

## SOLIDARITY IN GLOBAL MISSIONS

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## *Introduction*

The mission, vision, and values of the MAGL are what drew me to the program. For me, the signature themes of biblically informed practice, missional church, and global diversity are what stood out and created several “aha moments.” Before entering the MAGL, I had been a student of the missional church movement. The writings of Guder, Roxburgh, Hirsch, Frost, Stetzer had given flesh to what I had been thinking and feeling. However, something remained absent. Then it hit me as I began to interact with our diverse cohort. I had been blinded by my own white, Western cultural assumptions. I missed a global perspective. Although I would have been the first to champion the command of Jesus to “make disciples of *all nations*,” the “nations” remained absent from my life and ministry until I had the opportunity to interact with my fellow sojourners like Eleazar, Carl, Mihai, Diana, Jacqueline, Stavros, Jason, Safia, and Henry. New questions began to arise; questions like: Why are the non-Western voices missing from the missional conversation?<sup>1</sup> What is the church’s role in God’s global mission? Is cross-cultural mission only for the missionaries? Less than one percent are foreign missionaries. So, if mission is the exclusive domain of missionaries, where does that leave the other ninety-nine percent of us? Furthermore, there is only one category of believers: disciples. There is no hierarchy of the called with missionary at the top. Therefore, as His disciples, with our mosaic of God-given gifts, how is the church God’s instrument for blessing all nations?

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<sup>1</sup> I am aware that the missional conversation began because of Leslie Newbigin’s question “Can the West be converted?” However, as the conversation has developed over the years, the global scope of mission seems to have been lost.

Much of the missional literature is focused on helping the church rediscover its missional agenda in North America, but the global church seems lost in the conversation. We can no longer countenance a fortress North America for the church of Jesus Christ. Cardoza-Orlandi is concerned that the mission movement from North America generally lacks self-reflection and a sense of humility. This is how he describes the need.

Christians in North America need to be aware of the contextualized character of the gospel. This means that the church needs to take seriously how the cultural economic, social, political, and religious situation of its context shapes its understanding of the gospel and its missional task.<sup>2</sup>

To understand this is “to contribute to the liberation of the mission of the North American church from the captivity that constrains it.”<sup>3</sup> We need to look seriously at the framework of what it is we are doing in mission, challenging our tendency to want to fix things. We need to become more self-critical so as to hear the missional agenda from a global partner.

After the horrifying earthquake in Haiti on January 12, 2010, the arrest of ten church members on a “rescue” mission in Haiti provides churches with a sobering reminder of the need for the American church to convey a humble attitude that takes time to learn from the people they serve. As an American I realize the difficulty of breaking outside of our culture. To hear about international issues on the nightly news is rare unless of course it’s about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan or because a tragedy strikes. But even these issues tend to fall out of collective consciousnesses rather quickly. When was the last time a story from Haiti lead the news cycle? Our American isolation and cultural illiteracy creates a weakened mission for those who do

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<sup>2</sup> Carlos F. Cardoza-Orlandi, *Mission: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 17.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

nothing about it. However, we can also become cultural sponges if we are willing to humbly learn. This church group paid and is paying the consequences of their arrogance and not learning how to navigate the cultural/legal waters of Haiti.

Understand that I am not criticizing their motives, their compassion for orphans, or their devotion to Jesus and his mission in the world. But I am criticizing their arrogance; their seemingly unwillingness to obtain even a vague understanding of the Haitian culture/law. I wonder if anyone on the team spoke Creole. I wonder if they attempted to contact local churches and church leaders. Or, at the very least, tried to work with Western missionaries serving in Haiti. I wonder if anyone on the team researched Haitian adoption laws. I wonder if anyone considered the fact that these thirty three kids, ranging in age from two months to twelve years, may have surviving parents. USA Today reported that most of these “orphans” did.<sup>4</sup>

