additionally, church leaders shepherd by being examples for believers (1 Pet 5:3).

17 If a missionary and or his team start the new church plant on the mission field, the missionaries also need to be theologically equipped. Will Brooks encourages missionaries and church planters alike to follow apostle Paul’s model for planting NT churches by laying a strong biblical and theological foundation. See his “Paul as Model for Practice of World Mission,” in *World Mission: Theology, Strategy, and Current Issues*, ed. Scott N. Callaham and Will Brooks (Lexham Press, 2019), 311.

training.¹⁸ This is vital for several reasons. First, the new church begins on a solid ground by learning God's Word so that believers are always pointed to the ultimate source (Scripture) to find answers and seek agreement. Secondly, the church planters should model for the future pastors/elders how to fulfill the primary pastoral responsibility (teaching the Word) by rightly handling Scripture (1 Tim 4:16; Titus 1:9, 2:1).¹⁹ Thirdly, church planters model for the future pastors/elders how to lead by teaching and teach by leading.²⁰ Gradually, EA believers could get a new taste of an "unusual" experience from the start: their leaders actually convince them by always going back to Scripture rather than by telling them what to do with an authoritative tone.

Able to Establish and Defend Congregational Authority

While the church is in its rudimentary stage, congregational church planters need to do two things without delay. First, they need to provide a coherent teaching on ecclesiology over a course of time. The new but growing congregation needs to have a firm grasp on the biblical notion of church. In particular, the new church needs to understand and embrace the biblical truth that the church both universally and locally holds the ultimate human authority dispensed by Christ (Matt 16:18–20; 18:17–20).²¹ Second, church planters should differentiate congregational leadership from the paternalistic leadership by intentionally leading the church to understand and implement con-

18 The importance of theological training has been elevated increasingly in EA in the last two decades. While more and more church leaders have been trained in EA, their levels of training vary greatly. Though an accredited seminary degree is not necessary, the lead/teaching church planter should have undergone the core courses in theology. At minimum, I suggest a church planter who functions as the main Bible teacher/preacher in a new church plant should have taken the B.Th. level of NT and OT Intros, Systematic Theology, Hermeneutics, etc.

19 The primary responsibility of pastors/elders is teaching the Word which sets their role apart from that of deacons. Merkle, "The Biblical Role of Elders," in *Baptist Foundations*, 274. See also Mark Dever, *A Display of God's Glory*, 40. The future pastors/elders would only know where to begin to prepare the teaching of God's Word by getting used to hearing the faithful delivery of God's Word and watching the nitty gritty preparation for an expository sermon. Tony Merida, an expository preacher/theologian who takes teaching seriously, is indebted to not only his mentor Jim Shaddix but also a number of pastoral models. Tony Merida, *The Christ-Centered Expositor: A Field Guide for Word-Driven Disciple Makers* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2016), xvi–xvii.

20 Daniel Evans and Joseph Godwin Jr., *Elder Governance: Insights into Making the Transition* (Eugene, Or.: Resource Publications, 2011), 52.

21 John Hammett asserts that the highest authority is vested in the congregation as the supreme authority over the church is Christ himself. John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 112, 155.

gregationalism.²² Understandably, the congregational leadership will be a bit uncomfortable and unnatural to Chinese believers at first. But the notion of congregational authority anchored in Christ and Scripture will be gradually established over time if started well and maintained with persistence. Specifically, the church planters (as the interim leadership) must seek the congregation's approval for major decisions. In other words, they need to establish the congregational pattern by repeatedly sending this message to the young congregation: the will of leadership cannot hover above the will of the church.²³

Here is an example. Though functioning as the interim leadership at the outset, church planters are not pastors/elders officially because their leadership has not yet resulted from the corporate decision of the church. Instead of appointing themselves or others to be pastors/elders, church planters must set the precedent for the entire congregation to recognize and elect their own pastors/elders in the first place whenever the congregation is mature enough to do so.²⁴ With that said, church planters may or may not be elected as pastors/elders.²⁵ When the (first) pastor(s)/elder(s) are elected by the congregation, an ordination ceremony may serve the purpose of public recognition and endorsement of the congregational decision.²⁶

22 Despite the deeply rooted tradition in Confucianism, the church planters (foreign missionaries or indigenous church planters alike) must intentionally proclaim and demonstrate that the authority of Christ and Scripture is higher than that of leaders as promoted in Confucianism.

23 In the eyes of the paternalistic Chinese culture, the church planters would seem to deprive themselves of authority by yielding to the congregational authority.

24 Payne and Hesselgrave think that the potential new elders that the church planters have in mind are usually recognized by the church. Jervis David Payne and David J. Hesselgrave, *Discovering Church Planting*, 132.

25 There are two different scenarios: (1) If the church planters are international missionaries, I would agree with Payne and Hesselgrave that it is healthy for them to help establish the indigenous leadership as soon as possible. The church planters can continue to function as mentors to the new pastors/elders. Payne and Hesselgrave, *Discovering Church Planting*, 121–23. (2) If the church planters are Chinese nationals, they will most likely be elected as pastors/elders as a natural result since they have been functioning as church leaders. However, the congregational involvement and corporate decision-making is underscored for important events like choosing their pastors/elders.

26 Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 925. Benjamin Merkle concurs with Grudem that ordination is the appropriate means to install a pastor/elder into office by the church's recognition and election but demurs the sacred connotation of transferring special grace in ordination. See Benjamin L. Merkle, *40 Questions About Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2008), 209–12.

Able to Raise a Responsible Congregation

“Congregation” should not be an empty word to congregational church planters. They must constantly remind themselves about one thing at the outset: the goal of starting this church is to raise up a group of mature believers who can represent Christ and govern Christ’s body responsibly. Congregational leaders exert their pastoral authority while also teaching a drastically different mentality than paternalistic leadership.

There are several things that church planters could do to challenge the old (Confucian) tradition and develop a new (congregational) tradition: (1) encourage believers to seek opportunities or find ways to serve one another in the household of God—especially those in need (Gal 6:2, 10);²⁷ (2) help believers discover their spiritual gifts and use them in church ministries; (3) train believers how to make small decisions together so that the congregation takes baby steps toward making bigger decisions by seeking God’s will corporately through prayer and God’s Word;²⁸ (4) create channels for honest feedback from church members. This deliberation is particularly important for the “face” culture. At leaders’ encouragement, church members might become increasingly more comfortable to raise constructive voices and overcome the barrier of saving face among the leaders. As a result, the more that is expected from members, the more responsible the congregation (all members) will be for their church governance.²⁹ This equipper-mentality of church planters (later for pastors/elders) would naturally lead to assuming mutual responsibilities among the congregation, which will in turn help the church to grow in maturity.³⁰

27 Thabiti Anyabwile terms membership as committed love. He asserts that a healthy Christian is committed to expressing this kind of love toward other Christians. Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *What Is a Healthy Church Member?*, IX Marks (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 67–9.

28 For example, the church planters can make case studies to discuss with members how to solve certain ministry issues or personal struggles in the church body. This idea is intended to train believers to discern God’s will by digging through God’s Word, gradually reach an agreement with one accord.

29 James Leo Garrett Jr., “The Congregational-Led Church,” in *Perspectives on Church Government*.193.

30 John Hammett, “The What and How of Church membership,” in *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age*, eds. Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman (Nashville, B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 182.

Able to Work with Other Elders in Plural Eldership

The biblical case for plurality of eldership is robust and desirable.³¹ The benefits of plural eldership are especially significant to planting congregational churches in the Confucian culture. First, there is no super pastor—no one knows it all nor can do it all. Two or more elders can provide mutual support, insight, counsel, and teaching. One can supply the skills lacking in another. A plurality of elders could prove to be a more effective, wise, complementary, and balanced method of shepherding God’s flock than a single leader. Therefore, from both biblical and practical perspectives, a plurality of eldership (two at minimum) should be installed at the birth of a congregational church as soon as possible.³² Second, plural eldership can minimize the “one voice” that results from paternalistic leadership.³³ When each pastor/elder is held accountable by his peers, the inclination of Confucian paternalism is naturally minimized if not diminished.

The Expectations of a New Congregation

While biblically qualified leadership is one important aspect to be considered for planting a congregational church in EA context, the congregation itself is another important aspect. Specifically, a new congregation (regardless of its size) is expected to have three essential components to their congregational DNA built in at the start to ensure a solid foundation of congregationalism to counteract the Confucian challenges.

31 Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership*, Rev. and expanded (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1995), 16–31, 38–44. Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 928–36. James R. White, “The Plural-Elder-Led Church,” in *Perspectives on Church Government*, 255–96. Even earlier Baptists who usually practiced eldership in the form of single-pastor-with-deacons also believed the New Testament churches practiced plural eldership. See Greg Wills, “The Church,” in *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life*, ed. Mark Dever (Washington, D.C.: Center for Church Reform, 2001), 34.

32 Andrew Davis goes so far to suggest church planters and church revitalizers not install new elders until plural eldership is written in the constitution and bylaws. See his “Practical Issues in Elder Ministry,” in *Baptist Foundations*. 293.

33 “One voice” in the authoritarian leadership is infamously referred as *Yi Yan Tang* 一言堂 in Chinese. The strong-man leader has the final say for everything. No one can challenge that voice.

Two Binding Documents

At the outset, two church documents need to be drafted to identify a local church: the statement of faith and the church covenant.³⁴ The former is a list of succinct *doctrinal* statements which tell the world and themselves what this church body holds as common beliefs. The latter is a list of brief *behavioral* statements which provides basic guidelines of proper behavior in the church body. Because the church is new, church planters are responsible to draft a preliminary version of the two documents and seek suggestions and input from each member of the new congregation for improvement and refinement. Once finalized, church planters need to teach and explain each article to the new congregation.

These two documents also function as the threshold of church membership. Only those who have understood and fully accepted the articles of the two documents can be admitted into the church body as members. Importantly, these two documents need to be reviewed periodically by the congregation so the congregation will not only remain firm with their commitment to Christ and one another but also bolster meaningful regenerate membership.³⁵ By treating the two binding documents seriously, all committed members will come to a realization: this is our church and we are responsible to honor our spiritual household.³⁶ In turn, democracy and autonomy would spontaneously appeal to believers as they start to take ownership of their church by corporately contributing, revising, and maintaining these two binding documents.

Differentiated Responsibilities

Christ's church involves responsibilities. It is important to have the new church circumscribe congregational responsibility and pastoral responsibility.

³⁴ These two documents bind members together as one congregation. The entire congregation is involved in producing, revising, suggesting, approving, and owning their manifesto.

³⁵ Hammett underlines the church covenant as a means to recover a meaningful regenerate membership for Baptist churches which is foundational for congregationalism. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Church*, 125–29.

³⁶ Owning the two binding documents could steer the “face” culture in a healthy direction: Chinese believers are naturally spurred to seek their corporate family/community identity and honor.

ity at the start, and it is best to have them distinguished in a written form.³⁷ This is not meant to convolute the church “politics” with more bureaucratic paperwork. In fact, this written document (or oral agreement, if necessary) is meant to provide clarity concerning the responsibilities of church leadership and that of the congregation.³⁸ Since the congregational authority is above the pastoral authority in congregationalism, a potential “conflict” seems apparent: how does a congregation practically follow their leaders while the leadership is under the congregation’s authority? The simple answer lies in the specified responsibilities—who is authorized to do what?³⁹

Because the congregation possesses the highest human authority on the earth, the entire congregation is responsible for making major decisions: (1) evaluating and confirming the two church offices (eldership and deaconship), the church-sent missionaries, the church budget, the purchase or sale of church property, starting a new church plant, and any change to the two binding statements, constitution, bylaws, and vision;⁴⁰ (2) carrying out the final stage of church discipline (Matt 18:17);⁴¹ (3) participating in the two ordinances; (4) judging the soundness of teaching and discerning Christ’s will through the church leadership.⁴² As argued prior, the primary responsibility of leadership is teaching and safeguarding the Word of God through which pastors/elders guide and influence God’s flock. Supporting the church leadership, deacons serve as assistants to pastors/elders and are responsible for

37 Most Chinese house churches exist in cities. The urban churches are capable of composing the written form of distinguished responsibilities. In case of rural or ethnic minority church plants in China, it can be communicated in oral form: what are pastors/elders responsible for and what the congregation is responsible for?

38 Merkle asserts the authority of eldership is from God, not from the congregation. The congregation is instructed to follow its leadership. Merkle, *40 Questions About Elders and Deacons*, 95–97.

39 Jonathan Leeman, *Don’t Fire Your Church Members: The Case for Congregationalism* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Academic, 2016), 1.

40 Allison details in his footnote that a search team is responsible to bring the candidates to the team of elders and ultimately the church membership for their approbation. Allison also precautions the search/nominating committee from obtaining unchecked authority. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 306.

41 Leeman argues that church leaders have no authority to fire church members because Christ has called all members to do that work. Leeman, *Don’t Fire Your Church Members*, 96–108.

42 Stephen J. Wellum and Kirk Wellum, “The Biblical and Theological Case for Congregationalism,” in *Baptist Foundations*, 76. See also Gerald Cowen, *Who Rules the Church?: Examining Congregational Leadership and Church Government* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 85–91.

day-to-day administrative decisions.⁴³ Only in that sense are deacons considered a part of church leadership.⁴⁴

With the respective responsibilities clarified, the elders can lead and the congregation can rule with authority and confidence.⁴⁵ There should not be a competition for authority. However, in case of a power struggle, pastors/elders always yield to the authority of the congregation as they must function as fellow members first and foremost.⁴⁶ Built on a clear understanding of the distinct offices and their given responsibilities,⁴⁷ the elder-led and congregation-rule model of congregationalism can be operational and functional even in the Confucian context.

The Priesthood of All Believers

Last but not least, all members in a congregational church are urged to serve from the beginning. Congregational governance is not about power but privilege. The church is authorized by Christ to serve God with the privilege of a holy priesthood (1 Pet 2:5). The priesthood of all believers is buttressed by a few theological reasons. First, each regenerate person indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13–14) is capable of relating to God and discerning His will directly.⁴⁸ Secondly, each person is saved into the faith community where believers are sanctified through the vertical relationship with God and the horizontal relationship with one another.⁴⁹ This redeemed group lives life together as a family of God through sharing materials, hearts, and pains.⁵⁰

43 Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 224.

44 Dever and Leeman, "Introduction—Why Polity?," in *Baptist Foundations*, 16. See also Cowen, *Who Rules the Church?*, 101.

45 Leeman, "A Congregational Approach to Catholicity," in *Baptist Foundations*, 372.

46 Wellum and Wellum, "The Biblical and Theological Case for Congregationalism," in *Baptist Foundations*, 73.

47 Besides the two commonly recognized offices (eldership and deaconship), Leeman argues membership (the entire congregation) as the third office. See his article: "Church Membership is an Office and a Job," *9Marks*, 2019. <https://www.9marks.org/article/church-membership-is-an-office-and-a-job/>.

48 Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1004.

49 Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family: Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Christian Community* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2009), 136–39.

50 Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family*, 144–62.

Thirdly, each believer who is baptized by the Holy Spirit into the church has some unique gifts to build the church up (1 Cor 12:13–27).

For these three reasons, a congregational church must find creative ways to encourage every member to share, participate, and contribute to the greater gain of the church body. When believers deliberately practice “one-another-ness” in a church such as loving one another, serving one another, teaching one another, forgiving one another, and even disciplining one another, it behooves EA believers to gradually weed out the pernicious side of the “face” culture while magnify the positive side of the collective culture.⁵¹ By espousing the priesthood of all believers, members of a new church plant will increase their sense of ownership by exercising his/her priestly duties.

