

IJPM

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Missions: A Renewed Focus

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From the Editor's Desk

Missions: A Renewed Focus

Jeffery Nelson, Editor

Introduction

In this issue of the International Journal of Pentecostal Missiology, authors explore missions with a renewed focus on the Bible. Wrestling with current issues such as a proper exegesis of the Great Commission, keeping missions alive through the Spirit, ensuring *koinonia* exists in our fellowships, the foundations of Pentecostal hermeneutics in modern Kenya, the Philippian church and Paul as a model for biblical partnership, and a comprehensive model for the story of the Bible and motivation for missions. Authors take examples from their experiences around the world (Ethiopia, Kenya, rural USA, Iran, Albania, Burkina Faso, and Dominican Republic), and through unique illustrations from horse training, fire, and slavery. You are challenged to read these articles with an open heart. Many of the terms and topics are familiar, but the authors have tackled the topics with new approaches.

Having Gone, Disciple All Nations

Doug Lowenberg, Ph.D., lays out the exegesis of Matthew's Great Commission. The author shows that going, baptizing, and teaching are all related to making disciples. He emphasizes that living in a cross-cultural setting is necessary to fulfill the Great Commission. Then, he focuses on the theological institutions and encourages them to be preparing and inspiring students to go into distant cultures to make disciples. The concluding directive is this: All believers must heed the commission of our Lord inscribed in the canon of Scripture, live in the charisma of the Spirit, and go where others have not yet gone—to disciple the nations.

Re-Ignitional Missiology in an Era of Decline

In this article Fred Farrokh, Ph.D., calls for a missiology that reignites, or "Re-ignitional Missiology." The paper begins by explaining an analogy of the stages of a fire: Ignition, Growth,

Fully Developed, and Decline. It then addresses “the Missiology of Decline,” which is a phenomenon plaguing much of missiology today and is manifested in an overly-broad view of missions, and missiologically-induced syncretism. The article then pivots to consider the importance of revivalism and spiritual re-awakenings in church history. The conclusion outlines steps toward Re-ignitional Missiology. These steps include keeping a narrow missional focus on “apostolic function,” as proposed by Alan Johnson; that is, preaching the gospel where it has not been preached, and planting churches where they do not exist. Additional steps include resisting missiological decline in all its forms, and reapplying movements of the Spirit, by fire and by wind, in a revived and renewed missiology of the *Pneuma*.

The Slave is Your Brother

Rev. Rennae de Freitas, Ph.D. student, takes Paul’s letter to Philemon as a call for believers to serve as loving witnesses in the world. Unlike his other epistles, Paul does not overtly instruct the believers in Philemon, but rather he deals with a personal conflict between the master of the house church, Philemon, and his runaway slave, Onesimus, by summoning them to an alternative, missional way of living. This paper examines Paul’s vision of this *koinoniac* witness of the church in the society at large, what it means for this community to relate to each other as siblings, the implications of this household’s loyalty to King Jesus, and what is meant for Philemon and the entire house church to welcome a slave as a brother. In addition, it will discuss how Paul himself embodied the gospel to demonstrate the work of reconciliation. Finally, this paper examines the Holy Spirit’s role in Philemon and in key moments of church history that demonstrates the power and potential of the *koinoniac* witness of the church. This discussion aims to challenge the modern church to exhibit this barrier-breaking *koinoniac* witness to the divisions that continue to plague society.

Theological, Practical, and Missional Implications of Lukan Pneumatology

Leo Kihara Kinuthia addresses the theological, practical, and missional implications of Lukan pneumatology within the Kenya Assemblies of God. He addresses the theological implications from the historical debate of hermeneutical approach looking at the pertinent issues including evidential tongues, and the doctrine of subsequent to and separate from

conversion/initiation. He presents the Pentecostal responses and implications for future Pentecostal theology and missiology. He concludes with application to his ministry as pastor and Bible educator.

Partnership in the Gospel

Dwight Sandoz, Co-Director of Rural Advancement, uses an analogy from horse training as a model for partnership in the gospel. This article examines partnerships in ministry reflecting upon the relationship of Paul and the Philippian church with practical application to rural ministry. Paul established a model of relationship with the Philippian church that informs believers today. Sandoz examines the foundations of biblical partnership and in the Philippian church. He looks at the elements of the Philippian partnership which include prayer, humility, unity, and the gospel. Then he examines the progression of the Philippian partnership: walking together in fellowship, walking together in partnership, and serving together in mission. A true partnership in mission provides a secure launching place for ministry. Partnership accomplishes more than any solitary effort working toward personal or organizational goals to fulfill the mission of God.

The Story of the Bible and Motivation for Missions

This article addresses the various terms forwarded by authors as the central theme of the Bible and looks at the historic terms regarding motivation for missions. These terms are placed on models in their relationship to eternal and temporal relevance; plots, and themes; and finally, motivations, actions, and results. The resulting theme distilled from these models shows how God loves people and how He wants an eternal relationship with them and He wants us to invite others into relationship with Him.

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Views expressed in the Journal reflect those of the authors and reviewers and are not the perspectives or opinions of the editors, the editorial board, the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, or the participating institutions.

Articles

Having Gone, Disciple All Nations: Context, Canon, Commission, and Charisma

Doug Lowenberg*

Abstract

Doug Lowenberg, Ph.D., provides an exegetical analysis of Matthew's Great Commission focusing on the historical and textual context of the passage, showing that the going aspect of missions is a prerequisite to the actual carrying out of the command to make disciples of all nations. He emphasizes that living in the cross-cultural setting is necessary to fulfill the great commission. He challenges theological institutions to prepare and inspire students to go to the unreached peoples. He concludes that all believers must heed the commission of our Lord inscribed in the canon of Scripture, live and interpret Scripture dependent on the charisma of the Spirit, and go where others have not yet gone—to disciple all nations.

Introduction

Guided by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Matthew concluded the writing of his Gospel quoting the words of Jesus: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20 NIV). Not only is it highly significant that Matthew ended his writing with the statement of Jesus' Great Commission, but it is also shocking, yet deliberate, that he did not add any reference to Christ's ascension. Matthew's inspired intention was to leave the words of Christ's missional mandate reverberating in the minds of his first readers—most likely the church in Antioch,¹ the first great mission-sending church (Acts 11:20-23; 13:1-4)—and in us, the church of the 21st century.

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As the biblical text is read today in English with the double imperative found in most translations, “go” and “make disciples,” has the singular focus of Jesus’ missional mandate found in the Greek text been obscured? Likewise, do we need to reconsider the grammar of the commission in order to acknowledge the essential, supportive actions that make possible the single imperative? Did Matthew record Christ’s words to describe the means by which the Great Commission would be fulfilled? With special attention given to these final words of Jesus in their historical and cultural context, this study will consider the steps necessary for the disciples of Jesus Christ, then and now, to obey his final command: disciple all the nations.

Context

Before examining the actual words of the commission, a comment on the original historical context of the original recipients of this Gospel should be considered because of its impact on the meaning. D. A. Carson states, while admitting that one cannot be certain of the first readers, “Most scholars take Antioch as the place of composition. Antioch was a Greek-speaking city with a substantial Jewish population; and the first clear evidence of anyone using the Gospel of Matthew comes from Ignatius, bishop of Antioch at the beginning of the second century. ...The only reasonably certain conclusion is that the Gospel was written somewhere in the Roman Province of Syria.”²

If Antioch was indeed the receiving church for this ancient biography,³ it brings into question the general assumption that Matthew was a Jew writing to a primarily Jewish audience attempting to prove from Old Testament references that Jesus was the fulfillment of Jewish prophecies regarding their long-awaited Messiah.⁴

Matthew certainly writes from a Jewish-Christian worldview and addresses issues related to the impact that Judaism and Pharisaism were having on the church in the last half of the first century.⁵ But if the gospel was composed for the church in Antioch, based on Luke’s description of that assembly (Acts 11:20-23), many of the believers from its inception were Gentile. Ralph P. Martin comments, “Matthew’s church is quickly becoming predominantly Gentile.”⁶ He adds that one must consider “the missionary motif which runs through the Gospel, stretching from the visit of the Magi (2:1-12), anticipating the wider outreach of the Good News and the appearing

of Christ's light to the Gentiles.”⁷ In fact, it seems the missional motif of the book starts in 1:1 and continues to 28:20. Jesus Christ is the “son of David” and the “son of Abraham” (1:1)—capturing the imagery of the promise made to David of an heir who would be king of an eternal kingdom and would rule the nations (2 Sam. 7:13, 16; Ps. 2:8); and the seed of Abraham who would be a source of blessing to all the nations (Gen. 12:1-3; 22:18; Gal. 3:8). Matthew points out that Jesus' genealogy, confirming him as the legal descendant of David, includes at least three, if not four, Gentile women (1:2-16).⁸

The first people mentioned in the gospel who came and worshipped Jesus as divine and acknowledged him as “king of the Jews” were Gentile Magi from the east (2:1-12). This gospel describes the fulfillment of God's promise to send a King and Savior for all humankind (Matt. 8:10-12; 12:17-21; Is. 42:1-4; 49:6; Zech. 9:10; the perspective that the Old Testament prophesied a Savior for “all nations” is asserted by Jesus himself; see Luke 24:46-47).

Matthew, the well-educated Jewish tax collector, through his years of being disciplined by Jesus and later filled, transformed, and guided by the Holy Spirit, became an apostle and advocate for the proclamation of the Good News to all people.⁹ And the church to whom he wrote, if it was indeed Antioch, had the ongoing responsibility of continuing what the Holy Spirit started among them with the sending of Barnabas and Paul (Acts 13:1-4) to proclaim this gospel to all nations, make disciples, and plant indigenous churches. This church in Antioch, along with all ensuing churches of every country, ethnicity, and age, was given the assurance that Immanuel would be with them until the end of human history (Matt. 28:20).

Canon

There are several nuances in the Greek grammar of the commission that merit fresh consideration due to their possible impact on the intended meaning of the text. The “therefore” (οὕτως) reflects back to Christ's previous words of welcome to his startled, worshipping and doubting disciples: “All authority in heaven and on the earth has been given to me” (Matt. 28:18). During His earthly ministry, Jesus demonstrated authority over the forces of nature and every spiritual and human predicament. But now, following the humiliation and weakness represented in His death on the cross, there may have been questions in the minds of His disciples about their Master's sovereignty and divine authority. Having conquered the powers of sin and death in His resurrection, Christ announced His supremacy over every sphere of the

created order including heaven and earth.¹⁰ He followed this triumphal declaration with the command known as the Great Commission. The one with all authority had the right to command his followers where to go and what to do. As Randy Hurst notes, “When the Lord commands anything, there is no choice about which commandments to obey. Lordship requires complete obedience. Nothing less.”¹¹

The first word in the Greek text of verse 19, πορευθέντες, is translated in the NIV as “go.” Most English versions translate this aorist participle as an attendant circumstance with the main verb (disciple, μαθητεύσατε) so that the participle communicates action that coordinates and remains contemporaneous with the finite verb.¹² Thus, the outcome is two imperatives: “go” and “disciple.” With equal urgency, Jesus’ disciples are to simultaneously go and disciple the nations. The remaining two present participles of the commission, baptizing (βαπτίζοντες) and teaching (διδάσκοντες), are handled as adverbial participles of means describing the steps by which discipleship is accomplished: one disciples others by baptizing and by teaching.

The equal urgency interpretation, go and disciple, is the translation advanced by Daniel B. Wallace and others.¹³ While the text includes one aorist¹⁴ imperative, disciple (μαθητεύσατε), and three participles, the first an aorist (πορευθέντες, having gone, after going)¹⁵ and the remaining two present tense (βαπτίζοντες, διδάσκοντες; baptizing, teaching), the text is translated as two aorist imperatives with the two present participles functioning adverbially modifying the original, with the single imperative explaining the means whereby the command to disciple is to be accomplished. Thus, the interpretation becomes: Go and disciple by baptizing and teaching.¹⁶

Wallace claims that “the context plays a major role in determining the force of the Greek participle.”¹⁷ “The context has more influence on participles than on any other area of Greek grammar. In other words, for most participles, one cannot simply look at the structure to determine what kind of participle it is.”¹⁸ He notes that aorist participles usually denote action at an antecedent time to that of the controlling verb.¹⁹ If these rules were applied to the Great Commission, it would be translated, “Having gone (action prior to the main verb), disciple the nations.” But Wallace adds, “If the main verb is also aorist, this participle may indicate contemporaneous time.”²⁰ In this case if the meaning of the participle had a temporal meaning, the statement would read, “As you go (action contemporaneous), disciple the nations.”²¹

However, Wallace asserts that “if a participle makes good sense when treated as an adverbial participle, we should not seek to treat it as attendant circumstance.”²² And concerning attendant circumstance participles, there are no absolutes, and this structure must follow a “90% rule” in translating the aorist participle as an aorist imperative. Based on his guidelines, one must be cautious in determining how to interpret the participle especially if structural patterns imply an antecedent circumstance approach. While Wallace acknowledges that Matthew 28:19-20 is an example of a “disputed” text, he settles on the attendant circumstance participle meaning (“go” as an aorist imperative) which he believes fits better here than an adverbial interpretation.²³

Returning to the issue of the context of this final statement found in Matthew’s Gospel, one must question if the attendant circumstance interpretation is truly the best way to handle Jesus’ intention for the commission as inscribed in Matthew’s gospel. The text could have a temporal adverbial meaning with the stress on *when*. Jesus’ eleven Jewish disciples were to first go, leave behind the familiar and culturally comfortable, in order to adapt to a new contexts and cultures, and there make disciples of nations far different from that of their Jewish people and heritage. Their going was to be the norm, a foregone conclusion, for those who would heed Christ’s missional command.

The temporal interpretation follows the life example established by Jesus. Having gone from heaven, abandoning His exalted state as One with God the Father, leaving behind his position of honor as the “Son of God,” he became the “Son of Man.” He lived an earthly existence for almost 30 years before beginning His ministry which commenced with the making of disciples (Matt. 4:18-22; Luke 3:23). For the next three-plus years, much of His attention was given to the training of these men who were called to continue the proclamation and expansion of His spiritual kingdom and the discipling of the nations after his ascension and until His final return.

Initially, the disciples’ going to the nations ran contrary to their understanding of the mission of the Messiah. Accepting the inclusive nature of God’s mission that welcomed all nations around one table at the future messianic banquet (Matt. 8:11), provided salvation and deliverance for ancient enemies of Israel (Matt. 15:21-28), and redirected their ministry away from an exclusive focus on “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” to all nations (Matt. 10:5-6; 24:14) was extremely difficult for these ethnocentric, biased Jewish men. The idea of *going* clashed with their worldview, which in light of commission from the one with all authority in

Heaven and earth, had to be surrendered and transformed. Jesus was well aware of their racial prejudice and had previously restricted their evangelistic efforts among non-Jews knowing such ethnocentrism would negate any effective discipleship (Matt. 10:5-6). But Jesus patiently set the example of how they were to go and what they were to preach.

A temporal interpretation of the aorist participle also stresses the prerequisite of antecedent action in order to fulfill the priority of the commission. If disciples are to be made of the nations, those commissioned by Jesus must have already made the commitment to go geographically and culturally.²⁴ This understanding of a prior commitment to go and become culturally relevant to other people groups aligns with Paul's missiology: "I make myself a slave to everyone to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. ... To those not having the law I became like one not having the law . . . so as to win those not having the law. ... I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Cor. 9:19-22). Obedience to the commission required leaving behind the culturally and spiritually familiar in order to present the core of the gospel in ways that could be understood by other peoples. The discipling of a nation demanded long-term presence and commitment to help people of a different culture become true disciples of their Lord. Going needed to precede discipling.

This interpretation seems extremely relevant for the current culture where "tourist" missions has become popular. One might suggest that Jesus knew of the inclination of His people to make brief forays into foreign regions and cultures of the world convinced that cross-cultural discipleship can happen instantly while failing to recognize that discipleship requires cultural adaptation, proximity, and time. "Having gone" stands as a prerequisite to making disciples and planting the indigenous church.

While the temporal interpretation seems to fit the historical context of Jesus' final words to the eleven standing on a hill in Galilee (one should recall Matthew's previous reference to "Galilee of the nations"; Matt. 28:16; 4:15-16; Isaiah 9:1-2), the literary context suggests interpreting the aorist participle adverbially as means—the process whereby disciples are made. If the first participle is translated as the initial step needed to make disciples, it stands in parallel syntactically with the remaining two participles that likewise describe means whereby disciples are made: by baptizing and by teaching. If the three participles are understood as means for

making disciples among the nations,²⁵ it seems obvious that the first step must already be taken: a disciple of Jesus has already gone to people groups where no disciples are present. All of the implications of “having gone” are brought to bear with the first participle. The work of discipling requires arrival, cultural adaptation, language learning, and commitment to reach the local people, followed by baptizing and teaching as new converts are brought into the kingdom of God and incorporated into the community of faith. Conformity to the person of Jesus requires the continuous teaching of all that Jesus commanded.

The interpretation of the three participles as adverbial participles of means supports a singular emphasis on the one imperative—disciple—which seems to best fit the context of the first readers, the church of Antioch. If Matthew wrote to this church in the mid- to late-60s or later, the church at Antioch had already participated in the three missional journeys of Paul. Others may have gone from Antioch and seen the church planted in strategic centers such as Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome. Perhaps the close of Matthew’s Gospel was intended to provide encouragement to continue the process of making disciples among people groups not yet reached. The need to go was a foregone conclusion. Going was the precursor to discipleship. Evangelism alone was inadequate. Discipleship had to be accomplished by people on the ground who had adjusted to new cultures. Having become embedded in the culture followed by evangelism, new converts were baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and taught all that Jesus had commanded. The missional ministry of discipling the nations was to be normative.

In the West, there is a tendency to be reductionistic in the translation process and settle on one option when it comes to the primary elements or focus of a text. While it seems the historical and literary contexts of Matthew 28:18-20 support the view that emphasizes the single imperative—disciple —brought about by the means of having gone, baptizing, and teaching, there is a sense that the interpretation of the Great Commission could view the imperative and the three participles as commands: go, disciple, baptize, and teach.²⁶ It is clear that Jesus commands his followers to disciple every nation, and this duty requires those who have gone to continue welcoming new believers into the community of faith through the rite of water baptism, and providing relevant, culturally contextual instruction to equip the saints.

Commission

The intended meaning of Jesus' words, as penned by Matthew, emphasizes the process or means necessary for His followers to fulfill the heart of the commission which is to disciple all the nations.²⁷ What were the actions required to disciple the nations so that they would become committed followers of Jesus? There were three steps to fulfilling the commission. Firstly, the prerequisite was to go from the familiar, reside among those who were foreign, and adapt to a new people group and a new way of life. Secondly, they were to baptize those who made a commitment to become followers of the Lord Jesus Christ incorporating them into the community of faith. And thirdly, they were to continue teaching them all the words of Jesus. If Matthew's church and any church from that time forward were to make disciples among the diverse people groups of the earth, their first action would require a willingness to move from the geographical location and culture where they were settled and comfortable before they could begin the disciple-making process.²⁸

Jesus was calling His Jewish disciples and ensuing generations of believers to bold, committed, long-term actions rather than brief forays into foreign regions. The discipling of the nations required decisive, persistent commitment by Jesus' apostles to go from the familiar and become geographically and culturally resident among new people groups. Today, with growing affluence and ease of travel, people from both the majority and minority worlds pursue personal experiences of going to a distant land for a brief evangelistic experience with no intention of going and remaining to make disciples. In light of missionary tourists jetting around the globe, do we need to revisit the meaning of "having gone"?

For Jesus' Jewish disciples standing on a mountain somewhere in Galilee, who were "the nations"? They represented the socio-cultural-linguistic units of society beyond "the house of Israel," whether geographically or culturally near or far. This final command from the resurrected Lord to his Jewish followers was to leave the country of their birth, move centrifugally, and settle among the distinct ethnic people groups of the world until each one had indigenous communities of believers vibrantly expressing praise to their Creator and Savior,²⁹ and sharing the good news with their families and neighbors. For Matthew's readers in Antioch,

the command was to move out from Asia Minor to Africa, Asia, and Europe and become resident among those tribes and nations with no living witness.

The phrase, “all the nations,” is critically important.³⁰ The commission stands in stark contrast to Jesus’ earlier instructions to His disciples about where to go. Jesus previously told them not to go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans but concentrate on the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 10:5-6). During several trips the disciples made with Jesus among non-Jews, the biblical text reports that they were extremely uncomfortable living in different socio-cultural settings even for a short time (see Matt. 15:23; John 4:27; Luke 9:52-56). Could it be that at this earlier phase in their ministry and character development, the Twelve were too spiritually and culturally intolerant to have effective ministry among the ethnically diverse peoples of the world? They needed to understand the full scope of God’s eternal intention which was to provide salvation for every person and distinct people group of the world (Gen. 12:1-3; 22:18; Isaiah 49:6; Matt. 24:14; John 3:16; Rev. 5:9; 7:9). With these final words from Jesus, it was clear that their responsibility was to disciple every nation, every distinct cultural-linguistic group under heaven, including all Gentiles and Jews.³¹ D. Edmond Hiebert observes, “While ‘all nations’ should not be taken as excluding the Jewish people, the phrase does emphasize that the Gentile world will be the chief scene of the missionary efforts of the church.”³² Discipling all nations would require them to deconstruct their ethnocentrism, their judgmental and arrogant attitudes towards other people groups, and their nationalistic pride that skewed their understanding of God’s kingdom and agenda (see Acts 1:6-8).

Today the mission of God requires Jesus’ disciples following His example in leaving their home culture and mother tongue, moving from the place where the gospel has already taken root, and going to and embracing a new people, culture, and language so that the gospel is incarnated—becoming comprehensible to the receiving ethno-linguistic people group. This action embodies the sense of apostolic function³³—sent out by the Spirit with the endorsement, support, and prayers of the church, to officially represent the one sending them, the Lord of heaven and earth, with one goal: make disciples among a “nation” (*ethnos*, a unique culture and ethnolinguistic people group) who has never heard the gospel.

The main verb of the sentence is the imperative “make disciples” or literally “disciple.”³⁴ Their commission demanded all the time, effort, sacrifice, and cultural adaptation necessary to help people from another culture become followers and students of their Master, Jesus Christ.

The goal of the commission was to develop continuous learners who were being conformed to Christ in all dimensions of life.³⁵ The commission called for the building and grounding of new believers within their own indigenous culture.³⁶

To help people become loyal followers of Jesus, it was necessary to baptize new converts. Baptism had a spiritual and social dimension. The act of water baptism using the trinitarian formula was a public declaration of a new loyalty to love and serve Jesus Christ with all the devotion of a new-born child of God. And baptism was a rite of passage into the life and community of local Christians. Baptism welcomed the new believer into a new social home where nurture, teaching, accountability, discipline, and service would enable them to grow and become more like Christ.

