

From Roland Allen to Rick Warren: Sources of Inspiration Guiding North American Evangelical Missions Methodology 1912-2012

A paper presented to the Southeast Regional Meeting of the Evangelical Missiological Society, Wake Forest, North Carolina, March 24, 2012

By
Gary R. Corwin

While biblical revelation is always the foundational inspiration for engaging in missions in all times and seasons, it has not always been the primary methodological inspiration. It certainly was for Roland Allen, however, as the missionary methods of the Apostle Paul were not only an historical biblical narrative to learn from, but also THE model to be followed by all the Lord's servants since.

In the 100 years since Allen's famous, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* there have been a number of other thought and/or cultural paradigms that have risen to significantly impact missions methodology for varying lengths of time. The category lines for these could certainly be drawn in a variety of ways, but the following provide at least a sense of what some of the inspirational paradigm streams may be:

The Power Stream

The Colonial Context

Pax Americana

Setting Global Agendas

The Science Stream

Social Science Missiology

Church Growth

Technology

The Organizational Stream

Professionalization of Missions

Corporatization of Missions / Managerial Missions

Business as Mission

The Ecclesiastical Stream

Theological Precision Missions

Amateurization of Missions

Mega-church Missiology

The Biblical Model Stream

The Gospel Mandate – Paul as model

Holistic Mission – Jesus as model

It should come as no surprise to thoughtful readers that not all of the inspirational paradigm categories above are of equal impact or longevity. However, though they have not all been equally beneficial, they have each played a role in influencing the

direction and intensity of missions from North America over the last century. We turn now to look at each of them more specifically.

The Power Stream

Whenever cultural forces occupy the same geographical space there is normally a jockeying for prominence, position, and influence. When the power position of those cultural forces is out of balance, it is almost axiomatic that one side becomes the master and the other the mastered. This is true even when the relationships may be largely benign as, by and large, those of the missionary enterprise in the last two centuries have been. It is a function of that basic power relationship that very few of the points of interaction are left untouched or untainted by that circumstance. That is not to say, therefore, that little that is good can come out of it, but it is to say that many things, including missions methodology, are profoundly affected.

The Colonial Context

The subject of colonialism is one that has received a great deal of attention in many academic disciplines, including missiology. According to missiologist Jonathan Ingleby it can be defined this way:

Colonialism refers to the occupation and possession of territory by which an empire or nation state attempts to establish a permanent outpost beyond its borders. Accordingly, the idea of colonialism usually has a civilizational component, not simply the occupation of territory, but also cultural and religious transformation. The almost universal use of the term as a pejorative refers not only to the use of force against indigenous peoples, but also the imposition of a

‘foreign’ world-view on them. Because the spread of world Christianity has largely taken place in the modern era, it has been difficult to disassociate it from colonial history.¹

It is also true however, as Ingleby acknowledges, that the missions enterprise “often described itself in ‘colonial’ language (‘the spread of civilization’, ‘advance’, ‘progress’, and the like)...”²

There can be little doubt that the mindset described above also had a profound impact on missionary methods. The cultural patterns and preferences of missionaries were greatly influenced by their own backgrounds, loyalties, and tastes. They shared many of the assumptions about indigenous peoples and civilization held by those tied more directly to the colonial government apparatus. As a result there was often an imposition of Western practices and patterns at the expense of local options in things like “church order, family customs and styles of leadership, even including buildings and clothing.”³

Missionaries thus fathered a ‘colonial’ mindset which disregarded the legitimate claims of the context and encouraged attitudes of paternalism and dependency. This danger was identified early on in the modern missionary movement (consider the attempts of leaders such as Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson to popularize self-governing, self-financing and self-propagating churches) but the problem persisted.⁴

What has been said of Venn and Anderson in their work in the middle years of the 19th century also included the work of others, both contemporary and later. One contemporary, A. J. Crowther, the famed Nigerian missionary and church leader trained at Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone, worked with Venn in the Church Missionary Society and pioneered missions outreach along the Niger River, becoming the first Anglican bishop of the Niger territories. Subsequent influential advocates of

similar views included among others John Nevius, Roland Allen, and Melvin Hodges, whose writings and influence we shall discuss briefly in a later section.

Pax Americana

This Latin term that means “American Peace” is inspired by earlier examples of enforced peace through overwhelming military and economic power such as that exhibited in the *Pax Romana* of the Roman Empire and the *Pax Britannica* of the British Empire. Unlike either, however, it was and is not primarily a colonizing endeavor, but rather an influencing endeavor leveraged by the power of economic largesse and military protection. While it has been used in reference to various times and contexts including post-Civil War North America, and internationally in the period between the World Wars of the 20th century, it is used most often in reference to the period since the end of World War II in 1945.⁵

While different from the *Pax Britannica* in not being primarily a colonizing endeavor, the *Pax American* nevertheless has in numerous contexts been an inspirational source for many of the same less admirable aspects of missions methodology – many of the things that are perhaps most easily summarized under the rubric of cultural insensitivity. As Lord Acton so accurately articulated, “Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” The fact that American missionaries have during this period usually been far more wealthy than those among whom they were working, and that they are identified with a powerful and highly influential nation, has often impacted relationships in negative ways even where nothing but the best of intentions have been present. For those interested in reading

further on this subject, the 1950s book, *The Ugly American*, and Jonathan Bonk's, *Missions and Money*, are probably as good a place as any to see how some of these dynamics play out.⁶