Conclusion

In this article, I have built a case for planting an elder-led and congregation-rule church in the Confucian culture. Acknowledging the deeply rooted Confucian challenges in EA context, I have demonstrated how congregationalism could minimize those challenges. I conclude that congregationalism is not only feasible for a church plant in Confucian culture but also beneficial for the continued growth and maturation of the EA church as a whole in the long run.

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⁵¹ For example, Chinese believers will have to learn how to speak *truth* in love (Eph 4:15, 25). Unfortunately, the commonly used Chinese Bible (Union Version 和合本) ambiguously renders *truth* (ἀλήθεια) as honesty (*Chengshi* 诚实 in Chinese). Thus, church leaders not only need to nuance the biblical teaching but also need to show the church how to flesh out the *truth* in love. First, this fact again speaks of the importance of adequate Bible teaching offered by the qualified church leadership. Second, when believers are used to building each other up in biblical truth, the vanity of “face” resulted from Confucian humanism will fade. To read more Christian critiques on the vanity of face in Confucianism, see the helpful article written by Lit-sen Chang with G. Wright Doyle, “A Chinese Christian Critique of Confucianism,” *ChinaSource*, 16:1 (Spring 2014), 7–8, 16. <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/chinasource-quarterlies/confucius-and-christ-conflict-compromise-or-communication/>.

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Responsibility of the Local Church in Discerning Missionary Call¹

Ricky Don Wilhelm

When a church member says, “God is calling me to be a missionary,” many well-meaning pastors, struck by the realization that 4.7 billion people across the globe need the gospel, will not think twice about affirming and celebrating that person’s call. Evangelicals tend to give a great deal of credence to someone claiming to hear God’s still, small voice in decision making. Even the way in which Christians often express their sense of call (i.e., “God told me”) assumes a particular amount of divine authority.

In The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self,² Carl Trueman attempted to trace the development of the contemporary Western worldview and exposed “expressive individualism” as a prominent influencer of the modern psyche. Expressive individualism refers to an understanding that each person finds his meaning by giving expression to his or her own feelings and desires. Trueman observed that mainstream culture is advocating that individuals find meaning in the “inward quest for personal psychological happiness.”³

1 Much of the content in this article has been adapted from portions of my dissertation, Ricky Don Wilhelm II, *Where there is a Church: A Biblical Investigation into the Work of an Evangelist and Its Implication for International Mission Board Team Leaders in Established-Church Locations*. PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022.

2 Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020), 46.

3 Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 46.

They claim that the ultimate purpose of an individual is to externally express what he thinks will make him internally content—he must be *authentic* to his inward desires.

Expressive individualism could explain why so many rush to affirm someone's desire to become a missionary. Our Western intuition compels us to never stand in the way of what someone believes will make him or her feel happy. Churches must recognize, however, that a dangerous level of subjectivity resides in the idea of the missionary call which, if misidentified, can lead someone straight into the perils of expressive individualism. Still, should Christians fully dismiss their existential perspective in God providentially leading them to missions? This article proposes 1 Timothy 4:12-14 as a biblical model which acknowledges both God's activity and the authority of a local church in assessing missionary candidates. This article concludes with a warning about the ecclesiological dangers in allowing subjective callings to drive the decision for sending a missionary.

1 Timothy 4:12-14 as a Model for Assessing Future Missionaries

In 1 Timothy 4:12-14, Paul aims to encourage Timothy to persevere in his challenging ministry by reminding this apprentice of his election to ministry. Paul wrote, "Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you."⁴ Many scholars have recognized the correlation between this account of Timothy's election and the commissioning of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13:1-3.5

Upon observation of the events surrounding Paul and Timothy's laying-on of hands, the themes of gifting, calling, and a church's affirmation arise, which may serve to give churches and missions organizations insight into the New

4 Biblical quotations are from the English Standard Version.

5 Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 108; Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, vol. 34, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 139; John MacArthur Jr., *1 Timothy*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute, 1995), 180; Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 325.

Testament practices in sending and receiving missionaries.⁶ Since Timothy and Paul were leaders in the task of church vitalization, the use of “missionary” and the suggested areas for candidate assessment in this article particularly pertain to those commissioned to lead in healthy church formation, although the basic principles could apply to all.⁷

Evident Gifting

Paul wrote to Timothy, “Do not neglect the gift [χαρίσματος] you have, which was given you” (1 Tim 4:14), which likely referred to his gift for ministry.⁸ Paul did not specifically mention which gifting he meant. However, the imperatives preceding verse 14 may provide some clarity. As one charged with church vitalization, Paul expected Timothy to set an example (4:12) and devote himself to public teaching (4:13). These expectations confirm that the Holy Spirit had granted Timothy a gifting, at minimum, in leadership and teaching (Rom 12:7-8). Additionally, this indicates Timothy met the requirements of an elder listed in chapter three of 1 Timothy.

If the young missionary was to succeed in his task of strengthening this church to overcome false teaching, then the Spirit must have equipped him to lead and teach. As Paul instructed Timothy, “If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus” (4:6). Readers can

6 My research has led me to conclude that the NT depicts two kinds of missionaries: 1) Paul occasionally used ἀπόστολος in the generic sense of someone sent for the fulfillment of a specific task. This use would be translated as “missionaries” and gives credence to churches sending a variety of missionaries contributing to the body of Christ and the mission in different ways (Phil 2:25; 2 Cor 8:23; likely Rom 16:7). 2) New Testament evangelists (εὐαγγελιστής) are elder-qualified, leaders in itinerant church vitalization. Textual evidence identifies Paul, Timothy, and Phillip as evangelists. Paul uniquely exercised two roles—a universal-church role as an apostle appointed by Christ and a local-church role as an evangelist. However, all three (and certainly others) fulfilled the work of an evangelist by laboring in itinerant church vitalization as they traveled to various locations planting and strengthening churches. The strategy for fulfilling the work of an evangelist—whether planting or strengthening—was dependent on the status of the local church in the given location. Some will object to these categories on the claim that the NT depicts a little “a” ἀπόστολος to mean cross-cultural missionary or church planter—a category for which I find little scriptural support. See “Biblical Examination of Apostles,” in Wilhelm, *Where there is a Church*, 58-91.

7 *Church vitalization* is an all encompassing term. It refers to ministry that gives life to, or vitalizes, a local church including planting a new church or strengthening an existing church.

8 Gordon Fee argued, “The word gift [charisma] means something like ‘gracious endowment’; because in Paul there is frequently a close tie (as here) between charisma and ‘Spirit’ (cf. 1 Cor. 1:7; 12:4, 31; Rom. 1:11), the word is frequently translated ‘spiritual gift’ (as NASB, GNB here). In this case the gift ‘that is in him’ almost certainly has to do with his calling and gift for ministry as a preacher/teacher of the Word,” Fee, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, 108.

observe from 1 and 2 Timothy that God gifted Timothy to function as a temporary teaching-leader in a local church.⁹

Andy Johnson, who currently pastors overseas, presented this exhortation to sending churches:

If you carefully read Acts and the Epistles, you will notice that heresy, confusion, and syncretism most often occur at the edge of gospel expansion. Therefore, that is where we need our best-equipped people. Such work is not for every Christian who simply loves to share his or her faith. We need to make sure those we send possess deep theological knowledge so that what they teach can be reproduced in the lives of their hearers with accuracy until Christ returns.¹⁰

Before a church approves sending a church-vitalizing missionary, they should ask themselves, “Would I entrust this man with the teaching and leadership of a church plant here?” If a missionary candidate does not possess the competency to lead a church in his own country, the extra challenges present in a cross-cultural setting will all but ensure his failure.

Divinely Initiated Aspiration

Contention and confusion prevail around contemporary uses and abuses of “calling.”¹¹ For this reason, I would prefer to see an increase in the use of the word “aspire” from 1 Timothy 3:1 (“I aspire to be a missionary”). Of course, I am not implying that I do not believe God is at work initiating this aspira-

9 The assumption that Timothy settled permanently to Pastor in Ephesus makes two errors. First, it ignores the immediate context of the letters. Paul said, “Do your best to come to me soon....When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments” (2 Tim 4:9-13). Second, Timothy settling would assume that he suddenly changed roles. However, the NT consistently portrayed Timothy’s ministry as itinerant (Acts 17:14-15; 18:5; 19:22; 1 Cor 16:10; Phil 2:19; 1 Thes 3:2). Therefore, when Paul tells Timothy “fulfill your ministry” (τὴν διακονίαν σου πληροφόρησον), Paul was urging Timothy to begin wrapping up his ministry in Ephesus, so that he could rejoin Paul as was his custom.

10 Andy Johnson, *Missions: How the Local Church Goes Global* (Wheaton: Crossway 2017), 43-45.

11 See Jon Deedrick and Ryan Robertson, “Episode 14: Calling—Greg Gilbert,” September 29, 2019, in *The Great Commission Podcast*, produced by Reaching & Teaching, podcast, mp3, Length in 29:49, <https://rtim.org/podcast/episode-14-calling-greg-gilbert>.

tion.¹² In 1 Timothy 4:14, when Paul reminded Timothy of the prophecies about him, he emphasized God's direct involvement in moving this young missionary to serve in that particular place at that particular time. Philip Towner explained, "Prophecy itself will not have been the 'means' or cause of conveyance; the passive verb 'was given' indicates the action of God/the Spirit. It is probably rather a reference to words of the Spirit spoken...that confirm and identify Timothy's giftedness and thereby authorize his ministry in the community."¹³ In other words, Towner understood the prophecies as divine activity leading to words spoken to affirm Timothy's gifting to serve the church in Ephesus.

Of course, this raises the question of the nature of these prophecies (certainly, this article will not propose a resolution to this debate). On the one hand, readers could understand these prophecies as the Holy Spirit working through authoritative, divinely inspired utterance.¹⁴ On the other hand, these prophecies could be taken as the Holy Spirit working through the elders in Ephesus to speak intuitively in a way that provided Timothy with God-given confidence about his next venture.¹⁵

In either case, we can deduce that some amount of subjectivity clouded the certainty of Timothy's fitness to serve. Paul indicated that Timothy's age affected some people's confidence in the young minister (1 Tim 4:12). Perhaps the challenges of the missionary task in Ephesus affected Timothy's own perceptions of himself, which led Paul to urge Timothy to recall an earlier supernatural encouragement for him to labor there (what some might deem as a call to service).¹⁶

I would suggest a few brief applications for those feeling that the Lord may be leading them to missions. First, if you desire to lead in healthy church formation, look to the Word. Carefully examine how your feelings and aptitude align with the Scriptural requirements of those aspiring to such a work (Acts 20:17-38; 1 & 2 Tim; Titus). Second, if you conclude that this ministry suits

12 I fully affirm the categories of calling described in International Mission Board, *Foundations* (Richmond, VA: International Mission Board, 2018), 65-66.

13 Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 323.

14 MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, 179.

15 Carson, D. A., *Showing the Spirit*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2019), 214. Kindle Edition.

16 *Foundations*, 66.

you, listen to others. Those around you, especially pastors and fellow church members, will be able to speak intuitively about whether such a ministry would be a good fit. Third, if someday you do find yourself on the mission field faced with overwhelming challenges and discouragements, speak to yourself. Remind yourself of how the Lord used both His Word and other believers to encourage you to pursue that ministry. Let the memory of this support renew your resolve to complete your assignment.

Local Church Affirmation

While prophecy indicated the divine aspect of Timothy's call to service, Paul also highlighted the local church's role in affirming Timothy's call to a new location in Ephesus. Towner suggested, "the elders of the Ephesian community have played a part, by relating a prophetic word and laying on hands, in recognizing and confirming the gift (rather than in actually conveying it to him)."¹⁷ Paul referred to the prophecies and the laying on of hands by the elders, both which portray the "divine-human co-operation" in Timothy's election.¹⁸

The procedures in Timothy's election exhibit similarities to those in Acts 13:1-3 with Paul and Barnabas. Luke wrote,

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers [gifting], Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said [calling], "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them [affirming] and sent them off.

Both events describe the centrality of the local church's action. In Paul's case, the sending-church confirmed Paul's call and released him to preach in a pi-

17 Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 324. Towner indicates why this should be understood as laying on of hands by the Ephesian elders saying, "1 Timothy is written both to Timothy and the Ephesian church, and so Paul not only reminds Timothy of this event and the gifting and confirmation of authority to minister, but he also addresses the elders themselves as a way to ensure their continued allegiance to Timothy and the apostolic mission." Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 324.

18 Donald Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 14, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 112.

ioneer location. In Timothy's, the receiving-church confirmed Timothy's call to lead temporarily in their established church.

Subsequently, a Christian's expression of an internal but subjective sense of call to missions cannot supersede the authority of a church nor obligate that church to send a candidate. Instead, the church (even if assisted by a missions organization) takes an active role in the assessment of the potential missionary to discern if the candidate meets the necessary qualifications which are no less serious than that of pastor. In summary, the authority in electing, sending, and receiving missionaries belongs to churches as led by God—not individuals, not mission agencies, nor missionary teams. This realization becomes especially important in established-church locations.

In the twenty-first century, international missions entered a new era. Churches have more evenly distributed themselves across the globe than at any other time in history.¹⁹ We must consider this as a factor in how we approach deployment.²⁰ For example, Paul usually coordinated the arrival and ministry of a missionary with a local church. He attached his recommendation for Timothy's ministry to the church in Philippi, writing, "For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.... you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel" (2:22). Epaphroditus went ahead of Timothy to deliver this letter and paved the way for his arrival.²¹ Timothy would team with this church in a similar fashion as he did in Ephesus.

Sometimes, missionaries arrive on the mission field and show up at a local church, expressing their desire to serve. Local pastors are, at best, caught off

19 Martin I. Klauber and Scott M. Manetsch, *Great Commission Evangelicals and the History of World Missions* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2008), 1-2. In the introduction, Douglas Sweeney highlights how in 1500, only 19 percent of the world's population was Christian, and more than 83 percent of the world's Christians lived in Europe, but that today there are more than 800 million evangelicals spread throughout the world.

20 The IMB deploys 91% of their missionaries to "unreached peoples" meaning to people groups which are less than 2% evangelical, see Scott Barkley, "Southern Baptists Generosity Fuels Reaching the Unreached," *The Baptist Press*, October 12, 2022, accessed Oct 27, 2022, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/southern-baptists-generosity-fuels-reaching-the-unreached>. "Unreached" should not be interpreted as locations without established churches. For example, the IMB could deploy a missionary to London but assign him to evangelizing Iranians, or they could deploy him to almost every major people group on the European continent, and that missionary would be counted as deployed to the unreached. Yet, there are numerous established churches in those locations. At the time of writing, the IMB has 2156 units on the mission field and 419 of those are in Europe. Therefore, these all fall within the parameters of an established-church location.

21 Hansen, *Philippians*, 201.

guard by the unsolicited arrival of foreigners and, at worst, offended by the thought that they need the help of the perhaps lesser qualified and lesser experienced missionary. While Paul's apostolic authority was unique, churches and missions organizations would benefit from his wisdom and example by planning the deployment of missionaries with national church leaders. Intentional communication with national pastors and churches will help identify where church vitalizers are invited and needed in ways that demographic statistics cannot. Such an approach not only serves churches more effectively but also allows churches to exercise similar care for missionaries which Paul expected from churches receiving his co-laborers.

In 1 Corinthians 16:10-11, Paul urged the church to "put Timothy at ease" among them, to not "despise him," and to "help him." He prepared his own way to Rome by appealing to the church to begin praying for him so that when he came, he would be refreshed in their company (Rom 15:32). Unfortunately, when missionaries arrive on the mission field with no church waiting to take them in, help them, and put them at ease in their new context. When they arrive to churches unannounced, they may even find others despising their well-intentioned offer to help reach the city. Although coordinating with the local church may require more time and money, churches and missions organizations can more faithfully steward their missionary's calling by intentionally communicating and planning with local churches.

