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Comment

Al Tizon, executive minister of Serve Globally, Evangelical Covenant Church, and affiliate associate professor of missional and global leadership, North Park Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois

The Center for World Christian Studies, located at North Park Theological Seminary, exemplifies the spirit of this issue. Structurally, the center serves as a bridge between NPTS and Serve Globally, the international ministries of the Evangelical Covenant Church; and its director Paul DeNeui is appropriately both an NPTS professor and an ECC missionary. Theologically, the center represents the often-neglected truth of orthopraxy, which refers to "right theology" that leads to "right mission" in the world. Orthopraxy also implies that the church's missionary and pastoral activities lead to "right theology."

Serve Globally seeks to "practice the whole mission across cultures and around the world." In specifying "whole mission," this vision conveys the historical commitment of the ECC to both evangelism and justice. Practically, it aspires to operationalize around the world the five mission priorities of the ECC—to make and deepen disciples, start and strengthen churches, love mercy/do justice, develop leaders, and serve globally—across cultures and around the world.

The formula "Serve Globally seeks to serve globally across cultures and around the world" is awkward to say the least; however, it points to a very important truth about global mission—namely, its inseparable connection to the local. Serve Globally seeks to cultivate an intercultural, global witness to the missional activities of the church at home; for ultimately there is no qualitative difference between global mission and home mission, especially in the age of globalization. What the church does "over there" (at the ends of the earth, cf. Acts 1:8) is what it should be doing "right here" (in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria) and vice versa. In this light, the neologism "glocal" aptly describes the mission of the church. May the word gain acceptance some day in our official dictionaries—or

at least in the lecture halls of the theological academy.

This issue has sought to achieve this "glocal" perspective, as the contributors represent both Serve Globally personnel and their international partners. Framed by the ECC's five mission priorities, this issue features a pair of articles for each priority, one from a North American missionary perspective and one from a host country perspective. The hope is that, collectively, these voices have the ring of a diverse but unified song of God's mission.

Vincent Miéville, president of the Evangelical Free Church of France, provide a bird's eye view of disciplemaking in the country, while missionaries Holly and Jason Vandor share their perspective on what form disciplemaking takes in the rapidly diversifying city of Marseille in southern France. Timo Heimlich, church planter and pastor in Berlin, makes a strong case for the necessity of broad collaboration—with local businesspeople, artists, and other cultural influencers as well as with the global church—for effective evangelism and church planting in a post-Christian context. Tammi Biggs Hernandez, church planter and pastor in the Dominican Republic, emphasizes the importance of accepting others, wherever they may be in their spiritual journey. The contribution of Mathew Jock Moses, president of the Evangelical Covenant Church of South Sudan and Ethiopia, demonstrates that, in a context of war and poverty, the histories of the formation of the church and ministries of mercy and justice cannot be told independently. David Husby, recently retired director of Covenant World Relief, stresses the importance of intercultural mutuality—the complete opposite of paternalism—in relief and development work.

What does mental health have to do with leadership development? Missionary Grace Shim, who is also a licensed therapist, makes a strong connection between the two, while Shekhar Singh, professor of ministry at South Asia Theological Research Institute, reminds us how social context ought to shape the formation of church leaders who are equipped to respond to the issues and needs of that context—in his case, India. Cindy Wu, program manager of nonprofit *houston welcomes refugees*, describes the rich reciprocity that occurs between refugees and refugee workers, while Julio Isaza, Colombian-born missionary to Colombia, describes how the young people of El Bagre have taught him the ways of shalom in a place of violence. Both Wu and Isaza celebrate what they have gained in working among the vulnerable and traumatized.

In framing this issue by the ECC's five mission priorities, we sensed the need to identify and add a sixth category, namely, intercultural mission

partnership. For such partnerships, more than anything else, demonstrate the changing face of mission. The days of West-to-East, North-to-South mission are over, meaning, among other things, that the death knell has rung for Western missionary paternalism, ethnocentrism, and other stains of the colonial missions era. In the postcolonial age, mission is truly "from everywhere to everywhere." The last two articles discuss this core principle of partnership, which strives for genuine equality between missionaries and host peoples. Mark Seversen, ECC director of missional congregations, encourages eschewing "coffeehouse discipleship" for an integral discipleship in which mission and maturity are inseparable. The issue concludes with a co-authored article by missionary David Stockamp and Jacques Vungbo, vice president of the Covenant Church in the Democratic Republic of Congo, describing a ministry that exemplifies true partnership, invaluable for the future of the church's mission.

It has been a genuine pleasure to serve as guest editor, alongside Hauna Ondrey, in putting this issue together. May it contribute to orthopraxy, the thinking and doing of the church, for the transformation of the world.

Making and Deepening Disciples in France Today

Vincent Miéville, pastor, Église Évangélique Libre, Toulouse, France, and president, Union des Églises Évangéliques Libres, France

In April 2019 images of Notre-Dame de Paris engulfed in flames spread quickly around the world, causing great emotion far beyond France's borders. I too stood stunned in front of my television screen. The French response reflects the nation's post-Christian society: the French people mourned the destruction of Notre-Dame de Paris less as a symbol of living faith than as a symbol of our history, our architectural heritage, a relic of the past. The challenge of Christian discipleship in France today is to form witnesses to a living, relevant gospel rather than adherents to the vestige of a shared past.

I serve two ministries in France, one local and one national. I pastor a church of about one hundred fifty people in Toulouse, in the south of France. Since 2011 I have also served as president of the national board of France's Union des Églises Évangéliques Libres (UEEL, Union of Free Evangelical Churches). The UEEL is comprised of about fifty local churches throughout the country, with about 2,700 members and as many friends. Created in 1849 influenced by the Geneva Revival, the UEEL incorporated both Reformed and independent evangelical congregations, resulting in a dual theological legacy that persists in the culture of the union. As president I lead the national board in managing the union and developing our vision and strategy. As the official representative of the union, I liaise between local churches and pastors concerning the life of the union. My role is central to the coordination of the work of the commissions and ministries serving the UEEL and the implementation of our vision.

A Post-Christian Society

The French context is not only postmodern but also post-Christian. Though there are no official statistics on religious affiliation in France—this is legally forbidden—some polls suggest the French population can be divided roughly into even thirds: believers (of any religion), atheists, and undecided. Though the vast majority of French people self-identify as Catholic, for most this is only a cultural legacy unaccompanied by active religious practice. According to a recent poll, only fourteen percent of the French population actively practices any religion at all at least once per month.[1] In fact, a classical paradox in a post-Christian context is that people can self-identify as both Christian and atheist—Christian unbelievers! As Christianity continues to lose influence in France, even this nominal Catholic identity is less prevalent. This is somewhat less true for evangelical churches. The number of evangelicals in France is growing, though at a slow rate. Evangelical Christians are a very small minority, comprising only about one percent of the total French population.

France is characterized by a strong secularization. Religious concerns are increasingly restricted to the private sphere, and any public manifestation of faith may be considered suspect. Today in France, many people, including political leaders, believe religion should be excluded from the public sphere. Contrary to the alarmist messages of some populist discourses, immigration has not caused a "Muslim invasion," though the Muslim population in France is increasing. An estimated five to six million Muslims live in France (8–9 percent of the population), only a portion of which are practicing Muslims.

Post-Christian Discipleship

The reality of a post-Christian context is not necessarily bad news for the gospel, but we must be aware of the challenges and opportunities it presents to the church's mission. I would like to highlight a few of these challenges and propose how the church can utilize the corresponding opportunities they open for Christian discipleship.

Religions are no exception to the general distrust institutions face today. In France this distrust is a legacy of Catholic hegemony. Though the Roman Catholic Church was disestablished in France in 1905, its long history of collusion with political power has discredited it for many—and by extension has discredited all Christian confessions. The evan-

[1] "Rapport des français à la religion et aux convictions: chiffres clés," Gouvernement Français, https://www.gouvernement.fr/rapport-des-francais-a-la-religion-et-aux-convictions-chiffres-cles, accessed June 5, 2020.

gelical churches have a somewhat better reputation (though they are not immune from the general societal distrust); however, they are sometimes associated instead with sectarian excess, likely derived from their ultra-minority status.

It is important to recognize that *spirituality* does not share the negative reputation of institutional religion in France. The marketplace of do-it-yourself spiritualities—religious, philosophical, ecological—is flourishing. This presents the evangelical churches with an opportunity. By embodying the gospel in a more relational (versus institutional) way, churches accept the broader culture's distrust of institutions without contributing to its consumerist logic of spirituality. On the whole, the evangelical churches are quite successful with this, as they are commonly perceived as convivial and relational. However, we must remain vigilant about the risk of sectarianism, which is becoming a new form of institutionalism. Postmodernism and post-Christianity are not necessarily disadvantages for the evangelical churches as long as they know how to be innovative and a little adventurous.

A second aspect of France's post-Christian legacy is disappointment with a Christianity in name only that does not also impact life. As the influence of Christianity weakens, many who have identified as Catholic by baptism and family tradition no longer consider it necessary to attach themselves to this heritage. Christianity is seen as a legacy of the past, irrelevant in today's world. The challenge for the church is to demonstrate the relevance of faith for everyday life. And it is really a challenge! One of the central areas of work the PULSE diagnosis[2] revealed in my own church was the poor impact of the Sunday service on the daily life of church members. People were happy to attend the service and hear preaching, but what they heard and did during the service had no concrete consequences in their everyday life. The challenge is, how does the preached word impact the life of believers, not only on Sunday but also Monday through Saturday? One of the reasons evangelical churches fare better in a post-Christian and postmodern context may be their believer's church ecclesiology, based on personal adherence rather than birth or family tradition. However, the evangelical insistence on conversion and personal faith is not sufficient to demonstrate the relevance of the gospel today. We must work on it! We must demonstrate through our behavior

[2] The PULSE vitality assessment tool "Provides awareness of current reality, Updates progress every two years, Links the church more closely with the mission and message of Jesus, Suggests next steps, [and] Encourages spiritual discernment." See https://covchurch.org/vitality/pulse/.

that the gospel has actually changed our lives.

This is why our neighbors also demand consistency of those who do claim to be committed Christians. Recent cases of pedophilia in the French Roman Catholic Church have done great harm to the collective consciousness. On a smaller scale, the contradictions we accept in our daily lives undermine the relevance of the Christian faith in the eyes of our contemporaries. People can see them. There is no other way to deal with that than by working for better coherence between our words and our behavior, between our confessions of faith and our everyday life. In a post-Christian context, nonverbal testimony plays a central role because people no longer know anything about the gospel. The most beautiful words can be meaningless to them, but acts of solidarity and compassion, authentic love of neighbor, and enduring life's difficulties in peace express our faith and our hope concretely.

A final challenge derives from a deeply held French tradition of rationalism, deriving particularly from the Enlightenment, a tradition that has often taken an anticlerical turn. This is evident in the ever-renewed debate on laicity. The principle of laicity guarantees every person freedom to believe or not to believe; there is no single official religion, and the state does not recognize or subsidize any religion. In France the separation between church and state has often been experienced in conflict. Today this is often exacerbated by the fear of Islamic terrorism or sectarian excesses. This is why laicity "French style" is often understood as a rejection of religions. Rationalism is evident popularly in the French tendency to criticize, contest, mock, and debate for hours—often around a well-stocked table.

This opens an opportunity for Christian apologetics, a rational defense of faith. But this takes time, sharpened arguments, and a willingness to take some hits. One of the reasons the Alpha Course has been so successful in France is undoubtedly linked to this French value for free, convivial discussion around a good meal. That can be done very simply too, by inviting non-Christian friends to a meal and allowing discussion to move naturally to religious or existential topics. In France we love to talk and debate when we eat!

A Work in Progress

In light of the realities of this post-Christian context, the Union of Free Evangelical Churches is in a process of change. We recently identified church planting and growth as a renewed priority. Though not an entirely new concern, we named this as an intentional commitment because it is

the most effective means to reach those who do not yet know Christ. We have been stimulated here by the Congregational Vitality approach of the ECC, which we have benefitted from since 2013.[3] In 2017 we created departments of church revitalization and church planting to support this priority and hired permanent staff to lead these two new departments.

However, we quickly realized that what we needed was not simply a new structure but a new culture. Structures may favor or accompany cultural change, but it is finally the people who must change—or rather who must let themselves be changed by God. We recently redefined our vision in these words: "We want to be a Union of healthy missional churches, following Jesus Christ, feeding themselves with the Word of God and witnessing the Gospel around them, in order to accomplish the mission that Jesus Christ gave to his Church." We are in an ongoing process of cultural change to foster churches that are centered on present and future disciples and that truly and fully welcome all people.

UEEL congregations tend to be very focused on pastors. It is often difficult for a congregation to accept being without a pastor—so much so that for some churches seeking to survive, the only project becomes having a pastor! In our church culture, the ultimate goal is to become financially autonomous...in order to pay a pastor. Rather than seeking to become autonomous churches, the Congregational Vitality process pushes us instead to be healthy missional churches. This shifts the focus to believers in the church and unbelievers outside the church. We must become churches centered on disciples, present and future. The challenge is not new: it goes back to the words of Jesus sending his disciples (Matthew 28:19–20). Similarly, we must move the center of gravity of our churches outward. Our task is to make and deepen disciples, but it is imperative that we keep in mind both current disciples inside our churches as well as future disciples of Christ who are currently outside the church.

The concept of a dispersed church is also essential. The church is dispersed for the majority of the week, and church members should not consider themselves disciples only when they are gathered in church. The church's first responsibility to its members is to train and equip them for their mission as disciples in the dispersed church. This requires cultural change for both pastors and church members: pastors may have to change their focus in ministry and church members may have to change their

[3] For a summary of the ECC's Congregational Vitality initiative, see http://covchurch.org/vitality/ as well as John Wenrich, "The Holy Spirit and Congregational Vitality," *Covenant Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (2016): 3–15.

expectations about their pastor. In France, usually each congregation has only one pastor; therefore, he or she has to be a generalist. Churches centered on disciples need both pastors who are focused on the mission of God and disciples who carry out that mission in the world as the dispersed church.

A church centered on disciples, present and future, will encounter challenge in the ethical sphere. In France's post-Christian context, the ethical norms of society tend to deviate more and more from those usually advocated by Christians. This can be disturbing for Christians, who rightly want to remain faithful to biblical teaching. This concern can tempt the church to a reflexive reaction that ascribes an undue importance to ethical norms, but it is important that a church that wants to present Christ to everybody prioritizes openness and unconditional acceptance. We must maintain the unconditional acceptance of all, for the gospel's sake, which requires an absence of judgment and a refusal to impose an overly restrictive framework. But it is also necessary, for the gospel's sake, to promote the spiritual growth of the believers, their transformation into the image of Christ.

This requires wisdom regarding boundaries and balance. I suspect the greater danger among the evangelical church in France is imbalance toward excessive focus on ethical issues to the detriment of openness. One recent example is the energy expended by Christians to protest the legalization of same-sex marriage. Even if we believe this to be unbiblical, in the French context where the state defines and guarantees the conditions of marriage, Christian opposition has been widely perceived as homophobic and can divert an entire LGBTQ or LGBTQ-friendly population from the church. I wonder why the primary evangelical markers today are often specific ethical positions. Should not the principal evangelical markers be attachment to the person of Christ as presented to us in Scripture and the insistence on the need for a personal encounter with the resurrected Christ? We are called to make disciples of Christ—not disciples of our church, our belief system, or our ethical standards. Unquestionably it is the church's task to form ethical Christians. But even more fundamentally the church provides men and women the opportunity to meet Christ personally. And it is Christ who forms and transforms his disciples.

The challenge of welcoming is also multicultural in France. There is an ever-increasing proportion of immigrant populations in our churches, especially from Africa. The way we manage this in our churches is an indication of our ability (or indeed our difficulty!) to reach those who are different. This question is particularly important because, in a post-

Christian society, cultural gaps exist not only between people from different countries, but often between Christians and non-Christians who were born in the same country, even when they have attended the same schools and watched the same television shows.

Conclusion: Less Institutional, More Relational

Post-Christian society presents the church with obvious challenges, but it also offers opportunities. In a post-Christian world, traditional answers are no longer heard and religious institutions are no longer a point of reference. It is a real temptation for Christians to lament this loss, but that response is a sure path to discouragement. It is better to take society and the people we live with as they are and not as we think they should be. We should not expect them to change in order to receive the gospel. We can be confident in God who can touch the heart of anyone in any context. It is his job to change people, not ours.

A post-Christian world is not a world without spiritual thirst. This is an opportunity for the churches to refocus on the essential, to understand and live the gospel in new ways. We have to remember that the church is not primarily an institution; it is the spiritual body of Jesus Christ. It is people connected to the living Christ. The post-Christian world offers Christ's body the opportunity to be, as individual Christian and as church, less institutional and more relational. As Christians, our mission is not to invite people to join a religious institution but to meet Jesus Christ. And to do this we do have to show them Christ living in us.

Disciplemaking in Marseille: A Multidimensional Approach to the Transformation of a City in Movement

Holly and Jason Vandor, global personnel, Evangelical Covenant Church, Middle East/North Africa region[1]

Many "shades of humanity living life loud" exemplifies Marseille, France's second largest city.[2] This Mediterranean port city has been a cultural crossroads since its official settlement by Ionian Greeks around 600 BCE.[3] France's more recent colonial history, and particularly the independence of Algeria in 1962, has led to an influx of large numbers of Algerians, Tunisians, and Moroccans, as well as immigrants from other newly independent lands, such as the Comoro Islands. Many have found a home in Marseille, creating an urban dynamic where one is equally as likely to encounter Algerian Muslims as culturally Catholic French on streets or in shops.[4] While Marseille offers all the tourist-centric riches of a multicultural city, true interculturalism is elusive.[5] Our dominant impression is that people share the same spaces as many individual threads that have failed to intertwine to create a cohesive fabric.

In our early days in Marseille, we often felt overwhelmed by the confrontational quality of the city. Unsure where to invest our time

[1] Pseudonyms used for security reasons.

[2] Anthony Peregrine, "48 hours in…Marseille, an insider guide to France's port city with an edge," *Telegraph*, March 1, 2020, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/europe/france/cote-d-azur/marseille/articles/marseille-travel-guide/.

[3] David Abulafia, *The Great Sea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 123.

[4] Ibid., 622.

[5] We refer to Al Tizon's assertion that the term "intercultural" most aptly conveys the idea of mutual transformation between people of diverse cultures and backgrounds. *Whole and Reconciled* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 118–19.

and efforts, we began regular prayer walks. We moved through the city contemplatively, listening to the stories it was telling and seeking God for our focus. Ultimately, these days of prayerful dialogue instilled a love for our new home and led us to specific work for the transformation of our city. Every day brought interactions with dozens of people representing a variety of linguistic, religious, and cultural backgrounds. Consistent with the globalizing nature of our world, many who come to Marseille experience transnationality in which "they carry their *symbolic homeland* as they acculturate and territorialize in their new location."[6] Moreover, many experience the physical poverty and social isolation familiar to immigrants in urban environments around the globe.[7] For some, separation from family networks and the exhausting daily effort to navigate foreign social systems in an unfamiliar language and culture lead to anxiety, depression, and other forms of psychological and physical suffering. Those who have immigrated to Marseille from former French colonies often rely on the hospitality of the French government for legal residency, affordable housing, and unemployment stipends to provide for their families. Yet in the midst of these challenges, resiliency and hope are abundantly evident.

A Framework for Disciplemaking

Within this remarkable mix of cultures, where people inside and outside the church are both at home and between homes, three types of community provide a helpful framework for disciplemaking. Oscar Garcia-Johnson proposes that a eucharistic community reflects Christ's table by facilitating a safe space of welcome where there is no risk of "losing distinctiveness." A proclamation community is cultivated when the story of Jesus intersects with our personal stories. Finally, a pastoral community is one that has seen and heard the stories of their people and works for tangible transformation in a "restorative-healing community."[8] These three forms of community overlap and bear fruit simultaneously. For us, the manifestations of eucharistic, proclamatory, and pastoral communities have evolved with particular emphases on relational hospitality, neighborhood transformation, and justice initiatives in response to sexual

6 Oscar Garcia-Johnson, "Mission within Hybrid Cultures: Transnationality and the Global Church," in *The Gospel after Christendom: New Voices, New Cultures, New Expressions*, ed. Ryan K. Bolger (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 115, emphasis original.

7 Christine D. Pohl and Pamela J. Buck, *Making Room* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), chapter 5, section "Different Kinds of Strangers."

8 Garcia-Johnson, "Mission within Hybrid Cultures," 125.

exploitation and trafficking.