In the end, we need to realize that what may have been needed most in the midst of the devastation were Haitian churches taking the lead and Americans taking a more supportive role. This will mean new patterns of cooperation and new forms of partnership for mission. Therefore, the thesis of this paper is, we must ready ourselves for a global partnership of churches and mutuality between them. This partnership, while indispensable for mission in today’s globalized world, will challenge those who hold positions of power deeply. People with money and power easily become blind to the resources that churches from other countries bring to the table. The urge to “go it alone” is quite powerful. Too frequently, our unilateral disposition causes others to question the North American approach to global missions. More often than not, the desire is to

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Carpenter, “Missionary Arrogance,” [diningwithsinners.org](http://www.diningwithsinners.org), February 2, 2010, <http://www.diningwithsinners.org/2010/02/02/missionary-arrogance/> (accessed June 4, 2011).

call all the shots and control all of the resources. This attitude of superiority discredits the mission of the church.<sup>5</sup> We must ask: If the mission of the church is to bring the good news of the kingdom of God to all nations by participating in God's work in the world, how then can we possibly go at it alone?

### *God's Mission Among the Nations*

Nothing in history happens by chance. Every geographical move of every human being who ever lived happens within the overall will and sovereignty of God. The fact that God created nations (Gen 25:23; Ps 86:9-10), languages/cultures (Gen 11:1, 6, 7, 9), and determined the place (space) and the timing (time) of our habitation. Acts 17:26-29 implies that He not only uses the nations, but designs and employs the nations for His own glory. Every person and people group has a place and a role to play in God's redemptive history.

The embedding of Christianity into new cultures is derived from the central event of our faith, the Word becoming flesh and taking us residence among us (John 1:14).<sup>6</sup> Crossing cultural boundaries has been the lifeblood of historic Christianity. Moreover, Christians around the world share two things in common: our humanity and the biblical text. However, both our humanity

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<sup>5</sup> Gary V. Nelson, Gordon W. King, and Terry G. Smith, *Going Global: A Congregation's Introduction to Mission Beyond Our Borders* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2001), Kindle edition.

<sup>6</sup> All Scripture references are from the Holman Christian Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.

and the Bible are immersed in our own cultural particularity. At its core, Christianity is revealed as an act of translation. That is, Christ taking human form (Phil 2:6-11).<sup>7</sup>

The locality of faith often creates a tension that often results in territorialism and division among the world's churches. This is unwarranted because the tension that exists between our own particularity and the universal scope of God's mission is grounded in the narrative of Scripture itself. Genesis ten and eleven focus on the nations of humanity and their scattering. So it is only fitting that when one nation is chosen in Genesis twelve, all nations are the beneficiaries of that choice.

The Lord said to Abram: Go out from your land, your relatives, and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, I will curse those who treat you with contempt, and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you (Genesis 12:1-3).

The call of Abraham is the beginning of God's answer to the evil of human hearts, the strife of nations, and the groaning of brokenness of his whole creation. This call included the promise that his descendants would be a blessing to the nations. Ultimately, God purposed Israel's divine election for the sake of the nations. Therefore, God's sovereign election of Israel may not be defined merely in terms of privilege. Election has a purpose. This is why we may not regard Israel's function as an isolated entity separated from the world. Rather Israel and their election should be viewed as a people through whom God acts on behalf of the world. Moreover, mission to the nations is deeply rooted in the calling of this particular people and how they saw themselves in that story. So, throughout the Old Testament their story is told as a defense against idolatry (Deut 4:9-40), as a motivation for obedience (Deut 6:20-25), as corporate rebuke (Ps

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<sup>7</sup> Mark Laing, "The Changing Face of Mission: Implications for the Southern Shift in Christianity," *Missiology: An International Review*, vol. 34, no. 2 (April 2006): 166.

105-106; Mic 6:1-8; Amos 2:9-11), and as an anchor for hope (Jer 32:17-25) to assure that “all flesh would see the glory of God” (Is 40:5).<sup>8</sup>

Any reader of the Old Testament narrative could easily conclude that it is wrapped up in Israel’s celebration of God’s mission. One particular nation has been chosen so that they may be a universal blessing to all nations. Fortunately the story does not end here. Rather, Israel is subsequently represented by one man, Jesus, through whom God’s redemptive plan would indeed be made available to all. Following the resurrection of Jesus, no longer is Israel to be encapsulated in the midst of the nations. Instead, they are to face outward to the nations, proclaiming the presence of the Kingdom of God and issue the call the repentance and belief in the gospel to all.<sup>9</sup> The focus is no longer centripetal in nature, but centrifugal. We are to “make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19) not by suppressing our diversity and particularity, but by sanctifying it so that all nations may bring glory to God in their own unique ways.