Present Danger in the Subjectivity of Calling

One of the great fallouts of expressive individualism is the impact on how people perceive institutions, in that institutions no longer exist to mold a person but to affirm that person's external expressions of "self."²² Therefore, one of the greatest offenses which an institution could commit in this age is to deny a person's "right" to pursue what he believes will make him feel psychologically affirmed. Great Commission Baptist churches are not immune from such anti-institutional ideology. This ideology threatens the inspired truth that Christ left the church as His representing institution. According to Baptist ecclesiology, each local church autonomously governs itself under the guidance of the Scriptures. God works through the congregation as a whole to sanctify and build up its members (Matt 18:15-20; Eph 4:12-16). So,

22 Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 50.

the church cannot submit to the whims of every inspired member saying, “Here am I, Send me.”

Christ blesses the church with the privilege to encourage and empower those fit to lead in the missionary task. He also blesses them with the responsibility to prevent unqualified missionaries from going despite the cultural presuppositions that institutions do not have the right to hinder the pursuit of such internal desires. Missionary E.D. Burns cautioned, “Both elements, the inspiring call and the careful consideration, are needed. But we must think more about the fact that we are in a feelings-driven age, and it is now easier than ever to surf the wave of an experience all the way to a faraway place, only to find that once the feeling subsides, so too does the zeal for gospel promotion.”²³ Through the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit has given an objective assessment for the qualification of church leaders. Great Commission Baptists cannot leave the matter of electing missionaries to lead in church vitalization on the level of subjective feelings. The task is too important, and God’s glory among the nations is too great to be held captive by the modern self.

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²³ E.D. Burns, *The Missionary-Theologian: Sent into the World, Sanctified by the Word* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2020), 12-13.

Beyond Memorial

Toward a Richer Understanding of the Lord's Supper Through a Synthesis of Spiritual Presence, Human Participation, and Physical Media

By Charles Davidson

In the history of the free church movement, there have been diverse interpretations of the Lord's Supper. Most Baptists follow variants of the memorial view developed by Huldrych Zwingli or certain Anabaptist traditions.¹ According to this view, Jesus' statement, "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19) is sufficient support for retaining an element of memorial in the Lord's Supper.

1 Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 385; Mark Dever, "The Church" *A Theology for the Church*, ed., Daniel Akin, (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 603ff.; cf. "The Baptist Faith and Message 2000". At least certain anabaptist groups largely agreed with Zwingli's views on the Supper, cf. William R. Estep, *Renaissance and Reformation*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing), 1986, 208.

While acknowledging the Lord's Supper as a memorial is helpful, many conceptions of the memorial view fail to capture the full importance of the ordinance. They tend toward a truncated understanding of divine action, emphasizing human action in memorializing. Such views often do not appreciate the importance of the Lord's Supper for spiritual formation and church identity. The biblical testimony demands that a proper balance of divine action and human participation be maintained. An adapted spiritual presence view that captures three essential elements of the Supper: the primacy of divine action, the need for human participation, and the formative importance of the physical media of the Supper will provide such an equilibrium.

Conceptions of the Supper

A historical survey of positions regarding the Lord's Supper will situate the memorial view in its developmental context and help reveal its strengths and shortcomings. The memorial view appeared early in the history of the church but fell out of favor in the Middle Ages. Gregg Allison traces an emphasis on the Supper as a memorial to the patristic period in the thought of Justin Martyr, Cyprian, and Tertullian.² As with other doctrines, Tertullian laid the terminological framework for later theologians. He used *sacramentum* to speak of God's salvation (mystery) as well as rites that help the church remember or appropriate God's action.³ Though these theologians had elements of memorial in their teaching on the Supper, their understanding of *sacramentum* is nuanced and thus should not be conflated with the memorial views that arose during the Reformation period.⁴ As with other doctrines, Augustine both expanded and modified the early church's understanding of the Supper as a sacrament.

Augustine, Aquinas, and Imbued Grace

Augustine established the foundational view of a sacrament as a visible sign of an invisible, spiritual reality.⁵ Calvin followed Augustine in this definition,

2 Allison, *Sojourners*, 369-70.

3 Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, Fifth ed. (Chichester, West Sussex, United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 401f.

4 Tertullian's argument in "Against Marcion" and his other writings, for example, suggests the real presence of Christ in the elements, yet he does not specify the exact nature of the presence.

5 Gary D. Badcock, *The House Where God Lives: Renewing the Doctrine of the Church for Today* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 2009), chapter 7; Allison, *Sojourners*, 370.

equally discussing *sacrament* as the Latin translation of the Greek *μυστήριον* (“mystery”). As a result, Calvin stressed the sacramental nature of Lord’s Supper to help believers understand a spiritual reality.⁶ In theological discussions following Augustine, a sacrament became a visible attestation of grace or favor, thus, the sacraments came to be designated as “means of grace.” The nature of grace and its relation to the sacramental signs, therefore, became an issue of theological debate.⁷

However one interprets Augustine, views of grace as an imbued substance dominated in the medieval period.⁸ Since the sacraments were considered to be effective by virtue of being performed properly (by the Church) and, when performed, grace was imparted, the role of the Holy Spirit was effectively minimized.⁹ Instead, the Church took a central role in offering the sacrament and reoffering the sacrifice of Christ as God’s regent on earth.¹⁰ While both Lutheran and Reformed traditions retained a “means of grace” vocabulary, the conception of grace was fundamentally different. Explaining the Reformed position, Michael Horton writes, “there is no substance, even grace, that is poured out into us or at work in us; rather, it is Christ himself, by his Spirit...” and, “grace is a movement of relation and not a mere handing over of a commodity.”¹¹

6 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 1277-78; Allison, *Sojourners*, 322-23.

7 McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 407. i.e., they function independently of the officiant or recipient.

8 For Augustine, the grace bestowed by the sacraments is ostensibly a substantial, imbued grace (this is certainly true in later, medieval interpreters of Augustine). Such grace is imparted to the soul of the participant, granting the ability to act virtuously. Most theologians were careful to note that the sacraments do not cause grace independently. Cf. Allison, *Sojourners*, 322-23; McGrath, Alister E. *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 89-98. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 407-08. Badcock, chapter 7; McGrath, *Reformation*, 89-98; Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 63-70. Allison, *Sojourners*, 372-74; Michael Scott Horton, *People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology*. 1st ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), chapter 4; McGrath, *Reformation*, 89-98, 159f; Lindberg, 63f.

9 Horton, *People and Place*, 33f.; Lindberg, 63-70.

10 Ibid.; cf. Badcock, chapter 7; Allison, *Sojourners*, 374.

11 Horton, *People and Place*, chapter 4, “Means of Grace: Infusion or Ratification?”.

Reformation Views of the Supper

The Reformers reacted strongly against the conception of the sacraments as causing and conferring grace.¹² In his later thought, Luther developed what has since been labelled consubstantiation.¹³ He rejected transubstantiation but guarded the literal, bodily presence of Christ in the elements. Luther held that the body of Christ, by its assumption of human nature, is “ubiquitous, or everywhere present.”¹⁴

The memorial view developed by Zwingli was a reaction to both transubstantiation and Luther. He emphasized Augustine’s conception of Christ at the right hand of the Father and the notion that Christ’s body must be definitively somewhere (i.e., ascended).¹⁵ For Zwingli, Lord’s Supper was, therefore, primarily a remembrance of Christ’s work. Christ’s words in the gospels should be interpreted symbolically, and the elements were signs to help memorialize. Zwingli’s early thought spoke of the Supper as an oath or pledge by God to keep his promise, but his later thought further emphasized the action of believers. He came to see the pledge of the Lord’s Supper as one made by participants to live for Christ. The ordinance, thus, became a public declaration of faith.¹⁶ Perhaps influenced by his bellicose context, Zwingli’s later thought fixated on *sacramentum* as an oath similar to those taken by recruits to the army.¹⁷ Subsequent conceptions of the memorial view continued this tendency to emphasize human action both in remembering and declaring faith.

Calvin’s theology of the Lord’s Supper cannot be described as a combination of Luther’s and Zwingli’s views since it developed as part of his own theolog-

12 Michael Scott Horton, *Rediscovering the Holy Spirit: God’s Perfecting Presence in Creation, Redemption, and Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2017), 18. Michael Horton, following others, labels the Reformation a “rediscovery of the Spirit”.

13 In his early thought, Luther seemed to narrow to one sacrament (the “mystery” of the gospel) with several sacramental signs, a view reminiscent of Tertullian. Badcock, chapter 7.

14 Allison, *Sojourners*, 375-78; Bernard M.G. Reardon, *Religious Thought of the Reformation*, (New York: Longman, 1981), 106f.

15 Allison, *Sojourners*, 380; G.R. Potter, *Huldrych Zwingli, Documents of Modern History*, (London: Edward Arnold Publishers, 1978), 94, 99-100, 106. Since Christ was ascended, his body must also be absent from the Supper.

16 Allison, *Sojourners*, 380-81; Potter, 99-100.

17 Lindberg, *The European Reformations Sourcebook*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 6.20; McGrath, *Reformation*, 171. The function of these oaths was to declare loyalty before others.

ical system that heavily emphasized the Holy Spirit. Even so, Calvin viewed his position as a potential arbitrator between the other two theologians.¹⁸ Like Zwingli, Calvin found it unacceptable to say Christ's body is ubiquitous. The bodily resurrection and ascension of Jesus are fundamental to Calvin's analysis, protecting both from the errors of transubstantiation and from trajectories that eliminate the ontological distinction between Christ and the church.¹⁹ Although Calvin agrees with Zwingli concerning the bodily absence of Christ, he still had criticism for the memorial view:

While they [Zwingli et al.] were absorbed with this point, they forgot to define what is the presence of Christ in the Supper in which one ought to believe, and what communication of his body and his blood one there received. So, Luther thought that they intended to leave nothing else but bare signs without any corresponding spiritual substance. Hence, he began to resist and oppose them, even to the extent of denouncing them as heretics.²⁰

Calvin's solution was to maintain the bodily absence of Christ, but to emphasize the real presence of Christ through the Spirit. For Calvin, the elements are not "bare" signs for human remembering but they signify divine action of the Spirit, uniting believers to Christ and imparting spiritual life from Christ.²¹

Similarities in Calvin and Zwingli. Calvin's understanding retained much in common with Zwingli's. Likewise, Zwingli's own views interacted with and were influenced by those of Calvin. As such, the boundaries between the views are not as well defined as sometimes portrayed.²² Calvin himself did not

18 He ends his *Short Treatise on the Holy Supper* by discussing the controversy between Zwingli and Luther.

19 Following Calvin, Reformed theologian Michael Horton sees the bodily location as essential to a correct understanding of the church and participation in the Supper. Horton, *Spirit*, 180, 263-73, 282; Horton, *People and Place*, chapter 1.

20 J. K. S. Reid, *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1954), 165.

21 Reid, *Calvin*, 146.; Calvin, *Institutes*, 1284f., 1361ff.

22 Horton, for example, emphasizes the differences in his book *People and Place*, chapter 4, "Means of Grace or Act of Obedience?".

think Zwingli intended to leave the elements of the Supper as “bare signs.”²³ Calvin could also speak of the Supper as a memorial and of the human need to reflect on the past work of Christ, although he disagreed it is an oath on the part of participants.²⁴ In speaking of a memorial, he emphasized that participants must recall that spiritual life is found in Christ; as food is required to sustain life, Christ is required to sustain spiritual life.²⁵ Accordingly, the Supper is tied to the Word: the proclamation that Jesus accomplished all that is required for salvation. Memorial and gratitude (*eucharist*) were both proper elements of the Supper.²⁶

For his part, Zwingli also spoke of the “spiritual presence” of Christ in the Supper.²⁷ Zwingli’s emphasis on the memorial aspect of the Supper arose from acute reaction to transubstantiation and Luther. In both, he feared a propensity to understand the Supper as a re-sacrifice of Christ.²⁸ Zwingli, thus, accentuated the once-for-all nature of Christ’s completed work. The participant is to call to mind, reflect upon, and offer thanks for the finished work. Like Calvin, Zwingli also spoke of the necessity of receiving the Lord’s Supper by faith.²⁹ Yet, for him, the sacrifice in the Supper was meant to be believers who are offering themselves to God.³⁰ Such emphasis on remembering and pledging elevated human action. Nevertheless, Zwingli did not completely neglect the Spirit. He affirmed that the Spirit is the one who gives life, often placing the Spirit in juxtaposition to the flesh which “profits nothing” (John 6:63).

Distinctions between Zwingli and Calvin. The thoughts of Calvin and Zwingli, while similar, established differing trajectories, resulting in significantly different destinations in reception and practice. Though in certain places they speak similarly, Zwingli’s conception of spiritual presence dif-

23 Reid, 165f.

24 Reid, 145-46; Calvin, *Institutes*, 1381, 1386-90, 1412. Disagreement on oaths found on 1366.

25 Calvin, *Institutes*, 1361, 1363, 1371, 1385-89; Reid, 143-45.

26 Calvin, *Institutes*, 144-53; Reid, 143, 168; Horton, *People and Place*, chapter 5.

27 Potter, 106f.

28 Bruce Ware, “The Meaning of the Lord’s Supper in the Theology of Ulrich Zwingli,” *The Lord’s Supper: Remembering and Proclaiming Christ until He Comes*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Matthew R. Crawford, (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 224-26, 229.

29 Ibid.

30 Potter, 32, 97, 99f.; McGrath, *Reformation*, 171-72.

ferred from Calvin's. Zwingli primarily used such presence as rhetoric against bodily presence rather than positively considering the work of the Spirit (as Calvin would).³¹ In Zwingli's interpretation, spiritual presence in the Lord's Supper was not unique nor exceptional. Rather, it was a byproduct of a memorial and pledge: "believers could enter into the spiritual presence of Christ whenever, by faith, they looked to Christ as their savior and Lord, trusting his accomplished work and continued grace."³² Calvin, on the other hand, placed more importance on the Supper as a place where God invites believers to meet him and works more specially in lives of believers by faith.³³

Memorial views see participation in the Supper as an act of reflection and, in some instances, as a declaration of faith or pledge to God. At worst, such an understanding could lead to a devaluation of the Supper as something that is done merely for obedience, an obligation to be completed. Oath or pledging language could perpetuate self-reliance instead of dependence. Such thinking may be evidenced in infrequent observance of the Supper. Further, the emphasis on past action can have the effect of minimizing the current spiritual need of the believer and God's continued action.³⁴ On the Reformed side, there is a tendency to overemphasize the Supper's uniqueness in a way that could result in lessening Christ's presence in everyday life. Christian spirituality may be reduced to time spent in a church building. Shawn Wright worries that in Reformed circles Christians may be encouraged to hope in the Supper rather than Christ himself.³⁵

A balanced view is needed. Believers are never separated from union with Christ and can enjoy communion with him through the Spirit at any time and in diverse places (individually or corporately). Even so, this truth does not preclude God choosing to work at particular times and places or through specific means. A holistic view of the Supper must acknowledge God's presence with believers in everyday life. It must equally recognize that the Lord's

31 Ware, 231f. Potter, 100, 109; Carter, *Sourcebook*, 6.20. This discussion enters the debate between Zwingli and Luther on the human nature of Christ, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

32 Ware, 236-37. Zwingli's support for the spiritual presence was Matthew 18:20.

33 Calvin, *Institutes*, 1292-93, 1370-73, 1381-84, 1390, 1404-08; Reid, 144-49; This emphasis has been built upon by later Reformed thinkers. cf. Horton, *People and Place*, chapter 4, "Means of Grace or Act of Obedience?"