Relational Hospitality. The ministries in Marseille are an extension of the local church. Christ-followers from individual churches have reached beyond their own congregations to build a network of community centers and grassroots associations that work for the transformation of the city. Nurturing individual relationships in the context of hospitality is at the heart of these efforts. Hospitality models God's extravagant welcome by opening the way to the kingdom of God and, in turn, reflects a kingdom orientation as we welcome Christ by welcoming those in need (Matthew 25:34–40). The cultivation of relationships through hospitality requires "the crucial ministry of presence," in which task- and success-oriented mindsets and behaviors are sidelined to make space for attentive presence.[9] Our living room couch has become a sacred space as day after day friends and acquaintances come to enjoy food, laughter, and news. Many hours of prayer, weeping, and intimate expressions of joy, frustration, and sorrow have been shared in this quiet, comfortable space. The ministry of presence also recognizes our limitations. Not all problems can be fixed, but careful listening, friendship, and genuine encouragement are powerful healers for isolation and loneliness.[10]

Finally, making and deepening disciples through hospitality calls for a distinctive lifestyle. Referring to Christian witness among Muslims, who compose a large part of our community in Marseille, Evelyne Reisacher found that "the generosity and hospitality of Christians" is a primary factor in Muslims choosing to follow Jesus. Our lifestyles are noticed, and the alignment of our words and deeds is considered.[11] This includes reciprocity in our relationships. Mutual hospitality is essential; otherwise, we risk the condescension inherent in our refusal to be a guest. A dangerous power dynamic is enforced that risks perpetuating the disempowerment of someone in need when we are unwilling to recognize our own needs and another's capacity to be host and provider.[12] In view of this, we have spent many hours in table fellowship at the homes of friends who materially have very little to offer but whose lavish hospitality has taught us much about how to care well for people regardless of circumstances.

Neighborhood Transformation. In conjunction with the broader

[9] Pohl and Buck, *Making Room*, chapter 6, section "The Connection Between Marginality and Hospitality."

[10] Ibid.

[11] Evelyne Reisacher, *Joyful Witness in the Muslim World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 110.

[12] Pohl and Buck, *Making Room*, chapter 6, section "Hospitality and Power."

church, we have also worked toward the transformation of neighborhoods by addressing many physical and social needs. Due in large part to France's long history of religious wars and sectarianism, today faith is viewed as a private matter. As a result, it can be a challenge for churches to engage their larger communities. However, Gambetta, the local French Free Church in Marseille has worked to become a place of welcome for both French nationals and the international community. Internally, the church has welcomed Roma and Filipino congregations to use their space for worship, with great potential for further interactions as these relationships develop. Over the years the church has also warmly received missionaries from the US (ourselves included) and South Korea who have worked together in fruitful partnership. The pastor of Gambetta is intentional about fostering relationships with other churches throughout Marseille. He works to bring pastors together for times of encouragement and prayer for themselves, their communities, and the city. As a result, a growing sense of unity and encouragement is being cultivated among diverse churches.

Gambetta has also developed a strong partnership with a local community association, Marhaban. Marhaban is run by staff and volunteers from the Christian community of Marseille —Catholic, Protestant, and Coptic. Marhaban provides social assistance in a variety of ways, including transitional housing for migrants, student tutoring, food distribution, English language courses, and social clubs that enhance potential job opportunities and build social capital. In its role as a language center, Marhaban offers French language and literacy courses to non-French speakers. For those who seek to make Marseille their home, the inability to communicate effectively in French is a significant challenge. Over the past years, demand for these classes has exceeded Marhaban's capacity, and as a result Gambetta now hosts several courses in their building. Along with our own work with Marhaban primarily as English teachers, individual members of Gambetta serve as an administrator, food distribution facilitator, and French teacher. In all of these efforts, Gambetta and Marhaban are transparent about their Christian motivation in ways that are sensitive to the populations they serve. As a result, Muslims, secular French, and Christians from diverse backgrounds have forged a strong and safe community together.

Justice Initiatives in Anti-Trafficking Efforts. Ruban Blanc (White Ribbon) is a ministry that reflects our efforts to make and deepen disciples through justice-oriented initiatives. Initially established by a small, international group of French Christians and Marseille-based mission

practitioners, Ruban Blanc is a nonprofit association that aims to offer hope and support to people in situations of sexual exploitation, seeking to share the love of God and to work toward the reduction of suffering. It was formed on a foundation of Christ-centered values, understanding that transformation of the whole person can occur only when the needs of the whole person are addressed. Members meet regularly with women and men, both professional sex workers and those who have been trafficked into the sex industry, at the places where they work during the day and night. We often make initial contact on the streets and then connect these men and women with social care networks as desired. In our interactions, we seek permission to be welcomed into the spaces where they are working. After this initial act of hospitality on their part, we offer refreshments and a listening presence—showing up with open hearts and minds in places many refuse to go. First-time contacts often ask why we are there. This provides an open door to share about our model and motivator, Jesus Christ, and to express our availability for any needs. Trust, acquaintanceship, and even deeper friendships have developed through consistent visits and meetings outside of working hours. These encounters are characterized by encouragement, prayer, laughter, dream-sharing, and connections that provide social support that enables basic needs to be met and movement toward healing and wholeness.

Disciplemaking in View of the Whole Gospel

Disciplemaking in Marseille requires fluid and adaptive responses to meet individuals within the uniqueness of their stories. In all our work, and in our own growth as disciples, we are shaped and motivated by the good news that we have been given access to God's great mercy through Jesus's death and resurrection. We share the conviction of scholar-practitioners like Al Tizon that the substance of this mercy is all-inclusive, multidimensional reconciliation that is manifested in relationships of peace with God, ourselves, others, and all of creation. This is the essential nature of the whole gospel.[13] The working out of this whole gospel conviction is disciplemaking, in which our words and efforts are given to building Christ's church in the discipline of practicing justice and mercy. Moreover, disciplemaking is the heart of the commission that Christ gave his disciples in Matthew 28:18–20 and the propelling force of all mission practice.[14] This is in stark contrast to the outmoded—though still

[13] Tizon, *Whole and Reconciled*, 87.

all too frequent—assumption that the work of disciplemaking is simply evangelism, which in turn is reduced to producing converts.

While events such as responding decisively to Christ and baptism provide meaningful anchor points in a person's faith journey, the work of disciplemaking through the lens of the whole gospel is deeply transformative. Evangelism by proclamation is vital, but it must go beyond what Nabeel Jabbour describes as "presenting a set of facts to a person and asking that person to commit to these facts or endorse them." In contrast, Jabbour proposes that evangelism is most often simply helping people "move one little step closer to Christ."[15] The journey toward Christ is not linear; rather, it is full of twists and turns that are influenced by verbal sharing, just action, and decisions to turn to the Lord. In Marseille, moments of evangelism have looked many different ways as we continue to be shaped as disciples ourselves and as we practice the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18–19). We strive to live our daily lives as a message of our hope in Jesus within our context. We are God's people placed in a specific location and among specific people in order to live and speak as witnesses to God's desire that we all experience abundant life in its entirety.[16]

Despite this ideal, there are ways we fall short in our witness to the whole gospel. As we practice disciplemaking, particularly through hospitality and justice-oriented efforts, we are challenged as caretakers of the environment in which we live. Stewardship is an essential part of the vocation of the church in that it reflects God's loving care for the earth and its resources.[17] One task of the local church as it cultivates pastoral community is to assess local realities. In urban environments like Marseille, stewardship should extend to proper care for buildings and the city's physical infrastructure so people can live in safety. We have often observed the dangerous living situations of individuals who are at the mercy of state housing or unscrupulous landlords. Flooding, infestations, and weakening physical structures characteristic of an historical city are common occurrences. The state of these dilapidated buildings can lead to tragedy when ignored too long. In November 2018, Marseille made world headlines when two buildings collapsed in a well-known neighborhood near the city center, killing eight people. Many blamed city officials who,

[14] Ibid., 147.
[15] Reisacher, *Joyful Witness*, 72.
[16] Kosuke Koyama, *Water Buffalo Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 155.
[17] Tizon, *Whole and Reconciled*, 174.

despite warnings, largely ignored the state of the neighborhood mainly inhabited by Muslim populations and ethnic minorities. The *New York Times* reported that this tragedy led to a safety audit that concluded that up to 44,000 residential units were at risk, mainly in lower-income areas. In 2015 a government assessment estimated that 100,000 people in Marseille lived in housing that was a risk to their safety.[18] This is not insignificant considering the population of Marseille proper is estimated to be just under 900,000.[19]

These realities should be a wake-up call for the church. It is unacceptable that any of our neighbors, friends, or church members should live in such a state, particularly in a country with an abundance of social resources. How can we use our voices and actions to lobby for fair renter rights and equal opportunities in housing? Will people see that Christ-followers have advocated for fair housing both *before and after* such tragedies? Although referring specifically to Muslims within a British context, Ida Glaser's challenge is apt: "[T]he question is not *whether* we share the Gospel [with Muslims] but *what kind* of Gospel they are going to hear."[20] At the intersection of stewardship and justice, the church must work harder to care for the environment in which we live; our witness depends upon it.

In Marseille, we are confronted daily with the reminder that the world is not homogenous. In this globalizing, urban environment where much of the population is transnational, the local and global church are much closer together than many realize. The networks cultivated by people both within the church and without have a truly international impact. In such a context, ministry without intercultural partnerships would fall profoundly flat. Gambetta, Marhaban, and Ruban Blanc are led and served by staff and volunteers from a multitude of national, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. We have been humbled, trained, mentored, and encouraged by those we are privileged to serve alongside. Intercultural partnerships serve as witnesses to the truth that God welcomes and gifts all people as the Spirit works through and beyond all cultures to demonstrate the creative glory of God.[21] This is an important

[18] Agence France-Presse, "Death Toll in Marseille Building Collapse Rises to Six," *New York Times*, November 7, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/07/world/europe/marseille-building-collapse-toll.html, accessed September 13, 2019.

19 "Population de Marseille en 2019," http://ville-data.com/nombre-d-habitants/Marseille-13-13055, accessed September 16, 2019.

20 Ida Glaser, "Millennial Reverie: Muslims in Britain," *Anvil* 17, no. 3 (2000): 180.

and necessary example to the people we serve. The broader multicultural community must see that God's people do not dismiss cultural or ethnic differences but revel in the unique characteristics and skills individuals bring to their mutual efforts. Intercultural partnerships within the local church are a gift to their local communities as they represent a microcosm of the global church, showing outside observers that there just might be a place for them in the church as well.

Lessons for the Global Church

In light of our work with a church that strives in its diversity to embody the whole gospel through hospitality, community transformation, and justice initiatives, we commend the discipline of perspective-taking as a practice for the global church. Kevin Gushiken describes perspective-taking as requiring "patience and discernment as bi-directional dialogue occurs creating back and forth interaction between assessments of one's own culture with the engagement of another's resulting in a richer blended viewpoint."[22] Every culture and person has been formed and shaped by their own myths, stories, and histories. These narratives are reflections of the "Christ soaked world" that surrounds us, acting as both the hiding place and revelation of God.[23] Perspective-taking allows one to truly engage with another person and perceive the places where Christ is present in a culture or a person's life—even if they do not name it as such. Perspective-taking requires the capacity to humbly cross boundaries, though this ability is rarely automatic.

The church must develop the ability to join God most effectively in the task of making and deepening disciples. When the church engages in disciplemaking, it should do so with the recognition that crossing boundaries is also integral for our own ongoing journey of discipleship. We can play a role in discipling others, but another person's journey can often shape and lead us to see God's presence and activity in new ways. This is equally as vital to the outflow of ministry as to intercultural partnerships. Our lives and work are truncated when we do not make room for viewpoints and experiences outside our own.

[21] Ani Ghazaryan Drissi, "What is Transformational Discipleship?" *Ecumenical Review* 71, nos. 1–2 (2019): 224.

[22] Kevin M. Gushiken, "Cultivating Healthy Discipleship Settings in Multi-Ethnic Churches," *Transformation* 32, no. 1 (2015): 23.

[23] Richard Rohr, "An Incarnational Worldview," Center for Action and Contemplation, February 22, 2019, https://cac.org/an-incarnational-worldview-2019-02-22/.

The ministries highlighted here are examples from a diverse Christian community seeking to move closer to a reconciled relationship to God, peace-filled relationships with our neighbors, and loving care for creation in the unique urban context of Marseille, France. Even as we fall short in our witness to the whole gospel, we work to be in tune with the pulse of our city. We adapt daily to new forms of interaction in order to participate fully in the give and take of human relationships in transmigrational flux. In all contexts, as the global church lives out its vocation as the people of God, our local witness may have effects reaching farther than we can imagine.

Collaboration as a Necessity to Starting and Strengthening Churches

Timo Heimlich, missionary, pastor, and church planting catalyst, Gemeinsam für Berlin and Freie evangelische Gemeinde Pankow, Berlin, Germany

If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." This African proverb summarizes an attitude we learned quickly when we sought to start and strengthen churches in the city of Berlin, a secular, post-Christian capital in the most atheistic part of the world[1] where Christians are the minority. Though many in Berlin retain formal church membership and vestiges of Germany's Christian heritage remain evident, regular church attendance in Berlin is estimated to be as low as one percent. In certain areas in former East Germany only a few dozen people may attend church in districts of several hundred thousand.

"What is a pastor?" was the first question our mailman asked after we moved back to East Berlin in 2004 to start churches. Most Germans are not in contact with active Christians who can articulate their faith, since such expression was discouraged by the secret police in East Germany and remains culturally inappropriate in Western Germany more broadly. Church buildings continue to occupy central locations in many towns that comprise Berlin, but the churches themselves have very limited influence in a city dominated by naturalistic, secular, and progressive worldviews.

The church's declining influence has produced a survival mentality, in which protecting one's own congregation often eclipses the desire to be missionally active. Churches that do seek to reach out to their com-

[1] See Tom W. Smith, "Beliefs about God across Time and Countries," NORC at the University of Chicago, April 18, 2012, http://www.norc.org/PDFs/Beliefs_about_God_Report.pdf.

munities have had to learn how to start and strengthen churches as an under-resourced minority community. In order to regain a hearing for the sake of the gospel, many churches have had to learn how to form coalitions and partnerships not only with other Christians but also with secular and civic leaders and organizations.

In this article, I share the value of collaboration through ministry experiences in East Berlin, offer a biblical and theological rationale for such collaboration, and conclude with a set of questions for reflection. My hope is that readers will be encouraged to invest in collaborative partnerships in their own ministries.

"We Need Your Help"

In my experience, the humble confession "we need your help" has proven to be one of the most effective tools for mission and collaboration. I learned this lesson in collaboration in 2009. The year before, our church plant had hosted an exhibit of lithographs from Marc Chagall's painting of the Old Testament cycle of fall and redemption. This was an effective way to engage an intellectual, atheistic, and art-loving audience in gospel conversations. While the art outreach was a success by some measures (even the American actress Katie Holmes attended), it followed a fairly traditional model of self-sufficiency. We held the event in our own facilities and pulled it off with our own volunteers, through our own limited means. After much sweat and preparation, we opened the doors to present our great exhibit/event/product to an outside audience. We did not realize that we overworked our people and degraded those with whom we sought to connect as mere consumers and spectators.

My paradigm shifted in 2009 in a quarterly meeting of local business and cultural leaders, a group I had formed years before for the sake of collaboration. I suggested we repeat the Chagall exhibit with a different theme. My suggestion was well received, as the event had given some pride to the larger community. But then this paradigm-shifting sentence came out of my mouth: "We cannot do it alone this year. We need your help." Because we were able to identify the many areas of need to offer the event, local car rental companies, marketing companies, and civic organizations took ownership of the project, and the exhibit became a community event, not simply a church event. Collaboration happened on personal levels as well, for example when the daughter of the car rental owner, an art student at Humboldt University who had transported the pictures from Western Germany, began to give tours of the Exodus Cycle.

The simple admission "we need your help" turned consumers into

participants and provided many conversations on various levels. It even led to my performing a wedding years later for the leaders of the North Berlin business association. "We need your help" is countercultural to Western philosophy of ministry, which is often individualistic and self-sufficient. However, the humility of asking this question led to very fruitful collaboration and relational evangelism in the years that followed. "We need your help" has created—in this order—a coalition, deeper relationships, and a right to hear and to speak the gospel in this context.

"We need your help" also has practical application in the context of evangelism and starting churches, which are inseparable in a secular context like Berlin, where growing a church depends on evangelism. Every couple of years our church plant was visited by a student choir from (now former) Grace University in Omaha, Nebraska. The old ministry paradigm would have led us to utilize this amazing choir to host an attractional concert, inviting not-yet believers to enjoy the performance. In a city that offers around one thousand cultural events daily, attempting to attract people to such an event would be a bold endeavor without participation from the larger community.

The game changer was a newspaper article in which we communicated the need for families to host the singers. Within only a few days, thirteen, mostly atheistic, families had called offering to house a pair of students. What a wonderful opportunity to visit the potential hosts at home, hear their stories, and build relationships. The families were happy to help and were proud to offer a room, often in small Berlin apartments, meals, and enthusiastic city tours. The gospel was shared not at the concert alone but through one-on-one interaction, as host families looked through pictures of the singers' families and churches and heard their personal stories. For some hosts, that was the first time a Christian had ever stayed at their home. After the choir left Berlin, the local church could follow up on the new collaborative relationships. Some have hosted several teams over the years.

Our approach to summer vacation Bible school provides another example of the benefits of collaboration. Rather than simply producing our own flyer to advertise a church-run vacation Bible school week—when neither the event nor the flyer would have been welcomed by atheistic families—we instead created a network of secular educational organizations who offered art classes, English camps, and drama clubs during the summer. This network was united by the shared desire to advertise our respective summer programs and by the vision to serve parents by providing a helpful overview of all summer events in our part of town.

We created a "Ferien [vacation] in Pankow" flyer and a website that listed all summer programs and events, including the Christian VBS. While no school would have forwarded our VBS flyer to students, this overview was highly demanded and recommended by the schools.

Forming a coalition of partners required an initial investment of time and effort, but it proved to be far more effective in the long run. The cooperation extended beyond shared marketing. When we learned that the art school could only offer classes in the morning because of a lack of afternoon teachers, the church and a mission team jumped into the collaborative effort by working with the kids in the afternoon. This resulted in many great relationships and conversations with only a fraction of the effort that went into hosting our own VBS.

Collaboration in Church Planting Efforts

Collaboration has been essential to our church planting efforts as well. Before we even gathered our core team, the twelve founding members of Kirchehoch3 (then FeG Berlin-Pankow), we made sure other partners were ready for the ministry marathon of building relationships and planting a church in atheistic Eastern Berlin. The first global team was a team of individual prayer partners: one hundred people from five different continents who committed to pray daily for us to "plow the concrete" seven days a week (thus the group name "pankow7hundered").

Within the first months of church planting we hosted the first Pankow Partner and Vision Days. It was a conference with representatives from our German sending denomination (Bund der Freien Evangelischen Gemeinden, sister church to the ECC), two West German partner churches, and three American partner churches as well as individuals from the United Kingdom who were considering moving to Berlin. This was our first coalition of this collaborative church planting effort. We explored the needs in Berlin-Pankow, praying about what would be needed to reach this part of Berlin, which was home to about 120,000 people in a two-mile radius, and we listed the combined recourses of our various partners. We have repeated Pankow Partner and Vision Days in 2008 and 2012, both because this collaboration continued to strengthen the young church in the subsequent phases and in order to nurture the relationships that have developed among different partners.

All along, Kirchehoch3 has been waiting for opportunities to start its first daughter church. For just over two years, efforts have concentrated on another Northeast Berlin neighborhood, Karow. This too is a collaborative effort of international ministry teams, such as ECC Serve

Globally missionaries Greg and Kristi Fauss, the leadership of a refugee camp, social workers, and local church leaders. We know that young Christians from other cultures can reach atheistic Germans in ways other Germans cannot. We also know that a church started solely in a refugee community would not be very sustainable. However, the collaboration of recent migrants, long term German residents, and some established internationals proved to be a very strategic, synergizing effort that painted an inviting picture of the diversity of God's children and his kingdom.

When we move beyond asking, "How can we strengthen our own church?" or "How can we plant one daughter church/campus?" and begin to ask, "How can we start a church planting movement in our city?" broad collaboration is inevitable. In Berlin, church planting leaders from different networks and denominations started to dream together and plan what it would take to assist each other, initiate prayer, recruit church planters, coordinate training modules, and host shared gatherings for the planters in the city. With the support from our interdenominational, collaborative city network Gemeinsam für Berlin (Together for Berlin) and other networks and mission organizations, I am helping coordinate some of these efforts and we will launch several city-wide church planting events in 2021.

Biblical and Theological Basis for Collaboration

After looking at these practical examples, it is fair to ask whether the rationale for collaboration is merely pragmatic. Is collaboration only a circumstantial necessity due to our small number of Christians, churches, and ministries—and therefore optional in contexts where the Christian community is larger and resources do not have to be shared?