Setting Global Agendas

More subtle than either the Colonial Contexts or the *Pax Americana*, the international agendas and the consultations, conferences, and networks that have developed from them have in too many cases been a reflection of the rich and powerful maneuvering the less powerful to pursue their priorities and cooperate in their plans. The fact that Western cultures and particularly the American one are so individualistic and entrepreneurial are certainly instrumental factors in this being so, sometimes to beneficial effect in spite of everything, but often producing considerable negative impact as well. Fortunately, more recent years have witnessed an increasingly more level playing field characterized by developing mutual plans together, rather than the poorer and the weaker simply serving as pawns in the process of achieving the purposes and plans of the richer and the more powerful.

An interesting measure in this regard is to simply compare those present, and those giving plenary addresses at the most important global evangelical missions conferences of the last 100 years – Edinburgh 1910, Lausanne I (1974), Lausanne II in Manila (1989), and Lausanne III in Cape Town (2010). The measurable progress that has been made in North/South and East/West power parity in the global church (or perhaps better described as godly interdependence) as seen through these events is encouraging, but clearly still a work in process.

The Science Stream

It would almost be un-American if American evangelical missions methodology did not reflect a significant degree of influence from the experimental, inquisitive, and pragmatic nature of the American people that has provided the underpinning for scientific inquiry and its practical application throughout our history. The reality is that it has indeed reflected significant influence historically and continues to do so presently. This reality is visible in the emergence and widespread influence of social science missiology in missions practice generally, in the application of Church Growth theory more particularly, and in the important role that technological innovation has always played in missionary endeavors from North America.

Social Science Missiology

Social science missiology is a relatively recent adaptation of the last several decades in which various disciplines and aspects of the social sciences have been employed to serve missions purposes. As the social sciences themselves are a relatively recent academic specialization, the integration of them as a resource in addressing the tasks of missiology is in effect an innovation employing an innovation.

Enoch Wan describes the particulars:

Specialization and integration in the social sciences are relatively recent developments in the larger academic disciplines in comparison with studies of the

humanities (e.g., philosophy, literature) and the natural sciences (e.g., physics, chemistry). That they are *social* evidences the people component; that they are *sciences* shows commitment to certain methodological presuppositions across each of the fields. While there are several ways of classifying and categorizing disciplines in the social sciences ... in their relationship to mission and missiology they include anthropology, communication, economics, education, linguistics, modernization theory, politics, psychology, religion, research, and sociology.⁷

Overarching the benefits to be gleaned from particular social science disciplines is the synergistic benefits that integration of insights from those disciplines provide when viewed in conjunction with the insights that Scripture and history bring to the table.

Examples of the actual utilization of these various disciplines in missionary preparation are varied and numerous:

For example, many missions departments in Bible schools and seminaries have anthropologically trained faculty and offer courses in missionary anthropology. With increasing regularity, missionary candidates are screened by psychological testing prior to their acceptance by the organization and field appointments. Missionaries receiving language learning training are exposed to descriptive and applied linguistics. Many are trained in communication studies to enhance their ability to share Christ with non-Christians in culturally relevant ways.⁸

Likewise, in field ministry locations around the world, missions practitioners are employing various tools and methods of the social sciences to address serious issues, and to help answer questions like these suggested by Wan:

What are the social structures and undergirding cultural values that drive people of a given culture? How do they see the world and communicate their thoughts and feelings about their perceptions to others? How do people associate with each other and what rules govern role and status in a given society? What social and cultural dynamics are involved in religious conversion? How are people motivated, and how do they make decisions? What are the means of social change in a culture? What is the impact of urbanization on traditional religion and worldview? Many more such questions could be stated. All focus on the human realities with which every culture must grapple.⁹

One of the most vigorous and distinctive applications of an interdisciplinary use of the social sciences in missiology and missions methodology has been in what is known as the Church Growth Movement. To it we now turn.

Church Growth

According to C. Peter Wagner, one of Church Growth's best known and most prolific advocates, it can be defined this way:

Church Growth is that discipline which investigates the nature, expansion, planting, multiplication, function, and health of Christian churches as they relate to the effective implementation of God's commission to "make disciples of all peoples" (Matt. 28:19-20). Students of church growth strive to integrate the eternal theological principles of God's Word concerning the expansion of the church with the best insights of contemporary social and behavioral sciences, employing as the initial frame of reference the foundational work done by Donald McGavran.¹⁰

Wagner goes on to point out that its "defining focus ... is evangelism" and that which most clearly separates it from related groups is its explicit recognition of its founder, Donald A. McGavran.¹¹

It is beyond the scope of this paper to say much about McGavran, but suffice it to say that his experience as a Disciples of Christ missionary in India provided the springboard for the movement. Growing in his frustration with the slow progress of missionary endeavor as he observed it, he undertook a vigorous effort to determine a better way to go about it. The result, after much research and analysis (based in large measure on the research of Methodist Bishop Wascom Pickett's on "Christian mass movements" in India) was the publishing of *The Bridges of God* in 1955. With this event, the Church Growth movement was born.¹²

The impact of this movement on modern missiology has been profound, spreading worldwide through the influence of its disciples, its fountainhead at Fuller Seminary, and through the major evangelical institutions where courses in church growth are taught. On missions methods per se the influence has been particularly pronounced with regard to evangelistic expectations: that believers in many cultures are far more likely to come to faith in Christ in groups through community decisions than as individuals going against the grain of their society.