34 Horton, *People and Place*, chapter 4. Infrequent observance may have originated with Zwingli who thought strong faith and devotion made participation in the Supper less necessary, cf. Potter, 96.

35 Wright, 275.

Supper is an event during which God has promised to draw near and act to form the church.

Toward a Fuller Appreciation of the Supper

The Lord's Supper is a commemorative act inaugurated and ordained by Jesus during the Last Supper. In a sense, the memorial aspect is foundational to further discussion. Yet, the Lord's Supper is not merely an obligation or pledge from believers to God. Instead, it is a gift from God.³⁶ Focusing on the primacy of divine action in the Supper, the necessity of participation by faith, and the sanctifying, formative power of the Supper will yield a deeper appreciation and more robust practice.

Primacy of Divine Action

The Synoptic gospels record Jesus' institution of the Lord's Supper while celebrating a final Passover meal with his disciples. Jesus altered the standard procedure for a Passover meal, creating the Last Supper, the basis of the Lord's Supper.³⁷ Despite widespread disagreement on the interpretation of Jesus' statements during the Last Supper, they provide a firm foundation to interpret Jesus' actions as intending to establish an ongoing, memorial rite. Yet, the Lord's Supper is not portrayed in Scripture as only a remembrance. It is also a place of ongoing divine action portrayed as an act of identity-forming ratification and covenant-making. Additionally, John's account accentuates the promise and work of the Holy Spirit in the context of the Supper.

The Lord's Supper as a Covenantal Event. Jesus calls the cup "my blood of the covenant" (Matt. 26:28, Mark 14:24) or "the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20). Horton underlines the effect of Christ's acts in executing a covenant and effecting a new reality. He writes, "In the covenantal economy, the function of signs is not primarily to express an inner experience or wish. Nor is it primarily to refer symbolically to a state of affairs that transcends it. Rather, it is an obligation-creating act in the present...."³⁸ Allison, as a Baptist, likewise points out the covenantal nature of the event while retaining a greater emphasis on the newness or discontinuity of the covenant Christ

³⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1289, 1362.

³⁷ Allison, *Sojourners*, 386.

³⁸ Horton, *People and Place*, chapter 4, "Presence as Action". This view builds on Calvin but goes beyond his thought. Calvin primarily views the sacraments as a testimony to a spiritual "state-of-affairs".

implemented.³⁹ While Jesus goes beyond the Passover rite to establish a new covenant based on his blood, the covenants of the Old Testament remain the backdrop of Jesus' actions. Consequently, the thematic, typological elements of the Passover and features of covenant-making in the Old Testament are necessary to understand what was occurring in the establishment of the Lord's Supper.

The Old Testament presents God as the primary actor in covenant-making. Signs of the covenant were given to help the people called by God understand and remember his works and promises. Covenant ratifications were given as an assurance that God was active and would bring his promises to completion, as can be seen in the case of Abraham (Gen 15). The Lord's Supper, when considered as a ratification sign, is not only recalling past action, but is also the promise of present, ongoing divine action to fulfill his promises. In speaking of the Lord's Supper, Calvin emphasized it as a sign of God's present action to uphold his promises:

We are quickened by the true partaking of him... As it is not the seeing but the eating of bread that suffices to feed the body, so the soul must truly and deeply become partaker of Christ that it may be quickened to spiritual life by his power... he also testifies and seals in the Supper—not by presenting a vain and empty sign, but by manifesting there the effectiveness of his Spirit to fulfill what he promises.⁴⁰

The Supper helps believers amid weak and wavering faith.⁴¹ It provides assurance of God's favor and attests that the promises of the gospel are presently and personally applicable. Calvin pictured the Supper as more than just intellectual assent but as a place the gospel is visualized in embodied life. As visual portrayal of the gospel, it reminds the church that Christ accomplished all that is necessary and is the present source of spiritual life. The Spirit is currently uniting and perfecting, and one day, God will fully accomplish all that was promised. The realization of God's present working is meant to inspire trust and faith, and lead one to cling to Christ while for-

39 Allison, *Sojourners*, 395f.

40 John Calvin, *Institutes*, 1365, 1370.

41 Calvin, *Institutes*, 1281, 1371; Calvin, *Treatises*, 151-53.

saking all other assurances.⁴² Therefore, the Supper can be seen as an act of “performative communication” that encompasses past completion, present participation, and a future, eschatological hope.⁴³

The Lord’s Supper as a Work of the Spirit. The differences in John’s gospel have caused discussion over the timing of the Last Supper and whether it can be considered a Passover feast.⁴⁴ Jonathan Pennington explains the differences: “John has chosen to emphasize other elements... when we take the four-fold witness [of the gospels] as a whole then, it is not difficult to see multiple strands of interconnectivity which are not easily separated or un-twined.”⁴⁵ John enhances the context of the meal with Jesus’ discourse on the sending and work of the Holy Spirit. Including this context is necessary for a correct understanding of divine action during the Supper.⁴⁶

Christ’s departure was a central concern of the upper room discourse. Comfort is given by the promise of the Spirit.⁴⁷ Similarly, Calvin’s solution to the bodily absence of Christ was to emphasize the presence of the Spirit as the mediator to accomplish Jesus’ promises in his farewell discourse (presence, union, sustenance).⁴⁸ The coming of a new Helper would mediate Christ’s presence.⁴⁹ Christ also speaks of himself as the vine in which his disciples will find sustenance and life.⁵⁰ Since this promise is given its inauguration, it is right to see the Lord’s Supper as a vehicle for illuminating both the reality

42 Reid, 150.

43 Horton, *People and Place*, chapter 4, “Sacraments as Treaty Ratification”.

44 Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Was the Last Supper a Passover Meal?” in *The Lord’s Supper: Remembering and Proclaiming Christ until He Comes*, eds., Schreiner, Thomas R, and Matthew R Crawford, NAC Studies in Bible & Theology, 10, (Nashville, Tenn.: B & H Academic, 2010).

45 Jonathan Pennington, “The Lord’s Supper in the Fourfold Witness of the Gospels”, *The Lord’s Supper*, 32.

46 Horton, *Spirit*, 123-36, 149-60; Graham Cole, *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 222-24.

47 Horton, *Spirit*, 125.

48 Calvin, *Institutes*, 1373.

49 Gregg Allison and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Holy Spirit*, Theology for the People of God, (Nashville: B&H Academic: 2020), 448f.; Horton, *Spirit*, 125, 149, 150, 176.

50 Horton, *Holy Spirit*, 125.

of Christ's presence by the Spirit and his status as the life-giving vine.⁵¹ It should, consequently, be seen as a time in which the Spirit is especially active in showing, reminding, and carrying out the mediation of Christ's presence in a profound way. The Lord's Supper is not the only time believers experience union with Christ or his presence by the Spirit; even so, God's omnipresence should not deter from acknowledging God's particular presence and action at certain times.⁵²

Participation by Faith

The primacy of divine action in the Lord's Supper does not minimize the reality and importance of human participation. The foundational facet of participation in the Lord's Supper is an act of obedience. In this sense, it is appropriate to accentuate the Supper as an ordinance.⁵³ As an act of remembrance, it also inspires dependence and orients the believer to the gracious working of God. Calvin discusses such dependence, writing, "to 'believe with all our heart' is not to believe Christ perfectly, but only to embrace him from the heart and with a sincere mind; not to be sated with him, but to hunger, thirst, and aspire to him with fervent affection."⁵⁴

In a certain sense, the Lord's Supper can be compared to other spiritual disciplines, albeit one expressly ordained by God. It is a response of faith to God's revelation in his Word, which establishes the Lord's Supper as both a memorial and a place where God meets participants. In obediently keeping the Supper, believers place themselves in a receptive state, orienting themselves to the working of the Spirit of God. It is an act of faith to which God's faithfulness grants efficacy.⁵⁵

51 Calvin writes, "For though he has taken his flesh away from us, and in the body has ascended... He shows his presence in power and strength, is always among his own people, and breathes his life upon them, and lives in them, sustaining them, strengthening, quickening, keeping them unharmed, as if he were present in the body. In short, he feeds his people with his own body, the communion of which he bestows upon them by the power of his Spirit", *Institutes*, 1381.

52 Gregg Allison elucidates: My claim embraces both the ontological presence of Christ in observances of the Lord's Supper, as well as the particular manifestation of his covenantal presence... As Christ promised his spiritual presence to accompany his church as it carries out the Great Commission (Matt. 28:20) and as it engages in church discipline (Matt. 18:20), so too the Savior and all of the salvific benefits associated with his sacrificial death are present in celebrations of the Lord's Supper. Allison, *Sojourners*, 396.

53 Allison, *Sojourners*, 396.

54 Calvin, *Institutes*, 1283.

55 Cf. 1 Corinthians 3:7

Participation in 1 Corinthians 10-11. Participation in the Lord's Supper goes beyond merely an act of obedience and remembrance. Paul's discussion of the observance of the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 10:14-22 and 11:17f. is highly instructive. Allison helpfully explains, "The language employed... is about participation, not identification, Christians participate in the blood and body of Jesus Christ... participation goes beyond remembering."⁵⁶ To participate in the Lord's Supper is to experience union with Christ by the Spirit. This participation is in fellowship with God and with the church, which is why the improper observance by the Corinthians was so serious; it tarnished the *koinonia* that the Supper is meant to symbolize and generate.⁵⁷

Proper participation also includes self-examination. Examination is not to ensure perfection or personal worthiness but to place the focus on one's need for Christ (and to develop a hunger for him). It is also to discern the church as the body of Christ, the oneness that is implied by sharing in one loaf and Spirit (1 Cor. 10:17).⁵⁸ The unification of believers in one body is a Pauline theme throughout the epistles (cf. Eph. 2:22; Eph. 4:1-16; Rom.12). Participation in the Lord's Supper is, therefore, a highly communal act and one that is meant to generate both community and unity. As such, the Lord's Supper, when rightly interpreted, is counter-cultural to individualistic Western society.⁵⁹ In its observance, divine action is primary, but human participation by faith is essential. Improper observance or lack of faith renders the Supper not only ineffective, but inversely causes the presence of the Spirit in judgment instead of comfort. The Supper calls participants to look to Christ and cling to him, forsaking all else. It spurs them to perceive the church as united in being joined as one body to Christ. Participants must, therefore, examine themselves to ensure proper focus on the body of Christ and safeguard against lingering dissention among the members of the church.

Formation through the Supper

Memorial views can also lend themselves to over-emphasizing the mental state of reflection. Participation in the Lord's Supper is necessarily both bodily

⁵⁶ Allison, *Sojourners*, 396, 398.

⁵⁷ Horton, *Spirit*, 176; Schreiner, *Lord's Supper*, 70-72; Badcock, chapter 5.

⁵⁸ Allison, *Sojourners*, 394; Reid, 150-51; Calvin, *Institutes*, 1419-20.

⁵⁹ Badcock, chapter 5, "The Nature of Community: Three Models."

and communal.⁶⁰ The active presence of the Spirit remains the primary cause granting its benefits and formational qualities. Even so, the media remain important. A medium is the means by which something is communicated or expressed. The media of Lord's Supper are purposely physical and were given to support its purpose.

The media used in any act of communication not only conveys a message, but also has a formative effect on how the message is received, perceived, and understood.⁶¹ Further, sociologists often speak of the effects of society on the perception of truth.⁶² A medium is not always formative on the conscious level of opinions or concepts; rather, it often functions on a pre-reflective or presuppositional level.⁶³ James K.A. Smith arrives at a similar conclusion in discussing the importance of worship and its forms. Smith argues the affections are formed by the narratives, values, and aesthetic dispositions of a person, which are in turn formed primarily by bodily action or participation.⁶⁴ The Lord's Supper can be seen as a translation of the gospel message into physical media that intersect humanity's bodily existence. The Spirit works in illuminating minds to understand what is being communicated in the Supper.⁶⁵ The physical media—the spoken word, the bread, the wine (or juice), and the gathered church matter as formative agents that give corporeal signs to the truths being communicated. Thus, improper observance, as among the Corinthians (1 Cor. 11:17-34), is grave because it distorts the message. Such distortion may be obvious or more subtle.

The importance of bodily participation. Calvin repeatedly stressed the importance of the elements as a physical analogy that helps believers understand the spiritual reality; they are given as corporeal elements because embodied humans need their aid to understand.⁶⁶ Luther likewise linked the

60 Potter, 95; Calvin, *Institutes*, 1278; Reardon, 106-109; McGrath, *Reformation*, 159, 162-164.

61 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, 23, 62-66. Nancy K. Baym, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*. 2nd ed., Digital Media and Society Series, (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2015), 28ff.

62 Alan Jacobs, *How to Think*, (New York: Crown Publishing, 2017), chapters 2-3.

63 Ibid., 19.

64 James K.A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*, Cultural Liturgies, V. 2, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 109-119; James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, Cultural Liturgies, V. 1, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 38ff.

65 Calvin, *Institutes*, 1284-86.

66 Calvin, *Institutes*, 1363, 1364, 1371, 1381, 1390.

elements of the sacrament to Christ's incarnation: "We see a frail, weak and mortal human being – yet he is nothing other than the majesty of God himself. In precisely the same way, God himself speaks to us and deals with us in these ordinary and despised materials."⁶⁷ The Lord's Supper can, accordingly, be seen as an embodied presentation of the gospel, in which the believing participant feels and tastes the symbols of Jesus' work and divine favor.⁶⁸ Some mistakenly see the goal of Christian life as departure from the body. Instead of inspiring believers toward disembodiment, the Supper reminds them of the coming new creation, when believers will be raised bodily and participate in the wedding feast.

Other Media of the Supper. The elements are not the only operative media in the Supper. Briefly, a few others may be discussed. The practice of the Lord's Supper is tied to the Word and its proclamation.⁶⁹ Joined to the reading of Scripture, the physicality of the ordinance communicates to the congregation with multiple senses. Moreover, the gathered community is an important medium. It is a reminder that together the participants are being formed into members of one body (Eph. 2:16, 4:4) and the beautiful bride (Eph. 5:22-24). The communal nature of the Supper is not merely something that is taught, but felt as participants gather and partake in one table and one loaf. In the communal act, they are being shown that their salvation is not solely an individual matter.⁷⁰

Finally, believing participants themselves can be said to be a medium of the Spirit, for the Spirit is creating through their participation. The Spirit is operative to complete that which God has begun (Phil. 1:6). The Spirit, in forming and perfecting the church, brings about a foretaste of the eschatological hope to which the Supper points.⁷¹ The Spirit works using these created means to perfect and direct the church toward its intended end.⁷²

This action of the Spirit is also a message to the world. Those who were once far off are now reconciled to God in one body, being built into a holy tem-

⁶⁷ McGrath, *Reformation*, 164.

⁶⁸ Allison, *Sojourners*, 395-96.

⁶⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1416; cf. 1292, 1417-18.

⁷⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1415-16.

⁷¹ Horton, *Spirit*, 159-60, 180.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 258-260; Cole, 103; Köstenberger and Allison, 268-69.

ple (Eph. 2:11-22). The church's radical unity and nature reveal the power of the gospel (cf. John 13:35). Like wives and husbands reflecting the mystery of Christ and church, the unity of the church itself reflects the truth of the gospel to the world.⁷³ This unity is not carried out solely by human effort. Rather, it is a creation of the Spirit as humans participate in worship and communion together.

Conclusion

The three facets discussed above provide the basis for a richer appreciation of the Lord's Supper than is provided by many conceptions of the memorial view. Foundational to a healthy understanding the Lord's Supper is to understand it first as a divine action. The Lord's Supper is not only a remembrance of past divine action but also a present working of the Spirit that inspires hope in Christ and orients believers to a future eschatological hope of completion. Although divine action is primary, it is also appropriate to speak of the Lord's Supper as an ordinance in which believers participate in faith and obedience. It is a place where believers can expect God to meet them. Accordingly, it should be expected to be a highly formative event. It is not the only place or time God is present and active. It is, however, a significant moment of divine presence and promised activity.