The term "Christian community" suggests already that collaboration is central to Christ's intention for the church, that faith activities in isolation were never God's design. This can be observed in the Trinity, in the Old Testament people of God, and in the body of Christ. Often the "one another" of New Testament exhortations is applied within one church or within one small group. I believe the body of Christ in one city or country broadens the reference of that metaphor and calls us not only to a recognition of others but also to actively seek unity between churches and larger networks of believers such as denominations. Christ's prayer that the church be one (John 17) and Paul's body metaphor (1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4) serve as a basis for collaboration. The call to good stewardship of God-given talents (Matthew 25) stands at odds with the prevalent individualism in some church ministries. The world

can be healthier and more fruitful if the church connects outside the body of Christ.

Is there any basis for collaboration with secular organizations, public services, or individuals of other faiths or no faith? Here I am challenged by the incarnational approach of Christ himself whose rescue mission on earth happened among the people he came to save. For at least parts of his ministry, the Son of Man, had no place to "lay down his head" (Luke 9:58); he was dependent on the mercy and collaboration of others. He expected the same of his disciples when he sent them out with little resources in search of "a person of peace" and people to host and feed them (Luke 10). The Apostle Paul travelled with sailors and businesspeople who held the shared goal of reaching an overseas destination (Acts 27), co-labored with other tradesmen to finance his missions efforts and build strategic relationships (Acts 18), and sought out helpful gentiles to further his mission in any given city if the Jews he approached first proved uncollaborative (Acts 17). Paul's ministry promoted cooperation over self-sufficient silo thinking.

Building on these biblical examples as well as on the intercultural and cooperative practices of starting and strengthening churches exemplified above, it is a short step to locate church planting within the whole gospel mission of the church. Choosing a perspective that encompasses the whole city will quickly lead to collaboration. For Kirchehoch3, being part of an international family of denominations (the International Federation of Free Evangelical Churches, which includes the German FeG and the US-based ECC and EFCA) as well as local networks like Gemeinsam für Berlin connects us to church and parachurch ministries that serve in the areas of discipleship, leadership training, mercy ministries, and missions. None of these areas is compartmentalized, but all flow together naturally. By seeking to multiply churches that train disciple-makers and seek to be holistic and transformational, the whole gospel finds local expressions.

For example, ministry partners in Berlin work in anti-human trafficking by reaching out to women in prostitution, starting safe houses, or engaging in political discussions concerning trafficking. By partnering with these ministries from the outset of a church plant, we are not outsourcing mercy ministries but letting them transform the church. The same is true when it comes to work with refugees or serving globally.

While these partnerships and networks can feel artificial or constructed, seeking to plant transformational churches naturally attracts individuals who are passionate for specific people groups (socially, geographically, etc.) and sequentially inspires the church from the inside out. I think

of a Chinese leader in our church who is active in the discipleship of other Chinese Christians in Germany and China. Quite naturally, this focus on international discipleship impacts her ministry within the local church as well.

Another member of Kirchehoch3 has helped strengthen the church to become more holistically focused when she started an orphanage near Mombasa, Kenya (when she was already seventy years old). The collaboration of support and inspiration formed a two-way street. Other tools and experiences also travelled on a two-way street, such as the ECC's Church Vitality instrument and pathway, another example of collaboration. While we employ this tool (or better, toolbox) in Berlin, we are also exploring how to make it accessible to other German speaking churches—thus gathering around another platform for leadership development. Once again, it is collaboration that brings the whole gospel to the whole city.

Reflections for Effective Collaboration

To apply these particular experiences and lessons in different contexts, I suggest reflecting on the following set of questions.

1. Are leaders set free to seek and foster synergies with others? It takes time not only to discover but to then build and test relationships with other leaders, churches, ministries, and organizations. There is no guarantee that success will come quickly or that it will come every time. Collaboration is messy and consumes leadership resources. It also requires apostolic gifting to constantly have a kingdom focus and seek the good of the city beyond the ministries of a single church. Do we make room for leaders to invest into these kingdom relationships, or do we demand their full attention in our own church without any margin? Leaders who would like to network more with a missional purpose might ask, do I have the full support of my church to be a bridge builder in our city?

2. Do we prioritize relationships? Collaboration is messy and takes time because it is more than simply pairing organizations. It is about relationships. Hardly any ministry happens in a sustainable and long-term way without honest communication in the context of loving relationships. Are we prepared to invest in people and not just formal ministries when we want to develop partnerships to bring the whole gospel to our city?

3. Are we humble enough to let go of our name? "We need your help" is a vulnerable attitude. The humility to give up even tested ministry models for the sake of developing new, common ways to collaborate requires letting go of the need to have our own name on the possible results. Can we celebrate when others reap what we have sown?

4. Do we seek the good of the city and kingdom over our personal ministry success? This is a variant of the previous questions. To develop a heathy habit of asking for the good of our city and not just our current constituency is another foundation to working well with others. Unless we develop a vision at an altitude that sees the whole city (or country or continent) in a way it renders a solo effort senseless right from the start, it is hard to make collaboration a priority.

5. Can we formulate common goals collectively? After checking our posture, freeing capacities, and investing in relationships, one important step is setting common goals. Has one partner simply adopted the goals of the other(s) (for whatever reason) or has there been a process of praying, listening, brainstorming, and formulating together? This can be especially tricky if one of the partners contributes the most resources, but it is essential to the process of collaboration.

6. Can we sustain a long-term process? Planting churches in secular Central Europe is like running a marathon. Do we have a long-term perspective? Are we ready to take the necessary breaks to reflect and gain renewed strength to continue the work? Can we forgive and remain committed to our partners when something unexpected happens? Do we need to go fast, or are we ready to go far and go together?

This article was written before anyone knew about the challenges of COVID-19. A shared experience of the pandemic has strengthened most of the partnerships described here. To me this is further proof that efforts made to invest in these partnerships are bearing much fruit over time. My hope is that these kinds of collaborations will bless many other local and global mission efforts as they did ours.

Just as I Am: The Story of Tal Como Soy Covenant Church

Tammi Biggs-Hernandez, pastor, Tal Como Soy, and global personnel, Evangelical Covenant Church, Santiago de los Caballeros, Dominican Republic

La Real is a community in Santiago de los Caballeros, Dominican Republic. It is a lower-middle class community without a school, park, baseball field, or basketball court. It was a community without a church. It is a community with a deep mistrust for evangelicals—and many bad experiences to back it up. Many evangelical churches have tried to start a church in La Real and have failed. Many of our neighbors in La Real have shared their frustration of not feeling welcome in evangelical churches that place great emphasis on what Christians should not do and how they should look, communicating in effect, "Jesus loves you, Jesus accepts you, but…guys, put a tie on before you come into church, make sure you don't have any tattoos, and cut your hair short; ladies, make sure your skirt covers yours knees, don't have any piercings, and don't listen to secular music." There is a certain expectation that a person needs to change *before* coming to the church, a perception that God will not accept you the way you are. The people of La Real have experienced this over and over again. This is the community in which God has called us to plant a church.

Vision and Beginnings

God placed a burden on my husband and me that could not be silenced. Our heart breaks for those God loves deeply but who do not feel welcomed by the traditional church culture. God placed in our hearts a desire to bridge that gap. He gave us a vision to reach those whom the traditional church has rejected, whether overtly or covertly. The majority

of our leadership team comes from church backgrounds that emphasize the discipline of perceived errors without a system of restoration. Many talented young leaders therefore had found themselves on the "outside looking in." Our vision is to see more people, especially youth and young families, come to a real and life-changing relationship with Christ, *just as they are.* We want to see people worshiping God and following Jesus in their everyday lives. Our long-term projection is for our church to be a community center that teaches and demonstrates the love of Jesus in ways that are familiar to the community. Our emphasis is sharing the love of God through sports, cooking classes, hip hop, dance, and visual arts, and discipling those who do not know God in order for them to become deeply rooted in Jesus. We have a deep desire to love people where they are and allow God to convict and transform lives. We feel called to break down Christian stereotypes that are hindering people from seeing a very real God who loves them in a very real way.

One Wednesday in February 2019, we walked into our rented two-story house with only seven folding chairs, a speaker, and a microphone. That Friday we received a stove and huge cooking pot from a man who has a ministry in Israel. Saturday we held a domino tournament and mini-Olympics in front of a nearby convenience store. On Sunday we woke up with grandiose ideas that the people who had voiced interest in our new church would come. I cooked enough food for the entire neighborhood in anticipation of the after-church meal.

Our faith-filled, and perhaps somewhat naïve, expectations were replaced with lament when we learned that our neighbor's adult son had been killed in a motorcycle accident the night before. A service of celebration became one of ministering to the brokenhearted in our new community. Our team grabbed the big pot of food prepared for post-church fellowship, and we crossed the street. We offered prayers and words of hope. We held hands with people we had only just begun to know. We gave the family food for the difficult road of grief that lay ahead.

In the early days of our plant, God connected us to twenty young men—many with tattoos and pierced ears—through our basketball ministry. These young men originally came only to play ball, but they also received an acceptance they had never experienced from evangelicals. They learned God's love for them through Bible studies and, even more so, through interaction. We did not make church attendance a requirement for participation in the basketball ministry, but one by one the young men started coming. Seven made a confession of faith and were baptized shortly thereafter. Many more are still seeking. When I look

around on a Sunday morning, I see boys and young men who know they belong. These same young men are beginning to invite their mothers and siblings.

Ministry Philosophy and Practice

Most people we have encountered have experienced the church as focused primarily on discipline. Kids need to sit down and not move. One needs to arrive to church with the appropriate clothes. Anyone who appears to be living outside the moral parameters established by the church is deemed "in sin" and placed on "discipline." The system of discipline involves removing people from involvement in the day-to-day life of the church, whether in leadership or as a volunteer, and leaving them there. There is no real plan of restoration. When the leaders deem one worthy to return, they may or may not be allowed back in an active role. For this reason, many have found themselves on the outside looking in. Many have taken the strict discipline of the local church as a direct reflection of who God is.

Tal Como Soy—Just as I Am—is not simply the name of our church; it is our philosophy of ministry that starts with not emphasizing *who* is welcome at church or *how* one should come to church; all are truly welcome just as they are. We express this in many ways. For example, we have no explicit or implicit dress code. We welcome the neighbor whose activities the prior night are well known. We allow people to live out their faith and their doubts in a community that will love and walk through it with them. We allow people to fail and be restored. Children are encouraged to participate in the life of the church. One of our main priorities is to allow children to love Jesus in a way that is age appropriate. We allow them to grab hand-held instruments and plastic mini microphones and sing and dance up front during worship. Though it can be distracting when they are playing tambourines offbeat or trying a new dance move, one thing is certain: our children are learning both to love to worship and to love the God whom we worship. They are experiencing a freedom in knowing a Jesus who never pushed the children aside, and this is giving parents the opportunity to guide and teach their children in the "way they should go" (Proverbs 22:6).

Generally speaking, Dominican culture is male dominated and male focused, and the conservative evangelical Christian culture has largely perpetuated the elevated value of men over women. Very few denominations allow women in any form of leadership in the church. As an example, I was not allowed to translate a sermon for a visiting mission

team at another church. Women are allowed to teach the children and sing backup on the praise team. Many women are unable to come to church because of the need to cook for their family, especially if their male partner is an unbeliever. Meals are traditionally prepared by the woman of the house, and food is saved for the arrival of the man of the house, who is typically the breadwinner overseeing all finances and purchases. For this reason, meal ministry has been a priority of our church plant from the beginning. Our service begins at 11:00 a.m. so that we can share a meal after. This takes the pressure off women who would otherwise have to cook and allows them to bring a plate home to their husband if he does not attend. In the future we hope to replicate a sewing ministry that we helped develop in a large church in Puerto Plata as an outreach to women and young girls. In that context, the sewing ministry helped women escape prostitution, providing an alternative means of income. We have a deep desire to offer a similar ministry in La Real, where many women are caught in economic slavery and oppression.

My husband Jochy and I, along with our core team of leaders feel like surrogate parents and mentors for many of the youth and children in our church, whose biological parents are not present. Through relationships formed at Tal Como Soy, many are experiencing what it means to truly belong to a family—for the first time sitting down at a table for food and conversation, experiencing unconditional love, learning what godly love looks like and who God says they are. Many are learning that confrontation and consequences do not equal rejection.

God has opened doors for our ministry in surprising ways. The Neighborhood Association has given us blanket approval to hold whatever activities we would like in the community. Many neighbors have told us that this approval is "nothing short of a miracle because they don't approve anything." In summer 2019, we were invited to a meeting with the mayor of Santiago. My husband Jochy had some hesitation because he was concerned that we would be expected to simply "beg" for government help. However, we decided to attend in openness to however God might work. In his brief description of our community work, Jochy mentioned that we transport youth to another community for our basketball ministry because our own community does not have a court. Two months later the mayor himself came to La Real to announce the construction of a full-court community basketball court!

Conclusion

Tal Como Soy is a laboratory for finding common ground in Jesus. As an intercultural, multiethnic family, Jochy and I (along with our two children) serve alongside dedicated Dominican leaders, seeking to be a truly welcoming church for young people and their families, who come from varying economic, familial, religious and generational backgrounds. We have found beauty and freedom in seeing our differences as strengths and celebrating the diversity of ideas and giftedness each person brings. As a community of believers, we are digging deeply into the truth of Scripture to look past what we are supposed to be and how we are supposed to act according to culture and tradition. There is no greater satisfaction or joy than seeing people being set free and living into the truth that is found in God's word.

It would be easy to focus on all we lack, like the disciples at the feeding of the five thousand, but God has showed us a different way. He is teaching us to take the $3 offering we receive each week and give thanks that our young church is learning what it means to give to the Lord. He is teaching us that he is not defined or confined by budgets or lack of resources. He is reminding us that he is the God of nations by surrounding us with churches from around the world that believe in the call he has placed on us. He has placed in our path generous people and churches from other countries to support the ministry God has entrusted to us. He placed us in the heart of a man who had a ministry in Israel, who purchased our stove and big rice pot. He has partnered my husband, Jochy, with a musician from Kenya to record a musical collaboration in three languages. He is teaching us how to stretch $3 with his blessing. He is supplying for our needs and teaching us that living without a six-digit budget can mean living with freedom and abundance.

The verse God placed on our hearts when he called us to plant the church was Isaiah 43:19: "I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert." God continues to show us that we need to keep our eyes open to where and how he is working. God is always at work, often in ways that break through established traditions and practices. If we keep our eyes fixed on him, he will show us new ways of ministering and new ways of sharing the unchangeable message of his great love and redemption available to all through his Son Jesus. If we allow ourselves to see through God's lens, he will show us rivers springing up where we perceive nothing—rivers in the communities we have been entrusted

to serve, in those marginalized by society or church, in areas that have nothing to attract attention and, seemingly, nothing to offer. Rivers in the desert.

God is doing a new thing. Do you not perceive it?

Loving Mercy and Doing Justice in South Sudan and Ethiopia

Mathew Jock Moses, president, Evangelical Covenant Church of South Sudan and Ethiopia, Gambella, Ethiopia

The Evangelical Covenant Church of South Sudan and Ethiopia (ECCSSE) is a denomination established in 1996.[1] True to its nature as "a free church," it stands independently of any other national Covenant church in the world. However, it was through the partnership between the Sudanese American diaspora community (mostly located in the ECC's Northwest Conference) and Covenant missionary personnel that the ECCSSE was formed. We held our first annual meeting at Pugnido Refugee Camp in Gambella, Ethiopia, as part of the Akobo Conference of South Sudan. There we recognized before God the official standing of the ECCSSE as a denomination. We were grateful that members of ECC's Northwest Conference and Covenant World Mission (Serve Globally) were present. We have enjoyed our partnership with the ECC primarily through Serve Globally, in the years that followed up to the present day.

The ECCSSE currently has twelve regional conferences, six centers, 425 congregations, and 50,121 members across the Malakal Upper Nile, Jonglei, Bentiu, and Central Equatorial states in South Sudan and the western Gambella Regional State of Ethiopia. The ECCSSE has fifty-eight ministers ordained to word and sacrament and 3,500 volunteer preachers and evangelists. The ECCSSE serves South Sudan and western Ethiopia, with additional churches in refugee camps in Kenya and

[1] For more information on the Evangelical Covenant Church of South Sudan and Ethiopia, see www.eccsse.org.

Ethiopia. Its vision is "to reach all people of South Sudan and beyond with the gospel of salvation and be able to meet their spiritual, physical, social and psychological needs in their respective places."

The Ravages of War

The nation of Sudan was in full-scale civil war for nearly four decades, leading to the death of more than two million people and the displacement of five million more. This longest and most devastating civil war on the African continent was caused by multiple factors, including the imposition of Islamic Sharia Law on South Sudanese who were mainly Christians and animists; the lack of equitable development in the southern part of the country that is rich in natural resources such as arable soil, oil (the third largest oil reserve on the African continent), and other vital minerals; and the classification of South Sudanese as third class citizens, following Arab Muslims and African Muslims. This war has caused serious damage to South Sudanese living in neighboring countries as refugees for several decades. Many perished as the result of civil war through disease, hunger, violence, and other related hazards. In 2005 South Sudan and Sudan signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) through the support of the United States and other Western countries under the auspice of the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD), the bloc of East African countries in which Sudan is a full member. In January 2011, South Sudan ceded from Sudan through the decisive referendum won by the overwhelming votes of the South Sudanese people. On July 9, 2011, South Sudan became the 194th and youngest sovereign nation in the world.

Subsequently, South Sudan was soon plagued by frequent border wars and ethnic violence that killed thousands and displaced hundreds of innocent people. When President Salva Kiir falsely accused his former vice president, Dr. Riek Machar Teny Dhurgon, of staging a coup d'etat, presidential guards killed over twenty thousand members of the ethnic Nuer Community. On December 15, 2013, tensions between factions loyal to the president and those aligned with Dr. Machar exploded into full fighting in the South Sudan capital city of Juba. The conflict spread to other parts of the country, creating devastation to the people of the Upper Nile region. As a result of the ongoing Civil War of South Sudan, 400,000 people are estimated to have been killed, and more than 4.6 million people have been displaced in a country of about 12 million. Of these 4.6 million, over 2.1 million are displaced internally and over 2.5 million have fled to neighboring countries, especially Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan,

Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. With this large-scale displacement, South Sudan is now Africa's largest refugee crisis and the world's third largest after Syria and Afghanistan, receiving less attention and chronic underfunding.

The United Nations Mission to the Republic of South Sudan has documented mass killings, sexual violence, and other war crimes that have been committed in the new country.[2] Women and girls are at increased risk of sexual violence because of cramped conditions and the breakdown in social and cultural norms as a result of the violence. Government forces and allied militias have burned villages and killed and raped civilians with impunity. Cases where young girls were raped and thrown alive into burning fire while young boys were violently castrated present horrific human rights violations. The UN estimates that at least nine thousand child soldiers have been pulled out of schools to be recruited in the armed forces.

The ravages of war on the agricultural heart in the south of the country has caused the number of people facing starvation to soar to six million, with famine breaking out in some areas. The country's economy has also been devastated. According to the International Monetary Fund, real income has been reduced by half since 2013, and inflation exceeds 300 percent per annum.

Loving Mercy and Doing Justice in South Sudan

The ECCSSE was established during the Sudan Civil War, and the church seeks ways to safeguard the spiritual, physical, social, and psychological needs of the poorest and most helpless people in this desperate community, in partnership with the ECC primarily through Covenant World Relief, a ministry of Serve Globally.

Spiritual needs. The ECCSSE has been engaged in planting churches and equipping Christlike servants in South Sudan and beyond. In the past twenty-three years, the ECCSSE has established 415 congregations in South Sudan and outside South Sudan. It has trained more than eighty leaders in Bible, theology, reconciliation, and justice. Currently the ECCSSE has one educational institution, the Jerry Rice Covenant Bible School, named after Covenanter Jerry Rice (1939–2020).

[2] United Nations Mission to the Republic of South Sudan, "Human Rights Violations and Abuses in Yei, July 2016—January 2017," https://unmiss.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/report_human_rights_violations_and_abuses_in_yei_july_2016_to_january_2017_0.pdf, accessed July 27, 2020.

Physical needs. Since it began, the ECCSSE has been caring for the physical needs of desperate communities. We offer food and other relief items, supported through donations from Covenant World Relief. Through coalitions with other sister churches and local NGOs, we work to alleviate suffering of communities tormented by war. Additionally, the ECCSSE supports the needs of vulnerable widows and their children through the Vulnerable and Orphan Children (VOC) project. The concept of home-based support is superior to the orphanage concept that confines children and keeps them hostage against their will. By contrast, the home-based concept has a wider scope to reach siblings as well as widowed mothers or the children's guardians. This life-saving project is now entering its eleventh year of serving marginalize communities. The VOC project also trains widows in tailoring, business management, financial management, food processing, plumbing, weaving, and other relevant skills that allow them to stand on their own feet and support their households.