Reflection on these kinds of “people movements” or “mass movements,” as they are known, led in turn to what may be the most discussed and controversial aspect of Church Growth thought and practice – the homogeneous unit principle. As McGavran put it quite succinctly, this principle stresses “...human beings like to become Christians without crossing, linguistic, class, or racial barriers.”¹³ This writer has heard it expressed even more colloquially, though certainly less precisely, as “Birds of a feather flock together.” Wagner describes the primary assumption involved:

The homogeneous unit principle assumes that the focus and presentation of the gospel which has reaped an evangelistic harvest in a given people group might not have the same effect on other people groups, not because of the theological core of the gospel message, but because of irrelevant cultural trappings often attached to the gospel message by missionaries. Missionaries untrained in cultural anthropology tend to imagine that churches planted in any culture will look and sound and act like their own churches. The disastrous results of such cultural nearsightedness are extensively chronicled in missiological history.¹⁴

Critics of the homogeneous unit principle (HUP) have expressed concern about it having racial or class overtones. A fair reading of McGavran as a whole, however, would tend to alleviate that concern, though one can picture particular settings, particularly some urban ones (as McGavran acknowledges) where strict adherence to the HUP would certainly be counter productive. In conclusion it is reasonable to say,

as Wagner summarizes, “The homogeneous unit principle is a serious attempt to respect the dignity of individuals and the social units to which they belong, and to encourage their decisions for Christ to be religious decisions rather than social decisions.”¹⁵

Technology

Ralph Winter used to speak of pursuing a “wartime” lifestyle rather than a “simple one.” In doing so he was suggesting that while it is a good thing for God’s people, and especially for missionaries, to live simply, that should not preclude the use of the most advanced technology available to achieve God’s purposes. As in wartime, world evangelization efforts deserve the best equipment and technological means that can be accessed to get the job done. While there have been exceptions from time to time, that point of view has dominated missions methodology in the modern era.

Whether one looks at the pioneering work in jungle aviation, the use of about every band and frequency in radio communication for both internal communications and globe-circling evangelism and discipleship by groups like HCJB and Trans World Radio, satellite television programming, or more recent applications of internet and other digital communication tools, technology has long been a boon to missions endeavor and a key factor influencing missions methodology. The impact has not always been entirely positive, however.

Whereas in the past missionaries have often been distant in terms of time and geography, with E-mail they are just a click of a mouse button away. Some churches and individuals have sought to communicate more often with the missionaries and expect more and “better” reporting from them with less delay.

With the current “faddishness” of E-mail some missionaries find themselves swamped with E-mail requests awaiting immediate response. The senders of E-mail ... knowing that their messages arrive virtually as they send them, often expect answers back in the same way and in the same day.

Mission administrators then raise several crucial questions: Do the benefits justify the investment in the equipment and training costs? Are the technologies contextually appropriate? Will the use of new technologies facilitate the reaching of the mission field or not? Many technologies are available and affordable, but irrelevant or distracting.¹⁶

The astute reader will notice how dated the above quotation from the year 2000 sounds, technology having generated so many new tools and possibilities available today adding to the general concerns about distractibility and counter-productive activity – skyping, online communication of ministry events, etc. Clearly, technology has been and will continue to be a great boon to missions methods, but it is equally true that it will almost always come with inherent temptations to misuse, as well as with unintended consequences.¹⁷

The Organizational (or Business) Stream

Similar to the science stream in terms of its pervasive influence, it would be most surprising if the American love affair with the organizational methods of business did not rub off on the missions enterprise. After all, as Calvin Coolidge famously said, “The business of America is business.” The fact is that business methods and models have indeed rubbed off on the missions enterprise, both to good and not so good effect.

Unlike most of the streams we are looking at, however, many of the elements in the organizational stream that have impacted missions have been subtle in their

influence. They are often, therefore, more easily recognized on a personal or anecdotal level than through documentary resources. In whatever ways they are recognized, however, there can be little doubt that they have been significant in their influence on missions methods.

Professionalization of Missions

In using the term “professionalization of missions” the intent is to convey the idea that missions agencies evolved from being primarily “Mom and Pop” operations to becoming much more professional in the sense of having and using best practices from the business world in areas such as finance, personnel systems, leadership development, accountability, and board structure. As with any evolutionary process, change in these areas took place over time, but momentum really seemed to build from the 1970s onward.

Probably no one was more instrumental in this process than Ted Engstrom. In addition to his own leadership roles with Youth for Christ and World Vision (which he is personally credited with turning from near bankruptcy to one of the largest Christian relief and development agencies), Engstrom had an enormous influence, particularly through his writings, on church and para-church agencies of all kinds to be more effective in their administrative operations using sound business practices and principles. Over the course of his long and fruitful life (1916-2006) he wrote more than 50 books with titles like *The Making of a Christian Leader: How to Develop Management and Human Relations Skills* (1978), *The Pursuit of Excellence* (1982), and *The Best of Ted Engstrom on Personal Excellence and Leadership*

(1988). He was also a key founder of the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability.