*A Missional Hermeneutic – Multiplicity of Perspectives*

Revelation 5:9 celebrates the decisiveness of the work of Jesus who “redeemed people for God by [His] blood from every tribe and language and people and nation.” Moreover, mission has transformed the map of global Christianity. The whole center of gravity of world Christianity has moved from the West to the South and East. Christopher Wright explains.

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<sup>8</sup> Wright, Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006), 64-65.

<sup>9</sup> Arthur F. Glasser, Charles Van Egen, Dean S. Gilliland, and Shown B. Reford, *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God’s Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 187.

At the start of the 20th century, only ten percent of the world's Christians lived in the continents of the south and east. Ninety percent lived in North America and Europe, along with Australia and New Zealand. But at the start of the 21st century, at least 70 percent of the world's Christians live in the non-Western world—more appropriately called the majority world.

More Christians worship in Anglican churches in Nigeria each week than in all the Episcopal and Anglican churches of Britain, Europe, and North America combined. There are more Baptists in Congo than in Britain. More people in church every Sunday in communist China than in all of Western Europe. Ten times more Assemblies of God members in Latin America than in the U.S.<sup>10</sup>

In the midst of this new reality, in order to perceive the richness of global Christianity, we must include the recognition the multiplicity of perspectives and contexts from which people read the biblical texts. What one person of one culture brings from that culture to their reading of the biblical text may illuminate dimensions of the text itself that someone of another culture may not see so clearly.<sup>11</sup> This variety goes right back to the New Testament. The four Gospels themselves were written with four different audiences in mind. The Epistles are all written to different churches in different cultural contexts. Acts tells a more complicated story. From Jerusalem the church spread. Antioch became the place where followers of Jesus were first called Christians and became a center of westward expansion. Additionally, Ephesus became the center for the spread of the gospel in Asia Minor. And Paul was eager to make Rome a base to take the gospel further west into Spain. Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Rome were all simply one center among many.<sup>12</sup> James Brownson writes,

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<sup>10</sup> Wright, "An Upside-Down World: Distinguishing Between Home and Mission Field no Longer Makes Sense," christianitytoday.com, January 18, 2007, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/january/30.42.html> (accessed May 29, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*, 38-39.

One of the most obvious phenomena of early Christianity is the way the movement crossed cultural boundaries and planted itself in new places... This tendency of early Christianity to cross cultural boundaries is a fertile starting point... because it places the relationship between Christianity and diverse cultures at the very top of the interpretive agenda.<sup>13</sup>

So, whether we like it or not, every reader of the Bible is an interpreter. But we tend to think that our understanding is the same thing as the Holy Spirit's. However, "we invariably bring to the text all that we are, with all of our experiences, culture, and prior understandings of words and ideas."<sup>14</sup> Therefore, we need to be sensitive to the fact that the biblical text can only be interpreted within its own context (exegesis) and that the application (homiletics) of its message demands an awareness of our own cultural context. In other words, every interpretation must do justice to the text and at the same time connect with our own common humanity. So, within the reality of a new global church, fresh reading of Scripture is possible through the shared work of Christians from various parts of the world. In addition, only through a shared work with other Christians from various parts of the world, can a hermeneutic truly be missional.

Therefore, the best way we can fully understand the complexity of the gospel message is to learn from others who are seeing the story from different angles. Soong-Chan Rah, quoting Andrew Walls, describes how different cultures interact with the gospel through an analogy of an experience at a theater. Walls writes, "Everyone in the packed auditorium can see the stage, but

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<sup>12</sup> Wright, "An Upside-Down World: Distinguishing Between Home and Mission Field no Longer Makes Sense."