The ECCSSE is working tirelessly to equip widows with agricultural knowledge that enables them to support their households in the refugee camps. Four Refugees Widows Garden Projects currently serve 1020 widows and 275 orphans living in refugee and internally displaced person camps around South Sudan and Gambella, Ethiopia. The project trains widows in agricultural skills, as they tend the gardens, and provides nourishment through the produce yielded. This vital project is preventing children from falling under acute malnourish in the camps. The ECCSSE also supports the physical needs of the community through water and livestock projects. We offered water by drilling wells through the Deep and Shallow Wells Projects in South Sudan and Ethiopia and by providing cow's milk to acutely malnourished refugee children in Ethiopia.

Social needs. The ECCSSE provides educational training that sustains community welfare. We offer education to over one thousand children in South Sudan and neighboring countries where South Sudanese reside as refugees. The ECCSSE is a pre-accredited member of the South Sudan Council of Churches, a Christian body tasked with disseminating peace messages across a nation that is rent by a colonial legacy and ongoing ethnic division.

Psychological needs. Millions of people in South Sudan are living in despair due to the traumas of decades of civil war. Many have lost love ones and livelihoods. Others have witnessed horrible atrocities that will remain in their minds for the rest of their lives. Some are victims of rape, torture, and other serious crimes. There are some who saw their

relatives burnt alive and were forced to eat their flesh. Such crimes have remained engraved in the minds of the people and are deepening tribal hatreds and a desire for vengeance.

Social needs. In 2014, one year after the outbreak of violence, the ECCSSE formed Peace, Reconciliation, and Healing (PRH), a program focused on reconciling the antagonistic South Sudanese tribes within the refugee camps of neighbouring countries. The main objective of the PRH program is to find ways to bring peace and stability in South Sudan and to disseminate the messages of peace that will curb ongoing hatreds and deepest stress among the divided communities of South Sudanese in the refugee and internally displaced person camps. The PRH program seeks to relieve the psychological burdens of those who have suffered the deepest traumas of war. It promotes peace, reconciliation, and forgiveness among the divided communities of South Sudan. Through the PRH program, 5330 Peace Ambassadors have been trained and are disseminating peace messages in South Sudan and its neighboring East African countries.

Intercultural and International Partnerships

Intercultural partnerships are marked by the people of different cultures working together in mutual relationship and vision. They are also marked by mutual respect for each other in the ministry. Though we continue to grow in our partnership, we thank God for bringing the ECC and ECCSSE together to engage in God's mission through mercy and justice ministries. We have learned many things from the ECC, and we believe that they have learned many things from the ECCSSE's local ministry. We have demonstrated that the church should understand mercy, love, and justice as the main pillars of the Lord's ministry while serving people in need. The love of Christ is a central element of Christian theology. This encompasses the love of Jesus Christ for humanity, the love of Christians for Christ, and the love of Christians for others. These aspects are distinct in Christian teachings. The love for Christ reflects his love for his followers. The love of Christ is deep. Our deepest need is to know that love, and our mission is to share it with others. The love of Christ is shown through acts of justice and mercy. Some believe that these are incompatible, since justice involves the dispensing of deserved punishment for wrongdoing and mercy shows compassion and pardon to the offender. However, these two attributes of God do in fact form a unity that reflects his character.

Since the Lord came to the world to care for the needy and helpless

people, the universal church should double their efforts by caring for people in need and stand firm with those who are facing injustice across the globe. Many are facing injustice and persecution as the result of their faith in Jesus Christ. The universal church should stand firm in solidarity with those who suffer from many different needs. The ECCSSE is grateful to be used by God in partnership with the ECC. When we serve the needs of the people, our hope and prayer is that they will become the Lord's followers and accept Christlike discipleship.

From Paternalism to Mutuality

David Husby, former director of Covenant World Relief, a ministry of Serve Globally, Evangelical Covenant Church , Chicago, Illinois

On January 12, 2010, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake wreaked havoc on the nation of Haiti. More than 220,000 people were killed, 300,000 injured, and 1.5 million left homeless. This was the first coordinated response to a major disaster I participated in as director of Covenant World Relief (CWR). We were overwhelmed with phone calls and emails from individuals and churches desiring to donate to the relief effort. The generosity of Covenanters was tremendous. CWR received more than $1.3 million in donations designated for Haiti earthquake relief, which was distributed to four different partners responding to the disaster. In addition to generous donations, we also received numerous requests from people desiring to travel to Haiti to volunteer on site. However, due to the magnitude of death and destruction and the chaotic conditions, our partners requested that we not send volunteers, particularly during the early stages of the response.

Two months after the earthquake, two CWR partners in Haiti invited me and a few other ECC leaders to come see their ongoing relief and recovery work. As we were standing in line to board the plane for the two-hour flight from Miami to Port-au-Prince, we saw several groups wearing brightly colored matching t-shirts with slogans like "Help for Haiti's Helpless" and "Save Haiti." When we arrived in Port-au-Prince, we were overwhelmed by the mounds of debris from buildings destroyed by the earthquake and the resulting gridlock at the airport and throughout the capital city. During our brief stay we learned how the United Nations was coordinating the response through regular cluster meetings

of those organizations focusing on specific needs such as food, water and sanitation, medical care, shelter, logistics, and security. We saw how our partner organizations were participating in these cluster meetings and collaborating with other local and international NGOs.

We also learned about the "SUVs"—spontaneous, uninvited volunteers—pouring into the country to help with the response. Although they came with good intentions, for the most part they were actually causing more harm than good. Most had no language ability in French or Creole, little if any understanding of Haitian culture, and minimal experience in disaster response. One of the CWR partners in Port-au-Prince told us about a large group of medical doctors who arrived at their door soon after the earthquake, expressing the desire to help in any way they could. Yet, because they were uninvited, had no place to stay or means to care for themselves, and had no proficiency in French or Creole or knowledge of Haitian culture, our partner politely said, "No, thank you." The doctors angrily returned to the airport and took the next plane back to the US.

Paternalism: Robbing People of Their God-Given Dignity

Over a decade of working with CWR, I have received numerous inquiries from people wishing to go to other countries and serve poor and marginalized communities. These people sincerely desire to be the hands and feet of Jesus to those who are in great need. However, in spite of what I am convinced are genuinely good intentions to help the poor and the vulnerable, I usually try to dissuade them from going without first receiving appropriate training in missiology, cultural sensitivity, language acquisition, and holistic community development. Whether it is for two weeks or twenty years, some level of this kind of training is indispensable for intercultural service.

Beyond training, I believe we need to understand a more fundamental reason many of the volunteers to Haiti caused more harm than good. We in the West, particularly those of us from the dominant white culture, tend to be infused with deeply ingrained paternalism, which is often accompanied by a sense of superiority. With the help of many colleagues and friends around the world, including many in the US, I have come to see my own blindness in this area, realizing that as a white Westerner, paternalism is in my bones. I believe most of us in the West were raised in such a way that we unconsciously possess an attitude of superiority, which causes us to behave paternalistically toward the vulnerable and the marginalized, particularly those of other ethnicities.

There are many ways to define paternalism. In intercultural mission,

paternalism can be understood as "a top-down approach to helping others: those with the resources decide what's good for those without resources and impose their ideas on a community. This can foster a sense of helplessness within those being helped. It can also reinforce the idea among those who give aid that those they are helping really are helpless."[1] In our desire to engage in God's mission to love and serve the poor and vulnerable, rarely are we westerners consciously aware of our paternalism or our attitude of superiority. We truly desire to care for others who are in desperate need. But as Duane Elmer says, "Superiority cloaked in a desire to serve is still superiority."[2]

Missiologist Allan Tippet provides a helpful description of paternalistic or colonial mission:

> The old approach to mission was based on a wrong assumption that change was a one-way process. The stronger controlled the weak, the superior the inferior, the adult the child—and likewise the "advanced" people supervised the growth of the "child" races. Colonialism was based on these fallacies and colonial missions consciously or unconsciously went along with them. This was the root cause of our ingrained superiority and our paternalism.[3]

Tippet writes as if colonialism is over. However, I believe that the mindset of colonialism, with its paternalism and attitude of superiority, remains ingrained in postcolonial Western culture, including Western Christian mission, disaster response, and community development.

At the 2017 Africa CWR partners consultation in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, ECC executive minister of Serve Globally Al Tizon led a session on lament for the effects of colonial mission in Africa. Al asked the leaders of partner organizations to share their experiences of colonial mission. At first the tension and discomfort were palpable in the very silent room—after all, the leadership of the funding sources for their programs, and the event itself, were all present. After a long period of silence, one of the African leaders shared his painful experience of colo-

[1] Amber Van Schooneveld, "Does Sponsorship Encourage Paternalism and Dependency?" Compassion International, September 24, 2013, https://www.compassion.ca/blog/does-sponsorship-encourage-paternalism-and-dependency/.

[2] Duane Elmer, *Cross Cultural Servanthood: Serving the World in Christlike Humility* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), 17.

[3] Alan Tippet, *Introduction to Missiology* (Littleton, CO: William Carey Library, 2013), 87.

nialism. One by one, the rest of the African leaders shared the negative impacts of colonialism in their countries and their personal lives. As this time was nearing an end, one African woman raised her hand and said, "I hope you are not going to close this session by apologizing to us for the negative impact of Western colonial mission, because the reality is that colonialism continues even today."

As with so many problems, recognizing our ingrained paternalism is the first and most important step toward overcoming it. Corbett and Fikkert describe fives basic forms of paternalism and their false assumptions in their seminal book *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor and Yourself*.[4]

1. Labor paternalism falsely assumes that doing things for others is an effective way to help them—and allows the doer to feel good about themselves in the process. The reality is that simply doing things for others only serves to perpetuate their disempowerment and demonstrates disrespect.

2. Resource paternalism falsely assumes that when working in vulnerable and marginalized communities it is always necessary to bring resources from the outside. The reality is that no matter how dire a situation, local resources—human, material, and financial—are always available to some extent. In fact, resources brought from the outside can actually be harmful to the local economy and create unhealthy dependency. According to Paul Farmer, "Those who believe that charity is the answer to the world's problems often have a tendency—sometimes striking, sometimes subtle, and surely lurking in all of us—to regard those needing charity as intrinsically inferior."[5]

3. Managerial paternalism falsely assumes that the poor and marginalized are not capable of leading change in their communities—at least not with the efficiency of westerners. The reality is that community transformation can never be effectively imposed by outsiders; rather, the best leaders of change in any community are insiders.

4. Knowledge paternalism falsely assumes that those from the more economically developed West have the best ideas about how things should be done. The reality is that local people best understand their own context and culture. After frequently hearing mission teams on construction

[4] Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 115–19.

[5] Michael Griffin and Jennie Weiss Block, eds., *In the Company of the Poor: Conversations with Dr. Paul Farmer and Fr. Gustavo Gutierrez* (New York: Orbis Books), 38.

projects say, "That's not the way we do it back home," one Covenant missionary began to respond, "Fine. Do it your way when you go back home. While you are here do it the way the local leaders tell you to do it." According to Melba Maggay, "To be 'Jew to the Jew' and 'Greek to the Greek' requires humility and a certain plasticity, an adaptive power that is possible only to those who are prepared to be subject to other people's norms and values, to lay down their preconceptions, and affirm the life systems of those whose ways of doing things are vastly different from our own."[6]

5. Spiritual paternalism falsely assumes that the materially poor are also spiritually poor. This attitude of spiritual superiority is evident, for example, when mission teams request to offer vacation Bible school or to preach. The reality is that the materially poor are quite often more spiritually mature than we rich westerners because they are more dependent on God by necessity.

After thirty-seven years of mission and ministry in the ECC, I believe we have much to learn from our international partners when it comes to proclaiming the good news of the kingdom in both word and deed, without bifurcation.

Developing Partnerships Based on Mutuality and Respect

This deeply ingrained paternalism and attitude of superiority in Western culture has implications for how the Western church should participate in transformational community development, in local communities and around the world. I am convinced that one of the most effective ways for the church in the West to participate in God's mission of transformation and justice in the majority world is to enter into partnerships with local organizations marked by mutuality rather than dominance, humbly submitting to the leadership of the local partner organization.

There are many pragmatic reasons for partnering in God's mission with local organizations. Community development programs led by organizations located within or near marginalized and vulnerable communities have greater longevity and sustainability. Proximity to communities of engagement also means program expenses are far lower than if an outside organization relocates staff and ships supplies from a great distance. Proximity also increases the likelihood of contextualized expertise, as local organizations frequently have a superior understanding of their

[6] Melba Maggay, *Global Kingdom, Global People: Living Faithfully in a Multicultural World* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Langham Global Library, 2017), 103.

communities as well as shared language and culture. Furthermore, local partners usually have established networks.

Collaboration with local churches, NGOs, community leaders, and government is essential to holistic community development. An example of such collaboration is Fundefam, a nonprofit organization engaged in holistic community development in Monterrey, Mexico. Fundefam was organized in the late 1990s by Covenant missionaries and originally included effective ministries of parenting and marriage enrichment classes as well as a ministry to families of children with Down syndrome. Eventually Monterrey became too dangerous for the Covenant missionaries to remain. Because the missionaries had identified and empowered effective local leaders, Fundefam has flourished in the years since. They have broadened their impact and established much deeper roots in their community—developing an elaborate web of collaborative relationships with churches, schools, universities, government, businesses, the local community, and outside organizations, including CWR.

I believe Western Christian churches and NGOs should avoid working in any intercultural context without partnering with established local organizations, which may be either churches or Christian NGOs. This should be a non-negotiable starting point for Western development efforts in the majority world. But it is not enough. As we partner with local organizations and seek relationships of mutuality rather than paternalism, we must address the issues of power and ownership.

A 1964 *Wizard of Id* comic strip depicts the king proclaiming "Remember the Golden Rule!" from his castle balcony. When one of the subjects below inquires what the Golden Rule is, another responds, "The one who has the gold makes the rules." International partnerships typically include a local implementing church or NGO and one or more funding organizations from the West. Guess who usually has the power in these partnerships? One of the greatest obstacles to genuine mutuality in partnerships is the failure of funding organizations to divest themselves of the power that comes from possessing the gold. The following statement from the Cape Town Commitment is helpful here:

> Partnership is about more than money, and unwise injection of money frequently corrupts and divides the Church. Let us finally prove that the Church does not operate on the principle that those who have the most money have all the decision-making power. Let us no longer impose our own preferred names, slogans, programmes, systems and methods

> on other parts of the Church. Let us instead work for true mutuality of North and South, East and West, for interdependence in giving and receiving, for the respect and dignity that characterizes genuine friends and true partners in mission.[7]

Effective and impactful holistic transformation requires development programs that are locally initiated, led, and owned. Unfortunately, this is often not the reality for international partnerships engaged in community development in vulnerable and marginalized communities. Many Western NGOs boast that most or all of the staff carrying out their community development programs are local people. However, the reality is that these are often hired staff, mere agents of the Western organization; real ownership of the program lies with the outside partner, who acts as the initiator and leader of the program. Maggay writes, "It is an open secret that part of the ineffectiveness of many programs on the ground is that these originated not from the wishes and desires of the people but from the priority concerns of the funders. So-called participatory processes are merely efforts to make the people buy in and own the programs being offered."[8] Jorn Lemvik asserts that ownership of programs should extend beyond the local implementing organization to the local community itself: "Local ownership has to be found at every level of the 'development system' ladder, from the local projects, through the local organizations. If local populations do not feel a sense of ownership to the project activities, or if they have not been part of the process of setting up goals for development work, it is usually better to leave it undone."[9]

Although critical of much of the current community development being done through international partnerships funded by Western Christian organizations, Maggay suggests a better way forward:

> Clearly development needs to be deconstructed and reinvented as a location specific narrative that honors a culture's idea of a desirable future. While there are certain universals that all human beings rightly aspire to—prosperity rather than

[7] Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, *The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action* (The Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, 2010), 45, https://www.lausanne.org/docs/CapeTownCommitment.pdf.

[8] Melba Maggay, *Rise Up and Walk: Religion and Culture in Empowering the Poor* (Oxford: Regnam Books, 2015), 304–305.

[9] Jorn Lemvik, "Partnership: Guidelines for a New Deal," in *Power and Partnership*, ed. Knut Edvard Larsen and Knud Jorgensen (Oxford: Regnam Books, 2014), 120.

> poverty; justice as against inequality and oppression; health and not sickness; peace, community, and stability rather than conflict, isolation, and perpetual insecurity—the path to these are best determined and sustained within a people's own set of values and resource base.[10]

In light of Maggay's words some might conclude that it would be better for international organizations not to enter into partnerships at all and instead leave holistic community development to local churches and NGOs. However, the reality is that genuine need exists for financial resources from the West to supplement local human, material, and financial resources in the work of community development and disaster response in the majority world. Moreover, the West also enters international partnerships with genuine needs. Western Christians have much to learn from majority world believers when it comes to dependence on God, peace-making, creation care, and treatment of the marginalized and oppressed with dignity and respect—to name only a few areas. In relationships of mutuality, both needs and benefits should go both directions. I believe one of the greatest advantages to the approach of CWR in partnering with local organizations is that we in the Evangelical Covenant Church have the tremendous opportunity to learn from our partners and be transformed through these relationships. This requires that we humbly submit to our partners in the majority world whom God has given us as mentors and teachers.

Moving Forward

The Cape Town Commitment calls Western Christians to move from global partnerships beset with paternalism and the perpetuation of unhealthy dependencies to relationships based on mutual love, submission, and sharing.

> We urgently seek a new global partnership within the body of Christ across all continents, rooted in profound mutual love, mutual submission, and dramatic economic sharing without paternalism or unhealthy dependency. And we seek this not only as a demonstration of our unity in the gospel, but also for the sake of the name of Christ and the mission of God in all the world.[11]

[10] Maggay, *Rise Up and Walk*, 61.
[11] *The Cape Town Commitment*, 19.

Having completed my service as director of Covenant World Relief, I pray that the new capable staff will take CWR to new heights. I pray for a broader vision, for brilliant new ideas, for deeper engagement in God's mission in the world, and for greater impact on the ECC. I also pray that no matter what new changes come, CWR, along with the rest of Serve Globally, will continue to seek partnerships with local organizations that are based on mutuality and respect. That we will humbly seek relationships in which our local partner organizations are in the driver's seat while we count it a privilege to sit in the back seat as we journey forward together, participating in God's mission of transformation in our broken world.

Mental Health Care as Mission: Developing Leaders Globally

Grace Shim, executive director, Cornerstone Counseling Foundation, Chiang Mai, Thailand

"*They* are here for counseling?" My thoughts betrayed my surprise at seeing a highly esteemed missionary couple in the waiting room of our counseling center. As the newest counselor on staff, I was still acclimating to providing mental health care for missionaries. This was not a demographic I associated with counseling needs. A year prior, our family had moved from a small rural town in the mountains of Kyrgyzstan to Chiang Mai, Thailand. We traded the crisp, frigid alpine air, bleating of sheep, and tea-pouring hospitality of our Muslim community for dense tropical humidity, the chirping of exotic birds, and the kind smiles of our Buddhist neighbors. Our years in Kyrgyzstan reshaped our naïve understanding of being missionaries as we faced unexpected challenges that led to humility and growth.

It was supposed to be a smooth transition for our family. We believed we were moving "up," increasing our access to amenities, conveniences, and educational opportunities for our three children. And yet our family continued to struggle with the adjustment a year into our new assignment. We were still grieving the loss of Kyrgyz friendships, learning a new language, and searching again for where we belonged—in one of the largest missionary communities in the world, an environment ripe for comparison. I was convinced that we were the only ones struggling. Other families seemed to be flourishing with their happy smiles, friendship groups, successful ministries, and testimonies of God's goodness. However, in providing counseling for numerous missionaries and their families, I discovered that we were not alone. Many in our community

also felt lonely, burned out, and ashamed that they were not thriving in ministry and relationships as they had hoped.

Missionaries Struggle Too

Most people—perhaps especially those in ministry and leadership—do not honestly share their difficulties because they believe they are alone in their struggles. That belief often translates into behaviors and thoughts that hinder their flourishing. As the world suffers under the weight of unprecedented global crises, the accompanying isolation reveals the brokenness and sinfulness of humanity. Sadly, God's people often contribute to the sense of aloneness by masking their pain instead of facing it. This can lead to fractured individuals, families, communities, and societies. As a result, the church's witness, both local and global, negatively impacts God's mission in the world.

Cornerstone Counseling Foundation believes that addressing mental health needs is an enactment of the gospel to those who are hurting and in need of healing. Our mission is to empower others towards greater wholeness and reconciliation with self, others, and God through providing quality professional counseling. In particular, we provide counseling to missionaries and to the local Thai community. This vision is God's call to faithfully fulfill our part in developing men, women, and children who are leading and influencing the gospel's growth throughout the world.