Though Engstrom was a key man in this development, he was by no means alone in it. Many other business leaders who were as serious about following Christ as they were about being successful in business used their knowledge and experience to assist missions agencies and their leaders to be as effective in managing their organizations as they were in evangelism, teaching or other direct ministry. By way of example, we shall mention only Ken Hansen, Ken Wessner, and Bill Pollard all of whom have played key roles in the leadership of Servicemaster Corporation, and all of whom were very active over many years in consulting, leading seminars, and/or writing to assist various missions agencies with administrative and leadership issues. This writer personally remembers a seminar led by Ken Hansen in the late 1980s or early 1990s for global SIM leadership that was among the best he has experienced. The missions enterprise from North America owes much to such people.¹⁸

Corporatization of Missions / Managerial Missions

As with most good things in life, when a good thing is taken too far it can be problematic. This seems clearly to be the case with regard to the business world's influence on the missions enterprise. The problems that have arisen have come not so much in the arena of how missions administration ought to function (the systems improvements described above have been almost universally helpful), but over what should constitute agency priorities and whether goals which are not easily quantifiable, or not accomplishable within a predictable amount of time, are worth

focusing upon. That is not to say that this approach, too, has not had benefit (e.g. encouraging more systematic and energetic attention to least reached peoples), but it is to say that it also has a major downside.

Samuel Escobar, a leading Latin American missiologist has been an outspoken critic of this approach, which he terms “managerial mission.”

The term managerial missiology refers to a trend within evangelical missiology that emphasizes the management of mission practice. It developed in North America during the last third of the twentieth century. It came from a cluster of institutions connected to the Church Growth school and movements such as AD 2000 and Beyond. It is an effort to reduce Christian mission to a manageable enterprise.

Every characteristic of this missiological trend becomes understandable when perceived within the frame of that avowed quantifying intention. Concepts such as ‘people groups’, ‘unreached peoples,’ ‘homogeneous units,’ ‘10-40 window,’ ‘adopt a people’ and ‘territorial spirits’ ... express both a strong sense of urgency and an effort to use every available instrument to make the task possible. One way of achieving manageability is precisely to reduce reality to an understandable picture, and then to project missionary action as a response to ‘a problem’ that has been described in quantitative form.¹⁹

Escobar has rightly taken to task the tendency toward a “quantification is everything” bias in this approach. There are other concerns with it as well. The strong “closure” emphasis (“we must get the job done so Christ will return”), for example, which Escobar also mentions, seems to overstep the prophetic meaning of some of Christ’s statements (e.g. Matt. 24:14, Mark 13:10) and suggest an almost mechanical control of God’s timetable through human effort.²⁰ The great losers in these too often unbalanced approaches are the loss of focus on the teaching task in “making disciples,” the loss of clarity in communication, as well as loss of attention to the “loving our neighbors as ourselves” task inherent in the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:34-40).²¹

There is at least one other aspect in the corporatization of missions that should be mentioned before moving on. It is the increasingly common tendency to inflate the value of corporate background and skills as preparation for missions-related staff positions in churches, and for board and administrative leadership of mission agencies. While there are certainly important aspects of these roles for which such preparation is quite helpful, the diminishing weight being placed on pastoral and missions training and experience for these roles would certainly seem to indicate a shift in emphasis. Time will tell whether a healthy balance is being achieved.

Business as Mission

While it is not possible within the scope of this paper to say much about it, we must at least mention the much newer, and potentially profoundly positive contribution of the business world to missions described as “business as mission.” It is both rapidly developing and rapidly growing in its impact on missions methods around the globe. Tom Steffen said the following in his introduction to *Business as Mission: From Impoverished to Empowered*, a volume he co-edited with Mike Barnett for the Evangelical Missiological Society in 2006:

“To put it bluntly,” wrote Doug Pennoyer, Dean of the School of Intercultural Studies, Biola University and President of the EMS, when announcing the call for BAM papers, “Business as mission (BAM) is a work in progress. It is a field that needs definition, theological clarity, and missiological focus. Our call for papers for our regional conferences is timely, and the culminating discussions and presentations at the national level puts us in a place to make a pivotal contribution in a sea of some confusion and even controversy”.... While this volume will certainly not bring total clarity to the topic, it will provide some needed definition and precision while at the same time identify areas that will demand further discussion, clarification, and maturity.²²

Beyond what can be said here, the reader is encouraged to explore further information on this rapidly evolving contribution to missions methods. There are several helpful resources described in the notes.²³

The Ecclesiastical Stream

The way that both local churches and denominations have engaged with missions through the years has had a significant influence on missions methods. Because the nature of that engagement has evolved over time, that influence has evolved as well. It has, however, remained significant, whether one is looking at the decisions that have flowed from commitments to theological distinctives and denominational goals, or the impact of ubiquitous short-term missions endeavors, or the wide reach of the even newer phenomenon of mega-church missiology. We shall look now at each in turn.