Finally, the means the Spirit uses to form believers as they participate in the Lord's Supper are significant since they communicate profoundly to humans in their embodiment. The Lord's Supper is a multi-media event, and each medium is active in communicating to believing participants. As an act of embodied participation in a picture of the gospel, it grants assurance and generates unity in the covenant community. Partakers are taught through a tangible, bodily act to rely upon Christ and to be the body of Christ. As such, it is an identity building event. Not only are individuals formed in the likeness of Christ, the church collectively is shown as the body of Christ.

The church should place a high value on appropriately and consistently observing the Lord's Supper. As such, the church teaches its correct observance in conjunction with the act, lifting it up as a special moment for the body. Since it is a source of unity and assurance, frequent observance of the Supper

⁷³ Allison, *Sojourners*, 408.

is ideal.⁷⁴ Moreover, the physicality of the Lord's Supper illuminates the importance of physical presence and gathering as the church. Although digital media can be valuable to the church's mission, virtual practice of the Lord's Supper will necessarily be lacking.

Admired amidst the distractions of life, the Supper is a prod to cling to Christ as the sole source of true life. For the toils and trials that cause faith to waver and wane, it is a reminder that God has not forsaken his children. God will unfailingly accomplish all he has promised. As believers wait now, the Supper proclaims that they are receiving all Christ has won through the Spirit as a seal (Eph. 1:13). At the Table, believers are oriented to an eschatological hope that asserts Christ is better than all else and that he will return for his bride. Partaking in the Lord's Supper, believers celebrate that they will, because of God's faithfulness, participate in the marriage supper of the Lamb. The Supper is at the intersection of past action, present hope, and future reality. The church needs this formative event so that by the Spirit it may continue to groan, "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev 22:20).

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⁷⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1421-23; Allison, *Sojourners*, 399.

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The Dynamic Nature of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God: How Acts Lays a Sure Foundation for the Mission of the Church

Ross Frierson

It is not uncommon to be at an IMB training and hear the speaker encourage the listeners to open their Bibles to the book of Acts. However, it is at this point, when we open our Bibles to the book of Acts, that we need to stop and ask the same hermeneutical questions of Acts that we ask of other narrative portions of Scripture.

In this article, I will argue that Luke's narrative in Acts serves as an orderly account of the dynamic nature of the gospel of the Kingdom of God, in which the church rejoices and has confidence because the gospel is divinely effective. The "dynamic nature of the gospel" is described by Robert Plummer as, "an 'effective force' which inevitably goes forth and accomplishes God's will."¹ I will highlight Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart's hermeneutical principles for historical narrative to draw conclusions about Luke's original intention for Acts. I will then engage with an *apostolic hermeneutic* of Acts before giving

1 Robert Lewis Plummer, "The Church's Missionary Nature: The Apostle Paul and His Churches," (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2001). 72.

concluding thoughts on how Acts leads to the church's confident rejoicing in the power of the gospel handed down from the prophets and apostles.

Hermeneutical Principles for Historical Narrative

Sound hermeneutical principles help the reader to understand the author's original, Holy Spirit-inspired intent. Before drawing missiological implications from the book of Acts, the reader must ask and answer the question, what was Luke's original intent for writing Acts? This is important because, as Fee and Stuart write, "If it can be demonstrated that Luke's intent in Acts had been to lay down a pattern for the church at all times, then that pattern surely becomes normative, that is, it is what God requires of all Christians under any and all conditions. But if his intent is something else, then we need to ask the hermeneutical questions in a different way."²

Fee and Stuart go on to give a general principle to help the reader determine if Luke's description of what happened in the early church should be considered a norm for the church in all places and times. They write, "Unless Scripture explicitly tells us we must do something, what is only narrated or described does not function in a normative way - unless it can be demonstrated on other ground that the author intended it to function in this way."³ The authors then give three specific principles for determining if biblical narrative is to be considered normative for today:

1. "It is probably never valid to use an analogy based on biblical precedent as giving biblical authority for present-day actions."
2. "Although it may not have been the author's primary purpose, biblical narratives do have illustrative and (sometimes) 'pattern' value."
3. "In matters of Christian experience, and even more so of Christian practice, biblical precedents may sometimes be regarded as repeatable patterns—even if they are not understood to be normative." They go on to write that, "the strongest possible case can be made

² Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How To Read The Bible For All Its Worth*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), Electronic Publication, "Acts: The Question of Historical Precedent."

³ Ibid.

when only one pattern is found (although one must be careful not to make too much of silence)....”⁴

The reader’s task then is to exegete the book of Acts to determine Luke’s original intent and to find in that intent God’s word for the church today.

Luke’s Original Intent Six Acts

The view that Luke’s gospel and Acts were intended to be a two-volume work is summarized well by H.J. Cadbury’s statement that “Acts is neither an appendix nor an afterthought. It is probably an integral part of the author’s original plan and purpose.”⁵ With that in mind, it can be said that in his gospel and Acts, Luke intended to write an orderly account of God’s action to establish and grow His Kingdom by creating a new people from among both Jews and Gentiles, through the person and work of Jesus Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit. In Acts, Luke’s focus is on the spread of the dynamic gospel of the Kingdom of God, from its Jewish roots in Jerusalem to Gentiles in Rome, and everywhere in between. Luke shows that the gospel of the Kingdom of God is the fulfillment, in Christ, of Old Testament covenant promises. God’s people can now include all the families of the earth gathered in God’s place, which is the Church, and under God’s rule and blessing.⁶

The dynamic nature of the gospel of the kingdom of God is Luke’s focus in Acts. Luke does not allow the reader to conclude human agency as being the primary cause of the diffusion of the gospel in Acts, preferring to stress the activity of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, who accomplishes God’s will through the proclamation of God’s Word, is the source of power that makes the proclamation of the gospel effective. Michael Green points out that, “Every initiative in evangelism recorded in Acts is the initiative of the Spirit of God.”⁷

4 Ibid. Fee and Stuart elaborate on each one of these principles, providing cautions and exceptions.

5 H.J. Cadbury quoted in I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson, ed., *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 15.

6 Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom*. (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 1981), 53-54. Goldsworthy defines *Kingdom of God* and later argues that the pattern of the kingdom being God’s people, in God’s place, under his rule and blessing is established in the garden of Eden. (58-66). For this promise-fulfillment theme in Acts, see Darrell Bock, “Scripture and the Realisation in God’s Promises” in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, eds. I Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 41-62.

7 Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*. (London: Hodder and Stoughton; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970). Quoted in Plummer, “The Church’s Missionary Nature.” 72.

Luke's focus on divine agency is most clearly seen in his summary statements that divide his narrative into six acts.⁸ The summary verses in Acts 6:7, 12:24, and 19:20 highlight the *word of God* increasing, and Acts 9:31 and 16:5 highlight the gospel's work to *build up* and *strengthen* the church. When Luke writes in the closing lines of his narrative that Paul lived in Rome for two years, welcomed all who came to him, proclaimed the kingdom of God, and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ, the reader understands that for Paul to proclaim the kingdom of God was for him to proclaim how through Christ, all peoples could be adopted into God's family, gathered in His place, and continuously live under His rule and blessing. It is the diffusion of this comprehensive message that Luke shows to be divinely effective. It is divinely effective to save sinners, establish the church, and build up the church.

In reflecting on the dynamic nature of the gospel observed in Acts and in Paul's writings, Plummer concludes, "Because God's Spirit is a missionary spirit (i.e., revealing himself to humans and enabling their God-glorifying response) and God's word is dynamic and effective, the abiding presence of Spirit and word with the elect community guarantees its active missionary role."⁹ Any effort to draw normative missiological principles from Acts that does not first take into account Luke's original intent will more often than not reveal the reader's pragmatic biases; but, when Luke's intent is properly understood, the church is left with great cause to rejoice.

Engaging with an *Apostolic Hermeneutic*

Jesse Snodgrass critiques Fee and Stuart's principle that biblical narrative is only normative where it "explicitly tells us we must do something."¹⁰ Snodgrass concludes that *paradigms* can be observed in Scripture that can serve as an example for the "apostolic work" that should be normative for missionaries today.¹¹ He admits, however, "not every piece of Acts narrative is equally relevant in determining the apostolic work."¹² The question he then asks is how can one, "determine which aspects of the narrative are exempla-

8 The six divisions are Acts 1:1-6:7; 6:8-9:31; 9:32-12:24; 12:25-16:5; 16:6-19:20; 19:21-28:31.

9 Plummer, "The Church's Missionary Nature," 100.

10 Jesse Snodgrass, "To Teach Others Also: An Apostolic Approach to Theological Education in Pioneer Missions," (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 30.

11 Snodgrass, "To Teach Others Also," 34-35.

12 Ibid. 34.

ry instances of the apostolic work and which were truly ‘incidental’ to the purposes of the author?”¹³

The solution he proposes is an *apostolic hermeneutic* that looks for “Scriptural guideposts that direct the reader toward the proper interpretation and application.”¹⁴ The first guidepost is where Paul’s recorded works in Acts and his epistolary statements about his works *coalesce*. The second is where there is a *recurrence* of practices evident in multiple contexts.¹⁵ The proposed two guideposts focus exclusively on the apostle Paul, which is problematic, but space does not allow for critique of the interpretation that Paul is the prototype of the modern-day church planting missionary.¹⁶

In the end, Snodgrass’ conclusions regarding Paul’s apostolic work do not require additional interpretive principles, such as an *apostolic hermeneutic*, to what Fee and Stuart have given. I will list below Snodgrass’ four conclusions about Paul’s apostolic work and then for each one I will attempt to show how it supports Luke’s main intent in writing Acts, which was to demonstrate the dynamic nature of the gospel. Paul’s “apostolic work” included:¹⁷

1. “Proclaiming the gospel.” This is a pattern of believers in Acts, but Paul also commanded others to imitate him in this pattern of doing all things to the glory of God, which would include proclaiming the gospel, so that both Jews and Greeks might be saved (1 Cor 10:31-11:1). Therefore, the reader understands this pattern to be normative for all believers today. Luke’s concern in Acts does not seem to be with who is proclaiming the gospel, but rather that the gospel is being spread.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid. 34-35.

15 Ibid. 35.

16 Ibid. 39. Snodgrass’ rationale for focusing exclusively on Paul can be found under “Paul’s Definitive ‘Work’” beginning on page 39. For further study on the ongoing role of the apostle, see Don Dent, *The Ongoing Role of Apostles in Missions: The Forgotten Foundation* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2019). For an argument against the ongoing role of the apostle, see Ricky Wilhelm, “A Biblical Investigation of the Work of an Evangelist and Its Implications for International Mission Board Team Leaders in Established-Church Locations,” (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022).

17 Snodgrass, “To Teach Others Also,” 43. The author lists his concluding elements of Paul’s apostolic work and then writes, “While this does not, perhaps, exhaust the potential elements of the apostolic work, it does address the most prominent aspects following the exegetical guidelines of coalescence and recurrence.”

2. “‘Laying the foundation’ of new churches.” We see Paul, and others, establish new churches in places where there were no churches, and he does so by establishing the foundational teaching that had been passed down to him (1 Cor 11:23; 15:3; Eph 2:19-22). Theophilus could be, and the Church today can be, confident that the teaching handed down by the prophets and the apostles is authoritative, and Luke shows that it is this authoritative Word of God that has the power to establish and build the church. The reader should not draw normative patterns from Acts about where churches should be planted. That was not Luke’s intention, and a modern-day missionary going to a location that is less than 2% evangelical should not consider himself to be church planting in a pioneer context like Paul was when he went to a location with absolutely no churches.¹⁸ The reader should rather understand Luke’s intention to demonstrate that the dynamic gospel is the foundational teaching that establishes and grows the church.
3. “Itinerating by moving from place to place.” Luke shows in Acts that Paul’s church planting work was an itinerant work, although no clear pattern for the length of time in each place is established. Paul seems to have expected the same from his team, commanding Timothy to “do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Tim 4:5). Once his ministry as an evangelist was fulfilled, Paul requested that Timothy “make every effort to come to me soon” (2 Tim 4:9). No normative patterns can be drawn regarding the length of a missionary church planter’s itineracy, but Luke, and the epistles, do make clear the goal of the itineracy. The goal is to teach the foundational message passed down from the prophets and apostles (2 Tim 1:13-14). Luke’s focus in Acts is on the spread of the dynamic gospel and its effective nature to establish and build churches.
4. “‘Entrusting’ the work to the new communities.” This element of the work is closely connected to the itinerating element. Luke’s intent in Acts is to show that the gospel proclaimed by Paul, and

18 Ibid. 19. Snodgrass writes that, “A ‘pioneer’ environment is one in which Christianity is a fledgling enterprise, an environment that fits the missiological definition of an ‘unreached’ population as 2% or less evangelical.” He then includes in a footnote that according to the Joshua Project website, “The original Joshua Project editorial committee selected the criteria [for “Unreached”] less than 2% Evangelical Christian.”

every other believer, is divinely effective to make disciples, establish the local church, and then spread. The gospel has that power, not the apostle. Therefore, Paul instructed Timothy and Titus, itinerant missionary pastors in local churches, to appoint and entrust other qualified pastors who could teach sound doctrine and defend against false teaching. Paul's trust was not so much in the new communities but in the dynamic nature of the gospel.

A Sure Foundation

The church can rejoice because the word of God is dynamic and divinely powerful to establish and build up the church! This is the message proclaimed by Jesus in Luke's gospel, from Galilee to Jerusalem, and by the church in Acts, from Jerusalem to Rome. It is in this dynamic nature of the gospel that the church and her missionaries need to trust. The Spirit of God is powerful to cause the comprehensive message of the kingdom of God to diffuse, to be effective to save sinners, and to build and strengthen the church. Paul trusted in the Holy Spirit to do just that when he wrote that he had "fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ" (Rom 15:19) in the area from Jerusalem around to Illyricum. The work of the apostles was fulfilled.

Now, there remains a great need for an ever-increasing missionary force of sent out ones who know the dynamic nature of the gospel, follow the pattern of the sound message taught by the apostles, and guard the good deposit entrusted to them by the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells in them (2 Tim 1:13-14).

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VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Treasuring the Church

Beverly Cooper

When my family landed in our new place of service in Southeast Asia, we were full of excitement and enthusiasm for the work ahead. We were in a small nation that was home to hundreds of evangelical churches. All we had to do was to convince them to boldly proclaim the Gospel to the millions of lost and unreached around them, and our job would be done. Soon after arriving, we joined a local Baptist church that was 700 members strong. In the eyes of the local convention, it would be seen as a thriving church. They had a well-trained pastor, a growing children's ministry, a beautiful building, and plenty of money in the bank. Yet, as the newcomers with an agenda, we saw all the flaws. Within our first few weeks at the church, we were unashamedly vision-casting for the church to reach a particular Muslim people group that is the least reached in the country. When I introduced myself at my first young mom's church get-together, I made sure to share why my family had come to this location and what our heart was for the church. In a few sentences, I basically told them all what they were not doing well and how I could help them fix their problem. With each new church interaction, we made a point to share why we were here and how we thought the church should interact with the lost around them. We shared boldly, brazenly, and sometimes carelessly. A few months into our time we began to feel defeated. We had minimal traction and had made little to no progress in the work. At every turn, we were actively discouraged by many, including the pastors from our church, from doing any outreach work among the unreached Muslim people in the country. The church was still doing what it had been doing before we arrived, and we were simply frustrated and confused.