Baptism implies the necessity of forming a body of believers, a local, indigenous church into which new converts can be integrated and edified. The indigenous church was to fully identify with the local people and culture through the establishing of their own leaders and leadership systems; promote gospel outreaches to their own community; provide support for those who worked hard at preaching and teaching; develop their own contextual theologies and expressions of worship; demonstrate compassion for the poor and vulnerable in their own communities; and send their own sons and daughters as apostles to their unreached neighbors near and far.

After baptizing new believers into a local community of faith, the next step was teaching the new believers to continuously keep all that Jesus commanded his followers. This dimension of disciple-making inferred the need for training that encompassed everything Jesus taught and modeled including doctrine, attitude, moral and ethical behavior, the necessity of Spirit anointing, service, witness, and sacrifice. On one hand teaching all that Jesus commanded could be condensed into: “Love the Lord you God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. . . . Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matt. 22:37-40). On the other hand, Matthew recorded five major blocks of Jesus’ teaching (chapters 5-7, 10, 13, 18, 23-25) which addressed many aspects of the Christian living.³⁷ Teaching was to take place as people walked along the roads or gathered in local synagogues, the Temple, in newly planted churches, public buildings, or private homes in order to train up followers of Jesus

Today 40 percent of the world lives in geographic and cultural locations where there is little or no witness of the gospel.³⁸ Spirit-filled believers have not gone. Discipleship has not taken place. From our Pentecostal theological institutions, gifted graduates, pastors, and professors have stayed in already established churches, ministries, and familiar cultures. The challenge of the command to disciple the nations continues to resound in the hearing of God's people.

*Charisma*³⁹

This commission in the canon of Scripture, inspired by and interpreted with the assistance of charismatic insights from the Spirit,⁴⁰ who at times challenges readers to question traditional interpretations and activities of the established church, may create spiritual discomfort for those who ignore its full ramifications. The Holy Spirit can guide the focus of one's Scripture reading to particular words, phrases, or nuances of grammar to highlight aspects of the Christian life deserving greater attention. The same Spirit, who participated in the conception of the Messiah (Matt. 1:18, 20) bringing the Savior of all people into the world, desires to guide the church in fulfilling the mission of the Christ. The Spirit still anoints, calls, and sends Christ's disciples into the world to establish spiritual beachheads in the midst of darkness from which discipleship processes may be launched to reach the nations. Perhaps the mission to which the church is called has underemphasized the need for committed believers to abandon all and go for a lifetime. Possibly the making of disciples has been replaced by evangelism and ministries of compassion. Some churches in the majority world prefer to pass off this responsibility to more affluent churches in the minority world.

The Spirit comes to gift and empower the global church to engage in Christ's redemptive mission. To be Pentecostal is to be missional. The Spirit has been outpoured to empower his disciples to move from where the gospel is present to the geographical and cultural regions where there is no access to the message. Perhaps we need to reexamine the writings of Ralph Winter,⁴¹ Donald McGavran,⁴² Charles Kraft,⁴³ Paul Hiebert,⁴⁴ Alan Johnson,⁴⁵ Tite Tienou,⁴⁶ Christopher J.H. Wright,⁴⁷ Timothy C. Tennent,⁴⁸ and Ogbu Kalu⁴⁹ who call the church to the clarity and radicalness of Jesus' commission. Winter's understanding of the evolution of modern Protestant missions, initiated by William Carey in England, 1792, clarified our own current missiological context. Laborers were sent from the West first to foreign coastal regions, later to

the vast interior expanses, and most recently to the ethno-linguistically diverse peoples.⁵⁰ Now God has raised up the Pentecostal church in the majority world to take the lead in *missio Dei*. But no matter who we are or where we start, the going and discipling comes with great cost and requires lasting commitment. There is great disparity in the distribution of the laborers making disciples among the unreached peoples. Does the inequity of workers among the unreached indicate that Christ's church and our Pentecostal training institutions have minimized the necessity of "having gone"?

In our schools, we must be clear with our definitions. What is missions? Who are missionaries? Who and where are the unreached? It has become very common for "missions" to describe any Christian activity beyond the walls of the church. But to fulfill the Great Commission, the church, supported by our training institutions, must be intentional in equipping and sending her members across cultural barriers to evangelize, disciple, and plant the indigenous church where it does not exist.

If every Christian is a missionary, no one is truly a missionary. A missionary is one called and sent by the Holy Spirit as an apostle to cross linguistic and cultural barriers and make disciples of Jesus. Going across town or across a border to bring good news to a cluster of your own people using your own language is valuable and may have eternal dividends, but it is better classified as evangelism. Geographical distance is not the critical factor. A missionary is a person heeding Christ's commission to go for the long haul, penetrate cultural and spiritual barriers that keep people in bondage and isolation from Christ, for the expressed purpose of making disciples of Jesus. All who confess to be followers of Jesus must heed the commission: having gone, disciple all the nations. Not every child of God will go to another culture, learn another language, and disciple people among that ethno-linguistic group. But every Spirit-filled Christian must embrace the task and obey what the Lord of the harvest is asking them to do. Some must go; others must send through prayer and financial support. Every follower of Jesus must obediently sacrifice whatever the Lord asks: life, career, talents, finances, and prayer, to enable Christ's church to engage in the mission of discipling all the nations.

Application

Our first term of missionary service was in Burkina Faso, in the mid-1980s, with the goal of learning the Mooré language and culture to evangelize and disciple Muslims. We discovered a powerful indigenous, Pentecostal church consisting mostly of Mossi believers while other tribes and language groups remained unevangelized. Mossi church planters aggressively established Mossi cultural churches using Mooré across the country and beyond, but other ethnic groups were not attracted by the foreignness of what they saw and heard. As far as a burden for reaching Muslims, many Christians viewed them as existing outside the realm of Christ's grace. We noted barriers unintentionally erected by a church culturally monopolized by one ethnic group overlaid with religious prejudice and indifference towards Muslims and other ethnic groups.⁵¹ Our missiological lens shaped by Winter and others helped us identify the challenges that needed to be addressed if disciples were to be made of every nation living in the country.

In the late 1990s, we became directors of Addis Ababa Bible College in Ethiopia. The mission statement crafted for the school reflected our missiology: "Making disciples of Jesus to reach the nations as people of the Spirit and people of the Book."⁵² Reading Scripture through a missiological, Pentecostal lens in a training context helped us determine what levels of instruction were needed (diploma, bachelors, masters) and what the curricula needed to include in order to equip students with the ability, vision, and commitment to go and then disciple the nations of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa.⁵³

Training harvest workers in our Pentecostal Theological institutions and local churches is a key instrument for completing the Great Commission. Students can be trained to cross linguistic, cultural, and tribal barriers with a gospel message made relevant and understandable to the receptor audience.⁵⁴ They can discern the key factors that function to establish a homogenous people group, whether ethnicity, language, culture, location, education, or economic realities become most needed. The locations where Bible schools are established should be determined strategically with some established where revival has already exploded—to conserve the harvest. Others should be started on the edge of regions where people live without a witness.⁵⁵ Spirit-empowered, biblically trained, missiologically committed workers can function as catalysts for revival and church planting. Materials translated into major local

languages can enhance training and place tools in the hands of students who penetrate people groups where written resources are lacking.⁵⁶

Through the years, our work with Bible school training has been closely linked with our national churches (NC) recognizing that the school must be closely aligned with the missional vision of the NC. Mission vision must be part of the DNA of the national office, the local church, and the Bible school. We have tried to navigate the dynamic relationships between indigenous church principles and missional partnerships—supportive and equipping without being controlling. By ensuring that leadership, vision, and financial support are provided by local churches and the NC denomination, the necessity of accountability between indigenous missionaries and their NC is maintained and the work remains sustainable. Indigenous missional initiatives must safeguard themselves from well-intentioned, foreign donors who create crippling dependency on external support that stifles long-term, indigenous church growth, impedes proper accountable relationships, and misdirects faith from looking to God for supply to a foreign, human source. The Great Commission addresses every NC calling them to send their people across cultural barriers to disciple every nation. NCs should be suspect of tourist missionaries who come from other cultures without making long-term commitments to truly leave behind their indigenous culture and settle in a new cultural context.

To fulfill the Great Commission, there must be a simultaneous commitment to indigenous church planting among the unreached and the training of national workers in a Bible school context. This dual approach corresponds with Paul's apostolic model. In Ephesus he founded the church and then established a training school where he taught for more than two years. As a result of Paul serving as a church planter and a missionary trainer, the entire region was evangelized by his students (Acts 19:9-10).

In conclusion, to fulfill Christ's Great Commission, the mandate must be clearly understood and implemented. Completing the task begins with an understanding of the objective (to disciple the nations), grasping the means whereby the objective can be accomplished (going as an accomplished feat, followed by baptizing and teaching), and seeking the guidance and empowerment of the abiding Holy Spirit until the assignment is accomplished. Disciples from every people group must be raised up, indigenous churches planted, and local ministers trained and sent. The church of every ethnicity must send their own sons and daughters as near-neighbor

missionaries and disciple-makers reaching the next people group. While discipling those who are near, others must be sent to those who are culturally distant. There will never be enough workers from the West to accomplish the Great Commission. Every NC in the majority and minority world has received the mandate from Christ to send her members over cultural-linguistic hurdles to proclaim the gospel and make disciples. All must obey the Lord of the harvest.

We live in an amazing context of redemptive history where God has turned the attention of his church to the unreached peoples especially those without access to any form of witness. All believers must heed the commission of our Lord inscribed in the canon of Scripture, live in the charisma of the Spirit, and go where others have not yet gone—to disciple the nations.

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¹ For discussion on the location where Matthew's Gospel was first read and from where it was disseminated, see R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 15-19; David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NCBC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 51-52; Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (2d. ed.; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 45; Everett F. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 174. France posits that the location of writing could be somewhere in Syria or Palestine but the exact location is unimportant. Meanwhile, Tenney concludes, "While absolute proof that the Gospel originated at Antioch is lacking, no other place is more suitable for it" (*New Testament Survey*; rev. ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 151.

² D. A. Carson, *Matthew 1-12* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 21-11.

³ Craig S. Keener, *Matthew* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 24-25.

⁴ Hill comments that many scholars argue that "Matthew's Gospel is written from a Jewish-Christian standpoint, in order to defend Christianity, to make it acceptable to Jewish-Christian readers, and to prove that Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews" (*The Gospel of Matthew*, 40).

⁵ Keener, *Matthew*, 33.

⁶ Ralph P. Martin, *The Four Gospels* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 232.

⁷ Martin, *The Four Gospels*, 228.

⁸ The implication of Gentile women in the lineage of the Messiah supports the perspective that God's redemptive plan always included the nations. Matthew lists Tamar (Gen. 38:18), Rahab (Josh. 2:1), Ruth (Ruth 1:3), and Uriah's wife (2 Sam. 11:3). While Uriah was a Hittite (2 Sam. 11:3, 6), it is unclear if his wife had the same ethnic background. Possibly to emphasize her marriage to a non-Jew, Matthew does not record her given name. For further Old Testament examples of the people of God consisting of more than the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, note that a mixed multitude were part of the Exodus (Exodus 12:38) and that Rahab and her entire family were incorporated into the Israelite community (Josh. 6:25).

⁹ According to various Church Traditions, Matthew in his later life traveled to Ethiopia or Persia making disciples of those nations. See "St. Matthew: Apostle," [cited 1 December 2020]; online: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Matthew>.

¹⁰ Edgar Krentz notes that "this authority is total, extending throughout Heaven and earth, that is, the universe." See "Missionary Matthew: Matthew 28:16-20 as Summary of the Gospel," *Currents in Theology and Missions* 31.1 (2004): 27.

¹¹ Randy Hurst, "Our Mission: Reaching, Planting, Training, and Serving," in *Mission, Vision, and Core Values* (ed. John L. Easter et al.; vol. 1 of RPTS Missiological Series; Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God World Mission, 2016), 31.

¹² This approach is taken by Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 640-642, 645. According to Wallace, when an aorist participle precedes an aorist imperative, 90% of the time the participle should be translated as a verb without dependence on the main verb in terms of meaning. Wallace concludes that in this passage, it makes no good sense to translate the participle as an adverbial participle with a sense of the temporal (when) or means (how) (622).

¹³ Cleon L. Rogers Jr., *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 66; also Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28* (WBC 33B; Dallas, TX: Word, 1995), 882.

¹⁴ Aorist can describe action as a whole, a snapshot view, the unchanging nature or state of an action. See Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics*, 554, 557.

¹⁵ πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε can be translated as "Therefore, go and disciple" or "Therefore, having gone, disciple." The aorist participle serves as a verbal adjective. The verbal component has two aspects: time of action and kind of action. As an adjective, it modifies the subject of the sentence, Christ's disciples. Aorist verbs express undefined action (neither progressive or complete) in the present or past. But the aorist participle typically indicates action antecedent to or prior to the action of the main verb of the sentence (see R. Summers, *Essentials of New Testament Greek*; rev. Thomas Sawyer; Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995; 11, 97, 103). Friedrich Blass and Albert Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (trans. and rev. R. W. Funk; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 174, explain that a participle expresses the notion of completion often preceding the finite verb: "the completion of the action denoted by the participle, then the action of the finite verb." The word πορευθέντες could be translated: You all [plural for the disciples] having gone. Applying these guidelines, Jesus commanded them to disciple the nations, but prior to the making of disciples, they had to go. This view finds support in Craig S. Keener, *Matthew* (IVPNTC; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1997), 400.

¹⁶ Krentz takes an opposing position claiming that the double imperative is “deceptive” in converting the participle into a command and thereby weakening the thrust of the command: disciple the nations. See “Missionary Matthew: Matthew 28:16-20 as Summary of the Gospel,” 28fn21.

¹⁷ Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics*, 623.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 613.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 614.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 614.

²¹ Mary H. Shore translates the participle, “As you go.” See “Preaching Mission: Call and Promise in Matthew 28:16-20,” *Word and World* 26.3 (2006): 325. The weakness of this translation is that it seems to ignore the aorist aspect of the participle and treats it as a present tense participle.

²² Wallace, 640

²³ *Ibid.*, 641, 644-645.

²⁴ D. Edmond Hiebert presents a similar interpretation: “The aorist participle rendered ‘go’ (πορευθέντες), more literally, ‘having gone,’ shows that this missionary outreach is necessary before the central task of making disciples is realized. See “An Expository Study of Matthew 28:16-20,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* July-Sept (1992): 348.

²⁵ This view of one imperative carried out in three ways is supported by Craig Keener: “The one command is to make disciples of the nations, and this command is implemented by going, baptizing, and teaching.” See Craig S. Keener, “Matthew’s Missiology: Make Disciples of the Nations (Matthew 28:19-20),” *AJPS* 12.1 (2009), 3.

²⁶ Wallace states that some adverbial participles have both the notion of temporal and means. One must attempt to determine which element is being stressed. *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics*. 624.

²⁷ For further discussions on the relationship between the leading verb, disciple, and the three participles, having gone, baptizing, and teaching, see D. A. Carson, *Matthew 1-12* (EBC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 597; and Keener, *Matthew*, 402.

²⁸ Matthew uses this same word order in Matthew 2:8; 9:13; and 11:4 where go, an aorist participle, is followed by a command. “Go and inquire,” (2:8 πορευθέντες ἐξετάσατε) could read, “Having gone [to Bethlehem], inquire where” The magi needed to get to Bethlehem, an example of an antecedent action, before they could begin their investigation about the birth location of the Messiah. “Go and learn,” (9:13 πορευθέντες δὲ μάθετε) could read “Having gone, learn” where Jesus instructed Pharisees to turn to Scripture, away from their judgmental attitudes towards Him and His companions, then learn what JHWH meant with His words, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” To John the Baptist’s disciples, Jesus said, “Go and report,” (11:4 πορευθέντες ἀπαγγείλατε) which could read, Having gone [back to John], report.” However, in each of these cases, Wallace interprets the combination of the aorist participle and the aorist imperative as attendant circumstance, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics*, 641-645.

²⁹ See John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993).

³⁰ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, all the nations, represented the Gentiles, the many unique ethnic groups outside of the people of Israel. Keener, *Matthew*, 401, comments that all nations could signify distinct groups of people rather than the modern concept of nation-states; Jesus’ command was an appeal for his followers to bring the good news to each culture with sensitivity and clarity. Some hold the opinion that ἔθνη (nations, plural; ἔθνος, singular) refers to the Gentiles as one blended mass of humanity distinguished from the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. However, there is strong scriptural evidence that God both created and endorses the cultural-linguistic uniquenesses

of every people group on earth. Genesis 10 lists the table of nations. Deuteronomy 32:8 refers to the division of the world into nations. John's vision of Heavenly worshipers (Rev. 5:9; 7:9) acknowledges the distinct groupings of humankind formed around various affinities: tribes (φυλή, people as a national unity with common descent), languages (γλῶσσα, tongues, a group of people with linguistic unity), people (λαός, people as a political unity with common history and law), and nations (ἔθνος, people with ethnic cohesion) exalting Jesus Christ, the Lamb who was slain to provide salvation for all (see K. L. Schmidt, "ἔθνος in the NT," *TDNT* 2:369-372).

³¹ While some scholars believe Jesus' mandate redirected his disciples to the Gentile nations exclusively, this perspective contradicts the example of the church as described in Acts and Paul's epistles. Walter Klaiber rightly stated, "Surely for Matthew, Jews are included in the mission to all nations." See Klaiber, "The Great Commission of Matthew 28:16-20," *American Baptist Historical Society* 37.2 (2018): 113.

³² D. E. Hiebert, "An Expository Study of Matthew 28:16-20," 350.

³³ For a thorough discussion on the meaning of apostolic function, see Alan R. Johnson, *Apostolic Function in 21st Century Missions* (Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 2009).

³⁴ μαθητεύσατε is an aorist active imperative second person plural translated: (you all) disciple or make disciples. The aorist tense, as an undefined kind of action, emphasizes discipling in the sense of point action; just do it, once and for all—make disciples.

³⁵ Dan Day comments, "Because the eleven are themselves termed disciples, the import is that they are to replicate themselves, to introduce others to the Teacher (23:8,10), and as fellow learners, to become mentors in the Christ-life," "A Fresh Reading of Jesus' Last Words: Matthew 28:16-20," *Review and Expositor* 104 (2007): 379.

³⁶ This kind of discipleship that transforms beliefs, attitudes, and lifestyle demands much more than evangelistic crusades, medical outreaches, elementary schools, and tabernacle construction. Christ commands His church to equip and send disciple-makers who commit to going, staying, learning, loving, and serving—"boots on the ground."

³⁷ Krentz claims that "Matthew envisages the use of his Gospel as a manual for teaching Christian life." See "Missionary Matthew: Matthew 28:16-20 as Summary of the Gospel," 30.

³⁸ Johnson, *Apostolic Function*, 4.

³⁹ The word charisma, χάρισμα, is used here to emphasize the role of the Spirit in the thinking of the interpreter. The Spirit supplements one's scholarship and understanding of the text to guide the reader to note aspects and nuances of the text that may have been overlooked or misinterpreted. For a given situation or critical situation being faced, the Spirit can draw one's attention to a statement in Scripture for the purpose of giving guidance to how the issue should be addressed.

⁴⁰ John Wesley aptly states, "Scripture can only be understood through the same Spirit whereby it was given" (*Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament*, vol. 1; Bristol: William Pine, 1765), viii. Rickie D. Moore, having studied God's self-revelation in Deuteronomy, observes that God makes Himself and His will known through Written Word, the Ten Commandments and other forms of canon, and through charismatic revelation in terms of His abiding presence, the Spirit poured out on Israel's leaders, and theophanic manifestations. Moore proffers, "Deuteronomy remembers the paradigmatic revelatory moment of Horeb where God both wrote and spoke his word, in order for this same revelatory synergism to be manifest in the present and carried forward into the future" ("Canon and Charisma in the Book of Deuteronomy," in *Pentecostal Hermeneutics: A Reader*; ed. Lee Roy Martin; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 28.

⁴¹ For numerous works by Ralph Winter, see the lead article in this edition.

⁴² Donald A. McGavran, *The Bridges of God*, rev. ed. (New York: Friendship Press, 1981).

⁴³ Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979).

⁴⁴ Paul G. Hiebert, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," *Missiology* 10 (1982): 35-47; *Cultural Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976).

⁴⁵ Alan R. Johnson, *Apostolic Function in 21st Century Missions*. J. Philip Hogan World Missions Series 2 (Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 2009).

⁴⁶ Tite Tienou and Allan Yeh, *Majority World Theologies: Theologizing from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Ends of the Earth* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2018).

⁴⁷ Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Grand Rapids, MI: IVP Academic, 2006).

⁴⁸ Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-first Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2010).

⁴⁹ Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁵⁰ Ralph D. Winter, "Four Men, Three Eras, Two Transitions: Modern Mission," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader* (3d. ed.; ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne; Pasadena, CA: William Carey, 1999), 253-261.

⁵¹ The spiritual and cultural development of the Burkina Faso Assemblies of God has continued to the present. Over the last few decades the church has leaped over ethnocentric bounds and religious prejudices to plant indigenous churches among every people group in the country. Many Muslims have come to saving faith in Jesus Christ and are pastoring and planting churches among their own and other tribal units.

⁵² Through the influence of training, we believe we can equip men and women with skills, commitment, and vision to become more like Jesus in word, deed, and attitude, and encourage them to go beyond the current scope of the church to the peoples and regions of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. Training with the goal of earning diplomas and degrees has never been the ultimate purpose for establishing Bible schools, but rather the increased capacity and commitment of national workers to participate in fulfilling the Great Commission (see Mark 3:14).

⁵³ According to the Joshua Project, there are 123 people groups in Ethiopia, 34 considered unreached. Of 110 million Ethiopians, 18% are classified as Evangelical. "Ethiopia: Joshua Project," [cited 1 November 2019]; online: <https://joshuaproject.net/countries/ET>.

⁵⁴ Bible schools must equip students with a sound hermeneutic, such as the grammatical-historical approach, that enables them to discover the intended meaning of the canon while integrating a Pentecostal hermeneutic that recognizes the necessity for Holy Spirit's discernment (charisma) to identify what the Spirit is speaking through the text to address the needs of the contemporary context.

⁵⁵ We have located some of our extension Bible schools in centers where tremendous revival is occurring. At the same time, we started a school in Djibouti, our Muslim neighbors to the east, to train both Ethiopians, Djiboutians, and Somalis in Bible and missions, and to catalyze and sensitize them to disciple their neighbors. In the future, we plan on establishing schools near the borders of Sudan and Eritrea from which trained emissaries can cross porous borders.

⁵⁶ In Ethiopia, with the help of Africa's Hope, we are translating Discovery Series materials into Amharic (the official language), Afan Oromo (the largest spoken language), Somali (one of the largest UPGs in Ethiopia), and Tigrinya (the language of Eritrea, a closed country on the northern border) and using these training materials as the curriculum to prepare missionaries and pastors to expand God's kingdom.