<sup>13</sup> James V. Brownson, "Speaking the Truth in Love: Elements of a Missional Hermeneutic," in *The Church Between Gospel and Culture*, ed. George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 233.

<sup>14</sup> Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 18.

no one sees the whole of it. . . The focus varies according to [one's] place in the auditorium."<sup>15</sup> Rah adds, "The great drama of the gospel message is being revealed on the stage but no seat in the auditorium provides the complete view. . . Simply relying on one point of view in the auditorium us an insufficient experience."<sup>16</sup> For this reason, it is "imperative for the entire global community of believers to learn from one another in order to more fully understand the depth of the character of God."<sup>17</sup> It takes the whole church, in all of its differences, to know the fullness of God's mission in the world. Only in a diverse partnership can we illustrate the power of the reconciling nature of the gospel.

### *Elephants Dancing With Mice*

Miriam Adney illustrates how destructive the "making a difference in the world," Western missions can be at times by retelling a story an African friend had told her.

Elephant and Mouse were best friends. One day Elephant said, "Mouse, let's have a party!" Animals gathered from far and near. They ate. They drank. They sang and danced. Nobody celebrated more and danced harder than Elephant. After the party was over, Elephant exclaimed, "Mouse, did you ever go to a better party? What a blast!" But Mouse did not answer. "Mouse, where are you?" Elephant called. He looked around for his friends, and then shrank back in horror. There at Elephant's feet lay Mouse. His little body was ground into the dirt, smashed by the big feet of his exuberant friend, Elephant. Sometimes, that is what it is like to

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<sup>15</sup> Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1998), 2-4. Quoted in Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 135.

<sup>16</sup> Rah, 135.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

do mission with you Americans,” the African storyteller commented. “It is like dancing with an Elephant.”<sup>18</sup>

What this story illustrates the need for joint venture among the world’s churches rather than this type of discord in which one in a perceived position of power squashes the “disadvantaged.” Living in a global world that in which individuals can connect instantly with one another through social media, necessitates a constant questioning of our assumptions and our prejudices. The church must learn to engage the world together. This will demand a newfound humility that facilitates a deeper encounter with people who are different than us.<sup>19</sup> Otherwise, we are constructing a unidirectional line of power flow, however unintentional this may be. Yet many followers of Jesus are unable to deal creatively with themselves as strangers and therefore are unable to engage in serious theological reflection on “the other” in the light of the Gospel. That is to work together from everywhere with everyone.

Any global understanding of mission requires us to revisit Jesus’ own approach to ministry.<sup>20</sup> His advice to those he chose and sent will be of particular importance. Whether we generalize from the twelve, the seventy two, or all of those who proclaimed the Gospel beyond their locality the commission given is the same.<sup>21</sup> For this reason, in order to begin a theological reflection on global partnerships, we ought to start with the assertion that Jesus himself appeared

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<sup>18</sup> “Can Elephants and Mice Dance Together? Relating to Your Hosts,” [www.catalystservices.org/bm~doc/elephants-and-mice-dance.doc](http://www.catalystservices.org/bm~doc/elephants-and-mice-dance.doc) (accessed June, 8, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> Nelson, King, and Smith, Kindle edition.

<sup>20</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2007), 402.

<sup>21</sup> B. Malina and R. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 346.

to the people in the towns and villages of Palestine as a stranger. As charismatic, challenging, and convincing as he was in preaching his vision of the reign of God, at the end of the day, even those with whom he resided with in his hometown failed to recognize him (Mark 6: 1-5). He chose to live amongst us. He lived in a particular time and place, he spoke particular languages, and he lived in a particular culture in order to complete his mission on earth. The Gospel writers (apart from his first and last few years) see his life as so ordinary for the time and place that do not record it in any detail. Therefore, to the degree that we understand Jesus as a wandering stranger will we understand the missiological implications of entering a culture that is not our own. That is, to be a stranger and invited in (Mt 25:34-36).