Theological Precision Missions

Denominations exist because there are theological or practical commitments that a group believes are distinctive and important enough to warrant a separate institutional base from which to advance those commitments. Sometimes these commitments focus on issues that truly are of primary importance, and sometimes the issues involved are of secondary importance at best. Determining which is often in the eye of the beholder. In either case, these commitments will very often have the effect of skewing decisions about missions involvement and priorities in a particular direction.

Because of its distinctive commitments, any denomination or church body will almost never gather for their annual meeting without asking the question, “How many more churches like us have been established around the world?” Their missions-focused personnel will know this question is coming, and will almost instinctively orient their activities in the period leading up to it to produce a result that provides a positive answer to that question. In terms of missions methods this means that focus will almost always be skewed toward more receptive areas for evangelism and church planting, than to less receptive ones. While there are certainly exceptions to this among denominational missions both past and present, as agencies have responded to issues of need or to relational connections, the general tendency seems beyond question.

Interdenominational missions by contrast have tended to be driven by a different question, “What peoples or groups are being overlooked or underserved by current missions strategy?” That is not to say that these agencies are not also susceptible to the pressure to produce results to please their constituencies, but their constituencies are generally as much concerned with seeing efforts taking place among the least reached or “resistant” peoples as they are to seeing measureable results in terms of churches planted or new believers won to Christ. That bias generally leads most of them to engage the least reached as their primary strategy, although many specialty interdenominational missions (e.g. campus focus, theological education, radio, aviation) often operate on different criteria altogether.

Amateurization of Missions

Ralph Winter coined the phrase a decade and a half ago to describe the tsunami of short-term missions that were becoming such an integral and important part of the missions enterprise from North America. He used the term by way of a warning that the flood of inexperienced and untrained individuals participating might do significant harm to the long-term progress of the gospel around the world. He cited the “Student Volunteers” of a century prior (the backbone of a movement lauded by most missions historians) as an example of what can go wrong:

... college educated “Student Volunteers” took one look at the level of education of many African pastors and declared them unqualified. They pushed real leaders out of the pulpits. Serious setbacks resulted in most fields. It took twenty, thirty, forty years for the volunteers to relearn much of what earlier missionaries had already discovered.

Is “amateurization” always what happens when a new movement to the field takes place? ... even “short-termers have their problems. Can a little knowledge be a dangerous thing?

It did happen before. But we are reluctant to admit it. Popular interest in mission is so scarce that we mission professionals are inclined to accept “interest” – warts and all.²⁴

Not all missiologists are as pessimistic as Dr. Winter seems to be above, however.

Harold R. Carpenter, writing in response to Winter’s article, makes the point that the primary problem may be something other than amateurization:

Ralph Winter has raised a critical issue in contemporary missions.... However, some of his assumptions and terminology are open to question. (1) Is it a fair assumption to call the 20,000 young people who went to the field between 1886 and 1936 amateurs? Most of them had as much or more preparation than the missionaries of the “Great Century.” (2) Were the results of the Student Volunteer’s ministry as negative as Ralph paints them? Some of the great names of missions come from the group of Student Volunteers, and in terms of results almost no century in history has produced the quantitative results of this century.

Winter's concerns are valid, but I would suggest that the issue is more one of commitment than of preparation. Short-termers make some valuable contributions to missions, but a missionary can not really be effective without learning the language and culture of a people. This requires a long-term commitment and ministry. Are we really talking about re-amateurization of missions or a lack of commitment to life-long service?²⁵

Whatever one concludes on whether it is truly an "amateurization" of missions or something else, it is certainly clear that short-term missions have greatly impacted the way missions from North America are thought of, and have both aided and complicated the way missions is carried out around the globe. In conclusion, A. Scott Moreau has summed up well the positives and negatives of the movement:

On the down side, the explosion in short-term missions has not yet resulted in a corresponding increase in long-term missionaries. Even worse, short-term missions may very well be resulting in inoculation against long-term commitment for the coming generation. It is also true that increasingly the goal of short-term missions has shifted from participation in the Great Commission or exploration of long-term possibilities to personal fulfillment. Without proper preparation, they can also strengthen stereotypes that play into the Western myth of White Man's Burden, enabling participants to see their intended audience as objects who are ever needy rather than people who have something to share. They can build dependency and leave local initiatives stifled until the next short-term team comes through.

On the up side, more than one million people every year are being exposed in some way to new cultural settings and ways of living. When properly prepared, many of them gain a more realistic view of what missionary life involves, and through their efforts accelerate ministry or other work in significant ways. Those in their teen years can be changed for the rest of their lives even if they do not themselves become long-term workers. Mature adults can offer encouragement and wisdom in situations when needed. Professional health personnel can save lives and enable restoration to physical health. Business people can help local businesses start or grow in ways that will be important to their economies.²⁶

Only time will tell which kind of impact will ultimately be dominant.

Mega-church Missiology

The last several decades have seen the development of a new and significant force in the missions enterprise from North America – the engagement of influential mega-churches in global missions in ways unique to their particular ethos and experience. This new engagement often finds its impetus to a great degree in the assumption that their experience of growth in numbers and influence is replicable elsewhere around the world by following the same principles and methods. Or, like the huge growth in short-term missions, the assumption is simply that we can do missions directly at least as well as the agencies that have too long held a near monopoly in connecting to the churches and needs of other peoples and nations, and in generating creative methodology to do this well.