Recognizing our lack of progress, we realized what needed to happen. We stopped. We prayed. We re-evaluated. Here we were as newcomers full of pride and feeling like we were needed. We came in seeing only the shortcomings of the church, and we were more than ready to share what we saw with the church leaders and members and provide them with tools for how to improve. Yet, we had failed to genuinely love the body. We had not offered to serve within the body, except in ways that we felt would be beneficial for our strategy. We had bulldozed our way in, pointed out all the glaring flaws, and then stood by waiting for the church to ask us to help them. We needed to be reminded of the call found in Romans 12:4-5. “For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we who are many, are one body in Christ and individually members one of another.”

Through our prayer and self-evaluation, God revealed to us our pride and called us to humbly serve and join in what the church thought was important. So, I began serving in the nursery on a monthly basis, bouncing snotty babies on my hip and playing cars on the hard nursery floor during the service. We opened our home for a community group, giving up rare slow evenings as a family to study the Word with other church members. My husband, Louis, began serving on the church’s mission committee, sitting through late evening zoom meetings about mission budgets and proposals. I attended the young mom’s meeting, sharing only my parenting struggles and shortcomings. We invited people into our home, hosting the young, the old, the pastors, and the brand-new members. We joined in where the church felt they needed us, and slowly people within the church began to see that we had a heart for the church as a whole. As we interacted with more and more individuals from the church and in various settings, they would ask us why we had come to their country. We would then share the mission to which God had called us and listen to their stories of God’s work in their lives. We built genuine and deep relationships. We stopped triaging people based on who we thought was influential and able to further our goals. We realized that every person that we spurred on to deeper faithfulness in Christ was one more person who moved closer to faithfulness in gospel sharing.

As we got to know others, shared our stories, and dug in deep with them, we also invited those people to go out and share the gospel with us. One of those people was Sarah, a young local woman with a heart for missions. Sarah had done several short-term trips to other countries but was quite convinced that the gospel couldn’t be shared with a certain Muslim unreached

people group of her own country. She believed it would cause conflict and animosity. However, she was willing to go out together with us. That night, over plates of naan and aloo gobi, I shared the gospel with a couple we had just met. They listened. They smiled. They did not get up and leave. That one night transformed Sarah. The next month she shared at the church's prayer meeting about how she had gone out and shared the gospel with the unreached. As she stood in front of the church sharing that night, she, as an insider, had a greater impact than Louis and I, as trained missionaries, had in our 18 months of participation at that church. Sarah vision-casted so clearly, presenting the need, and sharing how the gospel could actually be shared. Suddenly, we had a multitude of people interested in being trained, joining us in our evangelism efforts, and hearing more about the unreached of their nation.

Another area where we saw growth was within our community group. When we first opened our home, we hosted only six people. We created a time of testimony at each meeting where we would share about people with whom we had had a chance to share the gospel or with whom we had follow-up and how God was moving. Within 16 months, the group grew to almost 20 people. Each member was full of passion for the lost. When we gathered, there were numerous people sharing about recent opportunities they had to share the Gospel, whether in their workplace, with their family, in their friend circle, or with strangers. Our community group became one characterized by mutual spurring on as we all encouraged one another to reach all the lost! This group has since multiplied and is on the verge of multiplying again.

Now, it may not seem like an earth-shattering concept, but we saw first-hand that the deeper our love for the church, the more openly we could share about the need for the gospel and invite others into the work. Our pastor's wife, Grace, came up to me one Sunday asking if I would be willing to take her out to share the gospel. On Grace's next day off, we met for lunch in a local food center, enjoyed our bowl of noodles, and shared not only our table with another lady, but also shared the gospel with her. Grace left our time together that day excited to apply the lessons she learned in her workplace and with her neighbors. Slowly, one person at a time, people started to gain an awareness of the concept of the need for the gospel among the unreached of their city and the need for these people to be able to hear the gospel in a way that they could understand and respond. Our church even asked us to lead an evangelism training and prayer time during the fasting month of Ramadan to lift up our neighbors. Numerous church members attended this

training and afterwards several of them came up to us expressing that they had no idea that Muslims in their country were coming to Christ and that they were challenged to be a part of this work.

God truly humbled us over our first months in this new context, and we have clung to the lessons that He gently taught us. We learned that no matter our context, we must enter humbly, coming ready to serve and to pour into the local church. We realized that we cannot make an idol of what we want the church to be. We were reminded that regardless of our differences, that we as a church are one body, confessing the same gospel. We saw that hospitality is a necessity as we open our homes, build relationships, and let others see our passion and calling. We also saw the importance of viewing all members of the body as valuable and needed. No one is non-influential. We needed to stop expecting others to fit into our mold. I praise God for the way that He transformed our hearts. He has shown me what it looks like to treasure my church--to build it up, to not give up on it, to show up, to serve from within. May each of us commit to live lives of faithfulness and humility and invite others to walk alongside us. May we live out Ephesians 4:2-6 in our churches, no matter the context. "Conduct yourselves with all humility, gentleness, and patience. Accept each other with love, and make an effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit with the peace that ties you together. You are one body and one spirit, just as God also called you in one hope. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all, who is over all, through all, and in all."

Beverly Cooper currently lives and serves in Southeast Asia alongside her husband and four young girls. Beverly has served overseas for almost ten years. She is passionate about evangelism and discipleship of believers.

RESOURCE REVIEWS

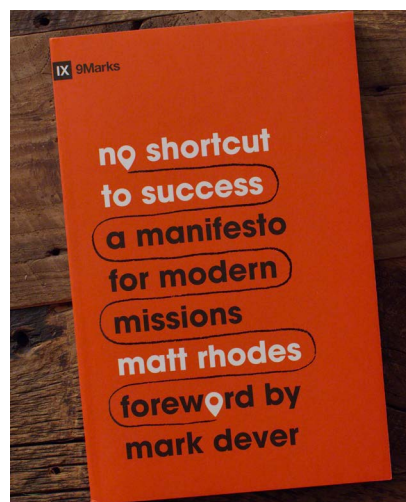
Book Review. No Shortcut to Success: A Manifesto for Modern Missions

Matt Rhodes. *No Shortcut to Success: A Manifesto for Modern Missions.* Wheaton: Crossway, 2022.

Reviewed by Zane Pratt, Vice President IMB Training, and Mark Stevens, Director IMB Field Personnel Orientation

Summary

No Shortcut to Success by Matt Rhodes is subtitled “A Manifesto for Modern Missions.” In it, Rhodes responds to contemporary trends in Evangelical missiology he finds troubling. In particular, he is disturbed by approaches to mission work that emphasize rapid reproduction as the controlling criterion in missionary strategies. Rhodes names Church Planting Movements (CPM), Disciple Making Movements (DMM), Training for Trainers (T4T), and Any 3 as the prime examples of rapid missionary methods. He believes these methods place an undue emphasis on speed and subsequently engage in reductionistic practices in language and culture



learning, evangelism, discipleship, church formation, and other elements of the missionary task.

The book is divided in two parts. Part 1 is entitled “Where Shortcuts Have Led Us: Surveying the Problem.” Rhodes identifies and analyzes the features he finds troubling in the popular missionary methods named above. These include deliberate anti-professionalism, anti-sequentialism, an overriding emphasis on speed, the quest for silver bullet strategies, an inordinate reliance on short-term mission trips, and an aversion to rigorous missionary preparation. He details his concerns about the quantitative and qualitative integrity of mass movements that have been reported by practitioners of these strategies. He is particularly concerned with inadequate language learning and cultural acquisition.

Part 2 provides Rhodes’ proposal for corrective action, responding to the issues he has described. He calls missionaries “ambassadors for Christ” and uses this identity to appeal for a focus on communication and teaching by missionaries. He stresses the importance of language learning, while fully acknowledging its difficulty. He insists that missionary communication be clear, credible, and bold. He proposes a path for long-term missionary service that includes extensive preparation and careful labor in biblical knowledge, language and culture acquisition, evangelism, disciple making, healthy church planting, and leadership development. He outlines the steps that a church, a mission agency, and a candidate should take in preparing and sending missionaries. He concludes his book by discussing the relationship between the work of the Holy Spirit and the work of missionaries in using ordinary means. He particularly focuses on concerns regarding popular ideas about prayer, fasting, and spiritual warfare.

Analysis

There is much to appreciate in this book. Rhodes accurately identifies the connection that can exist between an overriding concern with rapid multiplication and an unhealthy reductionism in many components of the missionary task. Having been engaged in this task for over three decades, as practitioners, trainers, and mission leaders, we found ourselves nodding in agreement with many of Rhodes’ observations. We wholeheartedly endorse his passionate commitment to deep, never-ending language learning. Our agency, the IMB, will send apprentice missionaries home if they have not met their language learning requirement by the end of their first term. We thor-

oughly agree with the necessity of solid biblical training, which is why our organization requires seminary training for long-term missionaries. Perhaps most crucially, we agree that Scripture never promises rapid multiplication, and that there is no silver-bullet strategy that will compel God to give it to us. We agree that evangelism must be clear and must include the necessity of repentance; that conversion is marked by a permanent, radical transformation of life; that discipleship is a life-long process that engages every area of life; that healthy churches with a rigorously biblical ecclesiology are a nonnegotiable necessity; and that church leaders need thorough biblical training. We agree that missionaries need to teach new believers and young churches, and not simply facilitate discussion. We agree that missionaries must be committed to hard work over the long haul – however long it takes to get to the point of *exit to partnership*. Furthermore, we agree that many of the methods critiqued by Rhodes can produce the results he mentioned, particularly in their early forms as recorded in the books he cites. In many ways, this book could have been a helpful corrective to concerns we share with him.

However, we also have concerns with this book. Some are relatively minor, but some are quite serious. We will begin with the relatively minor points and proceed to the serious ones. Rhodes writes of the early fourth century AD, “While the church may have formed around 10% of the Roman population, it had little presence outside the Roman empire” (74). This ignores the incredible growth of Christianity in the Persian empire, India, and Ethiopia in the early centuries of the Christian era. The interested reader is directed to the first volume of Samuel Moffatt’s magisterial *A History of Christianity in Asia* for more details.

Rhodes’ description of the Non-Residential Missionary (NRM) approach reflects more familiarity with the book by that name than it does with the reality that quickly emerged in the NRM program in the International Mission Board (IMB) in the early 1990s. NRMs were required to learn the language of the people they were assigned. Many NRMs (indeed, almost all in Central Asia) found ways to move into the area where their people groups lived and engaged in direct work with their people, while also seeking to encourage partnership between evangelical organizations and ensuring that issues such as Bible translation and media production were addressed. This example illustrates the danger of treating written sources as permanently definitive of the movements they represent. Rhodes accurately reflects the literature at this point, largely because most methodological developments never get

recorded. He would be better served to interview current practitioners rather than rely on books that are decades old to represent current realities.

A deeper concern is the impression that Rhodes values slowness for its own sake. In light of the vastness of lostness and the reality of hell, no one should desire that the gospel spread slowly. The Apostle Paul certainly did not (2 Thess 3:1). However, Rhodes uses the word slow quite often and with clear approval. While it is true that Scripture never promises speed, slowness is not a virtue. Urgency is a necessary consequence of understanding the exclusivity of the gospel and the condition of the world.

However, the most serious concern with this book is how Rhodes misrepresented Mike Shipman's work and the *Any-3* evangelism method. Below are specific examples from Rhodes' book that we believe misrepresent Mike Shipman and his work.

First, Rhodes states that Shipman does not encourage language learning. He then uses a quotation from *Any 3* out of context to support his accusation: "Mike Shipman, designer of the *Any-3* method, doesn't encourage language learning. In its place, he advocates using 'a translator . . . to bridge language barriers'" (147). Rhodes, as he does in many places in his book when referencing *Any 3*, does not list a page number in his footnote, only stating it was in chapter 7. The only reference to a translator in chapter 7 of *Any 3*, and the only section that fits Rhodes' quote, is in the section entitled "Speak his language." Here, Shipman advocates knowing the language and culture of the people and then adjusting your communication style as you share the gospel with them. Shipman writes, "Adjustments in communication are the responsibility of the speaker, not the listener. So, plan to adjust the way you communicate in order to be heard with as little misunderstanding as possible"¹ Shipman then explains how a translator may help expat mission volunteers² reduce misunderstandings when they are sharing the gospel during an overseas mission trip. Referring to these volunteers, not full-time career missionaries, Shipman says:

1 Mike Shipman, *Any 3: Anyone, Anywhere, Anytime* (Monument, CO: WIGTake Resources, 2013), 59-60.

2 A short term expat volunteer is ordinarily someone who is part of a two week trip. These volunteers are rarely experts in the language or culture of the people they are attempting to reach with the gospel.

A translator can help to bridge language barriers for expat mission volunteers. The translator should be trained to avoid terminology that might be misunderstood by the hearer. The goal is to explain who Jesus is according to the Scripture while using religious terms that are already familiar to the recipient. This way, the recipient will actually hear the gospel, rather than closing the conversation before the gospel is presented.³

Mike Shipman never suggested that career missionaries should use translators as a short-cut to expedite gospel conversations. Nevertheless, Rhodes misrepresents Shipman's suggestions making it seem that he is advocating for missionaries to use a translator in evangelism. Shipman is a model of fluency in the language of his adopted people group, and has numerous written works in that language.⁴ He is a strong proponent for extensive language and culture acquisition.

Second, Rhodes states that Shipman believes that learning a people's culture and beliefs before sharing the gospel is detrimental. Rhodes states:

Mike Shipman – the architect of *Any-3*, a widely used approach to missions – agrees that such an approach is dangerous, explaining that learning a people's culture and beliefs before sharing the gospel with them is actually *detrimental* to mission work. Shipman explains, "We find being a bit 'dumb' [is] better than being too smart, as expertise in the local culture can provoke defensiveness" (37).

Rhodes repeats this claim:

Many say it is unnecessary to learn people's culture and beliefs in detail before sharing the gospel with them. In fact, we're warned that it may even be detrimental. I've quoted this already but it's worth repeating. One of today's prominent missionary

3 Shipman, *Any 3*, 60.

4 See Mike Shipman, *Khotbah Alkitabiah Yang Komunikatif dan Berwibawa* (Lembaga Literateur Baptis: Bandung, Indonesia, 2003). Mike Shipman, *Pembaruan Pelayanan Mimbar* (Yayasan Kalam Hidup: Bandung, Indonesia, 2006). Mike Shipman, *Amat Agung: Karya Kerasulan Kuno dan Kini* (Rahayu Group: Salatiga, Indonesia, 2009), Revised 2012. Mike Shipman, *Amanat Agung Asli* (Rahayu Group: Salatiga, Indonesia, 2014). Mike Shipman, *Kepemimpinan Kerasulan*, (Dian Cipta: Jakarta, Indonesia, 2017).

leaders contends, “We find being a bit ‘dumb’ better than being too smart, as expertise in the local culture can provoke defensiveness.” But until we understand what people believe, how can we engage with them or answer their questions? (166).

Rhodes lists the source for this quotation as a *Mission Frontiers* article about Any 3.5 Shipman does say something similar in *Any 3* about “being a bit dumb,”⁶ but the context is opposite of what Rhodes is portraying for its meaning. A distinctive characteristic of *Any 3* is to ask questions about what people believe and listen, before sharing the gospel. Further, *Any 3* was designed with an extensive knowledge of the Muslim mindset.

In the original context described in *Any 3*, Shipman tells those sharing the gospel with Muslims to get to know and understand the beliefs of the person with whom they are talking. He is saying we need to ask each individual Muslim what they believe because many of them may not know their own religion or may have peculiarities. He suggests that it is better to be “a bit dumb”⁷ (meaning don’t assume you know what they believe) than to come across as an expert on what they believe, because that may provoke defensiveness. Shipman advocates asking questions about what they believe in order to understand first what they believe. Mike mentions dumbness twice in his book. First:

Asking personal questions builds rapport that is necessary for witnessing well. Early in a witnessing conversation, it is important to let the other person do most of the talking, because later you will guide the conversation. When you ask a lot of questions to get the other person engaged in the conversation, the person witnessed to will more likely listen politely later as the witness shares the gospel with him.