Moreover, never did Jesus contend himself with a position of dominance or superiority, or with merely inviting others to come and receive. “*He sat at other people’s tables as a guest, he was a recipient, he allowed others to minister to him*” (Mt 9:9-10).<sup>22</sup> Nor does he surround himself with goods, prestige, or influence (Mt 6:19-21). So when he sends the disciples he has already shown what must be their attitude (Mk 6:1-13; 30). Far from gathering and sending disciples in a centrifugal drive only after the resurrection, Jesus was committed to a mission of outreach among, with, and even as the stranger: a self-emptying rather than self-fulfilling ministry (Phil 2:1-12).

### *Dethroning the Missionary*

Humanity’s diverse responses to the singular story of God and the reality of His presence are disclosed in the mission of His people. For that reason, churches from North, South, East,

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<sup>22</sup> Anthony J. Gittins “Beyond Hospitality? The Missionary Status and Role Revisited.” *International Review of Mission*, vol. 83, no. 330 (1994): 400.

and West can form partnership in global mission for the glory of God. From its beginnings, Christianity has always been a worldwide movement with a divine commission to bring the good news of the gospel to all peoples, at all times, and in all places. The global nature of our faith is rooted in the universal mission of the Triune God who is professed as the creator of the whole universe. His providence extends beyond Israel to the entire human race. The risen Christ, despite being embedded in a particular place, at a particular time, among a particular people, is the universal Lord of all at whose name “every knee will bow . . . and every tongue confess” (Phil 2:10). Christian diversity is the necessary product of the Incarnation. However, the question is not a need to hear from diverse voices rather a question of if those voices will speak up and actually be heard. This process, I believe, begins and ends with dethroning the missionary.

The missionary is no longer at the center of mission activity. For years, the missionary was the axis by which the church understood and did global mission. Everything was brokered through them. Missionaries were the lens through which us at home looked at the world. This has changed. The missionary has been dethroned because of greater global access. No longer are the missionaries the lens through which the church looks. We can no longer assume that “our way” of looking at things is the “only way.”

However, America has become a highly individualized society. Our capitalistic structure encourages us to reach higher and higher. As a result, our society has become more and more stratified. The more stratified our society has become, the fewer people we have as peers. The fewer peers we have, naturally results in fewer reciprocal relationships. What we have instead of mutual relationships are different spots on an endless hierarchy or strata. To this end, the idea that the most powerful position is at the top is deeply ingrained. So even in church life we

typically divide Christians into three tiers, beginning with the laity, followed by the pastor with the missionary on the top. The laity are generally viewed as passive spectators who support the pastors. The pastors and the rest of the “leadership team” have answered the call of God, have been trained, and are the ones who do the work of the ministry which supports/promotes the missionary. The missionaries are those who have left friends and family to go into remote, dangerous corners of the world to engage whom they find there with the gospel. In the minds of many, they are in another ministry world altogether and hold a perceived position of power. So people lust after it, strive for it, and place it on a pedestal at conferences. Unfortunately, even with the common acceptance of this hierarchy, it simply is not a biblical structure. The Apostle Peter understood the calling on the life of every believer. This is why he writes in his first epistle: “Based on the gift they received, everyone should use it to serve others, as good managers of the varied grace of God” (4:10). All God's people are called to the ministry, all God's people are sent on mission. Nevertheless, often times the focus is on the what, where, who, and which we are all about. Where has God called you? Who has God called you to serve? Where has God called you to go? But these questions are upside down. We should not focus on the what, where, who, and which that we are all about. We should focus on the what, where, who, and which God is all about. The question, therefore, should be, “Where do I fit into God’s mission? And once we realize that God’s mission is to bless every tribe tongue, and nation, the answers to the what, where, who, and which will come from God’s perspective. In other words, every believer should be alert to the call of God and ever vigilant to respond as Isaiah did, “Here I am, send me.” God wants us to put our “yes” on the table and let Him place it on the map. Ours

is not to first determine where, ours is first to lean into obedience and let God work out the details. Where we serve is secondary to how we serve.<sup>23</sup>

*Implications: If you want to go fast go alone. If you want to go far, go together*

The retelling of the ten missionaries who were arrested in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake in the introduction demonstrates how a few rogue elements at tarnished the reputation of the churches and missionaries who, for years, had worked sacrificially and respectfully in one of the poorest countries in the world. By being inconsiderate of local churches, the gospel had been betrayed by these missionaries. Furthermore, they had been disloyal to God himself and his mission in the world. The arrest of these missionaries brought to the forefront the desperate need for global churches to partner together in mission. They may of reached Haiti fast, but they sure didn't get very far.