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to even attempt mentioning all the forms these efforts take, a brief look at three models that come quickly to mind will serve to provide some sense of the variety and scope of these endeavors. The first of these is the global network of the Willow Creek Association, an outreach of the Willow Creek Church of Barrington, Illinois and its founding pastor, Bill Hybels. It describes itself this way:

Founded in 1992 by [Bill Hybels](#), the Willow Creek Association (WCA) is a not-for-profit organization that exists to maximize the life-transformation effectiveness of local churches. We do this by stirring up and calling out the core leadership of churches around the world, encouraging them to follow their “holy discontent” as they build life-changing communities of faith. We then equip these leaders with next-step solutions to impact spiritual transformation of their people, their communities, and the world.

At the core of the ministry is deeply held belief that God’s ordained plan to redeem and restore this world for Christ is through the church. In fact, we believe that is the hope of the world.

For nearly 20 years, the WCA has developed a respected history of excellence and innovation in serving local churches and their leaders. In that time, the WCA has inspired and trained more than one million church leaders and has created and distributed millions of church resources into tens of thousands of churches representing more than 90 denominations. With more than 10,000 Member Churches in 35 countries, WCA leadership training events are now held in more than 250 cities in 50 countries each year.²⁷

The Association's appeal for new members adds further insight on the nature of its methodology:

Participating in the Willow Creek Association provides transformational experiences and resources that will strengthen you and your church in Kingdom-important ways:

- Enlarge your own heart and capacity as a leader
- Sharpen your understanding of God at work in your setting
- Discover proven solutions God is using in churches around the world to accomplish His purposes
- Create the resource mix and flow that matches your unique situation
- Experience encouraging training through a variety of channels
- Join conversations with others from whom you can learn and share²⁸

The second mega-church model is that of "City to City," a ministry of Redeemer Church and its founding pastor, Tim Kellar, in New York City. It forthrightly describes itself this way:

Redeemer City to City is the new organizational name for the Redeemer Church Planting Center (RCPC) and Redeemer Labs. [Enter Site](#)

Our mission is to help leaders build gospel movements in cities. We hope to build a global movement of leaders and practitioners who build upon and adapt our "DNA" to create new churches, new ventures, and new expressions of the gospel of Jesus Christ for the common good.²⁹

Its work is global and ambitious, and very much connected to reproducing its own model in the great cities of the world. They work very hard at it and are experiencing considerable success. We will leave it to the reader to pursue more detail as desired.

The final, and perhaps most ambitious, mega-church model we shall look at is that of Rick Warren and Saddleback Church that operates out of a number of locations in southern California. Its “peace plan” is its unique contribution and is self-described this way:

The PEACE Plan is a massive effort to mobilize Christians around the world to address what Pastor Rick calls the “five global giants” of spiritual emptiness, corrupt leadership, poverty, disease, and illiteracy by promoting reconciliation, equipping servant leaders, assisting the poor, caring for the sick, and educating the next generation.

PEACE is a movement to mobilize Christians

in churches working together to...

Plant churches that promote reconciliation

Equip servant leaders

Assist the poor

Care for the sick

Educate the next generation³⁰

More specifically those who visit their website are invited to “sign up” and become part of helping to make these things happen. Various resources are offered to help those who do to keep track of the projects they are already involved with, to find a church elsewhere in need of help, to become part of an existing work or to start a new one, to get training and resources, to see what others in their community are doing, and to easily find works that they are passionate about and able to support in various ways.³¹ Figures for how many are taking advantages of these opportunities were not readily available.

The Biblical Model Stream

Of all the streams of thought and activity influencing missions methods today and over the last two centuries, none have been more dominant, or borne the weight of authority more powerfully, than those based upon the biblical models. While various nuances of approach can be noted within them, these models boil down basically to two – the Pauline apostolic model, and the holistic mission model. The former seeks to follow the evangelism and church planting and nurturing methods of Paul, and the latter seeks to fashion itself more directly after the incarnational word and deed ministry of the Lord Jesus. The historical reality is that each of these models often look a lot more like each other in their actual application than the strongest advocates of each would like to admit. There is often considerable heat generated, however, in how the two camps characterize the work of the other.

The Gospel Mandate – Paul as model

The apostle Paul was keenly aware of his special calling as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. He preached the gospel boldly to them. He lived in the light of it at great personal sacrifice. And he defended it against perversion in both his writings and in personal debate. He also pursued his ministry using methods that have since been the primary model for establishing indigenous churches (i.e. those “that fit naturally into their environment”).³² John Mark Terry rightly traces pretty much all attempts to establish indigenous churches back to the apostle Paul as their source.