Re-ignitional Missiology in an Era of Decline

Fred Farrokh*

Abstract

This article calls for a missiology that reignites, or “Re-ignitional Missiology.” The paper begins by explaining an analogy of the stages of a fire: Ignition, Growth, Fully Developed, and Decline. It then addresses “the Missiology of Decline,” which is a phenomenon plaguing much of missiology today and is manifested in an overly-broad view of missions, and missiologically-induced syncretism. The article then pivots to consider the importance of revivalism and spiritual re-awakenings in church history. The conclusion outlines steps toward Re-ignitional Missiology. These steps include keeping a narrow missional focus on “apostolic function,” as proposed by Alan Johnson; that is, preaching the gospel where it has not been preached, and planting churches where they do not exist. Additional steps include resisting missiological decline in all its forms, and reapplying movements of the Spirit, by fire and by wind, in a revived and renewed missiology of the *Pneuma*.

Introduction

Cycles permeate life. Human existence would be unimaginable without the biorhythms demarcated by days, weeks, months, and years. The first thought a person may have when waking up in the morning and reorienting is to grasp which day it is. Life cycles include ebbs and flows. In their first year or so, people learn how to walk and eat independently. In later years, they frequently lose those abilities.

Cycles also detail the life of organizations, churches, denominations, and even civilizations. The energy pattern of such human organizations often mirrors the lifecycle of a typical fire. This essay will utilize various applications of the fire analogy, since the Bible likens

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the moving of the Holy Spirit to fire. John the Baptist prophesied that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matt. 3:11). When the Spirit descended on the Day of Pentecost, He manifested as tongues of fire (Acts 2:3-4). Pentecostal missiology centers on the fire of God falling upon previously unreached people groups (UPGs).

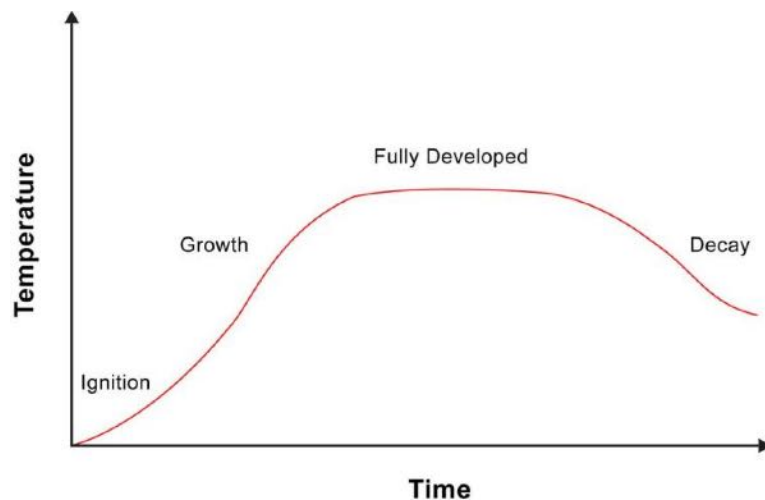
This article calls for a missiology that reignites, or “Re-ignitional Missiology.” The paper begins by explaining the analogy of the stages of a fire. It then addresses “the Missiology of Decline,” which is a phenomenon plaguing much of missiology today. The article pivots to considers the importance of revivalism and spiritual re-awakenings in church history. The concluding section outlines steps comprising a Re-ignitional Missiology.

Fires and the Fire of God

Firefighters study fires to prevent and extinguish them. Firefighting science has produced the following graph which illustrates the stages of a typical fire, in terms of temperature across time:¹

1. Ignition
2. Growth
3. Fully Developed
4. Decay

Image 1.



Applying the fire graph roughly to spiritual life, a quick international survey indicates that national churches may be found at various points of this cycle. Through the agency of missions, some nations are witnessing an initial Ignition of the gospel. As a former Muslim involved with ministry to Muslims, I happily observe this hopeful state in countries such as Iran, my ancestral homeland. There, the annual rate of growth of the church is reported to be 19.6%, the fastest growing evangelical movement in the world by percentage.²

Indonesia provides an example of both Ignition and Growth, which can also be considered a “harvest,” with many Muslims getting saved.³ I am presently serving in Albania, where an oppressive atheistic regime nearly extinguished all religious life, including the ancient churches indigenous to the country. Since that regime fell 30 years ago, the evangelical church has sprung to life with a growth rate reported about 5% per annum. This national church, now ignited, is in the Growth stage.

Other nations are blessed with a raging fire of God that can be considered Fully Developed. These nations experience burgeoning church growth and the institutional development that may include schools, seminaries, large numbers of people going into ministry, and established missions agencies. I have traveled to El Salvador numerous times to provide missionary training. Local Salvadoran believers have told me the evangelical church is strong, numbering approximately half the population of the nation.⁴ El Salvador has developed a robust missions sending program. However, as a contextual marker, one Salvadoran leader told me they are not witnessing the same number of miracles as was common in previous years during the Ignition and Growth stages.

Other nations are witnessing the fire of God in the Decay stage. This article will rename this spiritual stage *Decline*. The characteristics of Decline permeate many components of Christianity in the West, as will be explored below.

The fire analogy, though helpful, cannot fully reflect the complexity of human affairs. For example, in any given nation, one likely observes some church movements igniting—being birthed—while others have already reached a stage of being Fully Developed. Still others in the same nation are clearly in a state of Decline. In some contexts, an outward show of vibrancy remains, through well-oiled public relations machinery, yet internal spiritual vitality, marked by the fire of God, has waned. The spirituality of individual believers themselves may accordingly reflect ebbs and flows—backslidings and periods of spiritual growth and refreshment. Finally,

the shape of the curve, when applied spiritually, will vary greatly. Spiritual temperatures and timeframes may not follow a standardized pattern such as in the simplified firefighters' model, or even any bell-shaped curve.

While human institutions tend to decay over time, the life inherent in God is not subject to inevitable decline. Decline represents human failing, not a stage that is divinely predestined. Spiritual decline occurs by moving away from God, the divine life source. Early messianic believers faced persecution as described in Hebrews 10:32-34, which resulted in many believers backsliding *away* from God. Some "drifted away" from what they had heard (2:1).⁵ Others "fell away" from the living God due to evil, unbelieving hearts (3:12). Yet others "threw away" their confidence in Christ (10:35). The spiritual direction in these cases was always away from God. However, the author of Hebrews describes Jesus as the One in whom is vested the "power of an indestructible life" (7:16). Though the Lord Jesus was crucified, the nature of the life within Him resulted in a powerful resurrection. The saving work of Jesus on the cross and His resurrection are the gospel message that provide the critical spiritual spark. No other source of revival or spiritual life exists.

Jesus' disciples, trained by the Master, and sent out in the power of the Spirit, catalyzed worldwide revival. Their Ignition ministries frequently took place in high-persecution contexts, not unlike many UPG contexts today. Historian Rodney Stark estimates that the early church had a 40% annual growth rate over its first three centuries.⁶ By comparison, the Early Church experienced an annual growth rate *over three centuries* which doubles that enjoyed by any single country today. Those early apostles were igniters.

Some Characteristics of Fully Developed Spiritual Fires

Space will not allow for a full treatment of the myriad positive impacts of the gospel upon society. Alvin Schmidt's seminal *How Christianity Changed the World*⁷ describes the leavening impact of the gospel on the carnal Greco-Roman societies which it penetrated. No area of life was left untouched. Ethics, morality, art, education, law, and interpersonal relationships were transformed.

Nations in which the gospel makes significant inroads may also experience what Donald McGavran described as "redemption and lift."⁸ *Redemption* refers to gospel reception, while *lift* describes the attending work ethic, creativity, and freedom from wasting time and treasure on

vices—all of which may result in economic dynamism and societal prosperity. Though *lift* can be considered a positive side-effect that often accompanies widespread salvation, it is not a primary goal of preaching the gospel. South Korea and Brazil over the past half century portray many characteristics of “Redemption and Lift.”

Furthermore, nations in which gospel fires are fully developed will likely witness a commensurate increase in the development of Christian education, Bible colleges, and seminaries. A robust indigenous theological output typically accompanies these trends. Duane A. Miller has noted that ex-Muslim Christians are now finding their theological voice, focusing on the love of God uniquely manifest in Christ. Miller describes the self-theologizing of this rapidly developing movement:⁹

In turning away from the Umma and Muhammad and the Qur'an, they have turned away from a loveless power they perceived there to Jesus, his Church and the Bible and a deity whose power is perfected in weakness and whose love is stronger than death. And from this experience of the deity's love-power some have endeavored to build a new identity from the breakage among which they have lived.

As the fire of God becomes Fully Developed, nations which had once been thought of as missionary “receiving nations” also must become “sending nations.” For this action to take place, missions sending agencies must first develop. Latin America, East Asia, and even Africa, to some extent, manifest these encouraging trends.

The Missiology of Decline

When Christianity wanes in a society, a tragic ripple effect impacts all of life. This section, however, will address only those aspects of church life pertaining to missiology. During eras of Decline, both the quantity and quality of missions will likely decrease.

Declining Church Membership and Missions Sending

When a nation witnesses the fire of God in its Decline stage, more churches will close than open. The rate of conversions and baptisms will likewise plateau and then fall. Believers will encounter the discouragement of more people leaving the church than joining it. Missionary output will taper off. The following report describes the Southern Baptist Convention in the

United States, though similar statistics could be provided for many denominations and church movements, Pentecostal and otherwise:

The numbers are the numbers. Southern Baptists may be reluctant to accept the reality of the pervasive presence of decline and the loss of a vibrant evangelistic culture in SBC churches, but the official statistics of the Southern Baptist Convention paint a compelling portrait of churches struggling mightily to reach new converts and to hold on to people already in the fold...LifeWay Research reports that from 2011-2018, the SBC lost an average of 1,144 churches a year who gave up their SBC ID number. Also, in 2000 the average number of baptisms per SBC church was 9.97. By 2019, the average number of baptisms per church was 4.9, a drop of 50%. ... A Convention of churches declining in membership, worship attendance, and baptisms is unlikely to produce steadily increasing numbers of missionaries, and church planters. In 2018, with a budget \$16,000,000 higher, the *IMB had 1,574 fewer missionaries under appointment than in 2010*.¹⁰

Western Christianity does not stand alone in witnessing Decline. ReligionNews.com recently reported:

For many years now, Christianity has been the dominant religion of South Korea. However, if you look at the numbers there has been a marked decline. A 2015 poll reports that the younger generations are becoming increasingly less Christian and less religious in general. Furthermore, church attendance by those who remain is declining as they find religion less and less relevant. This is a surprise coming from the small country that sends out more Christian missionaries than any other country save the U.S. itself. Religion as a whole has been declining, but this is a manifestation of a deeper issue.¹¹

Small numbers of believers, if on fire for God, can ignite spiritual fires and revivals. However, declining numbers may reflect deeper issues. On a visit to South Korea in 2014, a missions leader shared with me that the early morning prayer meetings—every day in every church—which were the spiritual engine room of Korean revival, were not as well attended anymore. Likewise, the number of full-time missionaries sent out from South Korea was projected to decline.

Mission Creep

Since *missions* is not a featured biblical term, potential exists for the term to be filled with alternate and changing meanings. Alan Johnson's helpful work on "Apostolic Function" provides a biblical anchor for the term missions.¹² Johnson equates missions with a two-fold apostolic function: preaching the gospel where it has not been preached, and planting churches where they do not exist.

In the past century, however, missiologists have offered various visions of what *missions* might mean. While Johnson has taken a narrow, biblical focus, others argue for a much more expansive interpretation. Christopher Wright states, “when I speak of mission, I am thinking of all that God is doing in his great purpose for the whole of creation and all that he calls us to do in cooperation with that purpose.”¹³

While such a broad perspective includes laudable points regarding the *Missio Dei*, two threats emerge. First, an expanded mission may result in a Social Gospel emphasis in which the indispensable stages of Ignition and Growth have been skipped. Instead, missions may result in merely the transplant of the structures and accoutrements which have resulted from previous Fully Developed fires, but which are now in Decline.

Second, as Stephen Neill has briefly summarized, “If everything is mission, nothing is mission.”¹⁴ A watered-down or overly broad understanding of missions will necessarily result in halting and scatter-shot efforts on the field. Revival requires focus.

Missiologically-induced Syncretism

The timeless adage remains: The Word of God will keep one from sin, and sin will keep one from the Word of God. Eras of Decline inevitably witness the deemphasis, devaluing, misinterpretation, or misapplication of the Bible. While theological liberalism has plagued mainline denominations, hastening the trajectory of their respective declines, evangelical missiology has been plagued by a different malady—missiologically-induced syncretism.

Syncretism is the mixing together of two elements such that at least one of them loses its essential characteristic. Gailyn Van Rheen explains, “Syncretism is the blending of Christian beliefs and practices with those of the dominant culture so that Christianity loses its distinctiveness.”¹⁵ David Hesselgrave notes that syncretism impacts the important subject of comparative religions in an aptly-titled article: “Syncretism: Mission and Missionary Induced?” Hesselgrave states, “Syncretism is sometimes induced by underestimating the uniqueness of the Christian faith while overestimating the validity of competing faiths.”¹⁶ If missionaries are inducing syncretism, it naturally follows that the missiologists who have taught them bear responsibility for this syncretism.

God has been concerned about theological syncretism and outright idolatry from His issuance of the Ten Commandments onward. Missionaries and missiologists will inevitably

differ in opinion on some points. Those differences of opinion will not necessarily precipitate the church's Decline phase. Yet, recent field-based experimentation without appropriate theological guardrails has resulted in manifestations of syncretism which jeopardize the core of the gospel.

While a full discussion of contextualization as it relates to the tension between appropriate contextualization and syncretism is beyond the scope of this article, exploratory missiologists indicate they have long been aware of threat of syncretism. Charles Kraft of Fuller Theological Seminary evaluates this tension: "What about the concept of syncretism? Is this something that can be avoided or is it a factor of human limitations and sinfulness? I vote for the latter and suggest there is no way to avoid it."¹⁷

One missiological experiment which has gained traction in Western missiological journals and seminaries is that of "Insider Movements" (IM). IM built on existing missiology, yet failed to recognize the danger of new disciples of Christ retaining their birth religion. Kevin Higgins explains the development of the IM Paradigm (IMP):

In the second half of the 20th century, thinkers such as McGavran and Tippet began to popularize the idea of "people movements." One assumption of the people movement concept was that people in many parts of the world made decisions together rather than as individuals, and that such "togetherness" included tribal, caste, and other types of unity. As I use it, the phrase "Insider Movements" encompasses not only these earlier descriptions of people movements but adds "religion" to the above list of aspects of "togetherness" or unity.¹⁸

Higgins' proposal merits significant reflection and analysis. The IMP does not merely endorse retention of culture, but the retention of non-Christian religious identity and many non-Christian religious practices as well. Indeed, this paradigm recommends continuity of religious adherence. Higgins compares the apostles' continued attendance at the Temple in Acts 3 as a model for Muslims remaining inside the Islamic mosque after coming to the Lord Jesus:

Proponents of Insider Movements, especially among Muslims, have pointed to possible parallels here. They have argued from this passage and others that a biblical precedent exists for new believers from Islam to remain in the mosque and continue to practice other religious expressions of Islamic life.¹⁹

The Islamic mosque exalts the prophethood of Muhammad, who rejected the Lordship, Sonship, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, Higgins does not recognize continued mosque attendance in the long-term as compromise or syncretism. On the same page as the previous quote, he states: "I suggest that followers of Jesus can continue to embrace at

least some of their people's religious life, history, and practice without compromising the gospel or falling into syncretism."²⁰ Interestingly, my wife and I were recently talking with a single woman missionary serving in the Middle East. She mentioned an actual case in which Muslim-background converts to Christ wanted to discontinue attending the Islamic mosque, but a IM-promoting missionary exhorted them to remain in the mosque.

Missiologists may esteem their experimentation as the *avant garde* of what God is doing. Nevertheless, if not bounded by biblical guardrails, this experimentation may induce syncretism. In the final analysis, missiologically-induced syncretism will not create a spark of initial Ignition in an unreached people group or bloc. Such syncretism may rather smolder an ignition under the wet blanket of Decline.

Revivalism and Spiritual Re-awakenings

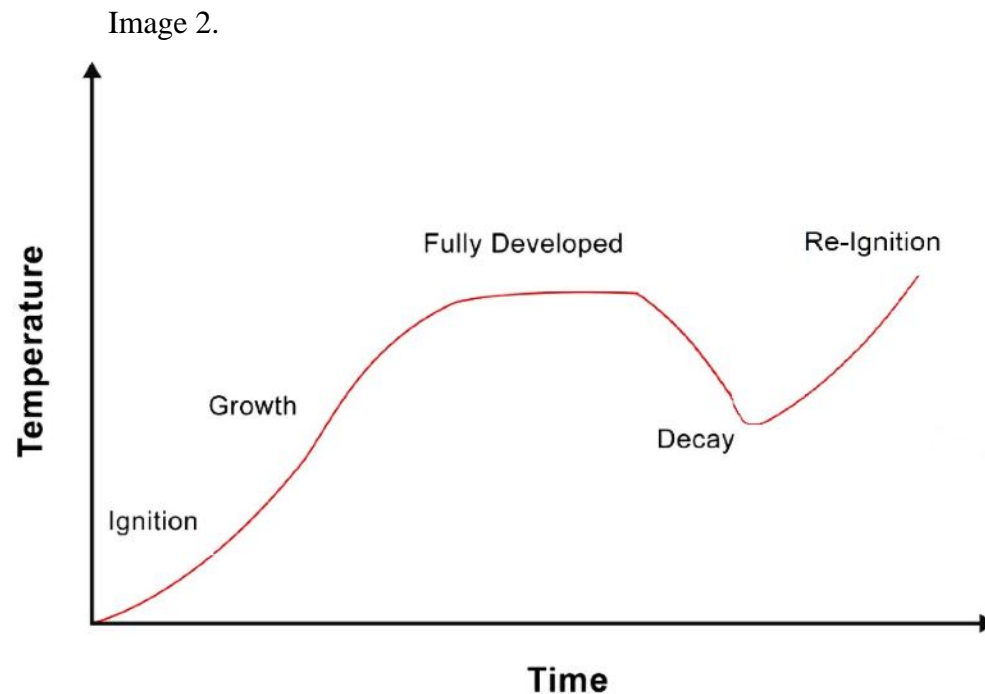
Before considering Re-ignitional Missiology, this article considers the rich history of revivalism and Spiritual Re-awakenings in the Protestant era. Revivalism enjoyed a rich history in Northern Europe, the British Isles, and the New World. In terms of the fire motif, the cooling and downturn of Decline is reversed by the fresh fire of a move of God.

Dating from 1727, Zinzendorf's community at Herrnhut launched a "100 Year Prayer Meeting." Their spiritual vitality manifest in over 300 missionaries sent out by 1791, some voluntarily entering their respective fields of service as slaves.²¹ Significantly, this movement occurred prior to the 1792 publication by William Carey of *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*. This publication and the subsequent sailing of Carey to India are often used as date markers for modern missions.

Revivalist Charles G. Finney articulates the indispensable nature of revivals in reversing seasons of spiritual decline:

A 'Revival of Religion' presupposes a declension. Almost all the religion in the world has been produced by revivals. God has found it necessary to take advantage of the excitability there is in mankind, to produce powerful excitements among them, before he can lead them to obey. Men are so spiritually sluggish, there are so many things to lead their minds off from religion, and to oppose the influence of the Gospel, that it is necessary to raise an excitement among them, till the tide rises so high as to sweep away the opposing obstacles."²²

Finney's prescription can be depicted on the fire graph as in Image 2.²³ A revival constitutes an intense and dramatic re-ignition. People may drift away from God, but to return to Him they must throw themselves unreservedly at His feet as is common in revivals. In theological terms, repentance constitutes a foremost component of revivals and Re-ignition.



Finney applies the principle of revivalism to international missions:

It is altogether improbable that religion will ever make progress among heathen nations except through the influence of revivals. The attempt is now making to do it by education, and other cautious and gradual improvements. But so long as the laws of mind remain what they are, it cannot be done in this way.²⁴

Thus, missions requires that those who glow with the fire of God seek to transplant that fire into cold and dormant places. In missiological parlance, this equates to reaching UPGs. The principles of ignition and re-ignition contain similarities. In the former case, a fire commences for the first time.

Prayer meetings remain inextricably linked to revivals and spiritual awakenings. Such an event occurred in Massachusetts, USA in 1806 with the "Haystack Prayer Meeting." Five college students, during a discussion of missions, sought shelter from a thunderstorm in a nearby

haystack. Their subsequent prayer meeting is credited, at least indirectly, with the sending out of 1,250 missionaries in the next fifty years.²⁵

Turning to East Asia once again, Koreans have developed contextual “Prayer Mountains” as the loci of prayer for revival. Yoido Full Gospel Church founded Osanri Choi-Jashil Prayer and Fasting Mountain Facility as both a spiritual retreat center and a place of revival intercession. The Korean revival spawned a magnificent missionary movement; wherever one goes in the world, one will likely meet Korean missionaries.

The Pentecostal revival and associated awakenings of the early 20th Century cannot be overlooked. Fire fell from heaven in places such as Azusa Street, Los Angeles. The missionaries who carried the DNA of this fire and transplanted it into hitherto unreached areas have changed the world. Pentecostals now number approximately 650 million followers globally.²⁶ Those who had experienced the fire of God took those burning coals and transplanted them in unreached areas through the preaching of the gospel. These once-unreached areas then burst forth into spiritual Ignition and Growth.

Re-ignitional Missiology

Certain natural phenomena can spare a fire from decay. The introduction of new flammable material will cause the fire to continue burning, as anyone who has fed a campfire can attest. Ventilation can also reinvigorate a fire. In the case of wildfires that have ravaged many forests, both elements exist: Nearly infinite combustible material—trees, as well as high winds, which the fires themselves help to create through searing updrafts.

In the Old Testament, priests were responsible to make sure the fire on the altar did not extinguish: “The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it. It shall not go out, but the priest shall burn wood on it every morning; and he shall lay out the burnt offering on it, and offer up in smoke the fat portions of the peace offerings on it” (Lev. 6:12). This lesson applies clearly to missions.

The New Testament notes the power and potential of fire ignition, for better or worse. Of the tongue, the Bible says, “See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!” (James 3:5). Gossip, for example, can run rampant like a destructive wildfire. On the other hand, missionary work may ultimately result in a spiritual fire that ignites, grows, and then fully develops.

The decline of missions, like the decay of fire, can and must be reversed. In terms of spiritual warfare, praying Christians can launch an effective counter-attack by reigniting missions. Satan greatly fears this type of counterpunch. The missiology behind such an initiative, herein called “Re-ignitional Missiology” must necessarily undergird such an enterprise. The following section sketches five components of Re-ignitional Missiology:

- a. Reaffirming the mission as Apostolic function
- b. Corrective missiology that resists decline in all its forms
- c. Hungering for a Hunger for God
- d. Recognizing our need for Holy Spirit fire
- e. Seeking a fresh Jetstream of the Holy Spirit

A brief treatment of each component begins with reaffirming the mission as Apostolic Function.