5 It should be noted that the *Mission Frontiers* article published July/August 2013, attributed to Mike Shipman, was not written by him. Rhodes references the *Mission Frontiers* article on pages 37, 38, and 166 of his book. Shipman asked the publisher to change the attribution, and it has subsequently been changed. The author of the *Mission Frontiers* article attempts to summarize several aspects of *Any-3*, but parts of the summary do not accurately reflect what Shipman writes and teaches. Mission Frontiers Contributor, “Any 3: Lead Muslims to Christ Now!,” *Mission Frontiers*: <https://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/any-3>, accessed 20 April 2023.

6 Shipman, *Any 3*, 60.

7 Shipman, *Any 3*, 60.

Being “a little bit dumb” is actually better than being “too smart.” Appearing to know too much about the person’s religion and culture, often makes the person being witnessed to uncomfortable. This may cause him to put up his guard. The best way to learn about a person is to ask him about himself and what he believes. Asking questions not only teaches you what the person believes and what makes him unique, it allows you to tailor your witness to that particular individual.⁸

The second mention is similar to the first:

Ironically, we have found that when it comes to evangelism, being a little bit dumb may be better than being too smart. Revealing expertise in the local culture can provoke defensiveness from the Muslims with whom you are sharing. Using an *Any-3* approach, and asking questions, even when you already know the answer, lays a foundation of mutual respect.⁹ (*Any-3*, pp. 64-65)

Shipman’s point is that when sharing the gospel, we should not come across as an expert or know-it-all. Instead we should find out about the person’s culture and beliefs and then share the gospel informed with that knowledge. Frequently, in *Any 3* trainings, Shipman explains what he means by being a little bit dumb: “I’m referring to the need for humility when we share the gospel, instead of coming across as a know-it-all.”¹⁰ He also frequently says in *Any 3* trainings, “Everything you can learn about their religion and culture is vital, as long as you don’t flaunt it when you share the gospel.”¹¹

Third, Rhodes implies that he espouses fad missiology, when Shipman painstakingly built his discipleship and church strategy (*The Big I*) upon a biblical

8 Shipman, *Any 3*, 60.

9 Shipman, *Any 3*, 64-5.

10 Mike Shipman email with author (Mark Stevens) 30 June 2022. Shipman makes these statements in his evangelism training.

11 Mike Shipman email with author (Mark Stevens) 30 June 2022. Shipman makes these statements in his evangelism training.

foundation using careful hermeneutics.¹² Any 3 is a book on evangelism, not a big picture missionary strategy. Another book by Shipman, *Plan A*, lays out much of his Big 1 strategy and plan.¹³ It is not clear why Rhodes refer to Shipman's evangelism book as a missionary strategy book but then does not refer to his missionary strategy book at all.

Conclusion

No Shortcut to Success aspires to be a manifesto for modern missions. Many of its critiques are valid, and much of its content reflects solid missiology. However, our concerns with how Rhodes misrepresents his sources outweigh the book's benefits. These misrepresentations are so egregious that we are compelled to recommend that no one read, distribute, or teach from this book

12 Robert Christopher Abner, "An Embryonic Ecclesiology Enabling Church Planting Movements to Flourish," (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019), 160. Abner applied an ecclesiological matrix to examine the foundations in church plants. He concluded, "The ecclesiological foundations of *The Big 1* church planting strategy are solid. They emphasize biblical essentials for church. At the same time, the strategy instills an element of multiplication."

13 Mike Shipman, *Plan A: Abide in Christ, Disciple the World!* (Mount Vernon, WA: Mission Network, 2019).

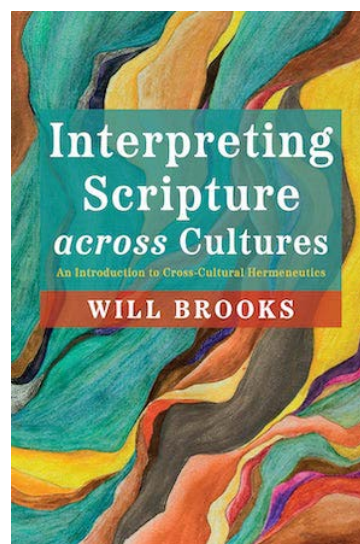
Book Review. Interpreting Scripture Across Cultures: An Introduction to Cross-Cultural Hermeneutics

Brooks, Will. *Interpreting Scripture Across Cultures: An Introduction to Cross-Cultural Hermeneutics.* Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2022.

Reviewed by Jon Staples, IMB Field Personnel, North Africa and Middle East.

In *Interpreting Scripture across Cultures*, Will Brooks provides a survey on the topic of biblical interpretation for those doing ministry in cross-cultural environments. Brooks has extensive experience in this area as he teaches New Testament interpretation at two seminaries in Asia and has done so for over ten years. Therefore, Brooks writes as a scholar-practitioner who has thought deeply about the topic while on the ground helping others learn how to interpret the Bible.

On the field, missionaries are certain to run into surprising approaches to reading and interpreting the Bible. Some may say that the Bible has no set meaning. Others will say that the meaning of the Scriptures changes in various cultures



around the world. Others will argue that culture and context play no role in the process of understanding the Scriptures. In this book, Brooks argues that “in every context” our goal as readers of the Bible should be to “understand the original author’s meaning” (14). He does this by examining the challenges presented by cross-cultural interpretation and the various views scholars have proposed, and then he presents a way forward with an author-oriented approach that can be applied in any context.

It is hard to overstate the importance of the topic of biblical interpretation for the missionary. As field workers seek to carry out the missionary task in their various contexts around the world, they must faithfully interpret the Scriptures. This is important not only for the missionaries themselves, but also for those whom they hope to train to be leaders and disciples who interpret the Bible faithfully and are teaching others to do the same. Faithful interpretation is crucial for the churches they leave behind. Brooks points out that how believers interpret Scripture “affects every single area of church health” (2). In other words, you cannot have a healthy church without healthy biblical interpretation. Therefore, this topic is crucial for all missionaries. Yet many cross-cultural workers may be tempted to fall into one of two ditches. Some may be more focused on faithfully interpreting the Scriptures to get the meaning of the text right while neglecting contextualization. On the other hand, some missionaries are more focused on considering their context, wanting to communicate the gospel well in a relevant and understandable way while neglecting careful interpretation of the Scriptures. Brooks helps balance these two tendencies showing that both careful biblical interpretation and faithful contextual consideration can and should be done well.

Interpreting the Scriptures across Cultures has many strengths. One that readily sticks out is the emphasis on training indigenous interpreters of the Bible. Brooks shows that the goal is to equip all believers in every context to interpret the Bible themselves as opposed to only giving them theological truths. Brooks encourages missionaries then to both “lead them to the Scriptures” and “give them solid interpretation skills” (25). Another strength of the book is that it is filled with both depth and practicality. For example, Brooks gives ten helpful principles for interpreting the Bible across cultures (chapter 10). He then builds on those principles by showing the reader how these ten principles can be practiced with four passages of Scriptures and a specific cultural context (chapter 11).

One final strength the reader will note is the value of humility in biblical interpretation. This is evident throughout the book. Brooks urges interpreters to pursue humility, read the Scriptures in community, and consider that they have much to learn from others. This value is vital as missionaries seek to serve across cultures.

Some readers may be tempted to skip or glaze over section two, which covers different views on cross-cultural hermeneutics. However, these chapters are not to be missed. As cross-cultural workers seek to partner with others in the missionary task, they will no doubt come across various views on how the Scriptures should be interpreted. While surveying these various views, Brooks points out the strengths and weaknesses of each view. I personally found these chapters helpful and enriching for my own views of how culture and biblical interpretation interact.

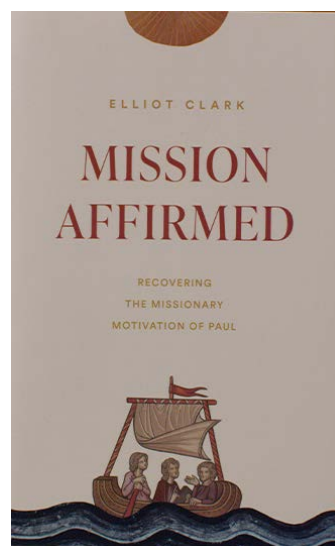
For missionaries who are working for God's glory to see healthy churches among the unreached peoples and places of the world, biblical interpretation is a crucial topic to consider. This book is unique in that it covers both faithful interpretation *and* careful contextualization. While you will find many books that cover one of these topics, I know of no other book that marries these topics as well as this one. For the sake of healthy biblical interpretation among all peoples and places, I commend this book to you.

Book Review. Mission Affirmed: Recovering the Missionary Motivation of Paul

Clark, Elliot. *Mission Affirmed: Recovering the Missionary Motivation of Paul.* Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2022.

Reviewed by Bo Parker, IMB Field Personnel, Asia Pacific Rim

Mission Affirmed is a work that focuses on the strategy of the Apostle Paul and the motivation behind Paul's mission practice. Elliot Clark proposes that the motivation behind Paul's ministry goes beyond the urgency of evangelism and the advance of the Kingdom. Paul's missionary motivation was driven by a desire to stand affirmed on the last day and to know that the work he had done would be approved by his Master. Paul preached the whole counsel of God and sought to bring all disciples to maturity in Christ in a way that would bring greater glory to God and thus stand affirmed. We also ought to be motivated by our satisfaction in knowing God and Him receiving that glory.



Clark takes the reader through the various epicenters of Paul's ministry and focuses on how the principles and motivations of Paul's ministry were carried out in each place. It is a refreshingly unique approach to highlighting the comprehensive nature (from entry to exit) of his ministry. He highlights how misplaced motivation can also lead to compromise in mission practice. In addition to demonstrating Paul's approach to ministry, Clark also presents ways in which the modern church has fallen short or become near-sighted in her approach to equipping and sending out those who are called to cross-cultural work. Longevity and sustained gospel presence should be our target rather than urgency to send anyone who may sense a call. In addition, Clark includes a careful examination of the western church's reticent and inadequate theology pertaining to suffering for the sake of Christ. He also tackles issues related to a missionary's partnership with existing national churches and issues of dependency. Though short in length, *Mission Affirmed* is comprehensive in scope and pointed in application.

Strengths and Weaknesses

As a field practitioner, Clark applies a seasoned and experiential look at current missiological trends. His keen focus on the Scriptures and sound application within modern context is the primary strength of his book. He provides important critiques of current missionary methods and approaches, while also providing a strong course correction that can be applied regardless of denominational background. Clark does not single out the proponents of the methodology he is critiquing. Instead, he addresses the methodology and offers a solution. This is refreshing considering our current cultural trends of criticizing without providing practical alternatives. He is genuinely concerned with the why and how of missions and seeks to encourage the church to grow in her understanding of what God wants to accomplish.

While I applaud Clark's concise approach, one area worthy of further discussion is his criticism of obedience-based discipleship and reproducibility. In chapter 4 entitled "Seeing the Invisible," Clark suggests these cannot be the benchmarks of evaluating missionary work. It is unclear in the chapter what markers signify genuine faith and growth in knowledge of Christ. A person's doctrinal fidelity is not the clearest way to evaluate whether that person is growing as a disciple of Christ. While true, that simplicity and reproducibility cannot merely be the marker of a comprehensive discipleship approach, neither can complexity of doctrine and knowledge alone. Both can be of the flesh. Not all those who desire reproducibility do so to the detriment of Spir-

it-filled, Spirit-led obedience nor aim for reproducibility through a shallow, hands-off discipleship. We need not create a dichotomy between grace and obedience in discipleship. The two do not exist independently but jointly demonstrate the reality of a transformed life. This chapter addresses an issue that requires more discussion.

Significance as a Resource for Cross-Cultural Work

In *Mission Affirmed*, Clark presents a work that is relevant for both the individual missionary and the church who sends the missionary. He sets before us a reasoned evaluation of Paul's motivation and strategy from both the equipping and field practitioner standpoint. It would be advantageous for church leadership (pastors, mission leaders, mission committees, sending boards), those considering long-term cross-cultural work, and those currently on the foreign field to read and interact with this work both individually and collectively. In an age when everyone is looking for the latest novel missionary strategies, this work deserves attention for its commitment to biblical orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

Recommendation for Additional Reading

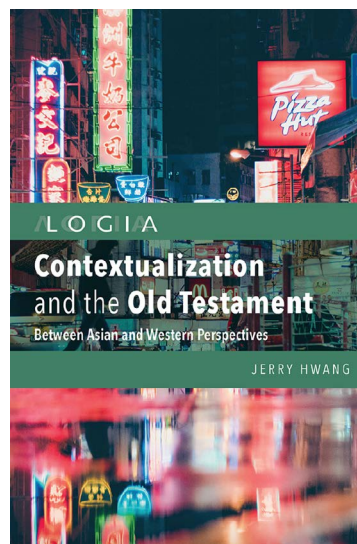
This book is a valuable tool to further sound missiological conversation. Clark does a calculated job of presenting the issues at hand and providing a biblical and practical response. He humbly provides the opportunity for his work to drive discussions across the broad evangelical landscape of missions. *Mission Affirmed* continues the tradition of works like Roland Allen's *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?*, John Nevius' *Methods of Mission Work*, and Roger Greenway's *Cities: Missions' New Frontier* by focusing our attention on biblical patterns with contemporary application.

Book Review. Exploring the Old Testament in Asia

Jerry Hwang and Angukali Rotokha, eds. *Exploring the Old Testament in Asia: Evangelical Perspectives. Foundations in Asian Christian Thought.* Cumbria, UK: Langham Global Library, 2022.

Reviewed by Jonathan McGrath, IMB Field Personnel, Asia Pacific Rim

As missionaries who seek to interpret the Bible well, we must first find the biblical author's intended meaning, and only then apply that meaning in contextually appropriate ways to a variety of cultural contexts. However, our cultural upbringing can affect our ability to interpret the author's intended meaning. Certain aspects of the meaning may come more naturally due to similar cultural norms with the original author, whereas other aspects may not seem clear or evident at all due to distance from the original author. Our cultural upbringing also affects our applications of the biblical text. Western readers have often applied Scripture in ways that relate particularly to their own experience. Western scholarship has not as consistently focused on issues more prominent in Asian contexts, such as "living as a religious minority, poverty, gender, syncretism, familial and socie-



tal relationships, superstition, violence, [and] corruption,” or has not applied it in contextually appropriate ways for the Asian church (2). Furthermore, missionaries raised and trained in Western contexts may not appreciate the importance of interpreting and applying Scripture with such topics in view.

Jerry Hwang (Singapore Bible College) and Angukali Rotokha (Oriental Theological Seminary, Dimapur) have assembled a diverse group of Old Testament scholars to address this deficiency. The scholars originate from and teach in Australia, India, Korea, Malaysia, Mongolia, the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Their contributions bring the Old Testament into dialogue with various Asian theologies—from Mongolian creation stories to Confucianism and prosperity theologies.

These contributions present a consistently evangelical perspective that desires to equip Asian churches to interpret and apply the Old Testament in their particular contexts. The first chapter sets the tone of the book. Bayarjargal Garamtseren shows how Genesis 1–11 gives a more complete and compelling story than Mongolian creation stories. He emphasizes that “all human problems go back to the original sin,” and that sin is the world’s greatest and foundational problem (13). Missionaries would agree. Thus, Garamtseren argues that all peoples need the Bible in their languages, so that “what God started in the OT and continued through Jesus Christ and his disciples in the NT [can] continue in every place and nation through ... the followers of Jesus Christ” (15). Because the authors of this volume desire to see all people come to know Jesus Christ, they emphasize that the Bible must be interpreted and applied in culturally relevant ways.