Cornerstone Counseling Foundation was established in 2004 in Chiang Mai, Thailand, by Dr. Bruce Narramore, founder of Rosemead School of Psychology and former president of Narramore Christian Foundation, and Dr. Timothy Friesen, who served as Cornerstone's first executive director. Dr. Friesen had counseled many missionaries who needed to return to the United States for care due to the absence of counseling resources in their region of service. This often resulted in extended disruption of ministry and schooling and exacted a financial and emotional toll on the entire family and mission. In some cases, home churches questioned their support of struggling missionaries who apparently were not "fit" for overseas ministry, compounding the shame experienced in the unanticipated return. The vision emerged, therefore, to provide professional Christian counseling to global personnel without significant disruption to their lives. Chiang Mai's location allows access to quality services within a reasonable travel distance.

Our clients serve as missionaries in more than forty-three countries throughout the world and are sent from over thirty-three passport countries. Most come to receive weekly or intensive counseling. Asia is home

to the largest population of non-Christians, which includes the majority of the world's Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists. Many who serve in this area of the world face considerable stress, isolation, and trauma that impacts their personal and relational well-being.

Currently, Cornerstone has fourteen clinicians who provide counseling for missionaries and the Thai community. Because most of Cornerstone's staff raise their salaries through various mission organizations, we are able to provide affordable care on a donation basis. Our team possesses depth and breadth of education, experience, and expertise to address the variety of issues our clients face. Since Cornerstone's founding, thousands of Christian workers have received help for marriage and family crises, depression, anxiety, addictions, burnout, trauma, abuse, team conflicts, and other significant issues. Our ministry is rooted in a vision empowered by the Holy Spirit and a group of people willing to serve globally to be vessels of God's healing. We serve some of the most courageous and passionate people who are seeking to minister in the most challenging places in the world. They are influencing, impacting, and innovating in local contexts and unique ways to see the gospel of God's kingdom reach the far corners of the earth.

You Are Not Alone

In *Leading with a Limp*, psychologist Dan Allender writes, "Anyone who wrestles with an uncertain future on behalf of others—anyone who uses her gifts, talents, and skills to influence the direction of others for the greater good—is a leader. No one is a mere follower.…Every believer is called to help someone grow into maturity—and such is the core calling of a leader."[1] This aligns with Jesus's command to his disciples in the Great Commission to "go into all the world and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). Each of us is called to invest in the growth and development of others—be it an employee, church member, colleague, child, student, or friend—in whatever role God has placed us. Every follower of Jesus is a leader because each of us is in a position of influence in someone else's life. Tod Bolsinger defines leadership as "energizing a community of people toward their own transformation in order to accomplish a shared mission in the face of a changing world."[2]

[1] Dan B. Allender, *Leading with a Limp: Take Full Advantage of Your Most Powerful Weakness* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2008), 25.

[2] Tod E. Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 42.

This is at the heart of Cornerstone's ministry: seeing people transformed to accomplish God's mission in a world that needs transformation.

What happens, then, when followers of Jesus—these leaders—are themselves struggling to live out this mission to the world? Many of our clients seek counseling because life, ministry, or relationships are no longer working. External circumstances, a traumatic event, a relationship breach, or long-standing behavioral patterns expose underlying issues that need to be addressed. Our clients indicate their struggle with phrases like, "I feel stuck," "I've lost my passion and sense of purpose," "I don't like who I'm becoming," or "I don't hear God anymore." They have already expended efforts toward healing through typical means such as prayer, Bible study, sharing with others, or self-reflection and observe little progress in their well-being. Many suffer privately, struggling to understand the surfacing symptoms that indicate something deeper may be amiss. Eventually, the inner turmoil leaks outward to negatively impact their family or ministry and brings them to counseling.

A quote I often use in counseling is, "Suffering is inevitable; suffering alone is intolerable." While pain is part of the human experience, it is the aloneness that becomes a heavy burden. The prophet Isaiah wrote that we will pass through the water and fire (Isaiah 54:2–4); Jesus confirms that we will have trouble in this world (John 16:33); and James reminds us that we will face many kinds of trials (James 1:2). Suffering is inevitable. But on the other side of these verses are the promises of God's presence amid hardship, Jesus's assurance of the Spirit's presence, and God's accessibility in trials. The antidote to aloneness is the presence of another in the suffering. There is no greater example of this than Jesus, who left the glory of heaven and came to earth in human form as Immanuel, "God with us."

As counselors we seek to embody this incarnational presence with our clients. It involves listening to stories of pain, trauma, injustice, and sin that can evoke emotions of grief, anger, and fear. I often leave the office heavy-hearted from hearing numerous stories of unspeakable heartache and agony. Henri Nouwen speaks to the burden of leaders as "wounded healers": "Who can listen to a story of loneliness and despair without taking the risk of experiencing similar pains in his own heart and even losing his precious peace of mind? In short: 'Who can take away suffering without entering it?'"[3] Some in the mental healthcare provider commu-

[3] Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (Garden City, NJ: Image Books, 1972), 72.

nity may say we are to be completely objective and emotionally distant in therapy. Professional and emotional boundaries are necessary, but not at the cost of our humanity. Entering into another's suffering is the first step toward healing because it targets the core need to know that we are not alone, that we matter to another. Time and time again, our clients give witness to the impact of our counselors' acceptance, empathy, care, and commitment that empower them toward greater self-compassion, courage, forgiveness, reconciliation, and resilience: "I am overwhelmed by God's grace and love and grateful to dive into parts of my heart and life I was afraid to explore"; "My time here has given me the courage to step back into ministry"; "Jesus met me in my time of counseling"; "I felt safe to share and process without judgment; I feel so loved." With the Spirit's power and the counselor's incarnational presence, our clients can more fully engage and lead in their spheres of influence, wherever they serve in the world.

Our Part in the Work of the Gospel

In the process of counseling, our missionary clients discover that their pursuit of the Great Commission must be anchored in the lived reality of the Greatest Commandments of loving God, loving others, and loving self (Luke 10:27). Our clients' courage and vulnerability yield the fruit of renewed vision, reconciled relationships, and restored hope. We witness sacred moments that build on each other and lead to ongoing healing. A husband tearily turns to his wife in repentance instead of defensiveness. A woman shares the details of her trauma for the first time in a wave of relieved sobs. A parent pulls his teenage daughter close, affirming his love regardless of her choices. A team leader confesses the impact of his authoritarian leadership. These moments are glimpses into the shalom God desires to be increasingly present in this world.

Al Tizon describes the biblical vision of shalom as "God's very best," restoring and reconciling the world to how God intended it to be. The church is called to proclaim and live out the whole gospel, "the gospel of the shalom kingdom: reconciliation between God and people, between people and people, and between God, people, and creation. God calls us to preach this whole and reconciled gospel and nothing less."[4] Cornerstone's vision is part of this larger vision of the "whole gospel, for the

[4] Al Tizon, *Whole and Reconciled: Gospel, Church, and Mission in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 88.

[5] Mission and Motto, Palmer Seminary, quoted in ibid., 97.

whole world, through whole persons."[5] Our starting belief is that every client is created in the image of God. Sin and its effects devastate humanity at every level, including the self from which every other relationship stems. Tizon states that the needed reconciliation "begins with me. In our brokenness, we forget our uniqueness, our incalculable worth….Before we participate with God...in the ministry of reconciliation, we look upward to God to heal and reconcile the broken pieces of our interior selves."[6] Herein lies Cornerstone's call to bring wholeness to the "interior self."

Our vision is grounded in the powerful words of Isaiah 61:

> The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, and release from darkness for the prisoners, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. (Isaiah 61:1–3a, NIV)

The good news is healing the brokenhearted, setting people free from captivity and darkness, comforting those who mourn and grieve, and helping people experience joy again. Each phrase describes the ministry of counseling and inspires our staff to live out mental health care as mission. As we enter into the brokenness of our clients, we are God's vessels of healing and reconciliation. The final verse of Isaiah 61 speaks of the fruit of this Spirit-anointed ministry: "For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations" (Isaiah 61:11, NIV). God transforms the global landscape as people experience freedom; through the good news of hope and healing, nations will be blessed with God's justice and glory.

Expanding the Vision

One of the most significant shifts in Cornerstone's ministry over the last several years has been its expansion from caring primarily for missionaries to the broader Thai community. The Ministry of Health in Thailand reported statistics that one in every five people in the nation

[6] Tizon, *Whole and Reconciled*, 103.

[7] John Fernquest, "Mental Health: Neglected in Thailand," *Bangkok Post*, September 25, 2012, www.bangkokpost.com/learning/learning-news/314017/mental-health-neglected-in-thailand.

struggles with mental illness[7]; one million adolescents are experiencing depression[8]; and every two hours someone commits suicide.[9] These numbers are consistent with World Health Organization reports on the global impact of mental health disorders.[10] As Cornerstone has developed quality staff and resources, we are heeding the call to steward our experience to the Thai community. Our initiatives are a response to joining God in what he is already doing as we discern together, pay attention to the Spirit's work around us, and respond with our God-given abilities and skills. Cornerstone's ministry has grown beyond its original mission in exciting ways.

First, God brought several highly qualified bilingual Thai counselors to the team. In Thailand, where less than one percent of the population is Christian, our Thai counselors are part of only a handful of Christian counselors in the country. They are pioneering the path forward in providing mental health care for the Thai from the perspective of faith and psychology. As a result, Cornerstone's Thai client population has increased to twelve percent in the last few years.

Second, God has provided significant opportunities to partner with local institutions and organizations in providing psycho-educational workshops and training. The two primary reasons people do not seek counseling are the lack of knowledge about mental health and its associated stigma. In offering education to local churches and communities, we aim to prioritize collaboration with the Thai psychological community. In a recent all-day workshop, two of our counselors presented with a translator on burnout and depression. In the afternoon, a Thai psychiatrist, Dr. Kittiwan, helped the participants understand how depression manifests in the Thai population and ways to receive care. She fielded many questions from the audience who appreciated the opportunity to gain answers about their mental health concerns. As Westerners, we learned how depression presents in different ways in the local context.

As we present lectures for psychology students in the local universities, provide training to Thai pastors and leaders, teach workshops to the hill-tribe minority groups, and hold monthly community workshops, we seek

[8] Pravit Rojanaphruk, "1 Million Thai Teens Suffer from Depression," *Khaosodenglish*, December 24, 2017, www.khaosodenglish.com/news/bangkok/2017/12/24/1-million-thai-teens-suffer-depression-official.

[9] "Stats Reveal High Rate of Suicide," *Bangkok Post*, November 2, 2019, https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/1785214/stats-reveal-high-rate-of-suicide.

[10] "Mental Disorders," World Health Organization, November 28, 2019, www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-disorders.

to partner with Thai colleagues in both faith-based and secular circles. This cross-cultural collaboration provides a more comprehensive understanding of how mental health issues can be addressed in Thailand. Thai participants have found these learning opportunities highly beneficial, and we continue to receive requests for additional training. Furthermore, attendees come to realize that they are not alone in their struggles. In turn, this recognition fosters an atmosphere of mutual encouragement and support.

Lastly, Cornerstone's staff has grown in number and diversity with the expansion of our vision. We have nearly thirty staff representing a broad spectrum of socio-economic, cultural, educational, and age demographics. We are committed to the truth of 1 Corinthians 12 of being one in Christ and affirming the value of each person's unique contribution to the body. Borrowing from an often-used phrase in Thailand, we are "same-same but different." However, the reality is that our differences have at times been painful, disappointing, and humbling. Our partnership in ministry as an intercultural team exposes our blind spots, insensitivities, and assumptions. As misunderstandings and hurts surface, we are faced with the choice to enter into the continuing work of self-reflection, ownership, confrontation, confession, and forgiveness. The sometimes-difficult relational dynamics trigger our defenses and also call forth humility. It is simultaneously messy and transformative. We must be willing to submit ourselves to the hard work of reconciliation and unity within our team, even as we seek to help our clients do the same. Loving and serving one another amid our differences is one of the most effective ways to "energize a community of people toward their own transformation in order to accomplish a shared mission in the face of a changing world."[11]

A Final Thought

I recently had a conversation with my eighty-one-year-old father, globally respected for his lifetime of pastoral ministry and leadership. In sharing my struggles with and questions about leading others, I asked him what he had learned about leadership from his decades of experience and his wealth of godly wisdom. He responded, "Leadership has become a simpler definition for me through these years. It is leaving the place where God has called you a little bit better than when you first arrived." I love that definition because it concisely expresses God's call to each one of us to be an agent of his wholeness and reconciliation wherever

11 Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 42.

we are. At Cornerstone Counseling Foundation, we are seeking to do our part as we faithfully minister in Thailand through mental health care with missionary clients and the local Thai community. In walking alongside the broken and the hurting in this part of the world, we hope that each person leaves Cornerstone further along in their journey toward wholeness in order to make a lasting impact on a world in need of God's transformation.

Church Leadership Development in India

Shekhar Singh, professor of ministry, South Asia Theological Research Institute, Pune, India

We all live in a broken world where economic disparity, poverty, gender bias, conflict, civil wars, refugee crises, displacement of the poor and marginalized, and natural and man-made disasters are present realities. These disparities also impact Indian society, which is pluralistic and complex. K.L. Sharma aptly describes India as,

> A grand synthesis of customs, cultures, religions, and languages of the people, belonging to different castes and communities, even social, economic, and political inequality. This is the real structure and picture of Indian society. The main reality is diversity; diversity not only in regard to racial compositions, religious, and linguistic distinctions, but also in patterns of living, lifestyles, land tenure systems, occupational, and professional activities and practices.[1]

Indian society is not simply a collection of various ethnicities, religions, linguistic groups, castes, and regions; it is also quite complex in terms of how these various cultural dimensions intersect with each another. The church in India has often been accused of a passive response to this changing context, focusing on its own internal activities, which serve to sustain its age-old structure, turning a deaf ear to society's cry for justice, peace, and equality. This article describes how the church in India has

[1] K.L. Sharma, *Indian Social Structure and Change* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2007), 1.

developed leaders in response to the complex challenges of its context.

The Indian Context and the Church's Response

The acknowledgement of context is critical to leadership development. I will highlight relevant aspects of India's larger social, religious, economic contexts in which the church exists, followed by how the church has responded to these contextual realities, both positively and negatively.

Social context. Indian society is hierarchical. The caste system has divided society for centuries and is deeply entrenched. At the top of the four original castes (called *varna*, or class) were the Brahmins, the priestly class, believed to have been created out of the mouth of god in order to lead worship and rituals and to advise society. The Ksatriyas, the warrior class, were created from the arm of god to serve as warriors, defenders, rulers, and administrators. The Vaisyas were created from the belly of god to be merchants and farmers, contributing to the economy. The Sudras were created from the feet of god to serve as laborers, servants, and menial workers. A fifth group, previously referred to as "untouchables," falls outside of the *varnashrama*. Gandhi referred to this group instead as "Harijans," or children of God. B.R. Ambedkar rejected this term on religious and social grounds. He instead coined the term "Dalit," which stems from a Semitic root "dal," meaning underprivileged, oppressed, and marginalized.[2] Thus, Indian churches are divided by castes in addition to denominations, following the prevailing societal context. Instead of coming together as one church, caste divisions result in little real fellowship and unity among congregations. This creates tension and divisions within and among the local churches.[3]

Indian society is also patriarchal. In *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Gerda Lerner defines patriarchy as "the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to such power."[4] Jesudason Basker Jeyaraj comments that "the consequences of the patriarchal system on society are so serious that it is impossible for Christian ministry to ignore this marginalized and oppressed group of the society. Women are treated as

[2] Quoted in Jesudasan Baskar Jeyaraj, *Christian Ministry: Models of Ministry and Training* (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 2002), 58.
[3] Ibid., 69.
[4] Ibid., 60.
[5] Ibid., 62.

inferior to men because of misconceptions on their sex and gender."[5] Gender discrimination persists as a sociological problem in India today.

Religious context. India is religiously pluralistic. Hinduism is the majority religion, followed by Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Jainism. Additional tribal religions are practiced, which are broadly animistic. Because of India's religious pluralism, many ethnic groups have emerged around religious convictions belonging to Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism.[6] What kind of leadership should the church develop in this situation? Who can bring peace and reconciliation among various religious groups?

Economic context. India is a developing country in which resources are distributed unequally across society. Indian society is governed by industrialists, bankers, large business owners, and some politicians because of their wealth and power. Since the social structure itself is under the control of the wealthy, the landless peasants, agricultural laborers, and daily wages workers remain under the bondage of powerful landlords. Though they work day and night, wages are not regulated, and benefits are regularly denied.[7] This structure perpetuates poverty and widens the gap between the rich and the poor.[8]

Materialism jeopardizes human community. Relationship can flourish only when people treat each other as human subjects rather than as objects. When relationships are mediated through consumer culture, people can hide behind possessions and fail to see each other's uniqueness. Materialism increases the desire for privacy, as money gives people the power to control their own lives. Some people spend money to save time while others spend time to save money. The problems of loneliness, alcoholism, drug addiction, and divorce can be found in wealthy communities. The church must engage itself in addressing poverty through nation building.

The church's response. The church in India is responding to its complex context in both positive and negative ways as we seek to develop Christian leaders. In most Indian churches, pastoral ministry is the work of a single minister. The concept of leadership is often viewed as priestly work, performing rituals on behalf of the people. By contrast, the biblical view of leadership is shepherding, which involves guiding, protection,

[6] William K. Kay and Paul C. Weaver, *Pastoral Care and Counseling: A Manual* (Secunderabad: OM Books, 1997), 7.

[7] Ibid., 64.

[8] Ibid., 63–64.

caring, and loving. Leadership development is negatively impacted to the degree that it is driven by caste, regionalism, gender bias, or denominationalism. Indian churches and church leaders are often blamed for their division along castes. Those who have become Christians from higher castes have difficulties attending worship services attended by lower caste Christians—even though Jesus came into the world to break down the barrier of caste. Regionalism has also plagued Indian church growth and leadership to the extent that leadership of the church has developed in few pockets of the Indian continent. Gender bias also impacts church leadership development, as women are marginalized and not given leadership opportunities in the church. Many congregational churches do not ordain women. Some of the mainline churches that do permit women's ordination do not provide opportunities for ministry.

On the positive side, the urban church is experiencing rapid growth as people migrate from rural to urban areas in search of jobs, education, and other opportunities. This prompts people to look for churches that can provide spiritual care. This urban migration can lead people to find new faith in Christ and join the church. Varying paces of population growth across regions has led to differences between urban and suburban congregations, new and long-established congregations, and congregations with varying age profiles. The present generation is comfortable with new technologies that allow people to relate in new ways. The Indian churches have been very traditional in worship, prayer, preaching, and conducting rituals. The information technology sector has opened new avenues for ministry in India, enabling churches to reach thousands of people with the gospel. Yet church leaders are still reluctant to use new technologies in evangelism, preaching, and other ministry opportunities available to the church.

The church and seminaries must make use of distance education as one of several viable options. More members of the congregations are interested to learn the word of God and desire theological training but lack the time to attend seminary for two to four years, with heavy financial requirements. The church and seminaries must be open to provide theological education by distance. Short-term leadership courses would be very useful in the present context. Congregants are looking for short-term certificate course and diplomas in leadership. Short-term courses could also be offered in biblical preaching, counseling, worship, music, and children, women, and youth ministries.

A Whole Gospel for Whole Persons

Romans 1:16 describes the gospel of Christ as the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. The gospel creates a people, and these people may or may not erect a building. They may organize a variety of institutions with a multitude of administrators, but neither the building nor the institutions and their administrators establish the church. Only the people called together by the Holy Spirit through the gospel are the church.

Proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repent in all areas of their lives. Social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. The task of the Christian leader is to demonstrate that the church is indeed the communion of the saints, the setting where we serve each other and the world. It is the only real brotherhood and sisterhood, for within the church all are brothers and sisters, closely bound together so that a greater unity could not be imagined. Though Protestant churches lack the structure and hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church, they do not lack any of the elements essential to the existence of the church of Jesus Christ.

Proclamation and social involvement are distinct activities, but both must be addressed in mission. If we ignore the world, we betray the word of God, which sends us out to serve the world. If we ignore the word of God, we have nothing to bring to the world. M.M. Thomas recognizes God's wider koinonia in the world, a "secular fellowship" outside the church, as a sign of Christ's redemptive activity; he recognizes too the existence of a "Christ-centred fellowship" within other religions and ideologies.[9] Based on this "wider ecumenism and open secularism," a Christian can cooperate with non-Christian neighbors of "faith or no faith" in order to experience spiritual communion, social community, and material communism.[10] This understanding significantly shaped Thomas's definition of the church. In his thinking, the church is not the only sphere of Christ's activity: as Lord over society, Christ is active in other religions and ideologies as human beings are released from the false absolutes they have created for themselves.[11]

[9] M.M. Thomas, Lesslie Newbigin, and Alfred C. Krass, "Baptism, the Church and Koinonia," *Religion and Society* 19, no. 1 (1972): 72.

[10] M.M. Thomas, "An Ecumenical Approach to Development," *National Council of Churches Review* 100, no. 2 (1980): 69.

[11] Siga Arles, *Theological Education for the Mission of the Church in India: 1947–1987* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 199), 88.