Reaffirming Apostolic Function as the Mission

Anyone who has tried to kindle a campfire will appreciate the importance of focusing the spark or match on a specific area of kindling. Missions likewise requires a tight area of focus if spiritual ignition is to be successful. This article affirms the specific definition of missions that Alan Johnson suggests is biblically mandated. Johnson calls this “Apostolic Function,” and describes it as preaching the gospel where it has not been heard, and planting churches where they do not exist. This specificity is necessary to generate enough focused heat to ignite a spiritual fire. Such an understanding remains consistent with the church’s historic understanding of the missionary call and missionary work, from Acts 13 onward. Re-ignitional Missiology represents a return to New Testament practice, rather than a modern innovation.

This discussion merits two points of clarification. First, one can assume that Christians, wherever they will go in the world, will do good deeds. They will be kind, generous to the poor, and compassionate toward the hurting. Nevertheless, these good works cannot, in and of themselves, substitute for apostolic function. They cannot *replace* preaching the gospel and planting churches. This consideration recognizes Neill’s caution above. Anything done anywhere by any Christian should not automatically be considered “missions.”

Second, entry into nations in which UPGs reside requires thoughtful and creative platform development. In nearly all these nations, a religious worker’s visa may be difficult or

impossible to obtain. Platform development, or “entry strategies,” may include Business as Mission (BAM) or community development work. Missionaries should seek a plausible, honest, integrated field identity that avoids the identity bifurcation of being a “missionary” at home, but “working for the company” abroad. A full treatment of this discussion remains beyond the scope of this article. Yet, missionaries called by God, and sent forth in the power of the Spirit, must retain a singular long-term focus of preaching the gospel and planting churches, however that may be done. As stated above, mission creep may result in the transplanting of the fruit of community development without the indispensable stages of Ignition and Growth. Though these initial stages may be long in coming, the apostolic focus must not waver.

Corrective Missiology that Resists Decline in all its Forms

Decline must be resisted. The fire on the altar must not go out. The “Missiology of Decline” described above must invariably be countered. For example, missions-induced syncretism has impacted Bible translations written for Muslim readers. These translations comprise “Muslim-idiom Translations.” These translations pose the threat of syncretism through the replacement of Divine Familial Terminology, such as “Father” and “Son of God” with alternate terms. Proponents of MITs argue that these alternatives retain the biblical message, while being both more understandable and acceptable to Muslim readers.²⁷ The challenge is tangible: Islam rejects that God be considered the Heavenly Father or the Son of God.

As Van Rheenen has stated above, a syncretism occurs when two faiths are mixed such that at least one of them loses its essential characteristic. Missiologists such as Adam Simnowitz contend that replacement of the divine referent “Father” with “Guardian,” or “Son” with “Caliph” collapses the heart of gospel.²⁸ According to the analogy employed in this article, extreme cases of mistranslation constitute the equivalent of pouring water on kindling.

Accurately translated Bibles form powerful missional tools in reaching UPGs. Inaccurate translations, on the other hand, stunt the process of Ignition and Growth. The Assemblies of God has provided guidance on the MIT controversy with the paper: “The Necessity for Retaining Father and Son Terminology in Scripture Translations for Muslims.”²⁹ Those similarly concerned with integrity in Bible translation recently launched the “Arlington Statement on Bible Translation.”³⁰ Both of these efforts seek to halt and reverse missiologically-induced spiritual Decline. Though perhaps unpleasant at times, more of these efforts will be needed to safeguard

missions from syncretism and to secure the missiological space for the Holy Spirit to do His work of Ignition.

Hungering for a Hunger for God

Complacency rears up as enemy both to missions and revival. A fully developed fire may quickly decay if those tending the fire are not vigilant. As a missionary who has traveled to nearly 50 countries, palpable differences exist regarding the important characteristic of *spiritual hunger*. Missionaries may raise budgets. Leaders may solicit support for important projects. Spiritual hunger, however, cannot be purchased. Such hunger is a key currency in the Kingdom of God. Spiritual hunger, even desperation, has resulted in Ignition and revival in Iran. This has occurred despite an Islamic theological dictatorship which seeks to jail and kill God's vessels of Ignition and Growth. In Cuba, where the average wage is less than US\$20 per month, spiritual hunger and desperation have catalyzed a Pentecostal outpouring since the mid-1990s. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:7). The equation has not changed.

Those experiencing church life in the Growth or Fully Developed stages may wonder at the urgency recommended here. Re-ignitional Missiology seeks to promote neither unhealthy spiritual discontentment nor unattainable idealism. Instead, Re-ignitional Missiology recognizes that the God who is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29), seeks to spark revival among UPGs through missionaries who carry that flame. As Finney has stated above, God works through revivals.

Recognizing our Need for Holy Spirit Fire

The Holy Spirit remains the Spirit of Missions. Jesus gave His disciples final instructions for their Great Commission during the Upper Room Discourse. He noted that when the Spirit comes, He will convict the world of sin...because they do not believe in Me" (John 16:8-9). This same Spirit came as tongues of fire. He baptizes with fire. When Jesus is preached in the nations, the Spirit glorifies the Son (John 16:14). Through this work of the Spirit, a spiritual fire is ignited, grows, and the church is born.

Perceptive leaders discern when the Fully Developed fire stage has plateaued. Coasting replaces the original spiritual urgency. From that point forward, Decline will set in if something

is not done. The United States Assemblies of God (AG) burst forth from its Ignition on Azusa Street in 1906. That fire quickly entered the Growth stage and soon was Fully Developed. A half century later, those early leaders had departed for their heavenly reward. Other great AG leaders carried the torch forward, yet plateau had begun to set in as the AG movement grappled with the contextual milieu of the 1960s and beyond. Everett Wilson explains:

While the movement's modification may have been anticipated—change is inevitable—constant renewal, by definition, is required of any religious revival. The challenge was to retain its early fervor in the face of a social and cultural evolution that tended to dampen its intensity and threaten its effectiveness.³¹

At that time, J. Philip Hogan began to champion something which in retrospect could be described as Re-ignitional Missiology. Hogan's vision for world missions set ablaze the AG movement with a fresh vision to glorify Christ to the ends of the earth. Wilson continues:

While the denomination was going through this process of metamorphosis, socially, culturally, and institutionally, the feature that helped stave off self-serving interests and disruptive internal conflicts was the frequently reiterated commitment to global evangelization. While everything else was in flux...missions was an inspiring unifying force that gave the movement a transcendent reason for being. Further it may well have been that the denomination's overseas efforts—its sacrificial, collective vision for reaching out to a needy world—was its principal stimulant to inspire its youth and mobilize an increasingly passive or even alienated laity. In any event, the argument is compelling that its missionary focus has played an important role in keeping the denomination on course, resisting or forestalling drift and deterioration.³²

Hogan's success was two-fold. First, his missions vision and practical application thereof rekindled fires within the sending churches. Second, those sent out brought Ignition throughout the Global South. These fires have grown with breathtaking results.

Seeking a Fresh Jet Stream of the Holy Spirit

Ventilation can enhance a fire. Blowing on a campfire will cause the fire to grow. The Spirit who comes by fire also comes as a rushing wind. When the Spirit comes as a wind, He transforms lives and nations. Jesus stated, "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it is coming from and where it is going; so is everyone who has been born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). Jet streams high in the atmosphere impact the weather conditions felt on the ground. The Holy Spirit, the rushing wind, seeks to create a jet stream in missions which can fan the flames of Ignition among an UPG.

The Holy Spirit turns souls around. He can turn nations around also. The full picture remains a mystery to us. We hear the sound, but we do not know where the Spirit comes from or where He goes.

So, it is in international missions. The Holy Spirit can turn around nations. Near-dormant fires can spring to life as the Spirit begins to blow. Decline can be reversed. Spirit-led missiology, re-ignited and re-focused, can be used by God to ignite a UPG as well as to re-ignite the senders.

Conclusion: Washing in a Pool Called “Sent”

This article calls for Re-ignitional Missiology in our time. Such a missiology can halt and reverse the downward spiritual trajectory of Decline observable in many contexts. Growing national churches need challenging goals. Our youth need to pursue the missionary quests to which the Spirit may be calling them.

Jesus healed a man born blind in John 9. This man represents us in our spiritual condition before meeting Christ. Interestingly, Jesus did not instruct him to wash in a pool called Prosperity, Multiplication, Grace, or Business as Mission. Jesus “said to him, ‘Go, wash in the pool of Siloam’ (which is translated, Sent). So, he left and washed, and came back seeing” (John 9:7). The blind man washed in a pool called *Sent*, embodying the missionary call. The formerly blind man—his name is never given—was unshakeable in testifying of Christ, even to the religious leaders.

A church baptized in a pool called Sent will fulfill its apostolic calling. Simultaneously, a church so baptized will stave off any spiritual Decline. Its fire will continue to burn bright. Its lampstand will illuminate the nations. Re-ignitional Missiology may spark such a sending. In doing so, it will result in UPGs being reached, as well as the fires of the sending churches being kindled afresh and re-ignited.

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The Slave is Your Brother: Koinoniac Witness in Paul's Epistle to Philemon

Rennae de Freitas*

Abstract

Unlike his other epistles, Paul does not overtly instruct the believers in Philemon, but rather he deals with a personal conflict between the master of the house church, Philemon, and his runaway slave, Onesimus, by summoning them to an alternative, missional way of living. This paper examines Paul's vision of this *koinoniac* witness of the church in the society at large, what it means for this community to relate to each other as siblings, the implications of this household's loyalty to King Jesus, and what is meant for Philemon and the entire house church to welcome a slave as a brother. In addition, it will discuss how Paul himself embodied the gospel to demonstrate the work of reconciliation. Finally, this paper examines the Holy Spirit's role in Philemon and in key moments of church history that demonstrate the power and potential of the koinoniac witness of the church. This discussion aims to challenge the modern church to exhibit this barrier-breaking koinoniac witness to the divisions that continue to plague society.

Introduction

Sitting in a prison in Birmingham, Alabama, Rev. Martin Luther King Jr wrote an epistle. He pens these words to his "Fellow Clergyman" of the time:

I have longed to hear white ministers declare: "Follow this decree because integration is morally right and because the Negro is your brother." In the midst of a mighty struggle to rid our nation of racial and economic injustice, I have heard many ministers say: "Those are social issues, with which the gospel has no real concern." And I have watched many churches commit themselves to a completely other worldly religion which makes a strange, un-Biblical distinction between body and soul, between the sacred and the secular.¹

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King's compelling words called the church to a counterculture way of living. The larger society may have been segregated, but King² envisioned a church that lived as a "colony of heaven." When King³ penned the words, "The Negro is your brother," he anticipated the possibility of an integrated, unified community of believers, whose witness would have real implications in the society at large.

Sitting in a prison, the apostle Paul writes an epistle. While the circumstances and the context differ significantly, Paul also calls the *ekklesia* to a countercultural way of living. In his epistle to Philemon and the church gathered in his house, Paul boldly pens the words, "The slave is your brother" (Philem. 16). The Apostle Paul and the Reverend King's letters bid the church to integrated relationships, devoid of barriers and they both envisioned the church to live in such a way that their communion displays the barrier-breaking work of King Jesus to society at large.

Unlike his other epistles, Paul does not overtly instruct the believers, but rather he deals with a personal conflict between Philemon and his runaway slave, Onesimus, by summoning them to an alternative, missional way of living. This paper examines Paul's vision of this *koinoniac* witness of the church in the society at large and what it means for this community to relate to each other as siblings. In addition, it will explore the implications of this household's loyalty to King Jesus and what it meant for Philemon and the entire house church to welcome a slave as a brother. And finally, it will discuss how Paul himself embodied the work of reconciliation that would define their witness to the world. This discussion aims to challenge the modern church to exhibit this barrier-breaking *koinoniac* witness to the divisions that continue to plague society.

Koinoniac Witness

In the Greek New Testament, Paul's letters written to churches commonly contain the word "*koinonia*"⁴ to refer to the fellowship, or community of believers. Murray Dempster describes the significance of this word, "Koinonia in the New Testament sense occurs when the Spirit creates within the church the real experiential bond of belonging to one another in God's inclusive family of equally valued brothers and sisters."⁵ Perhaps this type of bond spurs Paul's request to Philemon in the presence of the house church at the reading of this letter.

However, with the mission of the *ekklesia* in mind exists a fuller understanding of the purpose of this *koinonia*. This bond of belonging contains missional potential as the visible

expression of the koinonia creates a new vision for humanity. As this Christian community embodies forgiveness and reconciliation, they provide a noticeable witness to this pagan, Roman society of what life looks like under God's reign.⁶ Their vocation as a community serves as a "witness to God's hope for all by living as communities of visibly redeemed creation."⁷ Through exhibiting in its own life with the justice-doing and peacemaking of God, the church fulfills its vocation by becoming an anticipatory community of the new creation, a foretaste of the reign of God.

Yet, Paul does not task the church with abolishing slavery in the whole of the Roman Empire. Scot McKnight explains, "For Paul, the social revolution was to occur in the church, in the body of Christ, at the local level, and in the Christian house church and household."⁸ The decision to receive Onesimus into the fellowship of this community reveals a radical reaction to a fugitive slave.⁹ Receiving Onesimus demonstrates the counter-culture response of the Spirit's work among them to demolish the dividing walls of social order. In this manner the Holy Spirit "creates koinonia that witnesses to the inclusive scope and egalitarian nature of God's reign."¹⁰

While this small act of obedience and humility by Philemon would not indicate a drastic change in the systemic injustice of slavery in the Roman empire, today the church looks back on this ancient biblical text as the seed that would bring down the slave trade in the coming centuries.¹¹ Author William Webb in his book *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals* makes this point regarding a redemptive hermeneutic in Philemon. Paul's request sows seeds for an alternative way of living in Christ that in time would threaten the social institution of slavery.¹² This koinonia of Christian community under the empowerment of the Holy Spirit carries tremendous potential for future generations. John Yoder, in his book *The Politics of Jesus* reinforces this idea. "The primary social structure through which the gospel works to change other structures is that of the Christian community"¹³

Siblings

Paul states the motive of his letter with unreserved clarity. Perhaps the situation regarding his dear son Onesimus renders him with a feeling of helplessness, yet the apostle knows that his words carry influence, and so he states his desired outcome candidly. "No longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord."¹⁴ (Philem. 16) Paul appeals to Philemon to receive

Onesimus as a brother.¹⁵ The house church audience, perhaps astonished by this request, recognizes the significance of the sibling relationship for their context.

While the tightest units of loyalty and affection for Western kindred groups would be assigned to husband-wife and parent-child, the ancient Mediterranean family system, known as the Patrilineal Kindred Group as the sibling relationship, carried the strongest bond demanding utmost loyalty. This distinction serves the goal of this epistle in that Paul requests that Onesimus be received as a brother.¹⁶

Furthermore, the sibling relational model serves as the model followers of Jesus appropriate in their image of the church as family. Subsequently, the inclusion of Onesimus in the kinship of this New Testament household would demand more than Philemon as an individual forgiving his runaway slave. The house church listening to this letter understood the relational priority of a sibling,¹⁷ and it would demand that the whole household accept the demolition of a hierarchal¹⁸ association to Onesimus, and instead their relationship with Onesimus would be governed by love and loyalty.

New Loyalty

In fact, loyalty and allegiance, rather than blood relationship, form the bond that unites this new community. As followers of the Jewish Messiah, this group finds its roots in the Abrahamic Covenant. Joseph Hellerman makes the connection to Abraham in his observations related to this covenantal family.¹⁹ “It is most significant that the very origins of the Israelite people, according to their sacred traditions, are to be traced back to a single individual (Abraham) who opted for loyalty to God over loyalty to his father’s house.”²⁰ Abraham’s allegiance to Yahweh surpasses even the most treasured member of his natural family, when he willingly offers his son Isaac as a sacrifice.

Jesus further develops this principle of loyalty and family in His interactions with His followers. All of the synoptic gospels include a passage of paramount importance related to this theme:

Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, “Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.” “Who are my mother and my brothers?” he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mark 3:31-35)

While much discussion arises around the radical nature of Jesus' words, the point remains that Jesus envisions a surrogate kinship group, for which membership depends upon obedience to God rather than blood relationships. Therefore, inclusion in this new faith family demands a group commitment that surpasses one's blood family loyalties.²¹

And while these radical ideas may break through the culture's former constructs, in this new family formation Jesus assumes that His followers will relate to one another according to the standards shared by their culture's understanding of bloodline relationships. "Jesus promises Peter, who left his own family to follow him, that Peter will enjoy sibling-like relationships with others who have made such sacrifices ("brothers and sisters, mothers and children") and find life's necessary physical resources—such as shelter ("houses") and food ("fields") in the context of the new community."²²

New Lenses on Slavery

As this koinoniac witness summons the church to exhibit a new vision of family, an even greater challenge remains. How might this community understand relationships within the hierarchal structures of slavery? Perhaps every discussion regarding Philemon must address the subject of slavery in the Roman world. Significant debate exists on the distinctions between slavery in ancient Rome, the transatlantic slave trade, and modern slavery, such as the trafficking of people. While the numerous distinctions remain, K. R. Bradley offers an apt characterization in his book *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire: A Study in Social Control*. "Slavery by definition is a means of securing and maintaining an involuntary labor force by a group in society which monopolizes political and economic power."²³ The power inequity described by this definition, not just by individuals, but by the systems of society, exists in the slavery of all ages, contexts, and cultures.

Most scholars agree that Paul's request remains far removed from the abolishment of slavery.²⁴ The economy in the Roman Empire depended on slavery and therefore this kind of request holds significant implications for this house church community.²⁵ In fact, the context suggests that Paul is oblivious to slavery as an issue of morality in the larger society. Paul seems unconcerned for the conduct of the larger empire. He holds no allegiance to that empire. Paul's focus addresses the structures of this new community of redeemed believers.²⁶

Furthermore, Paul confronts Philemon and challenges the notion of the status of slaves in relationship to this house church family. By every definition of slavery, Philemon holds the power in this relationship. Onesimus stands at the mercy of Philemon. Paul understands how this works in society, but the transforming power of the gospel calls the church to a new way of living. In verse eleven, Paul uses a pun to address Philemon's view of Onesimus, whose name means "useful" in the Greek. "Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me" (Philem. 11). Lewis Brogdon suggests that "useless" serves as a reference to Philemon's perception of slaves. "Masters view slaves through a utilitarian lens. Slaves' value was tied to assigned duties and social invisibility. In all likelihood, Philemon assigned this kind of worth to Onesimus. As a slave, Onesimus worth ties to his utility. Because of this, Philemon cannot envision the need to include Onesimus in his fellowship."²⁷

Moreover, the possibility exists that the exclusion of Onesimus in the *ekklesia* causes Onesimus to run away.²⁸ Philemon treated Onesimus as a slave, his property. For this reason, Philemon would not easily even consider the possibility of Onesimus' inclusion in this fellowship. Paul knows this reality and for this reason his language related to Onesimus in this epistle holds tremendous significance. Paul's relationship with Onesimus elevates the status of this slave. He moves from different properties to "beloved son." Paul describes him as "my very heart" (Philem. 12). Paul envisions this community forming the "vanguard of creating a place where those deemed by the world and society in culture as unequals will be welcomed, not in terms of the world, but in terms of being in Christ."²⁹ The epistle calls Philemon and all who are watching to see with new lenses. Lenses cleared of societies stains by the reconciling power of the gospel.

Reconciliation and Embodiment

Interestingly, the gospel appears uncharacteristically absent in this epistle. The themes of Christ's atonement, so abundant throughout the other epistles, remain unmentioned. However, Paul clearly communicates the reconciling power of the gospel, not explicitly described through preaching, rather through his actions regarding Onesimus. Paul embodies the reconciling work of Jesus, and in effect, he represents Christ to Philemon. "So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it—to say nothing of your

owing me even your own self” (Philem. 16-18). Paul takes on the character of King Jesus. Paul values the outcast, the enslaved one. Paul, like Christ, offers himself as the one to satisfy the debt that Onesimus owes but can never repay.

Yet, Onesimus is not the only slave in this epistle. Paul envisions a freedom for Philemon, but not only Philemon, in fact for his whole household from the systems of the Greco-Roman world that compartmentalize people as Jew, Gentile, male, female, slave, or free.³⁰ Christ’s salvific work on the cross breaks the chains that enslave even the privileged and the resource-blessed populations to look down on the outcast or exclude the marginalized. Freedom in Christ “causes earthly relationships to take on new meaning. This is what Paul wants Philemon to understand, and it is only by understanding this that Philemon can move from exclusion to inclusion in his fellowship with his slave Onesimus.”³¹

While the systems of society remain enslaved to social distinctions, the gospel forms relationships in Christ that transcend the distinctions created by society.³² Paul proclaims this kind of freedom to Philemon and his household as the one to stand in as a Christ-like reconciler.

Furthermore, Paul’s embodied appeal to Philemon echoes his words in 1 Corinthians 5. The “no longer” (οὐκέτι) language of this epistle links to verse 15, “He died for us all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves” and “From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer.” (1 Cor. 5:17) In Philemon, the church observes through Paul’s actions the example of the “ministry of reconciliation.”³³

In his other epistles, Paul uses the metaphor of slavery to assist the understanding of sin and the nature of Christ’s atoning work. Here in this epistle, as Paul embodies the work of Christ, as he offers Philemon and the household the opportunity to live in a freedom that breaks down divisions created by society. Paul’s message of reconciliation and the payment of the debt, which remains appealing to Philemon, likewise proclaims the no longer (οὐκέτι) concept of Romans 6:6 “so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.” “No longer a slave” means freedom, not just for Onesimus but also for Philemon and the whole fellowship of believers gathered in his house. This kind of freedom includes the potential for them all to exist as a visible witness of freedom to those enslaved in the society at large.

The Holy Spirit and Koinoniac Witness In Church History

The demolition of the division between Philemon and Onesimus serves as an example of the Spirit's work to empower the visible witness of the church. From the inception of the Early Church in Acts, the Holy Spirit enables believers to continually break through barriers put up by society. Almost immediately, these new believers are challenged by divisions of ethnicity and economics with the neglect of the Hellenistic Jews, yet the Spirit causes this group to push past divisions and reconcile with the needy widows among them (Acts 6:1-7). The barriers continue to be broken with Samaritans (Acts 8:25), a eunuch (Acts 8:26-35), a Roman Centurion (Acts 10), and other Gentiles (Acts 11:19-21). In almost every chapter of the book of Acts, the public witness of this church demonstrates a counterculture way of living because of the mission of God.