Missionary efforts to establish indigenous churches are attempts to do missions as the apostle Paul did. A brief recital of Paul's missionary methods demonstrates this fact. Paul served as an itinerant missionary, never staying more than three years in any city. Paul's approach to evangelizing regions was to plant churches in cities from which the gospel would permeate the surrounding areas. He never appealed to the churches in Antioch or Jerusalem for funds with which to support the new churches. Rather, he expected the churches to support themselves. Paul appointed and trained elders to lead all the churches he planted. He gave the churches over to the care of the Holy Spirit, but he also visited them and wrote to them periodically.³³

Terry goes on to trace the development of "indigenous church" thinking with brief descriptions of the key principles advocated by a series of its champions: Henry Venn (1796-1873) and Rufus Anderson (1796-1880) advocating the necessity of establishing "three-self" churches capable of self-support, self-government, and self-propagation; John L. Nevius (1829-93) and "The Nevius Plan" that was adopted and had such great success in Korea; Roland Allen (1868-1947) whose books *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (1912) and *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church* (1927) have been so impactful in the 20th century; and Melvin Hodges of the Assemblies of God, whose book *The Indigenous Church* (1953) updated and popularized for many what had gone before.

Terry concludes his article with a helpful listing of indigenous principles that reflect a composite of the thinking of those discussed above. We conclude this section with it:

Missionaries who seek to establish indigenous churches should keep these principles in mind as they begin their work: (1) Missionaries should plant churches with the goal in mind. This means that the desired outcome – an indigenous church – should influence the methods employed. (2) There will always be a dynamic tension between supracultural doctrines and variable cultural traits. (3) Church planters should expect the churches to support themselves from the beginning. (4) Bible study groups should be encouraged to make basic decisions even before they organize as churches. (5) Missionaries should encourage new congregations to evangelize their communities and seek

opportunities to begin new churches. (6) Missionaries should always use reproducible methods of evangelism, teaching, preaching, and leadership. (7) Missionaries should give priority to developing nationals to serve as church leaders. (8) Missionaries should view themselves as temporary church planters rather than permanent pastors. (9) Missionaries should resist the temptation to establish institutions and wait for the national church to take the initiative. (10) Missionaries must allow the national churches to develop theologies and practices that are biblical yet appropriate in their cultural settings.³⁴

Holistic Mission – Jesus as model

“The aspiration for a more comprehensive view of mission became evident in evangelical circles as early as the Wheaton Congress of 1966.”³⁵ So says Rene Padilla, a leading Latin missiologist and an early advocate for what is today commonly known as “holistic mission.” He goes on to trace the increasing energy behind the concept, noting the role of John Stott at Lausanne I (1974) with the Lausanne Covenant’s affirmation of the duty of socio-political involvement, as well as summarizing Stott’s opening address on “The Biblical Basis of Evangelism”:

“... the mission of the church arises from the mission of God” and should, therefore, follow the incarnational model of Jesus Christ. On that basis, he argued that “mission ... describes everything the church is sent in to the world to do,” as those who are sent by Jesus Christ even as the Son was sent by the Father, that is “to identify with others as he identified with us” and to serve as “he gave himself in selfless service for others.”

The affirmation that the actual commission itself must be understood to include social as well as evangelistic responsibility seems to suggest a real integration of the vertical and the horizontal dimensions of mission, which is at the very heart of *holistic* mission.³⁶

Doug McConnell, reflecting on the growing acceptance of holistic mission thinking, points to the shift that took place between the first and second Lausanne Congresses. Both the Lausanne Covenant (1974) and the Manila Manifesto (1989) “... focus on evangelism, yet the latter emphasizes the issue of the whole gospel,

demonstrating the wide acceptance of social concern as an integral part of the Good News of Christ.”³⁷ McConnell also expands and sharpens the definition of holistic mission:

Holistic mission is concerned with ministry to the whole person through the transforming power of the gospel. While holistic mission affirms the functional uniqueness of evangelism and social responsibility, it views them as inseparable from the ministry of the kingdom of God. Therefore, holistic mission is the intentional integration of building the church and transforming society.³⁸

Concern over the integration of evangelism and social concern under the rubric of “missions” has generally not existed because of a low view of social concern as an inappropriate and unnecessary response of believers who are faithful and obedient in following Christ. On the contrary, the traditional agencies that emphasize evangelism and church planting do so in spite of their own significant labors to improve the social conditions of people in the areas of health, education, clean water, agriculture, etc. The point of concern, therefore, comes not over whether all these things ought to be done, but over whether they all constitute the special task of missions. The fear, invariably, is over whether this broadening definition of missions, to basically include all that Christ has commanded us to do, will in the end diminish the most central missions task that is evangelism and church planting among all peoples. The sad evidence that this may in fact be happening is that many of the newer agencies that claim their commitment to holistic mission are actually “halfistic,” ministering to human need but avoiding verbal proclamation of the gospel like the plague.

McConnell states that “Holistic mission is the commitment to all that the church is called to do, which includes the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) and the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:37-40).”³⁹ Others, including this writer, would suggest that

the commitment he describes is broader than missions. It is the commitment of all obedient followers of Christ. The uniquely missionary task is encompassed in the command to “make disciples” as outlined in the Great Commission.

Conclusion

Missions methods over the last 100 years have received, and sometimes suffered the impact of, a great many influences. We have looked at five streams of influence that have flowed together to help shape missions from North America into the broad river that we know today – the power stream, the science stream, the organizational stream, the ecclesiastical stream, and the biblical model stream. While the river is sometimes fast flowing and energetic, and sometimes slow and muddy, it does keep flowing and it does seem to “self-correct” (or should that be “spirit-correct”) by the Lord’s grace and the Spirit’s oversight. There is another very powerful stream flowing now that is likely to bring more new life and correction to the river’s flow than anything else currently bringing influence to bear – the Globalization of Missions stream.