One lesson learned from this situation is that solidarity is much more important than human aid. Aid generally does not require any intention to build a lasting relationship. In solidarity, the first effort to give commits the church to a deeper level of mere giving, but also of receiving. This ongoing process of both giving and receiving helps both partners discover that local churches can be united to one another in a way that reflects the character of God. In other words, mission can no longer be seen as service in one direction. Those who send must also be willing to see themselves also as objects of mission from those to whom they are sending. Such aspirations convey something about the story of God's redemptive work in the world. Christ "is

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<sup>23</sup> Ed Stetzer, "Involving all of God's people in all of God's mission, Part 1," EdStetzer.com, May 27, 2010, <http://www.edstetzer.com/2010/05/involving-all-of-gods-people-i.html> (accessed June 9, 2011).

our peace, who made both groups [Jews/Gentiles] one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility” (Eph 2:14). “So then you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of God’s household” (Eph 2:19). A faithful servant of God always seeks the best interest of His household. This means we need to temper any desire to position ourselves as benefactors or experts. For such partnerships to emerge, the co-participants must demonstrate that they are ready not only to give but also receive.

I recently attended a conference dubbed as “The largest gathering of church planters in the world.” But as I looked around the main conference sessions, the world’s church planters looked just like me – white, middle class, Western. What this “world’s largest gathering of church planters” missed was the development of networks of mutual exchange between multiple centers of influence. I shared this concern with a friend who happened to also be one of the main stage presenters. While he agreed that we all could use the kind of impulse that would come from learning from the Two-Thirds world, he qualified his agreement by stating that most people would probably have not attended a conference where someone spoke through a translator and talked about things from a different culture. Is he right? Can the church in the United States continue to give without receiving?

Last October church leaders from around the world gathered in Cape Town, South Africa, for the Third Lausanne Congress on Global Evangelization. This gathering truly was the largest, most diverse gathering of Christian leaders in history. One of the tangible outcomes of the congress was “The Cape Town Commitment” - a theological and missional document declaring a united, global focus as the church of Jesus Christ. Scott McKnight, in a recent article on the Our of Ur blog, gives four reasons as to why we do not care about global missions citing

the American churches' silence around the Cape Town Commitment (CTC). His reasons are worth quoting at length.

First, the silence about the CTC reflects America's insularity and willful choice to ignore anything that is produced by Christians from other parts of the world. We talk universal church, we talk global church, and we participate in missionary work, but the lack of attention to this incredible unifying statement reflects that what comes from elsewhere belongs elsewhere.

Second, the silence about the CTC reflects American evangelicalism's numbness about the vibrancy of gospel leadership in other parts of the world. We've got so much here, we're worried about our problems, and we're absorbed with our culture and consumeristic lifestyle to the degree that we are numb.

Third, American evangelicalism has become tribal, and this silence reflects that what isn't from our group isn't important. Whether we are conservative, moderate or progressive, whether we find our primary group to this association or that denomination, and some of this is shaped by internet tribal capacities, we are in a tribe and we pay attention to our tribe, and if our tribe doesn't produce it, then it must not be important.

Fourth, the silence reflects American evangelicalism's lethargy about missionary gospel expansion... This is the impact of pluralism, and it is leading to a missionary malaise.<sup>24</sup>

McKnight has skillfully summed up the thrust of this paper. While many churches in America are doing many great things around the world, the reality remains that, the church has become lethargic, numb to what is happening among the world's churches, and insular. The problem is the view that if the American church is not doing it – whatever “it” may be – then it is not cool, relevant, or worthwhile.