History continues to record the barrier-breaking work of the Spirit in the visible witness of the church. The Moravian revival of the 1700s caused two European men to offer themselves as slaves in order to reach African slaves in the West Indies.³⁴ In the 1850s Pandita Ramabai, a high caste Indian woman who converted to Christianity in a visit to England, founded a girl's home for child widows and orphans, the Mukti Mission. In 1905 the Mukti Mission experienced a powerful outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As a result, the girls of this home went out as evangelists to the surrounding villages. Ramabai herself deplored divisions in society and believed the Spirit empowered her as "a dedicated ecumenist before this word was coined in the twentieth century."³⁵

Perhaps the Azusa Street Revival of 1906 in Los Angeles serves as the most important example of the Spirit's barrier breaking work in the church. During a time of heavy racial segregation in the United States, the Holy Spirit demolished the walls of race and gender in Los Angeles, California. Participants in the revival services came from various ethnicities and backgrounds which included African Americans, European Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans and more represented nationalities.³⁶ William J. Seymour's early leadership team included mixed races and women. Frank Bartleman, an eyewitness and historian, would report in his detailed account of the revival, "The color line was washed away in the blood."³⁷

Sadly, the beautiful witness of the Spirit's work in Los Angeles remained unsustainable and today the church in America suffers the consequences of its demise. The Apostle Paul, writing to the Galatians, offers a possible reason for the tragic conclusion to the Azusa Street Revival. He writes, "After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?" (Gal. 3:3) Later in this same chapter, Paul reminds the Galatians of their identity created by the reconciling work of the Spirit, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

The Apostle Paul's incredible request in Philemon becomes clear in connection with Galatians. Paul emphatically believes that the active presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church results in the demolition of division and hierarchal structures that are built by society. Hollenweger offers an important observation in his forward to *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism in the USA*. "Pentecost is an intercultural agent throwing a bridge across the troubled waters between two cultures which otherwise may never meet."³⁸

Conclusion

Paul's short letter to Philemon appears to confront a personal conflict between Philemon and Onesimus. Still, the epistle truly intends to address the community of believers because Paul's vision included the *koinoniac* witness of the church to the society at large. This witness surfaces as a visible expression through the barrier-breaking fellowship of these early Christians, joining slaves and masters into sibling relationships in the family of God. Instead of bonds formed by blood kinships, this new faith family emerges out of their common loyalty and allegiance to King Jesus and His Kingdom. Paul understands the power of the gospel to form these bonds. In this letter he embodies the message of reconciliation and freedom for all by referring to Philemon, Onesimus, and the fellowship of believers. This short epistle serves as one of many historical records that demonstrate the potential within the body of Christ to demolish divisions created in society. Throughout history, from Acts and on through the Azusa Street Revival, the Holy Spirit manifested within the *ekklesia* breaks down barriers between class, race, and gender.

Ironically, in the history of the slavery in the United States, this Pauline epistle served more as an endorsement of slavery, and not as a catalyst for koinonia.³⁹ Perhaps in part, this hermeneutical failure in history serves as one of the many reasons the church in America

continues to fight the demons of division. It is a terrible shame when letters written from prison cells remain unheard; freedom cries from prison cells, loud and clear.

Martin Luther King Jr.⁴⁰, writing from his prison cell, envisioned the church as a “headlight leading men to higher levels of justice.” Paul’s prison letter envisions similar light beaming from the fellowship of believers in Philemon’s house. Paul sees the possibility because of the power of the Spirit to break down barriers. He sees the headlight beaming in their brotherhood, in their loyalty to a different kingdom, and in welcoming the slave as his brother. This essay attempts to serve as a catalyst for the kind of *koinonia* that would beam a light to the road ahead for the American Church living in a culture still enslaved by unnecessary division.⁴¹

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⁴ *Koinonia* is used in this epistle referring to Philemon as a partner. The familial language of this letter diminishes traditional hierarchal structures in society. Besides the fact that it calls for Onesimus as a slave to be an active and equal participant in that *koinōnia*, he includes Gentiles as his family members and addresses Apphia as having at least equal influence with the men in her church.

⁵ Murray Dempster (1991, 29-31) discusses the church's koinonic ministry thoroughly in *Called and Empowered*. Dempster (1991, 29-31) explains that the koinonic witness validates the truthfulness of the gospel proclamation, exhibits its character as counter community, demonstrates its responsibility to function as a moral community, and serves as a "signpost" that points to God's future reign.

⁶ Dempster, Klaus, and Petersen, *Called & Empowered*. 29.

⁷ Larry Rasmussen, "Creation, Church, and Christian Responsibility," in *Tending the Garden Essays on the Gospel and the Earth* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1987), 150.

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⁹ Bernardo Cho writes that Onesimus was not a runaway slave but went to the Apostle Paul in prison to address a grievance against Philemon (2014, 101). While Allen Callahan considers that Onesimus was not a slave but Philemon's estranged brother, and that this letter is Paul's attempt to encourage solidarity between Onesimus and Philemon and the church that met in his home (1997,12).

¹⁰ Dempster, Klaus, and Petersen, *Called & Empowered*. 30.

¹¹ While this point is somewhat disputed by McKnight (2017, 27), "if Paul was planting seeds no one watered them." He does not believe that Paul's agenda was to abolish slavery. However, Paul's agenda, as understood by McKnight (2017, 36) relates to a vision of a kingdom reality that takes root in the *ekklesia*. "From there a new form of primary socialization could take root that would, could or should work its way into the whole of society."

¹² Bernard Cho Bernardo Cho, "Subverting Slavery: Philemon, Onesimus, and Paul's Gospel of Reconciliation," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 86, no. 2 (April 2014): 99–115., in "Subverting Slavery: Philemon, Onesimus and Paul's Gospel of Reconciliation," writes "Paul's redemptive rationale behind the argument of the Epistle to Philemon has played a crucial role throughout Western history as a seed inspiring the implementation of genuine social change and eventually splitting the rock of slavery."

¹³ John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*., 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich. : Carlisle, UK: Eerdmans ; Paternoster Press, 1994). 157.

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¹⁵ Paul describes church members and "brothers" 112 times in his writings. For Paul, Christians call one another "brother" and "sister" because they are children of the same Father. Cain Hope Felder, ed., *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

¹⁶ According to Joseph Hellerman (2001, 43) "An ideally functioning group of siblings shared the following practical responsibilities; protection of family honor to outsiders and sharing of resources among insiders."

¹⁷ According to Hellerman (2001, 43) there are economic implications to Paul's request, Onesimus would share not only in the emotional bonds of the group, but equally share and contribute to the resources of the group.

¹⁸ Nikki Holland, “Philemon in Light of Galatians 3:28,” *Priscilla Papers* 32, no. 3 (Summer 2018): 12–16. discusses the hierarchy in Philemon in her article “Philemon in Galatians 3:28.” “The Greco-Roman family was governed by strictly tiered hierarchy with the father on top, then the mother, then sons, then daughters. But we do not see these lines of power reflected in the letter to Philemon.”

¹⁹ Joseph H. Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001). 62.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 66.

²² Likewise, beyond the canon of Scripture, the epistle to Diognetus from Early Church History (second century or third century) further demonstrates the significance of allegiance in this new kinship group. In chapter five of the epistle, the author describes Christians not as different with respect to their customs, language, food, or everyday living, rather, they have an allegiance of citizenship elsewhere. He describes their ethic and conduct in ordinary life as exemplary; “...they display to us their wonderful and admittedly striking way of life” (Jefford 2013, 221).

²³ K. R. Bradley, *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire: A Study in Social Control* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). 18.

²⁴ Bruce W. Longenecker and Todd D. Still, *Thinking through Paul: An Introduction to His Life, Letters, and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014)219.; McKnight, *The Letter to Philemon*; 30.; N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament commentaries v. 12 (Nottingham, England : Downers Grove, Ill: Inter-Varsity Press ; IVP Academic, 2008). 174.

²⁵ N.T Wright (2008, 174) quips that had Paul asked the Early Church to discontinue the practice of slavery in the Roman World, it would be like asking Christians today to give up their cars. One could argue that fuel emissions destroy the environment that Christians have been called to steward. Yet society depends on cars to function and therefore, however moral the request, it would be impossible to comply.

²⁶ Leander E. Keck, ed., *The second letter to the Corinthians, the letter to the Galatians, the letter to the Ephesians, the letter to the Philippians, the letter to the Colossians, the first and second letters to the Thessalonians, the first and second letters to Timothy and the letter to Titus, the letter to Philemon*, vol. 11, *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon press, 2007). makes this observation in “The Letter to Philemon” in *The New Interpreters Bible*; “The central meaning and purpose of the letter to Philemon concern the difference the transforming power the gospel can make in the lives and relationships of believers, regardless of class or other distinctions. Close study of the text makes clear that Paul’s primary focus is not on the institution of slavery but on the power of the gospel to transform human relationships and bring about reconciliation.”

²⁷ Lewis Brogdon, “Reimaging Koinonia: Confronting the Legacy and Logic of Racism by Reinterpreting Paul’s Letter to Philemon,” *Ex auditu* 31 (2015): 27–48. 43.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ McKnight, *The Letter to Philemon*.

³⁰ Mary Hinkle Shore, “The Freedom of Three Christians: Paul’s Letter to Philemon and the Beginning of a New Age,” *Word & World* 38, no. 4 (2018): 390–397.

³¹ Brogdon, “Reimaging Koinonia.” 38.

³² “Paul lived in a particular context. While he states that it is better to be free (e.g., 1 Cor 7:23), he also lived in a world that could not imagine itself without slavery. He lived in a world where he could face serious legal

repercussions for not returning a fugitive slave. He lived in a world where slaves were considered things rather than people. Within such a world, Paul was able to restore Onesimus's humanity by recognizing his status in Christ, and he expected Philemon to accept that as well, by recognizing Onesimus as his beloved brother (v. 16)" (Holland 2018, 12).

³³ The term, *katallosō*, or reconciliation, remains absent from this epistle, but very present as a concept in that the story behind the letter is a story of a breakdown of relationships. Max Turner, "Human Reconciliation in the New Testament with Special Reference to Philemon, Colossians and Ephesians," *European Journal of Theology* 16, no. 1 (April 2007): 37–47. believes it to be the most "exquisite short piece ever written" in any attempt to resolve relational conflict.

³⁴ William J. Danker, *Profit for the Lord: Economic Activities in Moravian Missions and the Basel Mission Trading Company* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002). 71.

³⁵ Allan Anderson, "Pandita Ramabai, the Mukti Revival and Global Pentecostalism," *Transformation* 23, no. 1 (January 1, 2006): 37–48. 43.

³⁶ Cecil M. Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville, Tennessee: Emanate Books, 2017). 14.

³⁷ Frank Bartleman, *How Pentecost Came to Los Angeles: The Story Behind the Azusa Street Revival*, ed. Cecil M. Robeck and Darrin Rodgers (Gospel Publishing House, 2017). 54.

³⁸ Ian MacRobert, *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism in the USA*. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). Xiv.

³⁹ Demetrius K. Williams (2012, 11-58) offers an important discussion regarding the history related to this epistle. In addition, Lloyd A. Lewis Felder in the article *Stony the Road We Trod*, "An African American Appraisal of the Philemon-Paul-Onesimus Triangle" addresses this. He makes the point that Philemon is "a letter that black peoples have heard as a proof-text to justify slavery in the past and to some extent racial bigotry" and thus invites the Church into "new, nonstatic social configurations."

⁴⁰ King, Martin Luther, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail."

⁴¹ Authors Michael Emerson and Christian Smith (2000, 85) explore the issue of this division in the modern American Church in his book *Divided by Faith*. "Until blacks and whites pray together, U.S. race relations are fundamentally unhealthy. There is no getting around this, segregated churches have been and will continue to be a direct reflection on America divided." Similarly, Jemar Tisby and Lecrae, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2019). makes the sobering point that; "there would be no black church without racism in the white church."

Theological, Practical, and Missional Implications of Lukan Pneumatology

Leo Kihara Kinuthia *

Abstract

This article addresses the theological, practical, and missional implications of Lukan pneumatology within a local Kenya Assemblies of God (KAG) church. The author addresses the theological implications from the historical debate of hermeneutical approach looking at the pertinent issues including evidential tongues, and the doctrine of subsequent to and separate from conversion/initiation. He presents the Pentecostal responses and implications for future Pentecostal theology and missiology. He concludes with application to his ministry as a pastor and Bible School educator.

Introduction

I serve as pastor in a Kenya Assemblies of God (KAG) church that upholds the Pentecostal doctrines and practice. Her belief in the Holy Spirit is espoused in the Statement of Fundamental Truths.¹ This paper addresses the theological, practical, and missional implications of Lukan pneumatology within my ministry context.

Theological Implications of One's Hermeneutical Approach

Background and History of Theological and Hermeneutical Debate

Various movements in the 19th Century contributed to the formation of Pentecostalism.² Loder notes that “many of the concepts present in the Classical Pentecostal doctrine of Spirit-baptism were being used by others long before the movement came into existence”.³ It is

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remarkable that Pentecostalism “was birthed out of dynamic experience rather than a theological discovery”.⁴

Lee asserts that modern Pentecostal movement started with a “theological Bible study” and not an experience.⁵ Menzies and Menzies affirm that students who were studying the book of Acts concluded, “Baptism in the Holy Spirit is accompanied by speaking in tongues”.⁶ This same example was experienced in the Azusa Street Revival meetings carried out by William J. Seymour.⁷ This period marked an unprecedented move of the Spirit in the world.⁸ Anderson records that other parts of the world like Asia and Africa were also experiencing a move of the Spirit at about the same period.⁹

Holiness roots and Fundamentalism shaped the values of early Pentecostals.¹⁰ The former emphasized a new experience after salvation.¹¹ Fundamentalism, on the other hand rose to oppose Modernism that emphasized liberalism.¹² They regarded the Word of God as supreme and emphasized its historical accuracy.¹³ The two though viewed separately had an overlap since they both employed the language of baptism in the Holy Spirit.¹⁴

Menzies and Menzies conclude by saying that, “When the Pentecostal revival came, the Pentecostals borrowed heavily from both the Holiness and Fundamentalist camps, from both the methodologies and the theological values of these groups”.¹⁵ These early Pentecostals were characterized by “Baptism in the Holy Spirit, commitment to evangelism and missions, strong faith, expectancy, reality, enthusiastic worship, rich fellowship, [and] biblical authority”.¹⁶

The Pentecostal movement kept growing and soon budded into denominations like the Assemblies of God and Church of God.¹⁷ What started then has continued to grow exponentially and ranks as the fastest growing in Africa.¹⁸ Charismatic movements also arose as a contemporary tradition to Pentecostalism. These movements mostly function within the mainstream churches.¹⁹ Menzies and Menzies observe that Pentecostals focused on evangelization of the world while Charismatics regarded their role as “revitalizing influence within their own tradition”.²⁰

Menzies and Menzies record about the uncertain relationship between the Pentecostals and Evangelicals.²¹ Although they reach out to one another, there remains significant differences in the understanding of the infilling of the Holy Spirit. To the Pentecostals Jugaru stated, “Spiritual baptism is not the same with the experience of conversion, baptism in the Spirit may occur simultaneously or after conversion but is not identical with conversion”.²² In contrast, the

Evangelicals “consider that the baptism in the Holy Spirit happens in the moment of conversion, simultaneously with the new birth”.²³ This profound distinction between the two groups has been core to the hermeneutical debate.

Pertinent Issues in Addressing the Theological and Hermeneutical Debate

The key issues revolved around the infilling of the Holy Spirit as normative and as subsequent but separate from conversion/initiation. In my understanding the questions are: (1) Is the Holy Spirit for soteriological or empowerment purposes? and (2) does one have to speak in tongues after being filled with the Holy Spirit?

Miller defines subsequence or separability as “The baptism in the Holy Spirit is a universal Christian experience separate from and subsequent to (if not always chronologically, and least theologically) the new birth.”²⁴ On normative tongues, he regards it as “The experience of Spirit baptism is always accompanied by the ‘initial physical evidence’ of speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance.” He refers to the latter as “normative missional sign.”²⁵

How the issues are handled will determine the full application of Luke-Acts. Subsequently, the missional mandate of the church will be affected depending on the understanding of the importance of the Holy Spirit and his purpose. If Luke-Acts is viewed as a mere historical narrative, the church will miss Luke’s theological intention.²⁶ I contend that Luke wrote so that the believers can learn from history and apply his writings paradigmatically.²⁷ He gave a timeless pattern for the followers of Christ.

Nature and Content of the Hermeneutical Challenge

While the Pentecostal theologians taught about continuous manifestations of the Holy Spirit, the Fundamentalists argued that the era for miracles had ended. Warfield alleged that,

The power of working miracles was not extended beyond the disciples upon whom the apostles conferred it by the imposition of their hands. As the number of these disciples gradually diminished, the instances of the exercise of miraculous powers became continually less frequent and ceased entirely at the death of the last individual on whom the hands of the apostles had been laid.²⁸

Writing further on cessationism Lee asserted that some gifts like “speaking in tongues and prophecy were ceased and could not occur in the present time”.²⁹ I affirm Homoki’s view

which concludes that the charismata³⁰ offers great pneumatological richness and implication to the church.³¹ The Holy Spirit is still at work with no lesser power and ability.

Pentecostals derive these doctrines from the Book of Acts as captured in various outpourings of the Spirit.³² One of the opponents of doctrines of subsequence and normative tongues is Gordon Fee. He alleges that “there is in fact very little biblical support for the traditional Pentecostal position on this matter”.³³ He regards the classical interpretation as flawed with clear exegetical and hermeneutical weaknesses.³⁴ He asserts “speaking in tongues is normal but not normative”.³⁵ To him, both subsequence and normative tongues are a misrepresentation and misinterpretation of Scripture.

Another critic of the classical interpretation is James Dunn. In his study of Luke-Acts, he concludes that “Luke’s pneumatology does not support Pentecostalism’s key distinctive: its doctrine of subsequence”.³⁶ He further argues that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was initiatory in character and marked the dawn of a life in salvation.³⁷ It is difficult to comprehend how Dunn missed all the outpourings recorded by Luke in Acts.

Pentecostal Responses to the Hermeneutical Challenge

Various theologians have responded to the hermeneutical challenge posed by both internal and external forces. Miller recorded Roger Stronstad’s response to the hermeneutical challenge. Stronstad called “for the literary and theological homogeneity of Luke-Acts,” “for biblical interpreters to recognize the theological character of Luke’s historical method,” and [Luke’s] theological independence from Paul”.³⁸ He noted that Luke presents the Spirit’s work as vocational, charismatic, and prophetic.³⁹

Moreover, Stronstad argues, “Dunn’s interpretation of Luke has been highly colored by his understanding of Paul; and consequently, Dunn has misinterpreted the meaning of significant passages”.⁴⁰ He challenges Dunn by asserting that “Only those who resist the evidence can continue to interpret the gift of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts to be an initiation-conversion experience”.⁴¹ He stressed that transfer, sign, and vocational motifs shape Luke’s pneumatology.⁴²

Max Turner swayed between two positions. In 1980, he unintentionally agreed with Roger Stronstad’s view that Dunn used Pauline categories in his exegesis of Luke.⁴³ In 1996, Turner shifted closer to Dunn when he argued that the reception of the Spirit was

soteriological.⁴⁴ He says that “For Luke there is no sharp divide between soteriology and missiology: indeed, that is one of the cardinal contributions of his theology”.⁴⁵

Ervin Howard analyzes Dunn on three fronts: (1) His unfair and unbiased exegesis of the New Testament, (2) His lack of charismatic experience with the Spirit, and (3) His synthesis of biblical thought without first understanding the biblical author.⁴⁶ Atkinson notes that the first two are not convincing but the third view carries some weight.⁴⁷ Dunn did not understand the authorial intent of Luke. He read Luke through Pauline’s eyes.

David Petts disagrees with Dunn on his failure to connect the outpouring of the Spirit with mission’s work, his connection of reception of the Spirit with initiation/conversion, and his view that outpouring of the Spirit was “necessarily for contemporaneous faith”.⁴⁸ He acknowledged that it was possible to believe in Jesus Christ without first receiving the Holy Spirit.⁴⁹ The Cornelius Outpouring attests to his claim.

James Shelton’s response to Dunn is not significantly different from what others had to say.⁵⁰ “He agrees with Stronstad that Luke actually needs to be “contrasted” with Paul”.⁵¹ Their different approaches to pneumatology should be respected. He affirms that the main role of the Holy Spirit is to empower believers for witnessing.⁵² He played a significant role in the inception, implementation, and completion of God’s work.

To Shelton, Luke’s mention of tongues as initial evidence is not consistent, hence the Classical Pentecostals’ position of tongues is questionable.⁵³ He concludes that “Luke is only peripherally interested in tongues in relation to the fullness of the Holy Spirit; for him, inspired witness is the essential issue”.⁵⁴ This view seems to suggest that not all who are filled with the Spirit speak in tongues. Acts however, does not support his position. There are many instances in Acts where speaking in tongues was normative.

According to Robert Menzies, the Holy Spirit’s primary role was missional.⁵⁵ He makes a clear distinction between Pauline and Lukan pneumatologies.⁵⁶ He refutes the claims of Dunn that Jesus’ anointing at the Jordan was an initiation into new age, that the Holy Spirit embodied a new covenant, and that infilling with the Spirit refers to conversion experience.⁵⁷ He contrasts the view of Evangelicals that equate Spirit-baptism with conversion with that of Pentecostals that insist the Holy Spirit came to empower the believers for effective witness.⁵⁸

While referring to various passages in the book of Acts, Menzies lays down a strong case against Dunn’s assertions. He says that the Samaritan and Ephesian Outpourings in Acts 8:4–17

and 19:1–7 show that they received the Holy Spirit after conversion.⁵⁹ They did not receive the Holy Spirit so that they could be converted. Acts 2:38–39 and Acts 10:44–48 confirm further that the Holy Spirit came upon the believers after salvation.⁶⁰ Luke’s pneumatology emphasizes the coming of the Spirit on converted believers.

Menzies and Menzies further argue that the Holy Spirit’s baptism is not merely for the well-being of the believers but for their empowerment to witness.⁶¹ “When the Pentecostal gift of the Spirit is understood in soteriological terms, Luke’s missiological focus and our expectation of it is lost.”⁶² The gift of the Holy Spirit is to witness and draw people to faith in Christ Jesus.

In his responses, Gordon L. Anderson calls for a proper Pentecostal hermeneutic. He defines this process as one that constitutes (1) “an exegetical method,” (2) role of the Holy Spirit (the pneumatic),” (3) “genre,” (4) “personal experience,” (5) “historical experience,” and (6) “theological presuppositions (doctrinal acceptance).”⁶³ He elevates both the personal and historical experiences as significant aspects of Pentecostal hermeneutics.” Unlike evangelicals who place a priority on didactic portions, Anderson argues that both narrative and didactic passages are fit for the theological foundation.