The consistent quality of the contributions makes it difficult to highlight only a few, but in my context, the chapters by Jerry Hwang, Peter Lau, and Huu-Thien Tran and Daniel Owens were particularly insightful. Hwang’s chapter emphasized the integration of God’s blessing and wrath in his passionate concern for both Israel and the nations. He suggests that Asian interpretation may provide a corrective to a Western church tradition influenced by Greek philosophical ideas. Lau’s chapter highlighted kinship relationship in the OT and Asia, with a focus on how the OT speaks about gifts, bribes, and corruption. Huu-Thien Tran and Daniel Owen’s chapter spoke to the prominence of prosperity theology in Asia and evaluated it in light of the Old Testament. They note how good impulses of the movement—such as prayer for blessing and healing—can lead to excess and need for biblical correction.

The diversity of the authors and their contributions means that not every contribution in the work applies directly to my context. However, even contributions that do not directly apply may help readers to think more broadly about ways that the text may apply in a global context. Some readers may wonder if the cultural appropriations suggested at points go too far or not far enough and some may wonder why certain dialogue partners were chosen. But even when readers disagree, they will have new insights to ponder and think how they would apply the text in their ministry context. As an American who regularly teaches the Old Testament in Asia, the book has helped me to think more deeply about how the Old Testament applies to the Asian church.

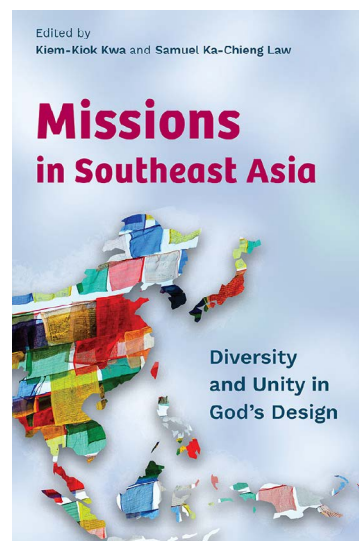
This book is recommended to those teaching the Bible in South Asian, East Asian, or Southeast Asian contexts, as the contributors to this volume come from these regions. Those serving in Central Asian and Middle Eastern contexts would still find much to value in the book, but it will not be directly applicable. I plan to use various chapters in Old Testament survey courses and will use Hwang's chapter in courses on biblical missiology and theology. This book is not only for those who are directly involved in a teaching ministry but also for those who desire to think about fresh ways to apply the Bible's teaching in Asian contexts.

Book Review. Missions in Southeast Asia

Kwa, Kiem-Kiok, and Samuel Ka-Chieng Law, eds. *Missions in Southeast Asia: Diversity and Unity in God's Design*. Cumbria: Langham Global Library, 2022.

Reviewed by Paul Salem, IMB Field Personnel, Asia Pacific Rim

For more than twenty years missiologists have been saying that the church is now a global church and the demographic center of the global church is no longer in the West. However, this statement has barely moved from being a novelty statement of a self-congratulatory nature. The time to hear from different parts of the world on church matters is long past due. When Asian theology is considered, the focus is often on the larger nations of India and China. Therefore, an academically rigorous volume of Southeast Asian missiology is both welcomed and needed to give depth to understanding Christianity in its global contexts. *Missions in Southeast Asia: Diversity and Unity in God's Design* edited by Kiem-Kiok Kwa and Samuel Ka-Chieng Law is a worthy contribution to global missiology.



The book is organized into two parts. The first part walks through “A Diversity of Local Church Histories”. Each chapter covers a brief history of Christianity and the state of the church in most of the Southeast Asian nations (with exceptions of Laos, Brunei, and Timor Leste). Each author offers an overview of the arrival and growth of Christianity in a particular Southeast Asian nation. These chapters offer analysis from a presumably local perspective (although author backgrounds are not given anywhere in the book).

Another beneficial contribution of these chapters is the analysis following the turbulent decades after World War II through the 1980s. Each of the authors moves beyond the telling of history, to offer missiological commentary on the state of the church in each of the nations featured, even venturing to suggest what must happen next. Various authors note that Southeast Asia is one of the most diverse regions in the world, and it shows in these chapters.

The second half of the book covers “A Unity of Interweaving Themes”. These are topical treatments of missiological themes that have global importance and particular relevance in Southeast Asia. Due to the diversity of cultures, faiths, languages, and political systems in the region, the authors challenge readers to move from an overly simplistic view of cultures and missions to one that engages a globally interactive and locally engaged region. The chapters cover missiological research, globalization, regional engagement with the global church, holistic mission, and contextualization. Each of the chapters includes short case studies with questions that encourage readers to bring various chapters together for integrated learning. The questions are designed to help the reader assimilate the ideas introduced in the different chapters into their own missiological framework.

Strengths and Weaknesses

This volume offers needed perspective from a region of the world that is often not represented in missions literature. Sometimes volumes of this nature can be heavy with a particular agenda or even portray Western missionary contribution in a negative light. While this volume in no way sidesteps the unhealthy or even damaging impact of Western influence, there is also an acknowledgment of many different influences on each nation. Some of these nations have complicated histories with each other as well as with other non-Western nations that shaped the region. Several of the authors acknowledge that this complex history makes the cultural tapestry more layered, thus calling for more careful and nuanced contextualization.

An indirect contribution of the book is the acknowledgment that, in all but one of the countries featured, Christianity remains a minority religion. As the church enters a time where it will be a minority in most nations of the world, this volume offers an important guide to thriving as a minority community and addressing issues that the church must face when it does not have political leverage.

One chapter by Samuel K. Law calls for a complex-systems approach to missiological research and education. Much of missiology has been developed in the context of cultural homogeneity. Southeast Asia, particularly in the cities, is an amazing mix of cultures, languages, and influences, making simplistic homogenized people group missiology obsolete.

There are a few ways in which this volume could be stronger. The chapters in the first half of the book did well to cover complex histories in a short space, but then sometimes reduced the analysis to the author's pet topics. For example, the chapter on Indonesia by Benjamin Intan was overly focused on political engagement, which moves the emphasis away from a missiological treatment to one of political theology.

Additionally, the book was lacking in some critical areas for a book on missions. For example, the book could have benefited from clarity on what is and what is not mission. Furthermore, academic missiologists offered little in the way of demographic or ethnographic research data. Relatively little space was given to evangelism, discipleship, and church planting, which have been the classic core of evangelical missions. Although readers get an idea of how the church was initially established, it was interesting that there was very little about the continuing of gospel advancement in Southeast Asia. This group of learned missiologists could have offered a more complete picture of missions in the region and where it is going.

The church of Southeast Asia, like that of the rest of the world, also faces the challenge of new, ever-changing urban dynamics. Although some individual contributors commented on urban contexts, others omitted this important reality. There were points in which it was suggested by authors that the church needs to be more indigenous and more deeply rooted in a particular culture. This volume could be greatly improved by addressing new global-urban realities and how they impact mission in Southeast Asia. The urban contexts of Southeast Asia are exceedingly diverse and are inundated with myriad global influences. Global corporate culture or youth culture might be

more influential than the old village culture of a particular ethnic group. A quick survey of what is played on the radio throughout Southeast Asia might indicate that urban Christians may be more comfortable worshipping with a contemporary musical style than with the old instruments grandma grew up with. In the largest metropolitan region of Southeast Asia, Jakarta, it is estimated that about one third of marriages are inter-ethnic. This is where Samuel Law's urging for more complex research tools is vital for the church going forward. Contextualization in the midst of diversity requires new thinking and a little less focus on traditional cultural expressions.

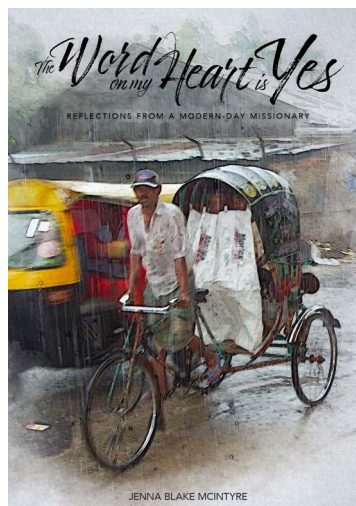
Missions in Southeast Asia: Diversity and Unity in God's Design is a valuable contribution to the global church and certainly a worthwhile read for anyone with an interest in missions in Southeast Asia.

Book Review. The Word on My Heart is Yes

McIntyre, Jenna Blake. *The Word on My Heart is Yes: Reflections from a Modern-Day Missionary.* Rickshaw Press, 2022.

Reviewed by Grace Martyn, IMB Field Personnel, Asia Pacific Rim

McIntyre's book *The Word on My Heart is Yes: Reflections from a Modern-Day Missionary* is a simple 31-day devotional reading from a female missionary's perspective. Serving as a missionary in South Asia for many years provides McIntyre with a unique perspective and understanding of how God speaks to her through mundane daily tasks and experiences. For each of the 31-day devotions in the book, McIntyre starts with a Bible verse and then tells a story from her missionary experience that relates to that verse. The story serves as a teaching moment that explains that day's scripture. She concludes with a prayer based on the verse as well as a question that enables readers to reflect on applications for their own lives.



One strength of the book is that McIntyre is a great storyteller. In an engaging and readable way, she conveys the ways she hears God speaking to

her throughout her everyday normal life as a missionary on the field. Thus, when reading through the book, readers are drawn into the stories in a way that connects very well with one's own life: From longing for a certain box of cereal that cannot be found on the field to seeing new believers come to faith in Christ during Easter... I found myself often getting emotional as I read. As a female missionary myself, many of McIntyre's stories are quite relevant to me and speak to the longing, frustration, and rejoicing in my life.

Second, McIntyre uses her stories to show God's love toward His people and to show His sovereignty over all things. God was in control when her family was detoured through an unknown rural village because of a roadblock caused by a bomb. God's presence calmed her while dealing with vehicle trouble with local police. God's Spirit moved hearts when she and her husband shared the good news of Jesus with hundreds of people in a village, including a demon-possessed man. These devotionals can be a great encouragement and inspiration to missionaries all over the world.

A third strength is that the short prayer and reflection question at the end of each day's reading leads readers to apply the lessons in a deeper way. These questions serve as a quick way for readers to connect their reading to their own spiritual journeys.

Finally, each day's devotion is very short, easy to read, and only takes about five minutes each day. It is a very convenient and low-pressure reading for busy missionaries on the field. Of course, if someone wants a deeper study, they can also take the reflection question at the end and dig deeper on their own or with a group of friends.

While the book has many strengths, one weakness of the book is that it lacks logical connection between each day's reading. The topics of each day are quite randomly arranged, and there seems to be no connection between each day's reading. You can start with Day 1 or Day 19; it will make no difference. It took me quite a few days of reading to get used to this arrangement. A more logical arrangement of the entries or separating the topics into different themes will make the flow of the book easier to follow.

The Word on My Heart is Yes is a great resource for personal devotional reading. It is a relevant and inspirational reading for missionaries around the world but especially for female missionaries serving in difficult locations where they may be isolated or lonely and need to be encouraged by stories of God's faithfulness displayed in the life of a friend. These missionary stories

combined with Scriptural teaching will give readers a healthy perspective of how to live out their life as followers of Christ while being missionaries on the field.

Book Review. Surrendering: My Story of Embracing the Will of God

Hepner, Kristen. *Surrendering: My Story of Embracing the Will of God.* Magnolia, Texas: Lucid Books, 2020.

Reviewed by Mandy Alexander, IMB Field Personnel, Central Asia

A heart of surrender is obedient to the only Savior who is worthy of our everything. This book is about Kristen Hepner's life as she surrenders herself day after day. She shares the intimacy of these moments to point us to her faithful and true Savior.

Kristen and her husband Josh have served on the front lines of missionary work in Eastern Europe for more than 15 years. They have endured many struggles and hardships, living in hard places amongst obstinate people. They have raised seven beautiful children in a foreign country. They have been models of leadership as they have led their family and many people to the Lord through their faithfulness, love, perseverance, and surrender. You will love reading her story of surrendering every moment to the Lord and finding God always faithful. You will



feel understood, encouraged, and strengthened to continue the race the Lord has given to you.

In this world and even in ministry, authenticity can be hard to find; but, it is through authenticity where we truly connect and grow. I appreciate Kristen's willingness to be vulnerable and honest with her walk with the Lord in victories, struggles, obedience, disobedience, strengths, and weaknesses. She encourages her readers to "live in a place of authenticity, to be your genuine self. He wants you to be the way He made you, not the way you perceive you should be or the way anyone else would like you to be" (65). She gives us an excellent example of a life truly surrendered. *Surrendering* reminds us that "[we] will have to pick up [our] cross daily for the rest of [our] lives and follow Him, but He will give [us] the strength" and "once we taste and see that the Lord is good, that cross becomes lighter and even a joy to bear" (34).

Kristen calls her readers to experience the Lord in His fullness. She reminds us God desires to give us an abundant and full life. However, God often defines abundant and full very differently than we may. Kristen shares what it looks like to give up personal idols, battle the lies of the enemy, and delight ourselves in the Lord. She also gives practical advice on how to discern whether one is seeking personal desires or His desires.

Christianity really is not as complicated as we often make it. It comes down to obedience. This book is a call to obedience over and over again, letting it infuse every area of our lives. Paul tells us in Romans 12:1 to "offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God- this is your true and proper worship." Kristen's stories of how she has had to wrestle and choose obedience with her family, her career, her home, her body, and health embody what it means to be a "living sacrifice." But, as she shares her stories, she also reminds us that "whatever God calls you to do, He makes it okay with your heart" (58-59). He equips the called with all they need to do His will.

Surrender and obedience do not equal an easy, carefree life. At times, we will suffer with doubts, anxiety, depression, loneliness, and hardships. Kristen opens up about hard times in her life when she was discontent, when she was weary, when she was far from perfect, and even when she was blatantly disobedient. There were times when life was not fair or when storms surrounded her. She says, "Peace is possible even in the storms of life. We do have the choice to find joy and even laughter in times of trouble" (84). We must stop viewing suffering as something that is opposed to God's goodness.

It is often through these times of suffering that we experience God most intimately. He transforms us through these experiences more into His likeness. God can also “use [our] hurt and even disobedience however He sees fit” (98).

One of the best lessons to learn in this life is our call to surrender to grace. We have been given what we do not deserve: forgiveness, mercy, and grace; therefore, why is it so difficult for us to forgive those who sin against us? Kristen walks us through forgiving one of the most heinous sins that can be committed against someone. Kristen explains that there are different levels of forgiveness and how we can dig into the deepest level of true forgiveness. She reminds us of an old saying, “unforgiveness is the poison we drink, hoping the other person dies” (76). In this life, we are faced with many opportunities to forgive. We live in an imperfect world with imperfect people who will disappoint us. That is a guarantee. Sometimes the hardest person to forgive is ourselves. Forgiveness is a gift to us and for us. It sets us free from bitterness, bondage, and insecurity.

One of my biggest takeaways from *Surrendering* is that we each have a story to tell. God is at work in each one of us, transforming us into His image throughout our lives. This daily surrender is, as we have previously noted, “presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is [our] spiritual act of worship” (Romans 12:1). Kristen encourages us that “if you have breath left in you, He is not done using you for His glory” (p 100).

Second Chronicles 16:9 says, “He searches the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him.” Psalm 52:8 says we “are like a green olive tree in the house of God. [Trusting] in the steadfast love of God forever and ever. I will thank you forever, because You have done it.” Keep surrendering, friend, to God; He is worth it.