It follows that openness is participating with Christ in others' deliverance from oppression to a liberated, happy life. "A church which is closed to the world which God has loved and redeemed also closes itself against God's spirit. Openness is the very fundamental characteristic of the church of Christ, and its form should be such as makes this double openness in Christ to God and the world an abiding reality."[12] In Christ, the church breaks down the barriers of human socio-economic systems that separate a person from cultures, ideologies, and religions.[13] Such view enhanced Thomas's concern for Christian participation in nation building through action groups for common humanity and social justice.[14]

The Mission of Jesus

Some Christian traditions dichotomize evangelism and social responsibility. In this view, because evangelism relates to people's eternal destiny while social responsibility relates to temporal needs, evangelism is prioritized. This hierarchy is a remnant of the reaction against the so-called "social gospel," which identified the kingdom of God with the construction of society on a Christian basis[15] and was seen by some to imply that human beings can establish the divine kingdom by themselves. However, an openness to social engagement is critical for the mission of the church in India today. As Thomas states, "Evangelism has meaning at depth only as a word coming out of a church engaged with all people in their struggle for personal dignity and social justice....A partnership in nation-building between Christians and non-Christians is the proper context for evangelization."[16] In his view, even the Lord's Supper will be efficacious only when it is actualized in the participant's life and witness in the world; otherwise, it is mere routine.[17]

The church's mission should be modeled after the mission of Christ himself. S.J. Samartha understands the mission and ministry of the church as largely determined by its Christology. Samartha's concept of the "unbound Christ" in his first work on Christology, *The Hindu Response*

[12] M.M. Thomas, "The Open Church," in *The Church: A People's Movement*, ed. Mathai Zachariah (Mysore: Wesley Press, 1975), 62.

[13] Ibid., 66.

[14] Ibid.

[15] See, for example, Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).

[16] M.M. Thomas and Paul David Devanandan, *Christian Participation in Nation Building: The Summing Up of a Corporate Study on Rapid Social Change*, Social Concerns Series 9 (Bangalore: National Christian Council of India, 1960), 112.

[17] Ibid., 71.

to the Unbound Christ,[18] expresses the idea that "Christianity belongs to Christ, Christ does not belong to Christianity."[19] That is, Christianity does not exhaust the person and work of Christ. The bulk of this book shows how select Hindu thinkers have responded to Christ from outside the Christian church. Samartha suggests that these make up an "un-baptized koinonia" of a Christian fellowship that extends beyond the bounds of the established church.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says to the apostles, and thus to the church, "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you" (John 20:21). Samartha prefers the term "witness" to "mission" because it does not imply proclamation but instead "sharing with our neighbours the hopes, the conflicts, and the ambiguities of human life."[20] The rethinking of mission includes the recognition that, in a pluralistic world, other faiths may also legitimately have their own missions. He defines mission as "God's continuing activity through the Spirit to mend the brokenness of creation, to overcome the fragmentation of humanity, and to heal the rift between humanity, nature and God."[21] In witnessing the kingdom to the world, Samartha believes that the church should look for new ways of witnessing. He points out that the church should act as a catalyst for the transformation of society. He hopes that the church by its deeds can influence neighbors of other faiths to share in the blessing of the kingdom, for "the blessings of the kingdom are offered to all."[22] Therefore, Christians "can no longer think of themselves as isolated entities moving into the future along their separate ways."[23]

The church must reflect the life of Jesus who become human and sacrificed himself as God. Therefore, the church must empty itself for the sake of the kingdom to reach out to all people to enter the kingdom. "The followers of Jesus are called to be the 'light' of the world. They are to be salt of the earth. What is demanded is not to convert into a salt mine but just be a salt and watch out not lose their saltiness."[24]

God seeks a world in which all relationships are loving and just. A

[18] Based on a series of lectures delivered at UTC in 1963, this was first published in German as *Hindus vor dem universalen Christus* (Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1970) and subsequently in English as S.J. Samartha, *The Hindu Response to the Unbound Christ* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1974).

[19] Samartha, *Hindu Response to the Unbound Christ*, 10.

[20] Ibid., 58.

[21] Ibid., 59.

[22] S.J. Samartha, "The Kingdom of God in a Religiously Plural World," *Ecumenical Review* 32 no. 2 (1980): 163.

[23] Ibid.

pulpit that is silent on social issues frustrates the purposes of God. Many Christian individuals and some Christian communities are left without a distinctive Christian compass to guide their moral reflection on social issues. If the Christian community is to witness adequately to God's unconditional love and call for social justice, Christian preachers must engage in frequent, honest, and careful reflection on social issues. The local church must become salt and light to the suffering masses through integral mission.

[24] Ibid.

It Goes Both Ways: Ministry Dynamics of Caring for Refugees

Cindy M. Wu, program manager, houston welcomes refugees, *Houston, Texas*

I stood at the counter of a Bosnian restaurant owned by a former refugee, asking about my pickup order. They were running a little behind, the cook answered in broken English. I replied in Spanish that I was not in a rush and told him I would wait by the front door. The hostess observed me timidly, noticing that I, too, was Asian. We struck up a conversation in Mandarin. I learned she was a recent immigrant from China, in Houston to study; she smiled when I told her my parents were from Taiwan but that I had been born and raised in Houston. What are the odds I would have to speak Spanish and Mandarin to pick up food from a Bosnian restaurant? I drove away thinking to myself, "I love this city."

Everything Is Bigger in Texas

Houston is my hometown. The stereotypes about Texas pride are all true—so I'm being humble when I say that despite the traffic, humidity, and lack of interesting topography, Houston is the best place to live south of the Mason-Dixon Line. One of the things I appreciate about Houston is its cosmopolitan spirit combined with hometown friendliness. The city's diversity has increased significantly since I was born. Houston is now a minority majority city, and one out of every four locals is foreign born.[1] It recently surpassed New York and Los Angeles to become

[1] Stephen L. Klineberg, *The 2018 Kinder Houston Area Survey*, Kinder Institute for Urban Research, Rice University, April 2018, 23, https://kinder.rice.edu/sites/g/files/bxs1676/f/documents/Kinder%20Houston%20Area%20Survey%202018.pdf.

America's most diverse city.[2]

A huge contributor to this diversity is the fact that Houston is one of the nation's top refugee resettlement cities. If Harris County in Houston proper were a nation, it would have ranked fourth for welcoming the most refugees in 2016.[3] Many factors draw people to Houston: our world-class medical center, a relatively low cost of living, job opportunities, an abundance of community resources, and a welcoming spirit toward immigrants. Geographically, the Greater Houston area is larger than the state of New Jersey; there is room for newcomers, *literally*. These factors make Houston an ideal setting for resettlement.

That we are a microcosm of the world's peoples means that we are also a microcosm of the world's religions. From Armenian Orthodox to Zoroastrian, Houston accounts for dozens of major and minor faiths. Today houses of worship dot our landscape, and religious holidays impact school attendance and shopping displays in ways they did not when I was growing up. Houston is home not only to many Christians megachurches but to some of the nation's *largest* megachurches such as Lakewood Church, a non-denominational church with an average weekly attendance of 43,000, and Second Baptist Church, a Southern Baptist congregation numbering 20,656 in average Sunday attendance, to name only two.[4] An "average" church here has hundreds if not thousands of members.

This confluence of factors that brings the world to Houston and its high number of Christians sharing the same space creates abundant opportunities for mission. How will the church respond? This is the question *houston welcomes refugees* seeks to answer.

houston welcomes refugees

In February 2019, I began working as program manager of a non-profit organization *houston welcomes refugees* (HWR), my first full-time job after fifteen years as a mom and homemaker, alongside meaningful but random part-time jobs, including research and writing on global Christianity and the global refugee crisis.[5] HWR's mission is "to ease the resettlement

[2] Brittny Mejia, "How Houston has become the most diverse place in America," *Los Angeles Times,* May 9, 2017, https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-houston-diversity-2017-htmlstory.html.

[3] Katharine Shilcutt, "How Houston Became the World's Most Welcoming City for Refugees," *Houstonia*, February 5, 2016, https://www.houstoniamag.com/articles/2016/2/5/resettling-new-country-syrian-refugees-houston-february-2016.

[4] Database of Megachurches in the US, Hartford Institute for Religion Research, http://hirr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/database.html, accessed September 27, 2019.

process for refugees coming to Houston by mobilizing invested, caring volunteers, fostering hope amidst crisis."[6] Our vision is to see the local church mobilized in response to the biblical teaching on God's love for the nations by welcoming refugees in our city with compassion, hope, and honor. Our model is holistic and intended to empower the families we serve by addressing tangible needs as well as needs for friendship and community. My role in the organization is to help manage our volunteer programs and community and church partnerships.

HWR finds itself in a particular context—a highly diverse, highly Christianized, highly populated community that in many ways gets along—that lends itself to deep reflection on a vision of the whole gospel. The church often serves as the mouthpiece of Jesus; what if we were also the hands, feet, and heart? HWR was born out of a desire to capitalize on the resources present in Houston (hundreds of thousands of believers), while waking up the church to do what was missing (a concerted effort to welcome refugees) in response to what God is doing in our midst (bringing the nations to our city).

Global Migration=Missional Opportunity

Migration has always been a part of God's plan for making his name known (e.g., Genesis 11:1–9; Genesis 12:1–3; Ruth 1:18–22; 4:11–12). More people are migrating today than ever before in recorded history. We are in the midst of the worst forced migration crisis since World War II, with numbers skyrocketing over the past five years due to the war in Syria and most recently the Venezuelan crisis. War and persecution around the globe have resulted in a staggering total of almost eighty million forcibly displaced persons by the end of 2019. Of that number, forty-five million are internally displaced, whereas twenty-six million—roughly the entire population of Texas—have fled outside the borders of their country of origin. Refugees, this latter category, are even more vulnerable than internally displaced persons because they lose many if not all of the protections of their state.

In any given year, less than 1 percent of all refugees worldwide are eventually resettled into a third country, a legal process that takes between eighteen and twenty-four months on average. Until recently the United

[5] E.g., Todd M. Johnson and Cindy M. Wu, *Our Global Families: Christians Embracing Common Identity in a Changing World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015); *A Better Country: Embracing the Refugees in our Midst* (William Carey Library, 2017). View further publications at www.cindymwu.com.

[6] For more information, see www.houstonwelcomesrefugees.com.

States was the world's largest receiving country for resettlement. But in fiscal year 2020, the refugee admissions ceiling was set at eighteen thousand, about one fifth our historical average since the national resettlement program was established in 1980. That admissions ceiling equates to approximately 0.072 percent of all anticipated resettled refugees worldwide in the 2020 fiscal year (compared to .12% for the 2019 fiscal year), a travesty when you consider the magnitude of the global refugee crisis and the fact that many refugees are persecuted Christians. Although the number of refugees is decreasing in the short term, followers of Christ are still granted two incredible opportunities. One is to strengthen and be strengthened by the global church. The other is to embrace the missional opportunity provided by refugees being resettled in our midst. Through tragic circumstances, the world has come to our backyard—could God have a plan?[7]

Mission is described today as being "from everywhere to everywhere," and this is precisely what is happening as refugee believers from all over the world cross paths all over the world, clinging to a whole gospel that addresses material needs as well as spiritual ones, a message that unifies unlikely path-mates in the bond of their suffering.[8] Since 2002 over 215,000 Christians—constituting the largest religious group—have come to the US for resettlement, making the American church as a whole not only more ethnically diverse but also more theologically rich.[9] Furthermore, as Matthew Soerens and Jenny Yang state in their seminal book, *Welcoming the Stranger*, "Migration is not just impacting the US church in significant ways, it is also impacting the global church for the furtherance of the kingdom of God."[10] Many of the Christian refugees who come to the United States end up serving their diaspora community here or ministering back home, forming networks of believers who otherwise

[7] Despite the suffering, one cannot help but ponder this question. See Stephan Bauman, Matthew Soerens, and Issam Smeir, S*eeking Refuge: On the Shores of the Global Refugee Crisi*s (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2016), 28; Sam George, "Is God Reviving Europe through Refugees?" *Lausanne Global Analysis* 6, no. 3 (2017), https://www.lausanne.org/content/lga/2017-05/god-reviving-europe-refugees.

[8] Al Tizon, *Whole and Reconciled: Gospel, Church, and Mission in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 32–24.

[9] Author's analysis of State Department WRAPS data, http://www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals/. Since the enactment of the Refugee Act in 1980, the United States has historically resettled more Christians than any other religious group. However, admissions data prior to 2002 was migrated from a legacy system, and therefore data prior to this date is not as reliable.

[10] Matthew Soerens and Jenny Yang, *Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion, and Truth in the Immigration Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 193.

would never be connected.

As for missional opportunity, consider Afghanistan. Afghanistan is 99 percent unevangelized, with an evangelical annual growth rate of 0 percent.[11] In Houston, Afghanistan is the top nationality to receive Special Immigrant Visas (SIV), granted to those who have served as military aids to the US government. By welcoming Afghan SIVs, volunteers have the opportunity to reach some of the world's most unevangelized people groups.[12] All it takes is hopping in a car—and sitting through some traffic is still less trouble than flying to Central Asia. We must not underestimate the potential of this opportunity.

Empowerment and Dignity

At *houston welcomes refugees*, our conviction to share Christ is an inescapable part of our identity. We channel the love of God by being the hands and feet and heart of Jesus in tangible and practical ways. We do this through ongoing programs that meet immediate needs while aiming to empower refugees. We collect specified household items used for setting up apartments on arrival day. Imagine a refugee family walking off a plane, bone-weary and anxious after a long international flight, followed by at least one hour in customs and immigration, and then another hour through Houston traffic. They enter an apartment that volunteers prayed over earlier in the day, with beds made, food in the pantry and refrigerator, and towels hung in the bathroom. This is what our families experience when they step into what might be their first real home in years if not decades. The money saved by the family's not having to purchase towels, pots, toiletries, and so on allows them to use personal funds and government welcome money on other necessities, easing some of their financial burden and giving them greater discretionary spending power.

Logistical and material provisions are a huge blessing, but the heartbeat of our organization is our Welcome Teams, groups of volunteers who walk alongside refugees for six months to support them as they acclimate to their new life in Houston. Welcome Teams do not replace the case managers who work tirelessly for dozens of families at a time, but they assist in the official resettlement process wherever possible while focusing primarily on friendship.

One challenge that volunteers often face when helping refugees is wanting to do too much for them, especially when some types of help

[11] Joshua Project, "Country: Afghanistan," https://joshuaproject.net/countries/AF.
[12] Joshua Project, "Frontier Unreached Peoples," https://joshuaproject.net/frontier.

are so easily within the volunteer's reach. As an organization we try to be mindful about leveling power dynamics and maintaining dignity. What may appear as kindness can end up disempowering or even insulting refugees, especially the many who come from an honor/shame culture. Moreover, it may reveal a subconscious savior complex wherein the American becomes the Benefactor, the Giver, the Hero.[13]

Consider a typical scenario of how this plays out. "Shakir" is a former refugee from Afghanistan. His family was paired with a Welcome Team who had a big heart but did not understand the honor/shame culture from which Shakir came. Whenever the team took the family shopping, they would insist on paying for the family's purchases, knowing that Shakir was working two part-time jobs yet still barely able to pay expenses. When the team visited, they would bring gifts for the children but reject offers of tea and bread out of pity for the family. Over time, Shakir started to make excuses for not being home when the team wanted to visit, eventually not answering the team's texts and calls. The team felt rejected and confused because they had only been friendly and generous with the family. They did not realize they were diminishing Shakir's dignity by drawing attention to the challenges he experienced in providing for his family and then refusing the hospitality extended by his family.

To preserve relationship, HWR encourages Welcome Teams to limit financial giving, waiting until friendship is established before offering any type of substantial gift (as refugees may feel pressured to reciprocate) and teaching refugees how to navigate systems rather than doing things for them (recognizing that there are situations in which direct provision is appropriate). For example, instead of automatically buying new clothes for a family, a volunteer might show them how to shop second-hand at Goodwill, garage sales, and clothing pantries. Instead of offering to drive them to work every day, a team might show them how to ride the bus or encourage them to enroll in a driving class. Teaching refugees how to meet needs on their own brings dignity and imparts valuable life skills along the way.

We emphasize mutuality and reciprocity in our friendships with refugees. We come into the relationship as both teacher and learner, helper and helped. Refugees are not "projects"; we do not try to fix all their problems or make them more like us but focus instead on relationship.

[13] Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor…and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012), 61; see especially chapters 5 and 7.

Refugees are not monolithic; they have different stories and backgrounds and talents, and so we take the time to learn. Some are more educated than our volunteers but through circumstances beyond their control are not able to thrive in the same way they could back home.

Contrary to some public opinion, refugees want to be independent, contributing members of society. They are incentivized through federal grant program requirements to work or enroll in English classes. They understand that they are expected to become "self-sufficient" in a very short amount of time. One of the best ways to achieve self-sufficiency is with the support of an American friend or mentor, but we do not want to stunt refugees' progress through excessive helping.

Sacred Partnerships

Christians cannot do the work of welcoming refugees alone—nor should we. HWR relies on our partnerships with others to expand our work, equip our volunteers, and ultimately benefit refugees. In less than four years, HWR has mobilized over eight hundred volunteers from over one hundred twenty churches in the Houston area. We partner with churches and faith-based community organizations that generously care for immigrants and refugees and the underserved. We do not provide direct services like English classes, job placement, or medical care; rather, we connect volunteers and their refugee families to existing providers. Through kingdom-minded partnerships we do a lot of the leg work so that churches can mobilize greater numbers of people. We also pursue opportunities to educate the community on the refugee crisis and God's heart for the nations.

HWR partners with a resettlement agency, YMCA International Services, a local affiliate of the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants and one of the nine national agencies that work with the US government to resettle refugees. Most people are familiar with the YMCA for their gyms, but few know that they also offer immigration services. In Houston the YMCA is the largest of the five local resettlement agencies. These local agencies cooperate as a consortium to plan special events and keep one another abreast of their respective programs.

Besides the five local agencies, dozens of community organizations partner with these agencies in the resettlement process, HWR among them. I always marvel when I look around the room at the stakeholder meetings and see people of all faiths and skin tones who care about welcoming the stranger and advocating for the vulnerable. Though we come from different perspectives and convictions, we are bound together

by our common goal of working to improve the lives of refugees. Global problems require globally minded solutions. I feel privileged to be a part of the solution in Houston, Texas.

When Helping Heals

North Americans have a tendency to judge people by standards that have nothing to do with one's worth: English fluency, hygiene, dress, or occupation. Interacting with refugees forces us to confront our prejudices. For me, helping refugees has been, above all, a spiritual journey that has brought me closer to God. It has made me more grateful for what I have and helped me see the grace of God in my life and the lives of others. My own story of coming to care for refugees had to do with examining my biases against a particular people group about whom I knew little but had judged based on their portrayal in the media. God convicted me of the stereotyping I had committed against an entire community, people made in the image of God, before I had even met someone of that group.

The cross-cultural friendships I enjoy with refugees have opened my eyes to an expanded way of being and living that awakens my soul and causes me to think more about peacemaking and reconciliation. Serving refugees has become for me a theological exercise. Theologian Amos Yong states,

> Each member of the body of Christ...is a recipient of and a conduit of God....[T]here is not only a continual reversal of roles...but, sometimes, we play both roles simultaneously, discerning through the Holy Spirit how best to act and respond in each case. So on the one hand, we receive the hospitality of God through the welcome of others, but, on the other hand, we enact the hospitality of God to our hosts.[14]

And so we offer a warm welcome as an act of worship, embracing the strangers in our midst with good news and good works, and yet we receive.[15]

[14] Amos Yong, *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008), 106–107.

[15] See further reflection on the facets of hospitality in Johnson and Wu, *Our Global Families*, chapter 9.

Youth Building Shalom *desde Abajo*

Julio Isaza, global personnel, Evangelical Covenant Church, Medellín, Colombia

Colombia, the country of my birth, is a beautiful nation that has suffered the consequences of violent conflict. One of my dreams has been to return Colombia to make a difference there. I dreamed of building peace. When my family and I returned to Colombia in 2016 after a year of home assignment in the United States, I imagined all the ways God was going to work through me to bring transformation. However, since arriving in Colombia it is I who have been undergoing transformation as I learn from the Covenant youth I serve alongside. They have shown me what it means to build shalom in a town that has experienced decades of social, economic, and environmental conflict. In walking alongside these young people who are building peace from the bottom up, *paces desde abajo*, I have witnessed the transformation of their community, and I have been transformed in the process.