The Holy Spirit plays a significant role in the illumination, interpretation, and proclamation of the Scriptures.⁶⁴ He says,

In general, it seems Pentecostals have developed a method of interpretation that incorporates some of the legitimate concerns of postmodern literary criticism, including the new hermeneutic and reader centered literary criticism, while retaining a high commitment to the truth and authority of the Bible and its relevance to the church today.⁶⁵

The Pentecostals have nothing to be ashamed of in the way they interpret Scripture. To the benefit of the body of Christ, Pentecostals have refused to accept a “reductionist hermeneutic which prioritizes grammatico-historical exegesis to the detriment of immediate Spirit-enabled awareness of meaning”.⁶⁶

Implications for Future Pentecostal Theology

Although Lukan and Pauline pneumatologies have their distinctiveness, they “should be viewed as complementary rather than competitive”.⁶⁷ The latter applies his writings broadly to the Christian life while the former focuses more on empowerment for missional work.⁶⁸ The two should not be read dichotomously since the Holy Spirit inspired both writers and guided them to

dwell on certain aspects. Moreover, Luke wrote Luke-Acts with historical, theological, evangelistic, pastoral, and apologetic intents.⁶⁹

Pentecostals should continue seeking the baptism of the Holy Spirit. At conversion, the Holy Spirit works in the heart of the new believer, but more infilling is needed for witnessing.⁷⁰ The baptism of the Holy Spirit occurs after the soteriological experience. A “believer becomes a disciple of Christ and then, in a separate experience as explicated in the book of Acts, receives the fullness of the Spirit in a baptism of fire and power”.⁷¹ This position should not be compromised.

According to Menzies and Menzies, the eminence given to the didactic portions reduce the narratives especially the Gospels and Acts into mere appendages.⁷² This claim takes away the intent of narrative portions. The manifestation of the Spirit did not cease “with the close of the apostolic era”.⁷³ Nel concludes that “The same God who spoke and acted in salvation-history events and in the inspiration of Scriptures speaks and acts today”.⁷⁴ Narrative theology has same value as that derived from didactic passages.

The Pentecostals should demonstrate and proclaim that the Holy Spirit’s baptism is to empower believers to be witnesses. His power is an absolute necessity for the fulfillment of God’s mission.⁷⁵ Some Pentecostals stand accused of vibrancy and speaking in tongues without any form of witnessing. To others, Spirit baptism is sought as a license to prosperity.⁷⁶ Unfortunately, the Pentecostals and Charismatics are key adherents and propagators of this gospel.⁷⁷ They have failed to understand why Jesus fulfilled his promise of sending the Holy Spirit.

The church should acknowledge that the gift of tongues is tied to missional witness.⁷⁸ It is not given for a show but is an indication of the Spirit’s power. Miller affirms that “Tongues are necessary, not simply because they evidence one’s reception of the Spirit, but because they are part and parcel of the empowering process itself”.⁷⁹ Believers should seek initial baptism and continuous infilling of the Holy Spirit. I agree with Hartwick who says, “Considering the biblical, doctrinal, and historical evidence, all believers should be earnestly seeking to be baptized in the Holy Spirit with the initial physical evidence of speaking in tongues as the Spirit gives utterance”.⁸⁰

Practical and Missiological Implications of One's Interpretation of Lukan Pneumatology

Impact on One's Theology of Mission

Miller affirms that Luke's primary intent in writing Acts was prophetic and missiological.⁸¹ He was a theologian in his own right and not just a historian only interested in a narration.⁸² Luke emphasized the role of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts more than the other Gospel writers did.⁸³

The Holy Spirit was given as fulfillment of the promise in Acts 1:8. Miller regards Acts 1:8 as the interpretive key of the book of Acts since it lays out the empowerment-witness motif.⁸⁴ Menzies and Menzies also noted that the purpose of the "Pentecostal gift is to empower believers to become effective witnesses".⁸⁵ Shelton collaborates this view when he says, "Luke's major emphasis is the Holy Spirit's inspiring human beings to witness concerning Jesus".⁸⁶ How believers understand Luke's authorial intent will impact their theology of mission. To embrace his theology is to embrace missions.

It would be difficult to fulfill the *missio Dei* without the Holy Spirit. Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:8 describes the geographical movement of the witnesses and the necessary power to accomplish the Great Commission (Matt. 28:16–20). The disciples absolutely needed the pneumatic empowerment.⁸⁷ Without the Holy Spirit, the current Christians' mission work would be a failure.

York says that "Spirit-empowered Christian witness may be the best recommendation of Pentecostal experience to watching Christians of Pentecostal tradition".⁸⁸ "The Holy Spirit is the source of missionary empowering."⁸⁹ This will call for humility in the Pentecostals as they acknowledge God's power at work in them.

The outpourings recorded in the book of Acts resulted in powerful witness. Bruce agrees that "the expansion of the gospel was marked by the spontaneous outpouring of the Spirit, as spontaneous as his initial outpouring on the Day of Pentecost".⁹⁰ For effective mission work, the Christians must seek a continuous infilling. A one-time baptism is not sufficient to sustain the mission of God. Acts 4:31 is illustrative of the need for regular infilling.

From this perspective, mission work faces opposition from both spiritual and worldly forces. To penetrate and overcome these forces, the believers should be filled with the Holy Spirit. This perspective will embolden them as it happened in Acts 4:31. Koech wraps this up by

saying, “The church in our contemporary situation needs the empowerment of the Holy Spirit in order to fulfill her prophetic role as well as the liberation function in all respects”.⁹¹

The Doctrines of Subsequence and Evidential Tongues in Light of Church’s Mission

Classical Pentecostals acknowledge and subscribe to the doctrines of subsequence and evidential tongues. It was the recorded pattern in the book of Acts where believers received the baptism of the Holy Spirit after converting to faith in Jesus Christ. According to Torrey,

The Baptism with the Holy Spirit is an operation of the Holy Spirit distinct from and subsequent and additional to his regenerating work. A man may be regenerated by the Holy Spirit and still not be baptized with the Holy Spirit. In regeneration, there is an impartation of life, and the one who receives it is saved; in the Baptism with the Holy Spirit there is an impartation of power and the one who receives it is fitted for service.⁹²

Speaking in tongues is a sign to the church that they are ministering under the Spirit’s power. It helps the new believers know that the Holy Spirit is indeed at work.

In his writing, Luke implies that the evidential speaking in tongues was normative and a reminder that the church “is a prophetic community called and empowered to bear witness to the world.”⁹³ Initially, the believers thought the gift of tongues was to enable them witness in unlearned foreign languages.⁹⁴ McGee points out that “When the failure of tongues as a missio-linguistic tool became apparent, they retained their confidence in praying in tongues as the source of power, an approach both biblical and already familiar to them”.⁹⁵ Tongues have a key role in the mission work.

Miller regards speaking in tongues as a missional sign. He says they signify God’s empowerment, the identity of believers as prophetic community, and God’s presence in His people.⁹⁶ This point means that believers who speak in tongues are encouraged to reach out since the power to witness is already in them.

Effects of Watering Down of the Doctrines of Subsequence and Evidential Tongues

Watering down the doctrines of subsequence/separability and initial evidence would have a significant effect on how the church approaches its missionary task. Unlike the Evangelicals, the Pentecostals hold that these doctrines are distinct from conversion to the faith. The Holy Spirit is given to empower believers in carrying out *missio Dei* (Acts 1:8).

Menzies and Menzies assert that, “When the Pentecostal gift is confused with conversion, the missiological focus is lost. Pentecostalism then becomes empty with no power for mission.⁹⁷ Christians who no longer seek to be filled will result in powerless churches and fruitless mission work. Miller attests that Spirit baptism “equips the Christian worker for greater effectiveness in ministry”.⁹⁸ Without the Holy Spirit, few churches will be planted and those that might will lack the requisite power to grow, disciple others, and witness effectively.

While writing on Pentecostal missions, York noted that the Holy Spirit empowers to witness, draws sinners to Christ, moves believers into compassionate service, shows God’s involvement in winning souls, and demonstrates God’s supremacy.⁹⁹ But all these features will be undermined greatly if the Pentecostal church abandons the doctrines of subsequence and evidential tongues. There is a “correlation between speaking in tongues and the resulting experience of Christian witness, especially among those of diverse ethnicity and language”.¹⁰⁰ The church needs to uphold the doctrines in all her mission endeavors.

Miller observes that speaking in tongues facilitates inner transformation, results in Spirit-inspired speech (prophecy), and praise and worship to God.¹⁰¹ The church stands to lose if the doctrines are abandoned. There is a danger of having churches that have numerical growth but have stagnated in spiritual growth. They would be spiritual infants (1 Cor. 3:1) tossed around by “every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14).

“Tongues then emerge as an integral part of the empowering process”¹⁰² and thus becomes critical in the personal life of the believer. The Holy Spirit gives insight and illuminates the readers to understand and apply the Word of God. In tough times, they are empowered to speak boldly and withstand persecution. Faith in Christ, then becomes experiential and relevant to the believers.¹⁰³

Classical Pentecostals subscribe to the belief that baptism in the Holy Spirit is the gateway to receive and manifest the gifts of the Spirit.¹⁰⁴ Although, those not yet filled can manifest the gifts of the Spirit, baptism with the Holy Spirit catapults their effectiveness. This implies that watering down subsequence and normative tongues will negatively affect the manifestation of spiritual gifts in the church.

Role of Spiritual Gifts in Missions

Miller says, “Spiritual gifts are supernatural anointings given through Spirit-filled believers by the Holy Spirit to accomplish the will of the Father”.¹⁰⁵ Their origin is God, are given through grace, released through the Holy Spirit, and given to accomplish God’s will.¹⁰⁶ They can also be defined as “any endowment that comes from God”¹⁰⁷ or spiritual attributes given to believers for use in the church.¹⁰⁸

Different authors use different categorizations of the spiritual gifts. Miller groups them into revelatory, prophetic and power gifts as depicted in Acts.¹⁰⁹ Those in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10 can also be grouped into “teaching and preaching gifts, ministry gifts, and worship gifts”.¹¹⁰ Regarding the gifts, Menzies and Menzies remark that they are guided by the principles of grace, edification, and participation.¹¹¹ They are free gifts from God to all and for all. In acknowledging their role in missions, Miller recommends that the gifts should be read within the context of evangelism and missions.¹¹²

Neglecting spiritual gifts has significant implications on the church’s evangelistic mandate.¹¹³ The ability to overcome evil forces, witness, and prophecy will be greatly hampered. This point then means that the edification of the believers and evangelism of the lost will be ineffective. To mature the Christians for ministry, the spiritual gifts should be manifested in the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11–13).

Throughout Acts, the baptism of the Spirit resulted in inspired speech with many coming to the Lord. 1 Corinthians 12:10 refers to this gift of prophecy. Missionaries need this gift so that they can ably minister the Word of God. What they proclaim must be inspired of the Spirit. The gift of prophecy strengthens, encourages, and comforts the church (1 Cor. 14:3).

The gift of speaking in tongues and interpretation reveals the mysteries of God to the unbelievers. In a congregation, they are more effective when working together so that the listeners can understand what God is saying. At a personal level, speaking in tongues edifies the believer (1 Cor. 14:4). With so many discouragements and opposition in the mission field, speaking in tongues helps to build the inner man.

Signs and wonders help the ministers demonstrate that God is at work. When Paul rebuked Elymas in Acts 13:11, he became blind, and the proconsul believed in Jesus. Miracles of

whatever nature have their place in the mission field. They help solidify the proclaimed word. These gifts are significant for church planting and growth.¹¹⁴

When Paul was in Philippi (Acts 16:16–34), he demonstrated the gift of distinguishing between spirits when he confronted the divination spirit in the slave girl. By casting out the evil spirit, the girl was delivered. Although the immediate result was imprisonment, verse 34 records that the jailer and his entire family believed in Jesus. Mission work involves spiritual warfare, and the gift of discernment helps the missionaries distinguish between spirits.

Mission work depends on faithful givers. Romans 12:8 categorizes giving as a spiritual gift. That is the gift that was at work in the Macedonian churches with how 2 Corinthians 8:1–7 show what Paul achieved in his missionary work. This spiritual gift has a role in the mission field. Missionaries cry for such people to rise up and be faithful in exercising their spiritual gifts.

The mission field can be tough and rough. With the best of intentions, missionaries face challenges that might make them reconsider their commitment. They need someone with the gift of encouraging (Rom. 12:8) to hold their hands. Barnabas served this purpose in Paul's life (Acts 13, 14). He defended him when the other apostles could not trust his conversion (Acts 9:27). A call, visit, or prayer will encourage the missionaries to remain strong.

Implications on Pentecostal Missions

Acts 1:8 records that the Holy Spirit was given to empower the disciples for witnessing. The fulfillment of that promise in Acts 2:4 resulted in great witnessing. Thereafter, Luke records many instances where infilling of the Spirit resulted in inspired speeches and proclamations. Pentecostal missions will only be "Pentecostal" if carried out in the Spirit's power. The ministers must seek and be filled with the Holy Spirit so that they can demonstrate the Spirit's power (1 Cor. 2:1–5).

Since God gives His gifts to everyone, the Pentecostal missionaries should not shy away from demonstrating their spiritual gifts. The gifts are for edifying others and are handy in evangelism. Pentecostal missionaries are not only filled with the Spirit but also demonstrate their gifts because they are full of the Spirit. Additionally, their transformed lives will validate their message of Jesus. The fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) will attract others to Jesus Christ.

By walking in the Spirit and witnessing under his power, the Pentecostal missionaries can expect the church to grow. Spirit-empowered witnessing is the only model that can cause

exponential growth. The new believers must be taught about the Holy Spirit, be filled with the Spirit, and sent out to witness.

Application to my Present Ministry Context

International Christian Center (ICC) where I serve as pastor is strategically located in the city of Nairobi. The mission field is right before her eyes since “The city population is projected to hit 5 million people in 2020 and 6 million people in 2025”.¹¹⁵ Considering that majority of the people are young, the mission field of ICC is ripe and ready for harvest.¹¹⁶ The opportunity to evangelise the city is within her reach.

Parsitau and Mwaura note that young people are attracted to Pentecostal churches in the cities.¹¹⁷ There is need to engage in programs that deliberately witness to them and take advantage of this disposition. Effective urban ministry would require ICC to understand the dynamics of urban environment.¹¹⁸ Praying in the Spirit for God’s guidance is critical so that effective Spirit-inspired witnessing can happen.

Another reason why ICC is on vantage ground is the growth of the church in the Global South. There has been an explosion of church growth especially in the Pentecostal movement.¹¹⁹ As a Pentecostal church, ICC should create networks with other Pentecostal churches in Africa. This networking can create missionary exchange programs that would result in intercultural exposure. As compiled by Dempster, Klaus, and Petersen, “Pentecostal and charismatic leaders need to seek ways to cooperate in ministry across ecclesiastical, ethnic, and racial boundaries.¹²⁰ Partnership is key in accelerating the church growth.

The congregation of ICC is well versed in media and communication. York says that “The computer age has generated an electronic media revolution”.¹²¹ The young people especially are tech savvy. ICC can use their connectedness to witness to them. Most of them have social media accounts and by befriending them, the church can create inroads into their lives. Bible studies can also be conducted online for them. Later, these people can be invited into the church where they will be prayed for to receive the Holy Spirit.

As an educator at KAG EAST University, there is the need to analyze literature in order to then teach pneumatology effectively. To allay the challenge posed by Evangelicals, more resources by Pentecostal theologians should line up the bookshelves. Menzies and Menzies observe that in the quest for acceptance by the Evangelicals,

[The] Pentecostals largely abdicated their theological agenda to Evangelical academic leadership. Pentecostal Bible Schools employed Evangelical textbooks wholesale. ...Further, some Pentecostal students who were immersed in Evangelical textbooks began to question the premises of Pentecostal theology.¹²²

This is a wakeup call to Pentecostal theologians. They must demystify the traditional view that Classical Pentecostalism is just about spiritual manifestations and is anti-intellectual.¹²³ The library at the KAG EAST University should be furnished with resources that propagate Pentecostal theology.

KAG EAST University as a Pentecostal institution should remain true to Classical Pentecostalism. Its mission of being a “Pentecostal training center” must be safeguarded and unashamedly propagated.¹²⁴ In such a college, Miller posits that,

- (1) Teachers should “systematically, convincingly, and abundantly [teach] about the Holy Spirit”.¹²⁵
- (2) Administrators must critically examine the curricula and steer it towards a strong emphasis on the Holy Spirit and Pentecostalism.¹²⁶
- (3) A “well-considered contemporary Pentecostal model for the training Spirit-filled pastors and church leaders” should be developed.¹²⁷
- (4) “The importance of the spiritual formation” in the student’s life should be emphasized.¹²⁸
- (5) Teachings about the Holy Spirit should be prioritized.¹²⁹

There has been overdependence on materials developed by the Evangelicals. The lecturers at KAG EAST University should revise the programs and ensure that Pentecostalism is emphasized at all levels. The lecturers should also demonstrate Pentecostalism in their lives and ministry.

A big threat facing KAG EAST University is the recent change from being a Bible Seminary into a chartered private university. Whereas in the past it enrolled Christian students to take Bible and Theology courses, the doors are now open to everyone. Secular courses have been added and there is a perceived risk of losing focus since some of the students will come strictly to learn and not to attain ministerial skills. On the other hand, it is an opportunity for the lecturers to demonstrate the Spirit’s power and draw them to Christ. The Chapel programming has to be designed in such a manner that it challenges students from the diverse faiths and backgrounds to embrace the lordship and salvation of Jesus Christ.

The need for a fresh move of the Spirit in life of every believer at ICC cannot be overemphasized. Hartwick asserts that, “Considering the biblical, doctrinal, and historical evidence, all believers should be earnestly seeking to be baptized in the Holy Spirit with the initial physical evidence of speaking in tongues as the Spirit gives utterance”.¹³⁰ In my church, I will continue teaching the doctrines of subsequence and evidential tongues to all new believers coupled with opportunities to be filled with the Spirit. Closely tied to this practice will be an encouragement to pray in tongues during corporate and personal prayer times.

I will continue to teach on the significance of the Holy Spirit. The power to witness and win the world for Jesus is available. Menzies and Menzies conclude that “Luke encourages post-Pentecostal disciples to ask for the gift of the Spirit, which, for Luke meant open access to the divine Spirit—the source of power that would enable them to be effective witnesses for Christ (Luke 12:12; Acts 1:8)”.¹³¹ If the church will have any impact in the world, she has to seek the initial baptism and infilling of the Holy Spirit in all the congregants. The Holy Spirit is missional.

The congregants will be encouraged to pray for boldness and share the faith with their families, workmates, and neighbors. Those who need help will be given evangelism classes to equip them on how to share the faith. Through the existing small groups, evangelism events will be organized in the neighborhoods. ICC will do well to adopt “organic evangelism”.¹³² This style seeks to minister to the whole person and touch “the deepest religious longings of the heart”.¹³³

Kenya hosts many refugees from the neighboring countries especially Somali and Sudan. There are also many labor immigrants from China as well as expatriates working for international organizations like the United Nations and NGOs. To reach these people groups, the church needs Spirit-inspired strategies. The small groups in their neighborhoods should be encouraged to invite them into their homes so that they can share the Word with them. ICC can adopt the concept of “Diaspora Missions” where the people not only evangelize to refugees but also compassionately reach out to them.¹³⁴ Befriending and helping them to assimilate culturally will be essential. They should view them as lost people who need to know Christ rather than “inconveniences” taking over their neighborhoods.

For the expatriates, there is the need to develop programs that will minister to their needs. Some of them come from post-Christian nations that require different methods of ministry for outreach evangelism. The locals who work with them will be encouraged to reach and invite

them to church or church-related events. ICC can have cross-cultural training that helps to interact and integrate the foreigners into the church life. Building friendships will help thaw the uncertainties or misconceptions that they might have about the local people or the church.

Time is ripe for the church to train, send, and support missionaries. These actions have been happening with some missionaries receiving financial support. Since my local church has the capacity to train and send, I will encourage an initiation of a program where potential missionaries can be trained on foreign missions and church planting. The congregants will be requested to adopt and support the missionaries while the church leadership deploys and mentors them.

ICC can also contribute to the missionary growth by raising tentmakers. As an urban church with college-educated congregation, there are a number of people who relocate to other nations on job assignments. These emigrants can be trained as tentmakers so that they can represent Christ wherever they go.¹³⁵ Such missionaries would penetrate the 10/40 Window¹³⁶ and post-Christian Western nations among other regions that closed to the gospel. Pentecostal businesspersons need to be encouraged to incorporate witnessing as they engage with both the local and international market.¹³⁷ Their business acumen is an opportunity to witness.

In training missionaries, it will be vital to speak about persecution. Spiritual warfare is at the core of mission work. Pentecostals know that their weapons are powerful enough to bring down strongholds (2 Cor. 10:5). However, boldness has gradually dwindled, and many are scared to venture out. With so many Christians preoccupied with safety and comfort, there is need to teach about the Spirit's protection when challenges arise. They should be encouraged that the Holy Spirit will be with them in the mission field (Luke 12:12). Those who remain in the church should pray that the Lord increases his harvest and sends out more laborers (Luke 10:2).

The local church where I serve faces two main challenges in establishing her Pentecostalism. These are African Traditional Religions (ATR) and prosperity gospel. For the former, some people including Christian believers infuse God's Word with animistic practices that put off those who would desire the Holy Spirit. For the latter, they teach that the Holy Spirit is a means to self-gratification and quick riches. The congregants end up disillusioned and confused about the Holy Spirit.

To counter these issues, the pastors should pray for the gift of discernment. This spiritual gift will help them differentiate truth from error as well as real workings of the Lord from

counterfeit miracles. Their preaching shall be inspired of the Holy Spirit that seeks to draw people into intimacy with Christ instead of promising worldly prosperity.

Finally, the local church should adopt the goal of seeing “10 million new believers baptized in the Holy Spirit and mobilized as Spirit-empowered witnesses”.¹³⁸ As part of the wider family of Assemblies of God, the church can factor this in her planning. The senior pastor can break down the goal and generate targets for the local church. Furthermore, to spiritually empower the congregants the local church should join hands with other churches and invite Acts in Africa Initiative for revival and refilling sessions.¹³⁹ This point will result in empowered witnesses.

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Partnership in the Gospel

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Abstract

In this article an analogy from horse training is used as a model for partnership in the Gospel. This article examines partnership in ministry reflecting upon the relationship of Paul and the Philippian church with practical application to rural ministry. Paul established a model of relationship with the Philippian church that informs believers today. Sandoz examines the foundations of biblical partnerships and in the Philippian church. He looks at the elements of the Philippian partnership which include prayer, humility, unity, and the GGospel. Then he examines the progression of the Philippian partnership: walking together in fellowship, walking together in partnership, and serving together in mission. A true partnership in mission provides a secure launching place for ministry. Partnership accomplishes more than any solitary effort working toward personal or organizational goals to fulfill the mission of God.