However confused or misguided missions from the West may be or become, the huge and growing stream of energetic missions coming from the Global South and East is changing, and will continue to change, both the ministry landscape everywhere and the methods being used even by the Global North. Hopefully that change will not simply be an abdication of personal responsibility through “proxy missions,” in which the Global North only sends money and not its youth, but a genuinely interdependent time in which all the gifts of God distributed around the

globe, in personnel and resources, work together to achieve his great purposes in the world.

¹ Jonathan C. Ingleby, "Colonialism/postcolonialism," in *Dictionary of Mission Theology: Evangelical Foundations*, ed. John Corrie (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 62.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ingleby, 63.

⁵ Wikipedia, s.v. "Pax Americana," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pax_Americana (accessed March 9, 2012).

⁶ William J. Lederer and Eugene Burdick, *The Ugly American* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co.), 1958 and Jonathan Bonk, *Missions and Money* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books), 1991.

⁷ Enoch Wan, "Social Sciences," in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2000), 885.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Wan, 886.

¹⁰ C. Peter Wagner, "Church Growth Movement," in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2000), 199.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), 163.

¹⁴ C. Peter Wagner, "Homogeneous Unit Principle," in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2000), 455.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Edgar J. Elliston, "Technology," in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2000), 935.

¹⁷ For a fuller discussion of this subject see Ron Rowland, "The Contribution of Technology to Missiology," in *Missiology and the Social Sciences: Contributions, Cautions and Conclusions*, Evangelical Missiological Series 4, ed. Edward Rommen and Gary Corwin (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1996), 84-101.

¹⁸ Rob Moll, "Ted W. Engstrom Dies at 90" in *Christianity Today* July 2006 (web only), <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/julyweb-only/129-13.0.html?start=1> (accessed March 17, 2012).

-
- ¹⁹ Samuel Escobar, "Managerial missiology," in *Dictionary of Mission Theology: Evangelical Foundations*, ed. John Corrie (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 216.
- ²⁰ For an excellent discussion of the "closure" issue see Craig Ott, Stephen J. Strauss, with Timothy C. Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2010), 186-190.
- ²¹ For discussion of these potential dangers see Gary Corwin, "Just Where Are the Frontiers?" *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 28:2 (April 1992): 118-123; Gary Corwin, "Editorial Response: In Pursuit of Good Communication in Mission," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 9:4 (October 1992): 117-118; and Gary R. Corwin, "Sociology and Missiology: Reflections on Mission Research," in *Missiology and the Social Sciences: Contributions, Cautions and Conclusions*, Evangelical Missiological Series 4, ed. Edward Rommen and Gary Corwin (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1996), 19-29.
- ²² Tom Steffen, "Introduction," in *Business as Mission: From Impoverished to Empowered*, Evangelical Missiological Series 14, ed. Tom Steffen and Mike Barnett (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 2006), 15-16.
- ²³ C. Neal Johnson and Steven Rundle, *Business as Mission: A Comprehensive Guide to Theory and Practice* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2009); Mark L. Russell, *The Missional Entrepreneur: Principles and Practices for Business as Mission* (Birmingham, Alabama: New Hope Publishers, 2009); and Steven L. Rundle and Tom A. Steffen, *Great Commission Companies: The Emerging Role of Business in Missions* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003).
- ²⁴ Ralph D. Winter, "The Re-Amateurization of Missions," <http://www.dake.com/EMS/bulletins/winter.htm> (accessed March 19, 2012).
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ A. Scott Moreau, "Epilogue: The Drama of Today's Short-term Missions," in *Engaging the Church: Analyzing the Canvas of Short-term Missions*, ed. Laurie A. Fortunak and A. Scott Moreau (Wheaton, IL: Evangelism and Missions Information Service, 2008), 230.
- ²⁷ Willow Creek Association, "Who We Are," <http://www.willowcreek.com/about/> (accessed March 21, 2012).
- ²⁸ Willow Creek Association, "Membership," <http://www.willowcreek.com/membership/> (accessed March 21, 2012).
- ²⁹ Redeemer Presbyterian Church, "Redeemer City to City," http://www.redeemer.com/about_us/church_planting/ (accessed March 21, 2012).
- ³⁰ Saddleback Church, "The PEACE Plan," <http://www.saddleback.com/aboutsaddleback/signatureministries/thepeaceplan/> (accessed March 21, 2012).
- ³¹ Saddleback Church, "The PEACE Plan: Why Sign Up?" <http://thepeaceplan.com/WhySignUp> (accessed March 21, 2012).
- ³² John Mark Terry, "Indigenous Churches" in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2000), 483.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 485.

³⁵ C. R. Padilla, "Holistic mission," in *Dictionary of Mission Theology: Evangelical Foundations*, ed. John Corrie (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 157.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Douglas McConnell, "Holistic Mission," in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2000), 449.

³⁸ Ibid., 448.

³⁹ Ibid., 449.