Colombia is a country that has experienced centuries of violent conflict. It was conquered by Spanish colonial violence in the sixteenth century,[1] and it secured its independence through violence in 1819.[2] Colombia's path to becoming a republic was marked by civil wars.[3] A brief period of peace (1906–1930)[4] was followed by intermittent episodes of violence (1931–1948)[5] and a period of increased violence (1948–1974)

[1] David Bushnell, *Colombia: una nación a pesar de si misma: nuestra historia desde los tiempos precolombinos hasta hoy*, 21st ed. (Bogotá: Planeta, 2016), 27–49.
[2] Ibid., 51–82.
[3] Ibid., 85–114.
[4] Ibid., 22–58.
[5] Ibid., 261–85.

as rebel groups began to fight with the government.[6] During the 1970s through the 1990s, violence came to the cities through warring drug cartels.[7] Later in the 1990s through 2006, paramilitary groups fighting against the rebels, carried out massacres and caused significant displacement in the countryside. From 2007 to the present, criminal gangs have been responsible for many homicides and displacement in some areas of the country as they fight for the control of territory, natural resources, and drug markets. El Bagre is a town that has experienced many of the consequences of these conflicts.

El Bagre is a town of 51,862 people located in the state of Antioquia. Its economy is largely dependent on gold mining (80–85%), and over three-quarters of its people (77.41%) live beneath the poverty level.[8] Illegal armed groups have been present in the town since the end of the 1970s. Over 49,000 people have been victims of violence or displacement between 1985 and 2020 due to violence in the surrounding countryside and extortion in the urban areas.[9] El Bagre's rivers and creeks are polluted with mercury and sediment from gold mining.[10] The land is being destroyed by mining, and the process of recovering it for agriculture is very expensive and time consuming.[11] Government presence in the area has been so weak that the local people do not trust the state. The Colombian government has signed peace agreements with a paramilitary group (2006) and guerrillas (2016), but local people are not yet experiencing that peace. It is in this context that a group of Covenant youth are bearing witness to the gospel of shalom.[12]

Paces desde Abajo

God's shalom is not the kind of peace the world is seeking (John

[6] Darío Villamizar Herrera, *Las guerrillas en Colombia: una historia de los orígenes hasta los confines* (Bogotá: Penguin Random House, 2017).

[7] Gerard Martin, *Medellín: tragedia y resurrección, Mafias, ciudad, y Estado, 1975–2013* (Medellín: La Carreta, 2014).

[8] "Perfil productivo del Municipio El Bagre," July 15, 2014, p. 43, http://issuu.com/pnudcol/docs/perfil_productivo_el_bagre.

[9] Red Nacional de Información, Ficha estratégica PDET, http://fichaestrategica.unidadvictimas.gov.co/BoletinPDET/IndexPDET.

[10] Sandra Elena Botero, "Minería y contaminación de ríos, las violencias invisibles en el Bajo Cauca," *El Espectador*, January 17, 2017, https://colombia2020.elespectador.com/territorio/mineria-y-contaminacion-de-rios-las-violencias-invisibles-en-el-bajo-cauca.

[11] D. Villar Argaiz, "La mineria como 'locomotora' de la economía colombiana y su costo ambiental," *Revista Colombiana de Ciencias Pecuarias* 27, no. 3 (2014): 155–56.

[12] Colombian law defines youth as fourteen to twenty-eight years of age.

14:27); sometimes even Christians do not seek this kind of peace. God's shalom is peace that passes any human understanding (Philippians 4:7) and involves human's relationships with the Creator, oneself, other humans, and the whole ecosystem—in other words, the entire sphere of human relationships. Shalom is what Eve and Adam experienced in Genesis 1 and 2: harmony with their Creator, themselves, each other, and the creation.[13] Shalom is not merely the absence of conflict because conflict is a part of being human.[14] To build shalom is to create environments where life can be lived and experienced fully.[15] This is the peace Jesus Christ came to give (John 10:10b). This is the peace a group of youth in El Bagre have been building since 2017, and I have had the privilege to partner with them.

Paces desde abajo is the peace that is built by communities that have experience direct structural or cultural violence; therefore, they themselves start initiatives to transform their situation in peaceful ways, according to their understanding of peace. This is not based on top-down peace agreements but on local ideas. These ideas come from groups of people—children, youth, women, indigenous people, Afro-Colombians, and farmers—who desire transformation in their own contexts.[16] These peace initiatives are generated in communities of violence as the people use their moral imagination to envision something better without forgetting the reality of their context.[17] They decide to build something good despite the current situation. In Colombia there are many secular examples of peace building based on *paces desde abajo* that have been giving hope to communities within the country.[18] However, an even more complete hope can be offered when the peace built from the bottom up comes from the very giver of shalom.

The Whole Gospel in El Bagre

For a group of youth actively engaged in peacebuilding in El Bagre,

[13] Lisa Sharon Harper, *The Very Good Gospel: How Everything Wrong Can Be Made Right* (New York: WaterBrook, 2016), 13.

[14] Percy Calderón Concha, "Teoría de conflictos de Johan Galtung," *Revista de Paz y Conflictos* 2 (2009): 67, https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=205016389005.

[15] Luis Gómez, "Consecuencias prácticas de la: Shālôm y su relación con la Justicia hebrea," *Franciscanum* 58, no. 165 (2016): 203–14.

[16] Esperanza Hernández, "Paces desde abajo en Colombia," *Reflexión Política* 11, no. 22 (2009): 176–86.

[17] John Paul Lederach, *La imaginación moral: el arte y el alma de la construcción de la paz* (Bogotá, Colombia: Semana Libros, 2016), 21.

[18] See Esperanza, "Paces desde abajo."

through the "Be Peace, Make Peace" project, two Bible verses have been central: "Seek the peace [shalom] of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers [shalom] —you too will prosper [have shalom]" (Jeremiah 29:7); and "Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9). The youth do not see themselves as exiles because they live in their own land, but they want to not only *pray* for the shalom of their land but also to actively *build* it. They believe they are children of God and for this reason are working for peace. In order to do this, they entered a six-month process of learning about shalom, conflict transformation, and public advocacy. They then began to put what they learned into practice.

For the youth of El Bagre, shalom is practical, and it is pursued outside the walls of the church building. The local churches in El Bagre tend to focus their ministry in a centrifugal way, expecting people to come to the church building to get to know God. By contrast, the youth of the Covenant church in El Bagre, Centro de Armonia Cristiana, have been taking the church outside the four walls of the church building, sharing shalom in different neighborhoods throughout the town. As a part of the "Be Peace, Make Peace" project, they have organized peace fairs, led clean-up campaigns, planted trees, held an "abrazaton" (offering free hugs as people passed by) in a busy area of town, organized a peace soccer tournament, created a community kite festival, participated with the local youth organization to plan and implement a youth event, and joined a peace march. These are just some of the practical ways youth are seeking to build shalom in El Bagre.

The youth have understood that the peace that comes from God has to be shared in tangible ways with everyone, especially with those who do not come to the local church. They are building shalom from the bottom up, and it shows according to Alirio Castro, one the leaders in the community, who said:

> These youth have positively impacted my life and the community, because today we have a group of youth and children with a basic concept of forgiveness, reconciliation, and transformation of conflicts. To see these young people speaking of these themes with ownership and with conviction is so incredibly satisfying.…It's not just theoretical for them. It is practical knowledge and the significant experiences that they have had in different areas is a testimony.

The work the youth are doing in El Bagre is connected to their vision of

the whole gospel. The kind of peace they are building seeks to reconcile relationships that have been affected by sin, relationships Jesus came to restore: relationship with God, ourselves, others, and the whole creation. This kind of reconciliation is based on the entire narrative of Scripture and centered on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It is through Christ that God reconciled the whole world to himself (Colossians 1:20), and for the youth in El Bagre peace is built on the work of Christ who is the reconciler and the one who brings true peace.

The whole gospel seeks to restore all aspects of human life that have been affected by sin, including the economic, political, social, and cultural spheres of human existence.[19] This is what the youth of El Bagre have been seeking as they build peace in their hometown. They have been teaching other youth entrepreneurship in order to improve their economy. They have been equipping youth to understand their political rights and be involved in the democratic process. Teachings about gender equality and conflict transformation help participants face the "machismo" and the culture of violence that are so present in El Bagre. The project also creates space for activities aimed to prevent youth and children from gang involvement and drug use. The youth are working additionally to restore their ecosystem that has been damaged by gold mining, teaching their peers that stewardship of God's creation is part of the whole gospel. The Covenant youth of El Bagre are building peace that seeks the well-being of participants in all aspects of their life.

Global Lessons from El Bagre

Many things can be learned from this particular youth ministry. The whole church, including children and youth, can and should be agents of transformation. The youth-led peacebuilding in El Bagre, transforming a community impacted by decades of violence into a town of hope, is a testimony for the entire church. Too often, children and youth are seen by local churches as the object of the gospel rather than agents of transformation. In El Bagre the youth believe that they can transform not only one neighborhood but a whole town by building shalom. Pastors and church leaders need to trust and encourage the work that youth and children can do in order to bring transformation to their context through the good news of the whole gospel. This ministry, "Be Peace,

[19] Lausanne Theology Working Group, "The Whole Church Taking the Whole Gospel to the Whole World," *Lausanne Movement*, June 1, 2010, https://www.lausanne.org/content/twg-three-wholes.

Make Peace," has impacted not only the town of El Bagre but also the global personnel who serve alongside the youth. They have taught us to let the youth lead and believe that they can bring transformation to their own town.

Biblical shalom is tangible, and it produces real transformation when it is put in practice. The ministry of peace in El Bagre demonstrates that in regions impacted by decades of violence, peacebuilding must be visible and contextualized, based on people's abilities and needs. The youth of El Bagre desire shalom for their community. They want people to experience harmony with God. They want people to experience healing from the consequences of violence. They want to be able to forgive and live in harmony with others by transforming conflict in peaceful ways. They want to protect and recover the ecosystem.

One day we were meeting about the peacebuilding initiative far from El Bagre in the city of Medellín. We, some professionals and others from Medellín, were trying to tell the youth of El Bagre how best to implement the ministry of peace in their hometown when a sixteen-year-old girl spoke up and said, "We know how to do it. We don't need people from the big cities to tell us how do it. We live there and we know our region. We know how to do it; just walk a alongside us." This is a critical lesson for intercultural ministries: local people know how to do it.

The youth of El Bagre are building shalom from the bottom up, *paces desde abajo*. They say this is Jesus's way because he could have transformed the world from the top down, but he wanted to come to be with us, to walk with us and transform lives, communities, and towns from the bottom up. We have the privilege of walking with these children and youth who have been agents of transformation in their own land, building peace from the bottom up. We need to let them know that we go with them, that they are not alone.

Beyond Coffeeshop Discipleship: The Significance of Mission in Spiritual Formation

Mark Seversen, director of missional congregations, Evangelical Covenant Church, Chicago, Illinois

I grew up in a home where coffee was an "adult beverage." As children we were warned against it with the dire consequence that "it will stunt your growth." My grandmother was living proof: as a young man I could rest my chin atop her head. While I am still not convinced that coffee compromises a person's growth, I am certain that discipleship over coffee creates stunted disciples.

Discipleship over an americano is as misguided as it is ubiquitous. Walk into any coffee shop and you will find disciples pouring over Scripture and engaged in conversations meant to further spiritual growth. I invite you to picture yourself there right now, latte in hand, with those you mentor. How do you feel about their progress as a Jesus follower? How do you measure their growing conformity to the image of Christ? What questions would you ask to determine their spiritual growth?

Since Scripture's focus is on God and God's mission, I would urge you to ask a missional question. That's right: raise a topic not covered in the early sections of virtually any discipleship resource, if at all. Remind your mentee of God's missional calling for disciples and the intercultural DNA of that commission. Note the celebrations described in Revelations involving people of every culture. Then ask this question: "Why do we do mission?" I am willing to wager a cappuccino that the subject of any response you hear centers on the needs of others. This is why I urge you to put down your mug and walk out the door. Let me explain.

Integral Discipleship

Mission or maturity, which matters most? Is this even a fair question? God's passion for the salvation of the world is inextricably linked to God's passion for the sanctification of his church. We must recognize that God's two great concerns are inseparable.

Scripture describes salvation as God's generous gift of new life in Christ. It is a gift offered to all who believe, since it is God's will that none should perish but that all should come to repentance (cf. 1 Peter 3:9). The result of God's reconciling work is a life of abundance. When embraced, salvation transforms people, communities, and the places they live. The Bible takes us beyond gratitude for our own salvation. We live for God's namesake and are thus called to bear witness to his good news. Salvation calls us to live missionally in our own communities and to commit to mission around the world. Our God-given commission to go into the whole world is articulated in the first chapters of Genesis and celebrated in the last chapters of Revelation. Mission claims a central place in God's purposes for his children on earth: the church bears witness to our good and sovereign God and brings joy to the world.

Scripture also reveals God's imperative that his children and Christ's church grow in spiritual maturity. Sanctification is the Holy Spirit's work of making Christians holy, also described as progression toward Christ-likeness and maturity in Christ. This transformation was Jesus's intention when he gathered disciples and called them to make disciples. Discipleship describes an individual's journey toward spiritual maturity. Progress is marked by a conscious commitment to follow Christ, to learn from Christ, and to be transformed by Christ with the purpose of "attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). Jesus modeled discipleship in bringing his followers to greater maturity. For Jesus, mission and maturity were never separate endeavors. The church would be wise to follow his practices. God's missional calling takes us beyond the familiarity of our own communities into intercultural settings where we bear witness to the gospel. Robust missional living is intercultural. Robust discipleship is also intercultural.

Torn Asunder: Practical Dualism

Mission and maturity are not two distinct priorities. Each is essential to the other, and neither can be accomplished without the other. When it comes to the salvation of all peoples and the sanctification of his church, God chooses both. God's twin intentions—that all people come to faith and that all people of faith grow in Christ—lead directly to the essential

elements of the church's work.

While this is readily affirmed, it is often poorly modeled. Regrettably, as congregational leaders, theological affirmations are often overruled by pragmatic complexities. Over twenty-seven years of ministry, I have seen myself and other leaders wrestle with what I call "practical dualism" in response to the push and pull between mission and maturity. The Evangelical Covenant Church has embraced the phrase "deeper in Christ, further in mission" as an expression of Christ's calling for his church.[1] Yet too often, "deeper in Christ" and "further in mission" are considered distinct endeavors, and we feel obligated to decide which matters more. Moreover, we tend to be naturally inclined toward one or the other. Our passions and life experiences—and at times congregational "squeaky wheels"—cause our ministries to tilt one way or the other.

The prevalence of this dualism within the church is evidenced in the way we describe congregations. Some churches are identified as missional, while others proudly note their deep discipleship focus. Few leaders explicitly claim that mission or discipleship is more important than the other, but many of us reveal implicit distinctions through what we choose to invest in. We make strategic choices that confirm mission and discipleship as discrete endeavors, and we construct ministry frameworks in which one matters more than the other. We have defined mission and discipleship with such precision that we have inserted space between them. Each is given unique leadership, objectives, budgets, space, time, and organizational value so that "deeper in Christ and further in mission" is no longer a single pursuit.

This dualism is also evident when mission and discipleship are approached as sequential steps, one following the other. This sequentialism is apparent in the planning, programming, and teaching of many churches, as mission and maturity are treated as distinct steps of faith that should be taken in order rather than two intertwined aspects of Christian calling to be embraced simultaneously. With good intentions, we as church leaders guide new Christians to enter a discipleship framework that is focused on the development of basic Christian maturity. Then later, when we think a person has developed a deeper faith, we introduce mission into the framework. The content of many discipleship resources assume sequentialism as they include a chapter on mission toward the

[1] This phrase is commonly used in ECC materials. The title of the ECC church membership resource, for example, is *The Meaning of Membership: Deeper in Christ, Further in Mission, Together*.

end of the curriculum, suggesting that mission is only for the advanced disciple.[2] Sequential dualism, although common, is not inevitable. Jesus did not even present it as an option.

Mission and Maturity in Scripture

Does the New Testament depict the Holy Spirit engaged in missional acts or discipleship acts? Were the earliest Christians concerned with reaching the lost or with building the church? It is nearly impossible to untangle these threads—and surely irresponsible to try. The book of Acts establishes the identity of the fledgling church in a few sentences: "the Holy Spirit will come upon you and you will be my witnesses…to the ends of the earth" (cf. Acts 1:8). This is an account of people in motion, Christ's church "on the way." God's intention is that none perish, and his church embodies that missional passion as it carries the good news forward.

As the story unfolds, the church's missionary calling becomes the very means by which it matures. Acts 10–15 describes a pivotal period in the disciples' growth in understanding. The Holy Spirit has pushed them beyond the once-safe confines of their Jewish community. Unexpectedly, the gospel is embraced as good news by Gentiles. A crisis erupts, and the church faces the first threat of division. Peter steps into the fray with a surprised exclamation: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism" (Acts 10:34). Moreover, he notes, this truth was in Scripture all along! This was a stunning acknowledgement. What had happened? The church stepped out into mission, the Holy Spirit acted, and the first generation of disciples finally began to grasp the difference between their standards and God's heart.

I am convinced that the early church did not accurately understand

[2] I have made a hobby of examining introductory discipleship materials. In *Discipleshift* Jim Putnam's "Discipleshift Wheel" includes "release to do ministry" as the ninth of twelve steps toward maturity (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013). Ogden's *Discipleship Essentials covered* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018) address the importance of surrender, disciplines, quiet time, Bible study, and worship as essential tools for spiritual growth maturity; missional activity is not covered. Even Bruce's remarkably thorough volume, *The Training of the Twelve* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2000), fails to consider the instructional power of mission often used by Jesus. In his book *Dedication and Leadership* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), Douglas Hyde notes a stark contrast between his training in communism and later training in the Christian faith. He describes a process of training recruits by not instructing them straight away. Instead, "quite consciously and deliberately, they are sent into some sort of activity which will commit them publicly to communism." A recruit then "discovers his own inadequacy" and longs to understand more (p. 44).

Scripture until it began its mission. And the disciples were not theological lightweights! Their shortcoming was not lack of knowledge of Scripture; their problem was naïveté. Misconceptions are not always corrected by more study. The antidote to the disciples' ignorance was a willingness to respond to God's call to go. Their assumptions and biases remained in place until they were challenged by mission. The Spirit led the disciples on a missional journey, turning the wider world into a learning lab where they could gain deeper spiritual understandings and maturity. If there is any sequentialism at all (and I do not believe there is), then mission came *before* maturity. Going "further in mission" caused the disciples to grow "deeper in Christ."

The concomitant nature of mission and spiritual maturity is evidenced elsewhere in Scripture. Take the story of Jonah. If this were just a story about the repentance and salvation of Nineveh, the fourth chapter would never have been recorded. Yet chapter 4 is actually the culmination of the story. Only here do we discover God's agenda for Jonah, the timid, self-righteous, and rabidly nationalistic prophet. The possible transformation of Jonah's heart completes the story of the Nineveh mission. Certain critical discipleship lessons cannot be learned in one's hometown. The story of Jonah highlights the difference between missional living in one's own community and that which takes us beyond our own culture.

The term parochial describes a limited or even miniaturized perspective of life. The term aptly describes Jonah's pre-Nineveh faith. I believe it is also a fitting description for much of what passes for discipleship today. Jonah's view of God and God's mission was myopic before his reluctant trip to Nineveh. His faith was small and incomplete, shaped by a single culture and easily aligned with his patriotism. He was quick to pronounce God's judgment and bitter about God's forgiveness. It took leaving his hometown and his native culture to bring Jonah's parochial faith crashing into contact with the wider world of big fish, hostile governments, and unsettling grace.

Intercultural Disorientation and Reorientation

One of the most common elements in God's approach to discipleship is most uncommon in ours. It was intercultural. Webster defines *intercultural* as "occurring between or involving two or more cultures." Intercultural engagement is disorientating, but we see again and again in Scripture and church history how God uses this disorientation as a powerful tool for spiritual formation. Crossing cultural divides changes people. It affords great opportunity to bring deeper maturity to dis-

ciples. We all hold convictions that are alien to gospel truth but enjoy unwarranted support in our hometowns. Our faith remains dangerously entangled with nationalism, ethnocentrism, and selfish attempts to justify the unjustifiable. Our self-chosen circles of belonging protect rather than challenge distorted beliefs.

In scriptural accounts like those discussed above, we discover that experiences of disorientation can become rich and necessary opportunities for spiritual maturity. What we might call "disorientation discipleship" becomes the antidote to parochialism. We see this throughout Jesus's ministry. Some of the best discipleship stories in the Gospels involve intercultural elements (cf. Matthew 15:21–28; Luke 8:26–39; 10:25–37). It makes me wonder if Jesus purposely led his followers into encounters with Samaritans, Greeks, and Syrians in order to protect them from the same sort of parochial discipleship that plagued Jonah.

Coffeeshop discipleship creates parochial disciples. It is a method as common as it is easy. Even if there had been a Starbucks in the vicinity, I cannot picture Jesus and his disciples enjoying a comfortable conversation over lattes. Jesus often led his disciples into places of discomfort. He frequently confused, challenged, and disoriented them. Consider the desperately disorienting situations the disciples faced. Thousands of people needing dinner and expecting them to help (Matthew 14:16). A command to eat Jesus's flesh (John 6:53). Waves about to sink a fishing business (Mark 4:39). Crowds demanding crucifixion (Luke 22:61). Jesus unsettles—he generates disorientation—in order to accomplish gospel reorientation. God cultivates that kind of maturity in the unsettled terrain of mission.