Introduction

The summer of 1987 provided a new opportunity for ministry and our young family moved to a small community in western Nebraska to pastor a rural church. Several men in the small-town church worked on area ranches, presenting an opportunity for time with ranchers, cowboys and recapturing a childhood enjoyment of horses. After a couple years, I purchased two untrained horses, but they needed the diligent work of training. The horses taught me important

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life lessons while responding to the riding and training process. Looking back at the experience, I learned far more than the horses I attempted to teach. The process of developing a horse into a good partner involved more than I understood, but that began an interest to study horse training. I learned through this experience the value of partnership in the Gospel. If a horse trainer can find that level of partnership, how much more should the servants of the Lord establish partnership. This paper examines partnership in ministry reflecting on the relationship of Paul and the Philippian church with practical application to rural ministry. Paul established a model of relationship with the Philippian church that informs believers today.

A video with a trainer, Shana Terry and her trained American Quarter Horse, Marty, from Down Under Horsemanship demonstrates an amazing partnership of performance and difficult maneuvers.¹ Marty performed flawlessly, while Terry gave instructions from a distance, without halter, bridle, or lead line touching the horse. The horse ran, made difficult spins, jumps and maneuvers from cues that he learned from Terry. One exercise demonstrated a partnership of trust and communication where Marty backed down a slope across a body of water and then trotted back to Terry on cue. The relationship, trust, and performance of Terry and Marty should pale in comparison to the partnership of believers to accomplish God's will for His kingdom exceeding the best partnership with a well-trained horse.

Foundations of Biblical Partnership

Partnership requires unity and togetherness to build relational bonds fulfilling God's great mission. Creation unfolds with the first example of partnership. God said, "Let us make man in our own image" (Gen. 1:26). As for the doctrine of the Trinity, some refer to the tri-unity of God which gives insight in partnership.² Charles Hodge provides further insight into this unity, "According to the scriptures, the Father created the world, the Son created the world, and the Spirit created the world: The Father preserves all things; the Son upholds all things; and the Spirit is the source of all life."³ The unity and partnership of the Trinity, beginning from the account of creation and continuing throughout Scripture, paints a picture of the potential for partnerships according to God's design.

The work of partnership in God's relationship with man continues in the New Testament primarily through the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Jimmie Evans III noted the teachings of Jesus where He expressed the necessity of sending the Holy Spirit:

While with His disciples, Jesus was a present helper and teacher, but following His departure the Holy Spirit takes on those roles (John 14:26). He will also remind them of Jesus' words, and He will testify about Jesus through the disciples (John 14:26; 15:26). Not only do these verses indicate His role, they also reveal His identity in terms of the progression of who sends Him. In 14:16, He will ask the Father to send the helper. In 14:26, the Father will send the Holy Spirit in Jesus' name. Then in 15:26, Jesus refers to Himself sending the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father. Each of these instances of sending reveals a unity and bond between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, whereby the three comprising the Trinity are displayed working in cooperation.⁴

Jesus sent His disciples in the same way and through the same Spirit. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21). The little word "as" means in the same way. In the same way the Father sent Jesus, He sends His disciples. With the same Spirit and same anointing (Luke 4:18-19), this work of the Holy Spirit finds greater expression through the New Testament. Especially in Acts where Luke identifies the Holy Spirit as the primary source and partner who leads and guides the church.

The first chapters of Acts set the stage for the remainder of the New Testament modeling reliance on the Holy Spirit to direct and guide the church (Acts 1:8, 4:31, 5:32, 6:3 6:19). The disciples trusted the Savior who baptized in the Holy Spirit and His partnership to lead the New Testament Church (Acts 15:28). The New Testament church launched with an expectation of partnership with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). This historical moment continued with varying intensity from the days of the Early Church onward. A refreshing and intensifying of this recognition of the Holy Spirit in the church occurred in the early 20th Century with a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit and a continued revival with the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, CA. This Spirit-led revival brought deep spiritual connections removing the classes separating people and released the power of partnership.⁵ The spiritual renewal possessed similarities to the Early Church on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit led people to love, celebrate, preach, plant, share, and send out people with a transformational and redeeming message.⁶ These Spirit-empowered believers became a discipling, multiplying community of faith without any regard to race, class, or gender and sent people out to plant churches, ministries, and missionaries throughout the world. This level of partnership continued through the following decades of the Pentecostal movement and remains in place to present times.⁷

That era of church brought significant partnerships from pastor to pastor, church to church and pastor to church. The culture of working and playing together reflected strong

relationships where pastors worked together on churches, summer camps, church buildings, and other projects. They often celebrated together, hunted together, and some vacationed together.⁸ The cooperation and collaboration, common in decades past with the rural church and community, finds a less common place in rural life today; yet partnership continues to give blessing and life to all those who access it.

Partnership in the Philippian Church

As mentioned above, this paper examines partnership in ministry reflecting on the relationship of Paul and the Philippian church with practical application to rural ministry. Paul established a model of relationship with the Philippian church that informs believers today. Enoch Wan and Johnny Yee-Chong Wan noted, “The Paul-Philippians partnership reveals the ingredients of successful partnerships for the twenty-first century.”⁹ The timeless truth found in Paul’s relationship with the Philippian church gives insights for organizations and individuals today.

True partnership reflected in the life of the Early Church and the disciples struggled to understand partnership. Luke 22:24-27 records,

A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at the table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves.”¹⁰

Jesus makes a differentiation between the behavior of contemporary leaders and the expectation for His disciples. He corrected the disciples in their struggle for position; Jesus measured greatness in service as a key for biblical partnership.

Ministry partnership multiplies gifts and talents released in the church and community changing the outcome by encouraging a truly spiritual mindset in the partners. When partnership works well, the wealth of knowledge and experience of all the individuals contributes to the whole organization. The Early Church deeply shared in life together; “And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need” (Acts 2:44-45). This level of partnership, unique to the early believers in the Jerusalem church, revealed a close relationship. The New

Testament does not record living at this level of community in the remainder of the book of Acts, but instead records trusting partnerships in ministry.

Biblical partnership applies to multiple areas of life for rural leaders including; partnerships in marriage, partnerships in ministerial connections, and partnerships for the kingdom.¹¹ Biblical partnership flows naturally through relationships in the rural community considered as a “fishbowl” that allow others to observe how spiritual and other partnerships take place. Rural communities possess a strong awareness because their culture functioned with high observations skills. Glenn Daman observed this relational knowledge, “Rural people may not have academic degrees, but that does not mean they are uneducated and ignorant. Their education comes through the experiences of life and common sense.”¹² Authenticity, modeled through a “life on display,” enhances partnerships and informs the understanding of a leader’s life and ministry.

The challenge of practical application of biblical partnerships occurs at some point in most relationships. The fallen nature of man tends towards an elevation of self as well as a separation from those God has called His church to love and embrace. In Section 91, the Lausanne Cape Town Commitment explained, “When we live in unity and work in partnership, we demonstrate the supernatural, counter-cultural power of the cross. But when we demonstrate our disunity through failure to partner together, we demean our mission and message, and deny the power of the cross.”¹³ The rural community tends to possess an increased awareness of this truth. From Section 92, the document then expounds further, “At Pentecost God poured out His Spirit of prophecy on all flesh, sons and daughters alike. Women and men are thus equal in creation, in sin, in salvation, and in the Spirit.”¹⁴ God’s work at Pentecost informs the partnerships for the church through the ages at its foundational level.

Elements of the Philippian Partnership

Paul modeled partnership in his letter to the Philippian church and gave insight into the nature of partnership for the broader church. The passage following the greetings in Philippians spoke to a strong ministry partnership.

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your *partnership* in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me

to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel (emp

hasis mine) (Phil. 1:4-7).¹⁵

Paul served as the founding pastor and continued to enjoy a close relationship with the Philippian church. He wrote, expressing warmth and affection to the church, thanking them for the recent gift they sent with Epaphroditus. Several notable elements strengthened his relationship with the church: prayer, humility, unity, and mission.

Paul's close relationship with the church at Philippi removed the need for strong positional authority. Lightfoot noted, "The official title of Apostle is omitted here, as in the epistles to the Thessalonians. In writing to the Macedonian Churches, with which his relations were so close and affectionate, St Paul would feel an appeal to his authority to be unnecessary."¹⁶ True partnership functions well with little positional authority because the high regard of relationship makes declaration of position unnecessary.

Paul's partnership recognized women. Fee noted three of the four names mentioned in the Bible associated with Philippi are women.¹⁷ He further stated, "...this is probably not accidental, since there is good evidence that in Greek Macedonia women had long had a much more significant role in public life than in most other areas in Greco-Roman antiquity."¹⁸ Partnerships included women in many aspects of the Early Church. In Section 94 of the Lausanne Council, the information confirmed the following: "We affirm that the gifts of the Spirit are distributed to all God's people, women and men, and that their partnership in evangelization must be welcomed for the common good."¹⁹ The Apostle Peter called husbands and wives as "equal partners" (1 Peter 3:7). Both past and present biblical partnerships include women that God has anointed for His service (Ex. 15:20, Lk. 2:36, Rom. 16:1-8).

Prayer

Paul mentioned prayer three times in the first nine verses in Philippians (Phil. 1:3-4, 9). Paul's prayer for the church and the Philippians' prayer for Paul indicated a relationship that connected Paul and the church in a praying partnership of ministry. Paul mentions prayer for

them as more than an introductory or a concluding activity—three times in a few verses, “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy...” (Phil. 1:3-4). Every time Paul thinks about the Philippian church, he thanks God for them. This foundation of prayer set a relational tone that naturally built a strong ministry partnership. Prayer remains absent in many relationships leaving the dynamic of God and His guidance and provision out of important actions and decisions. Prayer brings spiritual unity; no other exercise draws people together like prayer. Planning, preparation, and the resulting activities only reach their highest potential when people gather and pray.

Partnership without prayer lacks a key component for building together for kingdom work. The comradery and unity built through prayer, combined with the direction from the Lord during seasons of prayer, strengthens and further builds personal and organizational relationship. A simple act of joint prayer moves varied individuals toward partnerships together.

Humility

Paul reminded the Philippian church of the importance of the humble position that the Lord Jesus took in His time on earth. If Jesus maintained the posture of humility, how much more should His church live with humility in relationship to each other and before the lost world? A foundational principle of partnership admonishes believers to “...do nothing from selfish ambition or deceit...count others more significant than yourselves” (Phil. 2:3). This key understanding of relationship reduced conflict in the foundational nature of partnership.

Humility and faith give a strong foundation for partnership. Often fear keeps those in the community of faith from deep levels of partnership allowing the fear of being wounded to hinder true partnerships.²⁰ David Gray wrote, “Paul proposes downward mobility for the more affluent members of the congregation and encourages communal or shared accountability.”²¹ This approach to ministry facilitates both humility and opportunity for growth of all the church. Faith and humility become key components for those who chose to partner with others for the kingdom establishing the bridge necessary to walk forward in service.

Pride and ego receive serious blows as humility, the attitude of the Lord, becomes a driver in church life. Esteem for others provides the gracious work of humility, as a place to bring peace in the relationships. Fee explained, “Clearly, Paul is emphasizing that while entitled to the benefits of his birthright, Jesus willfully chose downward mobility, an action that would

capture the attention of a class-conscious society.”²² The humble spirit (Phil. 2:6-11) brings a quiet sense of togetherness and mutual appreciation.

Unity

Paul mentioned unity as an important factor in the understanding of relationships leading to ministry partnership. The imprisoned apostle reminds the church of his joy to hear of the good report of their unity, “...standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel” (Phil. 1:27). This position protects partnership and maintains unity in spirit, mind, and body. He then takes unity one step further in the partnership relationship, “...being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind” (Phil. 2:2). Paul encouraged the church at Philippi to remember the model of Christ and “be like minded,” which strengthened the cohesion in the group. Paul drives his descriptions deeper with each phrase, unity of thought, unity of passion, unity of purpose, and truly together. Paul explains that Christians should look to the interest of others, as one would seek to attend to one’s own self-interest (Phil 2:4-5). Division loses its strength in the partnership of true unity. The mind of Christ that voluntarily humbles itself provides a glue that sticks relationships together. Ministry in unity makes achievements together that can never be accomplished alone.

The Gospel

Labor for a purpose can strengthen partnership bonds. Paul’s connection with the Philippian church maintained a strong gospel connection. Fee noted, “for Paul ‘friendship’ has to do primarily with his and the Philippians, ‘partnership/participation’ together in the advance of the gospel, both in Philippi and elsewhere.”²³ Partnership facilitates a relational connection for the greater work of the gospel. Eight times Paul mentions the ‘gospel’ in the book of Philippians giving a picture of a partnership that spread the good news as the mission of the church.

Biblical partnership keeps the gospel central; however, many “Christian partnerships” maintain a different focus than the gospel. Partnerships in feeding programs, drilling wells, hospitals, education, and a variety of other pursuits can create drift from the primary work of the good news about Jesus and the inner work of transformation.²⁴ “Partnership in the gospel” must answer the question, “What drives this initiative?” If the gospel and the person of Jesus Christ

hold the driver's seat, the partnership "in the gospel" keeps with the biblical understanding with a strong missional focus. If the driver of the partnership can function without Christ and His mission, the existing partnership may have benevolent value; however, participants cannot say with Paul, as "partnership in the gospel" remains the central focus.

The Progression of the Philippian Partnership

The progressive and relational components to partnership passes through phases and that then compels examination. Relationships strong enough to weather the demands of ministry in partnership grow deeper over seasons of relational encounter. Paul and the church in Philippi took the time to develop genuine trusting and working relationships.

Walking Together in Friendship

Paul's friendship with the church at Philippi remained a foundation of the partnership expressed in chapter one. He wrote, "I thank God on every remembrance of you" (Phil. 1:3). This point indicated something stronger than simply speaking a short prayer, "Thank you Lord for this church." He speaks of them with fondness and joy, in warm narrative, recounting the events of his time together with them.

Friendship becomes the relational factor that makes ministry partnership of a joy and removes the drudgery from the daily grind. Paul mentions joy and love each five times in the short letter. He longed to hear from them and hear about them, and that love brought joy. (Phil. 1:4; 1:25; 2:2; 4:1; love, Phil. 1:9, 17; 2:1-2; 4:8). This purposeful friendship combined the love of the Savior and the diligence of working together for the benefit of the kingdom of God.

Working Together in Partnership

The level of partnership that Paul shared with the Philippian church differed from other churches. He wrote, "no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only" (Phil. 4:15). The church in Philippi caught the vision and their offering of support communicated, "We want to join with you." Paul reflects on the Philippians with joy, "because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now" (Phil. 1:5). He responds to this church that has joined with him in affection and joy. Ralph Harris explained, "This joy resulted

from the fellowship (*koinonia*) with him in the gospel.”²⁵ *Koinonia* demonstrated a true partnership in the work of the gospel. Paul looked forward with anticipation to hearing from the church at Philippi through the lens of partnership.

In contrast to the relationship with the Philippians, partnerships do not always go well, and some do not end well. Phil Arendt noted that Paul also experienced the challenges of partnership, “One of the most blessed but also most tragic partnerships in the Bible is that of Paul and Barnabas.”²⁶ No less than 27 times do their names appear together as mutually submissive co-workers in Acts chapters 11-15. Yet the last words spoken of their partnership and friendship reflect a challenging conclusion: “They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company” (Acts 15:39). Partnerships bring great blessings, but they also can experience misunderstanding, disagreement, and pain, as people of faith may enter with idealistic distortion and breakdowns in communication leading to painful misunderstanding. Relationships do hurt and some partnerships with people of faith may hurt; however, Paul and Barnabas accomplished great things together and in the arena of risk and rewards, the benefits exceed the price.

The Philippian church exemplified fellowship and Paul uses *koinonia* in conjunction with fellowship on three additional occasions in the book of Philippians: fellowship with the Spirit (2:1), fellowship of Christ’s sufferings (3:10), and fellowship of Paul’s trouble (4:12). Partnership connects meaningful relationships with good and difficult times and that strength continues through challenging situations.

Serving Together in Mission

The relational foundation provided the necessary structure for mission. Paul communicates one focus, the gospel. Fee wrote, “It does not take much reading of Paul’s letters to recognize that the gospel is the singular passion of his life; that passion is the glue that holds this letter together.”²⁷ Paul used the word, “gospel,” as the large tent of ministry. It involves more than just sharing the message, because it states the good news, but also the transformational work that this good news brings. The kingdom partnerships transformed lives, authenticated the message, and shared the good news. This partnership between Paul and the Philippian church produced the successful fulfillment of what Paul hoped to achieve.

The church in Philippi joined in this gospel endeavor with Paul. He describes them as, “partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of

the gospel” (Phil 1:7). Paul shares in three aspects of grace: in imprisonment, in defense, and in confirmation of the gospel. True partners share both the times of adversity and blessing and share adversity that builds relationships.

Partnership in mission requires shared values. Anthropologist Sherwood Lingenfelter provided insight into shared values with three key thoughts, “serving others...relinquishing control...and trusting God for all outcomes.”²⁸ When leaders fail to establish shared values, partnership loses influence and position. Arendt accentuated the love component, “There is no greater work or greater understanding of partnership than the building of relationships in love (Rom. 13:10; 1 Cor. 12:31b-13:3, 13; Col. 3:14; 1 Tim. 1:5; cf John 13:34-35).”²⁹ The partnership in mission advances the kingdom and builds relationships that last a lifetime. Paul and the Philippian church enjoyed and mutually benefited from the partnership in mission.

Conclusion

A true partnership in mission provides a secure launching place for ministry. Arendt connects the Godhead to partnership throughout Scripture, “The doctrine of the tri-unity of God reflects partnership within the Godhead. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit live in and provide a perfect model of partnership. This doctrine spans the whole of Scripture from beginning to end, e.g., Gen. 1:26-27; Matt. 28:19; John 14:26; 15:26; 1 Pet. 1:2; Rev. 1:4-5.”³⁰ Like a good marriage, both people advance beyond the levels that either would reach alone. Partnership avoids emphasis on position and works toward a common mission. Dee Hock, leader with VISA noted, “We must examine the concept of leading and following with new eyes. We must examine the concept of superior and subordinate with increasing skepticism.”³¹ Partnership gives more than conventional views of relationships while sharing life with another person made in the image of God. In the case of Paul and the Philippian church, they worked to increase the gospel. Some leaders mistake jockeying for positions and relationships as partnerships, but that point falls far short of revealing the picture of the Philippian church. True partnership exceeds many contemporary models to tap into the creative resources that bring great ideas and solutions to every situation.

The partnership that develops as believers work together should reflect a relationship that connects God and His work with His people. Partnership enhances the church because the gifts of each member contribute to the whole, fulfilling the God-ordained potential. This development

leads to living together, growing as a community together, and accomplishing mission together. This point then describes the relationship Paul established with the Philippian church. Partnership accomplishes more than any solitary effort working toward personal or organizational goals to fulfill the mission of God. Thus Paul, the Philippian church, and believers today then function better together.

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¹ Down Under Horsemanship. *Shana and Marty at Liberty - Downunder Horsemanship*. DU Horseman. March 10, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AYeHIQqDo2I> (accessed December 2019). The maneuvers that Shana trained Mary to do truly make a person horse partnership look easy. The level of communication between trainer and horse required a unity and understanding rarely found. If a horse trainer can find that level of partnership, how much more should the servants of the Lord establish partnership.

² Jimmie III Evans, (2016). "The Third Person of the Trinity: How the Holy Spirit facilitates Man's Walk with God." *Fidei et Veritatis: The Liberty University Journal of Graduate Research*. Volume 1 (accessed August 26, 2020). https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1027&context=fidei_et_veritatis.

³ Charles Hodges, (1981) *Systematic Theology: In Three Volumes*, Volume I (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.), 445.

⁴ Evens, "The Third Person of the Trinity," 2.

⁵ Denzil R. Miller, (2015) *From Azusa Street to Africa to the Nations* (Springfield, MO: AIA Publication), 11-21.

⁶ Miller, *From Azusa Street to Africa to the Nations*, 15-20.

⁷ The Pentecostal experienced and continues to experience a struggle to maintain partnerships, however, observations of four decades of ministry indicates seasons of refreshing that tend to remove this tendency toward division and brings unity in the church.

⁸ Sitting with older pastors for many years, provided opportunities to hear multiple stories of the partnership between pastors, churches, missionaries, and districts. The urgency of kingdom service and their sense of eschatology reflecting the soon return of Christ caused many leaders to see every person who worked diligently for the kingdom as a ministry partner. This level of partnership drove church multiplication and cooperation in ministry. They expressed a praxis of 'one in the Spirit and one in mission.' This did not represent all but many in the rural area where I first experienced church and the Pentecostal message.

⁹ Enoch Wan and Johnny Yee-Chong Wan (April 1, 2010). "Partnership in Action: A Relational Study of the Trinity and the Epistle to the Philippians" (2010, 6) *Global Missiology*. Accessed June 20, 2020. <http://www.enochwan.com/english/articles/pdf/Relational%20Study%20Of%20The%20Trinity.pdf>

¹⁰ All scripture unless otherwise noted use English Standard Version. Crossway Bibles, ed., *ESV Study Bible: English Standard Version*, ESV text edition (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Bibles, 2008).

¹¹ Most successful ministries continued to surround themselves with strong kingdom partnership. The highly individualistic nature of most of these rural people causes this to command more attention because of their willing and eager desire to partner for the kingdom. The mission of God superseded their individualistic nature and they partnered for His purposes and mission.

¹² Glenn Daman (2018).). *The Forgotten Church: Why Rural Ministry Matters for Every Church in America*, (Chicago IL: Moody Bible Institute, 2018), 45.

¹³ Lausanne Movement, The Cape Town Commitment October 16-25, 2010. "Confession of Faith and Call to Action: IIF. Partnering in the Body of Christ for Unity in Mission: Partnership in Global Mission." Accessed ADD Date). <https://lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment#p2-6>.

¹⁴ Lausanne Movement, (2010 Action: Partnering in the Body of Christ for Unity in Mission: Men and Women in Partnership." Accessed ADD Date). <https://lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment#p2-6>.

¹⁵ Paul lays a foundation of biblical partnership that becomes the model for the church throughout the ages. This extends beyond orthodoxy to orthopraxis and orthopathos where the passion of the church sees kingdom as the driving motivation.

¹⁶ JB. Lightfoot, 1953. *St Paul's Epistle to the Philippians: A Revised Text*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 28.

¹⁷ Gordon D. Fee, 1995. *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 26.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Lausanne Movement, 2010 Action: IIF. Partnering in the Body of Christ for Unity in Mission: Men and Women in Partnership.

²⁰ The faith and humility required to have true partnership tend to be met with reservations because the wounds of the past proved difficult to overcome. The trust and confidence that God can heal even the wounds caused by those we partnered with finds a difficult place to reestablish. This foundational position launches from a deep point of faith that ascertains, "People will hurt you, but God heals."

²¹ David Gray, "Christological Hymn: The Leadership Paradox Phil. 2:5-11." *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership*. Winter 2008. pdf (accessed August 30, 2020), 6.
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²² Fee, 1995. *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 28.