The Western church needs to be awakened to is a missions from a reign of God perspective in which all contributions are valued, all actors are recognized, and the church takes

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<sup>24</sup> Scott McKnight, “McKnight: Why Don't We Care About Global Missions. Explaining the American church's silence around The Cape Town Commitment,” OutofUr.com, June 9, 2011, [http://www.outofur.com/archives/2011/06/mcknight\\_why\\_do.html](http://www.outofur.com/archives/2011/06/mcknight_why_do.html) (accessed June 9, 2011).

its rightful place at the center. With this perspective, our churches can become, communities sensitive to the initiative of God; communities motivated of the reign of Jesus; communities characterized by mutual sharing from mutual centers of influence. Global partnerships demonstrate the missionary nature of God. Partnership in mission reflects the identity of the Triune missionary God, who sends the Son, who in turn sends the church in the power of the Spirit. The mission of God is rooted in relationships of mutual love modeled by the Trinity for the sake of the mission of the church in the world. Global partnership is, therefore characterized by a mutual love and respect for one another. Mission is highly relational. Partnering with God and with one another is to mirror the divine will within the *missio Dei*. But when we reduce mission to what we can accomplish we miss the call of God on each of our lives. That is, the call to become his disciples who make disciples of all nations. For this to happen, there must be a renewed sense of mission being about discipleship and faithfulness to Jesus. Just as the missional church in America must live its life in the reality of the kingdom of God, were all churches in the same area are perceived as part of the same mission, so must a global mission be lived out in the same way.

### *Implications For My Life and Ministry*

The church I currently serve has been inspired to engage the world with the gospel in both Word and deed, but simply do not know how to go about it. The question we are currently asking is how do we cultivate disciples who make disciples of all nations?

There are several starting points, but we see three concentric circles. In the first circle, we need to start with cross-cultural opportunities nearby. Nashville's foreign-born population has

more than quadrupled in size between 1990 and 2010. What's more, Nashville has the fifth fastest growing Metropolitan Statistical Area for foreign born population in the United States. Tennessee, as whole, is twelfth in Nation for receiving foreign born refugees and immigrants. There are one hundred thirty five languages spoken in Nashville area schools. Thirty five of the seventy identified ethno-linguistic people groups in the Metropolitan Nashville Area that number one thousand or more and are less than two percent evangelical. The four largest unreached people groups in Metropolitan Nashville are: East Indian, Kurdish, Somali, and Vietnamese all of which number over ten thousand. This is our global training ground.

The second circle would be to connect with believers and church leaders from all over the world who have come to live in America. How can we partner with the Chinese congregations, the Vietnamese congregations, the Latino congregations, the Arabic congregations, etc. to serve our city? How are the students at local universities? This question is vital because they are bridges to the world. They understand different cultural perspectives and can teach us. They can be our consultants.

The third circle is to send individuals. We are in the process of developing an exchange program where we exchange our budding leaders to serve on one another's pastoral staff for one year. After that year in another culture, they will come back and become a bridge person. That exchange gives those individuals the gift of seeing that the world does not always work from any individual cultural perspective.

I am currently developing a team that will implement the above by simply asking "Where is God already at work?"

*Conclusion*

In my opinion the day where most evangelism and church planting around the world is accomplished by western missionaries is past. However, the Western church has yet to wake up to that fact. We should celebrate the fact that the center of world Christianity has shifted away from the West. This means all of our missionary efforts have worked albeit a bumpy road along the way. Now, if the Western church could humble themselves and learn from the rest of the world and apply what has been learned over the centuries of sending.

I have often been asked if I am advocating a moratorium on sending western missionaries? By no means! I believe the missions by proxy movement (stay at home and send your money) is bad theology and missiological heresy. So, then, what can Western missionaries contribute to international missions? Western missionaries today should focus more on training nationals and producing materials. I am not saying that missionaries should stop evangelizing and planting new churches. They need to share and plant to obey the Great Commission and model those activities for the local believers. However, increasingly in the twenty first century the role of western missionaries will focus on training. For example, the leaders of the house church networks in China are pleading for training for their house church pastors. They know how to do evangelism and church planting, but they desperately need to learn Bible and theology. Here am I, send me.

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