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The Story of the Bible and Motivation for Missions: God Desires an Eternal Relationship with People

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Abstract:

This article addresses the various terms forwarded by authors as the central theme of the Bible and looks at the historic terms regarding motivation for missions. These terms are placed on models in their relationship to eternal and temporal relevance; plots, and themes; and finally, motivations, actions, and results. The resulting theme distilled from these models shows how God loves people and how He wants an eternal relationship with them and He wants us to invite others into relationship with Him.

Introduction

Scholars have proposed many themes, motives, and purposes for the Bible generally and the motivation for missions specifically. In missiology, as in any discipline, founding principles and assumptions are important. In this article numerous proposed themes and purposes of the Bible and motivations for mission will be considered. These points will be analyzed, grouped, and evaluated. A proposed model for understanding the various terms will be presented which both reconciles the terms but also suggests the best-tested motivation for missionaries. Love will be found as the main motivation for both God and humans for mission. God loves people (us) and wants an eternal relationship with them (us), and He wants us to invite them into relationship with Him. God desires an eternal relationship with people.

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Establishing a Unifying Theme

Before one can propose a theological motif that can serve as a center or unifying theme for the Old and New Testaments, one must establish if in fact God had indeed intended a theme to emerge. The scholars who purport that there is no unifying theme seem to come from a liberal persuasion. This perspective may stem from a presupposition that prediction is not possible.¹ If the Bible were written by humans without the miraculous ability to predict the future, then numerous authors writing over hundreds of years would not have one central theme. However, scholars who believe that God inspired humans to write as the Holy Spirit moved them to see the biblical center as possible.

If a God who can see the future from the past and then inspire the Bible, then writing a book with a central theme is most reasonable. Isaiah states this precisely. “I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please” (Is. 46:10 NIV). Kaiser points out that the word “purpose” here is singular² implying that God has one purpose, which He is developing through history and revealing through the Bible. If this is indeed true, the task of biblical scholars is to find that purpose or central theme for an accurate interpretation and theology.

Central Themes Proposed

The question of the Bible’s central theme and motive for mission is unresolved in theological circles, even among those who agree that there is one purpose. Some of the themes suggested include salvation³ (of the Gentiles), kingdom⁴ (of God), the covenant⁵, “the rest of God, the work of the Holy Spirit, ... the resurrection, ... the promise, ... the blessing, the oath, the word,”⁶ redemption (in Christ)⁷, mission,⁸ *missio Dei*,⁹ worship,¹⁰ the glory of God,¹¹ God,¹² God in relationship with people,¹³ and love.¹⁴ What is the central theme of Scripture alongside the motivation for mission, and how do we reconcile these differing opinions?

Mission

Köstenberger and O’Brien state “few biblical topics are as important as mission”¹⁵ but seem to imply through the book that salvation is the central theme: “We have understood the notion of ‘mission’ . . . as intimately bound up with God’s saving plan . . . as framing the entire

story of Scripture.”¹⁶ The title of their book, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, reflects the supremacy of the salvation theme.

Kingdom

Glasser on the other hand focuses on “Kingdom” as the central theme. “This brings together the message of Old and New Testament narratives because the Kingdom of God is one of the central overarching themes of the Bible.”¹⁷ “The apostle Paul centuries later confirmed this when he stated that God’s purpose was to ‘bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ’ (Eph. 1:10).”¹⁸ Bartholomew and Goheen use the term “covenant” in the Old Testament and the “Kingdom of God” in the New Testament and emphasize redemption throughout.¹⁹

Promise

Kaiser in *The Christian and the “Old” Testament* wrestles with the central theme in detail.

This set of studies will fill what almost certainly is one of the largest vacuums in modern day believers’ handling and understanding of the Bible: an overall plan for the total 66 books of the Bible. The Bible wants us to see that despite all the variety and variegated forms of literature, subjects, and personalities, God has been at work in carrying out a single plan that embraces loads more than just the plan of salvation, the promise of the coming of the Messiah, or any other single theme . . . There is an all-embracing promise-plan of God that includes scores of other topics (such as the kingdom of God, the rest of God, the work of the Holy Spirit, the salvation of the Gentiles, the resurrection, and on and on) all in the one plan call the “Promise.”

The Old Testament never got around to focusing on a single name for this on-going plan of God but referred to it under a constellation of terms: the covenant, the blessing, the rest, the oath, the word, and more. Only when we arrive at the New Testament did the Spirit of God finally reveal that the name for this plan was the “Promise” of God.²⁰

Mission and missio Dei

In Kaiser’s other book, *Mission in the Old Testament*, he uses neither the word salvation (of Glasser) nor kingdom (of Köstenberger/O’Brien) nor the “Promise” from his earlier writing as the central theme. He calls it mission. “The Bible actually begins with the theme of missions in the Book of Genesis and maintains that driving passion throughout the entire Old Testament

and on into the New Testament.”²¹ While this is not contradictory to his term “Promise,” another word is added to the discussion.

In York we find yet another term; *missio Dei*. “The Bible tells this story of an advancing Kingdom, the mission of the triune God: providing redemption, finding the lost, and then using them to mediate kingdom blessing to those yet lost. In the story of missions, the Latin term for mission of God, *missio Dei*, refers to God’s plan to bless the nations through the gospel of Jesus Christ.”²²

Love and Eternal Relationship

Dillard and Longman suggest a multi-perspectival approach to biblical theology. “The Old Testament is about God, even to say that it is about God in relationship with people, is not really informative ... Thus as God’s redemptive plan progressed through the ages, so the history of revelation unfolded.”²³ This conclusion agrees with Lowenberg who offers, God desires an eternal relationship with man.²⁴ Bogosian argues for love over worship and glory which supports this eternal relationship theme.²⁵ And Willis similarly states, “God’s mission is to restore fellowship with man and make him a partner in world redemption,”²⁶ but later reverts and says, “the glory of God is the ultimate goal of God’s mission.”²⁷ Can these positions be reconciled?

Worship and Glory

No discussion on the motivation for mission is complete without considering what place of the glory of God and worship of God plays. The Calvinist places the glory of God as the highest theme.

“In the classical Calvinist missionary thinking, from Voetius to Edwards, the emphasis was on God’s sovereignty over everything and on the conviction that God and God alone could take the initiative in saving people.... Believers stood in awe of the majesty of God, the Wholly Other. In Protestant orthodoxy, however, the emphasis on God’s initiative became wooden and rigid; people were taught to wait in complete passivity upon the saving work of God in their souls ... In the period we are surveying here (the Enlightenment and following), by contrast, there was a growing awareness that God’s initiative did not exclude human endeavor and that His majesty was really the other side of His grace and love reaching out to humankind. In the wake of the Great Awakening, then the motif of the glory of God became wedded to other motifs, in particular that of compassion.”²⁸

This point was clearly demonstrated in the negative in 1786 when William Carey asked, “Have the churches of Christ done all they ought to have done for the heathen nations?” To which Dr. John Ryland replied, “Young man, sit down; when God pleases to convert the heathen world, He will do it without your help or mine either.”²⁹ The concept of the sovereignty of God through a Calvinist lens can be misconstrued to be a demotivating factor for mission.

John Stott and John Piper continue this theme. Stott comments on Romans 6, “The highest of missionary motives is neither obedience to the Great Commission (important as that is), nor love for sinners who are alienated and perishing (strong as that incentive is, especially when we contemplate the wrath of God, verse 18), but rather zeal-burning and passionate zeal for the glory of Jesus Christ.”³⁰ And Piper takes from Stott’s lead and makes this the opening of his thesis. “Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn’t.”³¹

Bogosian seeks to return the mission motivation from glory (the result) to love. “The bottom line is this: missions doesn’t exist because worship doesn’t; rather missions exists because the Father loves people, the Son loves people and the Apostle Paul and missionaries throughout the centuries have loved people. That love constrained them to sacrifice all that was necessary to save the lost and perishing millions who were precious to them.”³² He comments on the shift from the glory of God to the love of God as the motivation for mission is producing positive results. “Remarkably, and wonderfully, this shift resulted in such an unprecedented ingathering of souls ... which he (Kenneth Scott Latourette) termed ‘The Great Century.’” “Altogether tens of thousands of missionaries were sent out filled with a love for the lost which resulted in the number of evangelical believers in Africa, Asia and Latin America increasing from about 6,000,000 in 1900 to about 305,000,000 in 2000.... So, unquestionably, the shift in paradigms was for the best.”³³

Model for Understanding Central Themes

So, who is correct? Are these differences simply just questions of semantics? How do we reconcile these different terms, which may be used even by the same person at different times in his/her own writings? Lowenberg suggest eight criteria for a central, unifying theme: 1) comprehensive, 2) inductive, 3) inclusive, exhaustive, and integrative, 4) progressive, 5) diachronic, 6) theological, 7) relevant, and 8) flow into the New Testament.³⁴

Is there a model for understanding the apparent discrepancies? Is it possible that some scholars have prejudiced their theme? It is an “all-too-prevalent temptation to impose one’s own philosophical grid or theological framework over the testament.”³⁵ Finding the unifying theme inductively rather than from personal theological leanings is critical.

Grouping: Eternal and Temporal

A grouping of the suggested themes is helpful at this point. First, some of the suggested themes are eternal (transcending the limits of human history) such as kingdom, the rest of God, the blessing, the word, fellowship, glory of God, worship, love, and relationship between God and man. Others are temporal (they are restricted to a beginning and at times an end – such as between the fall of man and the New Heaven and New Earth) such as salvation (of the Gentiles), the work of the Holy Spirit (in mankind), the resurrection, the Promise, the covenant, the oath, mission and missio Dei. Dividing the themes into these two major categories helps one to work constructively on the problem at hand.

These groupings help organize those that are eternal into a group of “God’s eternal relationship with man” plan. The eternal kingdom rule of God is His plan for relationship with man. The rest and the blessing are in His eternal plan for humanity. Fellowship, worship, glory, relationship, and the word are eternal. All these eternal themes are concerning God’s relationship with man in this present world and with those living in heaven.

All the others, the temporal ones, deal with bringing man from his sinful relationship to a fellowship relationship with God (such as salvation, the work of the Holy Spirit in mankind, the resurrection, the Promise, the covenant, the oath, mission and missio Dei). “There was no ‘mission’ in the Garden of Eden and there will be no ‘mission’ in the new heavens and the new earth (though the results of ‘mission’ will be evident).”³⁶

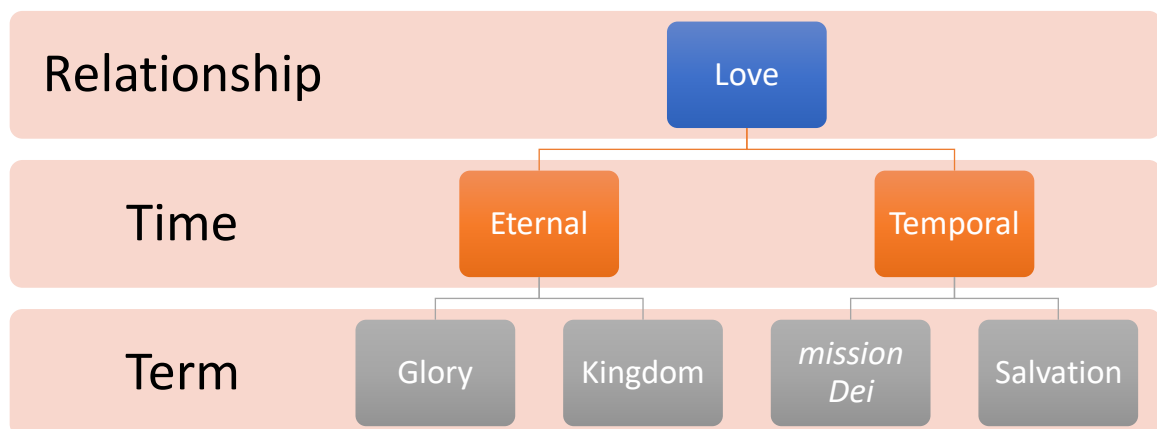
Proposed Resolution

I would like to agree with a theme among the list provided by Lowenberg,³⁷ which may serve to reconcile the central theme issue: God desires an eternal relationship with man. The central theme of the Bible includes both the temporal and the eternal. All the themes suggested seek to define mankind having the right relationship with God. The central theme of the Bible

could be defined as loving relationship or love. The central theme of the Bible and motivation for missions is this: God loves people and wants an eternal relationship with them, and He wants us to invite them into relationship with Him.

A Model Emerging

This theme provides an overarching term to contain all perspectives. For instance, the temporal purpose of God's message to man from the fall to the new heaven and the new earth is a salvation message sent through His missionary Son, Jesus Christ. This point involves restoring man's fallen relationship with God. The eternal message of the Word of God is that God will rule in the lives of his people forever in loving relationship with them. This thought involves eternal relationship between God and man. All the terms of the lists above readily fit into this larger term.



The Model Developing: Theme and Plot

In addition to distinguishing between the eternal and the temporal, it is important to distinguish between the theme and the plot. The plot is the series of events in the story that leads the reader to the conclusion, which is the theme. The theme is the main idea or lesson that the author desires the reader to grasp after reading the story. The plot is the process the character(s) go through to overcome the obstacles of the antagonist. Upon reading the story the reader comes

to understand the lesson or the theme intended by the author. In a large literary work as in the Bible, there are multiple sub-plots and sub-themes. But the question remains, is there a main theme that is developed by a main plot?

The terms previously discussed can be separated into plots and themes as well as eternal and temporal. The words and phrases that would be categorized as plots are salvation, the resurrection, the Promise, the covenant, the oath, mission and *missio Dei*. The words and phrases that would be categorized as themes are the work of the Holy Spirit in mankind, establishing the kingdom, the rest of God, the blessing, the word, fellowship, glory, worship, love, and relationship between God and man.

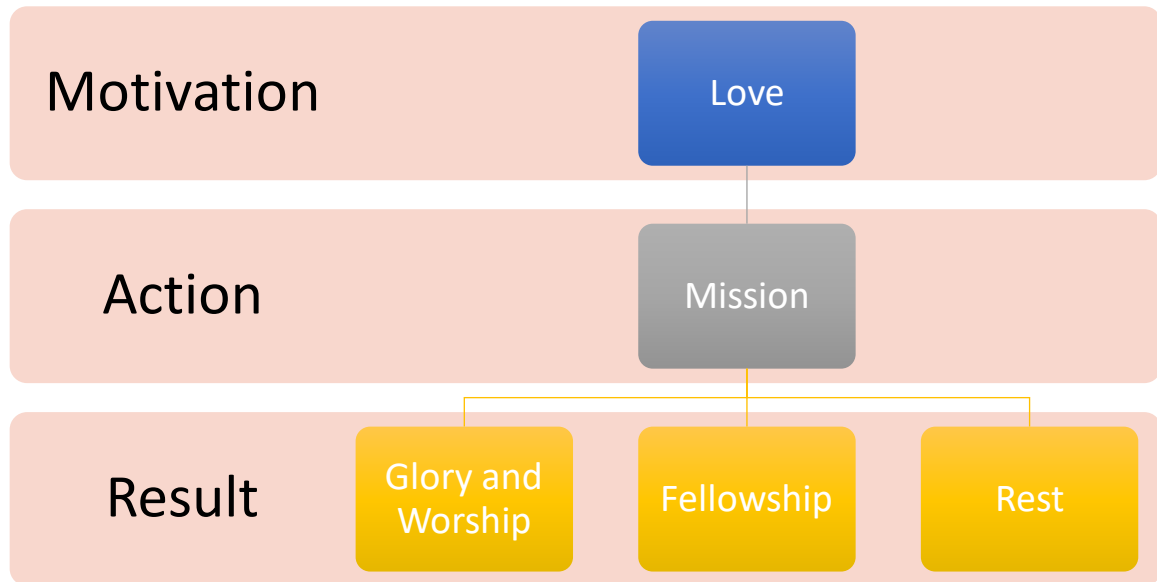
This theme, God loves people and wants an eternal relationship with them, and He wants us to invite them into relationship with Him, is found throughout Scripture. The tripartite formula, “I will be your God; you shall be my people, and I will dwell in the midst of you”³⁸ is found in part or in full at least 28 times from Genesis to Revelation.³⁹ All three elements of this formula speak of God’s desire for relationship with man. A similar formula “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt” is found about 125 times in the Old Testament.⁴⁰ Love is also held as the highest eternal element in 1 Corinthians 13, especially in verse 13: “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love” (TNIV). Drummond called this the greatest thing in the world.⁴¹

It seems logical that a God who knows the future and desires to communicate with His creation would oversee the writing of His book. This God of order and design stated He had a purpose (Is. 45:10). It is the task of scholars to find that purpose to correctly divide the Word of truth. The many themes, which have been suggested by noteworthy scholars, fit in two major categories: temporal and eternal. The overarching theme that includes them all is God desires an eternal relationship with man.

A Comprehensive Model: Motivation, Action, and Result

A final comprehensive model which seeks to incorporate the various themes, sub-themes, plots, sub-plots, eternal and temporal elements is to look at the motive, actions, and results demonstrated in the Bible. John 3:16 can be used to illustrate this model. For God so loved (motive) the world that He gave His one and only Son (action), that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life (result).

Using this model, the motivation for missions (which is parallel to the theme or eternal purpose) is love. The action (which is parallel to the plot or most often the temporal) is mission. Words such as *missio Dei*, salvation, covenant, oath, promise, and word are the actions God takes to bring humans into loving relationship with Him. The result (which above is often seen as the theme) is eternal life. The other results listed in the discussion above in this model are results include glory, worship, fellowship, and rest.



Conclusion

This is important to grasp as one seeks to develop a missiology, to then understand the Great Commission as it relates to unreached people groups, and then eventually helps to form a model for church planting among all peoples of the earth. If love is the motivation of missions and central theme of the Bible, this will determine how one acts, lives, and conducts missionary endeavors.

The theme and story of the Bible and motivation for missions is this thought: God loves people and wants an eternal relationship with them, and He wants us to invite them into relationship with Him. God desires an eternal relationship with people.

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¹ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 30.

² Ibid.

³ Köstenberger and O'Brien state "few biblical topics are as important as mission"³ but seem to imply through the book that salvation is the central theme: "We have understood the notion of 'mission' . . . as intimately bound up with God's saving plan . . . as framing the entire story of Scripture."³ The title of their book, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, reflects the supremacy of the salvation theme. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 268.

⁴ Glasser on the other hand focuses on "Kingdom" as the central theme. "This brings together the message of Old and New Testament narratives because the Kingdom of God is one of the central overarching themes of the Bible." "The apostle Paul centuries later confirmed this when he stated that God's purpose was to 'bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ' (Eph. 1:10)." Arthur F. Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God's Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2003), 20-21.

⁵ Bartholomew and Goheen use the term "covenant" in the Old Testament and the "Kingdom of God" in the New Testament and emphasize redemption throughout the text. Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004). And The Bible Project leans toward "covenant partnership" as the theme, The Bible Project, *The Story of the Bible*, Introduction to the Bible, "The story of the Bible is about humanity's cycle of self-destruction and the Messiah who will restore the covenant partnership between God and humans." <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/the-story-of-the-bible/>, accessed November 19, 2021.

⁶ Kaiser says, "There is an all-embracing promise-plan of God that includes scores of other topics (such as the kingdom of God, the rest of God's characteristics and actions, the work of the Holy Spirit, the salvation of the Gentiles, and the Resurrection) all in the one plan call the 'Promise.'" Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. *The Christian and the "Old" Testament* (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1998), xiii-xiv.

⁷ Jeremy Kimble and Ched Spellman, *Invitation to Biblical Theology: Exploring the Shape, Storyline, and Themes of the Bible*, Grand Rapids, Kregel Academic, 2020. And Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004).

⁸ In Kaiser's other book, *Mission in the Old Testament*, he does not use the word "Promise" from his earlier writing as the central theme. He calls it mission. "The Bible actually begins with the theme of missions in the Book of Genesis and maintains that driving passion throughout the entire Old Testament and on into the New Testament." Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. *Mission in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 7. And C. T. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*, Downers Grove, IL, IVP Academic, 2006, 18, states, "Missions is, in my view, a major key that unlocks the whole grand narrative of the canon of Scripture."

⁹ In York we find yet another term; *missio Dei*. “The Bible tells this story of an advancing Kingdom, the mission of the triune God: providing redemption, finding the lost, and then using them to mediate kingdom blessing to those yet lost. In the story of missions, the Latin term for mission of God, *missio Dei*, refers to God’s plan to bless the nations through the gospel of Jesus Christ.” John V. York *Missions in the Age of the Spirit* (Springfield, Missouri: Logion Press, 2000), 19-20.

¹⁰ John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad* 2nd Ed (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 1993, 2003), 17.

¹¹ John Stott, *Message of Romans: God’s good news for the world* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 53.

¹² Dillard and Longman suggest a multi-perspectival approach to biblical theology. “The Old Testament is about God, even to say that it is about God in relationship with people, is not really informative ... Thus as God’s redemptive plan progressed through the ages, so the history of revelation unfolded.” Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 36.

¹³ Dillard and Longman, 36 Lowenberg, 79.

¹⁴ Philip S. Bogosian “‘Missions Exists Because Worship Doesn’t’ ... Or Does it?” *Journal of Asian Mission* Vol. 11, Nos 1-2 (March – September 2009), Asian Theological Seminary, Quezon City, Philippines, 8.

¹⁵ Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 19.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 268.

¹⁷ Arthur F. Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God’s Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2003), 20.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁹ Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004).

²⁰ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. *The Christian and the “Old” Testament* (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1998), xiii-xiv.

²¹ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. *Mission in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 7.

²² John V. York, *Missions in the Age of the Spirit* (Springfield, Missouri: Logion Press, 2000), 19-20.

²³ Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 36.

²⁴ Douglas P. Lowenberg, *Current Issues in Old Testament Interpretation: Doctoral Study Guide* (Lomé, Togo: Pan-Africa Theological Seminary, 2006), 77-79.

²⁵ Bogosian, 8

²⁶ Avery T. Willis, Jr. *The Biblical Basis of Missions: Your Mission as a Christian*. (Nashville: Convention, 1984), 12.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁸ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991) 285.

²⁹ Joseph Belcher, *William Carey: A Biography* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1853) 19.

³⁰ Stott, 53.

³¹ Piper, 17.

³² Bogosian, 8.

³³ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

³⁴ Lowenberg, 77-78.

³⁵ Kaiser, 1991, 22.

³⁶ Köstenberger, 251.

³⁷ Lowenberg, 79.

³⁸ York, 29.

³⁹ Gen. 17:7-8, 28:21; Ex. 6:7, 4:22, 19:5-6; Lev. 11:45, 22:33, 25:38, 26:12, 44, 45; Num. 15:41; Deut. 4:20, 29:12-13; Jer. 7:23, 11:4, 24:7, 30:22, 31:1, 33, 32:38; Ezek. 11:20, 14:11, 36:28, 37:37; Zech. 8:8, 13:9; 2 Cor. 6:16; and Rev. 21:3-7.

⁴⁰ Kaiser 1991, 33-34.

⁴¹ Henry Drummond, *The Greatest Thing in the World*, London: Forgotten Books, 2016, title page.