Intercultural space can be liminal space—unsettling, unfamiliar, and immensely valuable for discipleship. Jay Moon observes that "exposure to other cultures reveals disciples' own worldview assumptions, perhaps for the first time."[3] Moon quotes Paul Hiebert's statement that a powerful way to transform a worldview is to "step outside our culture and look at it from the outside, and to have outsiders tell us what they perceive as our worldview."[4] Moon and Hiebert both recognize the mind-changing impact of intercultural discipleship. Profound spiritual maturity can grow out of intercultural and liminal space. This approach to discipleship is not as neat and organized as a methodical progression through

[3] W. Jay Moon, *Intercultural Discipleship: Learning from Global Approaches to Spiritual Formation; Encountering Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 241.

[4] Quoted in ibid.

books that invite us to fill in blanks, highlight sentences, and discuss study questions. Indeed, intercultural mission is messy. Disorientation unsettles settled matters. False certainties are replaced by gospel truths. Mission creates dissonance and forces us to recalibrate long-held convictions. This allows our narrow, static, and familiar views to be replaced by gospel perspectives that foster spiritual maturity.

Toward the Inculturation of Missional Discipleship

God's passion for the whole world to be saved is inextricably linked to God's passion for his church to be sanctified. What steps can leaders take to foster missional discipleship? Consider the following four practices, with corresponding reflection questions and related ECC resources.

1. Strengthen pedagogy around missional discipleship. Does what we teach reflect the indivisible connection of mission and maturity? Does our discipleship approach involve missional activity and disorientation? How can God's twin passions be taught in uniquely relevant ways in every ministry area? Serve Globally, the international ministries of the Evangelical Covenant Church, continues to create resources that bridge both of these areas. A study of the book of Jonah highlighting themes mentioned above is a Serve Globally resource available for small groups. Serve Globally's Global Engagements program creates specifically designed avenues through which groups and individuals who are seeking direct intercultural opportunities can experience intercultural ministry firsthand.[5]

2. Regularly evaluate and selectively deepen the church's intercultural partnerships. Does this ministry with which we partner exemplify whole gospel ministry and other values that we celebrate and invest in as a congregation? Does this relationship provide opportunities for the church to be challenged and strengthened?

3. Travel interculturally. How do congregational trips strengthen our global relationships and congregational discipleship? Are we guided by recent research and best practices (rather than existing relationships and travel expenses) as we plan our trips? Are our trips part of a larger ministry objective and integrated with local congregational ministry? There are stories of churches doing this poorly, but it is possible to do better. MERGE is an ECC resource for short-term trip and is intentionally developed to strengthen global partnerships as well as congregational

[5] For more information on Global Engagements through the ECC's Serve Globally mission priority, see https://covchurch.org/global-engagements/.

discipleship. Recent research continues to inform our objectives, staff leadership, and strategies.[6]

4. Assess current leadership priorities, organizational structures, and discipleship paradigms. Is mission integrated into our other ministries, or is it a stand-alone ministry? If we consider the geography of Acts 1:8 as a portfolio of missional endeavors, where are we invested? Do we want to make some changes? How do we remain aware of global factors that impact the effectiveness of our current strategies? Is our missional leadership and involvement intergenerational? Part of Serve Globally's investment as a ministry priority of the ECC is to consult with and coach leadership teams to help optimize the unique Great Commission impact of each local church.

Deeper in Christ, Further in Mission

If the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results, then sanity is a willingness to try something new—or in this case, something ancient. "Deeper in Christ, further in mission" describes God's two purposes knit together as the hope of the world and the maturity of the church. It is neither a choice between two paths, nor a choice of which path to take first. The simple and sane choice is to embrace the integrity of our gospel calling and again experience the missional and maturational acts of the Holy Spirit in our lives. This is why God sends his church out on mission. God is preparing for a celebration where his children from every tribe and nation wholly reflect the character of Christ in the new heavens and the new earth. This is where mission leads.

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[6] For more information on MERGE ministries, see https://covchurch.org/merge/.

The Continuing Pastoral Education Initiative of the Communauté Évangélique de l'Ubangi-Mongala

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Jacques Vungbo Sambo, vice-president, Communauté Évangélique de l'Ubangi-Mongala, Democratic Republic of Congo

For over eighty years, the Communauté Évangélique de l'Ubangi-Mongala (CEUM) and the Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC) have joined in a fruitful and mutually blessed intercultural partnership. The CEUM's primary ministry context is the northwest corner of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) covering a terrain roughly equivalent to the size of Ohio. The CEUM-ECC partnership endeavors to serve this region through initiatives in community health, economic development, primary and secondary education, and theological education.

Presently, the CEUM has over fifteen hundred "formed" or trained pastors serving nearly two thousand congregations with a combined membership of 213,000 baptized members.[1] CEUM pastoral training is offered upon multiple levels of education ranging from grade school to college. However, one challenge the CEUM has faced is providing its pastors consistent and meaningful continuing education opportunities. Until 2015 the only continuing education offered was a biannual training experience that was poorly attended due to geographical distance, the advanced age of a significant portion of the ministerium, and prohibitive cost. Moreover, the learning of those who did attend was often limited by the absence of accompanying written materials to review after returning to their ministry contexts. These conditions have contributed to a sense of isolation, disillusionment, and malaise among pastors. To complicate

[1] 2018 Presidential report to the CEUM General Assembly.

matters, the CEUM had few capable continuing education personnel to provide pastors with quality training.

To address this need, in 2013 the CEUM launched the Continuing Pastoral Education Initiative. This article highlights the steps taken by the CEUM-ECC partnership to elevate the CEUM's continuing pastoral education program, methodologies used in the implementation of the program, and the program's transformational impact on CEUM clergy.

The Continuing Pastoral Education Initiative

Methodologies. The Continuing Pastoral Education Initiative (CPEI), began when, in response to the CEUM's invitation, we gathered a team of four Congolese "master trainers" capable of providing edifying and pertinent training experiences consistent with the CEUM's evangelical heritage. The CPEI team's mandate is to preserve the CEUM's long history of investment in theological formation, deepen biblical knowledge, encourage pastoral excellence, increase faith through spiritual discipline, and restore pastoral dignity and unity. CPEI provides quality continuing education that resources Congolese pastoral needs by offering geographically decentralized annual training seminars and publishing volumes of practical theology in Lingala, the area trade language. The published books supply content for training seminars and are additionally made available to every CEUM pastor.

Preparation for annual training seminars begins a year in advance. The five-member CPEI team selects topics drawn from CEUM pastors' expressed needs. At the close of each seminar, questionnaires are distributed inviting participants to recommend topics for future seminars that would be most beneficial to their ministry context. The CPEI team tabulates results and usually selects topics based on number of requests. Each member of the CPEI team is then assigned to research and write two articles. The team's combined articles form chapters in the following year's volume on practical theology.

Topical research includes Bible study and the reading of relevant literature. Finding adequate research material is often a challenge with basically no resources in Lingala and limited amounts in the national language of French, especially written from an African context. One of the roles the missionary team member has played is to provide appropriate French books and articles for team members. English materials are also translated into French for team use. Team members provide at least one of their two article drafts by March 1 of each cycle. The full team then reviews these articles and provides recommendations and revisions. This

process is repeated for the second article by late summer to early fall. After several rounds of revisions, the final articles are printed as a book by the year's end.[2] This volume then serves as the material for the next cycle of seminar training, with plenary training modules led by article authors.

CPEI is now on it fifth cycle, having completed twenty-nine four-day training seminars to date, with an aggregate of over three thousand five hundred participating pastors. The CPEI team has produced five books on practical theology, with a sixth volume to be produced by the end of 2020. The volumes constitute an invaluable pastoral library for CEUM pastors.[3]

Metrics. Research questionnaires from select seminar participants testify to the effectiveness and popularity of CPEI. Of the 874 pastors who participated in five seminars offered in the Ubangi-Mongala region in 2019, 143 completed questionnaires, providing a 16.5 percent sample. Fifty-three percent of respondents reported they get to a seminar center within a day's travel—coming close to our initial goal of 65 percent—and 23 percent could arrive with two days' travel. Thus, 76 percent of the respondents have a continuing education center within two days' reach—a game changer in terms of access in the DRC. The most common method of transportation to seminars was bicycle (51%), followed by motorcycle (35%). Others came by canoe, commercial truck, or on foot. Sixty-two percent of respondents reported difficulties in their travel such as transportation breakdowns, bad roads, the elements, harassment from governmental authorities at check points, health problems, and accidents. Imagine if 62 percent of the Covenant ministerium were to encounter similar difficulties in attending a Midwinter Conference!

Yet 100 percent of the respondents said they were glad they came to the

[2] Over fifty articles have been published to date, including "The Prayer Life of a Pastor," "The Problem of Polygamy," "The Pastor's Love of the Word of God," "How to Promote Reconciliation," "The Blessings of Scars," "What Pastors Need to Know About Islam," "The Sacraments of Baptism and The Lord's Supper," "How Pastors Can Encourage One Another," "The Pastor and the Environment," "The Pastor and Human Rights," "The Traits of a Good Pastor," "Demonology," "The Pastor's Children: How to Raise Them," and "Pastoral Ethics in the CEUM."

[3] Funding for CPEI was initially provided by ECC churches and individuals through a Friends of World Mission project. In 2016 two Christian foundations made a four-year commitment to fund program operation. In early 2020 the same foundations renewed their commitments. CEUM churches and pastors also contribute financially though seminar participation fees ($3.50 per person), book purchases (presently $3 per book), and in-kind gifts. Pastors are responsible for transportation costs, which usually exceed participation fees or purchase of subsidized books. Hosting churches provide participating pastors with housing and food.

seminars and wanted to return the following year. When asked why they came to the training seminar, 42 percent of the 2018 respondents named fellowship with their colleagues, and 54 percent increasing knowledge and receiving good teaching. Ninety-eight percent of the 2019 respondents said they were able to pay their participation fees in full—no small deal. CPEI has in aggregate a higher pastoral participation rate than the biannual pastors' conference, due largely to the increased access enabled by lower fees and geographical decentralization of the training centers (though this decentralization does not afford the opportunity for participating pastors to connect with the entire ministerium).

Tangible Intangibles. CEUM leaders and pastors testify to many additional, less easily quantified, benefits of CPEI. Vice-President Vungbo notes that CPEI training and materials are culturally relevant, practical, and applicable no matter the educational level of the pastor—and more widely accessible because they are in Lingala, which covers a broad spectrum of tribes and is more readily understood than French. Moreover, they refresh the memory of participating pastors, reminding them of their previous training. Vungbo notes that CPEI training events provide an environment of participant care and excellent worship experiences. He credits CPEI with promoting a greater sense of unity in the CEUM. CPEI preserves the initial investment of pastors' theological training and enables pastors to be more effective for the present and future needs of their churches. It reinforces what pastors learned and introduces program participants to new fields of practical theology that were not possible to explore in the classroom.

Additional accounts of the program's efficacy come from CEUM pastors. After one training event, Rev. Hilaire Goyenge of the Karawa region encouraged fellow participants to go home and use the materials to train church deacons as he had. Rev. Mawe recently declared, "If we were to lose all other of the CEUM's programs, may we always have this training." In one recent seminar, upon conclusion of the "Pastor and His Family" module, pastors took part in a guided prayer session interceding for their families. They cried out the names of their loved ones—for their return to the Lord, for God's provision, or for forgiveness for their own failures toward them. Pastors raised their arms as tears streamed down their faces; others knelt in earnest petition. Upon completion of the module of reconciliation, two pastors immediately sought to reconcile publicly. Pastors of the Gbadolité region took up a seminar challenge to form peer-mentoring relationships with fellow pastors. To date, thirty-seven pastors of the region are actively engaged in this strategic form of discipleship.

Connecting the Vision

All too often, well-meaning educational initiatives fail because they are touristic rather than incarnational. Visitors who come for a short time and "show how it's done" with little follow-up serve only to discourage those they intend to inspire, leaving a disconnected vision. As Jonathan Bonk states, "These theological and missiological tourists—superbly trained, well-funded, and well-equipped—can often make local teachers and indigenous missionaries feel tawdry, poorly provided for, and backward."[4] By contrast, CPEI's incarnational response to the CEUM's continuing pastoral education challenges serves as an integral part of the CEUM and ECC's whole gospel endeavor. Congolese leaders are developed as a new class of trainers and authors is equipped. Disciples are deepened through continuing education in practical theology that enhances pastoral competence. Churches—and the CEUM as a whole—are strengthened through CPEI. CEUM President Mboka and Vice-President Vungbo acclaim CPEI's contribution in unifying the church.

The CEUM-ECC intercultural mission partnership also intersects with the larger framework of missiological research. In his book, *Transformation After Lausanne*, Al Tizon refers to this type of partnership as a form of "glocalization" stemming from "our attempts at missionary equality and mutuality, i.e., partnership in mission between churches across cultures."[5] CPEI embodies the vision of a true partnership in theological education by which the grip of Western domination is loosened while the hand of Congolese self-theologizing (practical theology) is strengthened, which is an absolute necessity in doing theology responsibly.[6]

Carl Gibbs delineates five training levels of theological education in a cross-cultural context: (1) discipled believers, (2) lay leaders of small groups, (3) bi-vocational leaders of larger groups, (4) full-time trained leaders, and (5) scholars.[7] Gibbs believes that the two highest levels, full-time trained leaders and scholars, contribute the most to the stability of a church.[8] CPEI's focus is the full-time trained pastors (level 4) who form

[4] Jonathan Bonk, "Non-Western Theological Education Entering the Twenty-First Century," in *Evangelical Mission Entering the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Jonathan Bonk (Pasadena: William Carey Library, Evangelical Missiological Society 10, 2003), 129.

[5] Al Tizon, *Transformation after Lausanne: Radical Evangelical Mission in Global-Local Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 222.

[6] Ibid., 219.

[7] Carl Gibbs, "The Training Pyramid," in *Theological Education in a Cross-Cultural Context: Essays in Honor of John and Bea Carter*, ed. A. Kay Fountain (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 106–107.

[8] Ibid., 108.

the backbone of the CEUM. While promoting stability in the church through continuing pastoral education, CPEI strives to balance being flexible to the felt needs of participants with being prescriptive regarding the essential doctrinal underpinnings of the CEUM's evangelical heritage, a balance Gibbs advocates:

> Prepackaged curriculum should not become a pedagogical straitjacket that does not allow for contextualization. On the other hand, simply teaching to the felt needs of the students is not adequate. There are many prescribed needs—many of which are in the Bible—that the student may not sense an urgency to study. "Real needs" are where a student's felt needs and the prescribed needs overlap.[9]

One of the primary benefits of CPEI is the mentoring relationship between the missionary trainer and the four Congolese master trainers. Jurgens Hendricks affirms mentorship in education as a potent means of empowerment: "Empowerment does not happen only through formal education. Mentors, too, have unique abilities to guide and empower people, and this can also happen within the context of education."[10] This has certainly taken place within the six years of CPEI's existence. The relationship between the missionary trainer and Congolese master trainers is of a mutually beneficial nature where the parties learn from one another, with the Congolese master trainers setting the agenda (for they know what will work with their constituents) and the missionary trainer assisting in giving birth to their vision through exposure to resources and experience. Team members competently conduct their training modules and engage in collective problem-solving with increasing confidence. In large part, the missionary trainer now merely accompanies the Congolese team, taking a secondary role with the Congolese leaders at the forefront. In some cases, the missionary trainer does not accompany the Congolese team at all (for example due to health concerns given the rigors of distant road travel or political conditions unfavorable to expatriate involvement), facilitating a good transition strategy.

CPEI was created to expand CEUM writers in the realm of practical theology. Priest, Barine, and Salombongo state, "Writing and reading, and not merely orality, are important in the contemporary world for the

[9] Ibid., 121.

[10] Jurgens Hendricks, "Empowering Leadership—A New Dawn in African Christian Leadership," in *African Christian Leadership: Realities, Opportunities, and Impact*, ed. Robert J. Priest and Kirimi Barine (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2017), 162.

strength of the African church."[11] They go on to state, "The identification, coaching, and training of Christian writers in Africa must be strengthened and expanded."[12] This has taken place as the CPEI team's original four Congolese master trainers have written fifty practical theology articles, and the writing team expands as team members reach out to additional pastors to co-author articles. Two articles from Kinshasa-based CEUM pastors were published in the 2020 volume; two additional articles from Kinshasa-based pastors are expected to be included in the 2021 volume.

Final Thoughts on the CEUM-ECC Partnership

Trust is a critical element in intercultural mission partnerships. Trust requires patience through the obstacles. Significant delays in communication have proven mutually frustrating for CEUM and ECC partners. Such delays usually stem from technical difficulties and competing priorities, as CPEI team members carry additional church responsibilities. Such circumstances have provided opportunities to trust rather than jump to premature assumptions that would endanger the partnership.[13] By God's grace and despite difficulties caused by vulnerable infrastructure and political instability, the CPEI program has never once had to cancel a scheduled seminar until global COVID-19 restrictions came into place in spring 2020. At the time of this writing, the team is on track to complete all seminars that were postponed.

In his book, *Whole and Reconciled*, Al Tizon notes seven critical areas in a life of discipleship that require cultivation: (1) a devotional life of worship, (2) a wise life of Bible study and obedience, (3) an interdependent life in Spirit-filled community, (4) an ethical life of personal and social holiness, (5) a peculiar life of contrast and distinction, (6) a missional life of local and global witness, and (7) a reproductive life of mentoring or making disciple (both in the qualitative and quantitative sense). We believe CPEI embraces many of these areas of discipleship in the form of peer mentoring and training others. Worship is the team's priority for every meeting. Vigorous engagement with Scripture is required in addressing pastoral issues as team members work on their respective

[11] Robert J. Priest, Kirimi Barine, and Alberto Lucamba Salombongo, "Reading and Leading—Challenges for African Christian Leaders," in *African Christian Leadership: Realities, Opportunities, and Impact*, ed. Robert J. Priest and Kirimi Barine (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2017), 194.

[12] Ibid., 195.

[13] Mary Lederleitner, *Cross-Cultural Partnerships-Navigating the Complexities of Money and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 65–66.

articles. Each team member is cared for and held accountable by the others. Contributions from other CEUM pastors are strongly encouraged by the team. Therefore, we submit that the CPEI program is worth considering as a model for equipping pastors for relevant ministry in terms of continuing pastoral formation. CPEI program is worth considering as a model for equipping pastors for relevant ministry in other contexts.

A true intercultural mission partnership offers both parties opportunity for change. In the case of CPEI, there has been a change of approach in how training is delivered. Never before has the CEUM nor the mission used such an intensive platform for consistent and effective continuing education. CPEI has broken loose from the moorings of traditional formal training in the classroom and one-off seminars that have had little cohesion in terms of practical theology. The team has given this missionary co-author the name *accoucheur* (midwife) as the one who helps give birth to their dreams. And the team has provided inspiration with their graceful resilience to consistently and passionately equip their pastoral colleagues—a drive based on true compassion and a sincere desire to encourage a more effective ministry. For us as authors, the relationship has truly been an "iron sharpening iron" experience. We are forever grateful to the CEUM and the ECC for this unique and unprecedented ministry opportunity.

Book Reviews

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David W. Swanson, *Rediscipling the White Church: From Cheap Diversity to True Solidarity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 197 pages, $16.

As I was reading David Swanson's book *Rediscipling the White Church*, protests swept the country following the murder of a black man, George Floyd, by a white police officer. It is disconcerting to read a text that presents hope for racial justice through what Swanson terms "racial discipleship," only to turn on the news and watch buildings burn in a battle cry against systems that continue to oppress and murder black and brown people. In moments like these, racial justice feels elusive. Despite the number of books published on the need for white Christians to care about racial justice, nothing seems to change. People of color continue to suffer under white supremacy and police brutality, while many white Christians are paralyzed by, ignorant of, or actively perpetuating the problem.

Though our present situation may feel overwhelming, it is precisely to this moment that Swanson's book speaks. Swanson argues that white advocates for racial reconciliation have primarily directed their efforts toward multiculturalism and diversity but have failed to address the ways Christian discipleship practices undergird systemic racism. When

the white church fails to address its historical and ongoing complicity in racial violence, white Christians mistakenly believe that racial justice is unrelated or tangential to our spiritual formation. Swanson thus encourages white churches to build anti-racist practices into their ecclesial lives as a matter of Christian discipleship. By understanding the ways biblical teaching and corporate worship affect a white church's ability to combat systemic racism, pastors and leaders can reimagine catechetical and liturgical practices as means of ushering white Christians into solidarity with communities of color.

Swanson's book is primarily directed toward pastors and leaders of predominately white congregations. He discusses the ways table fellowship, preaching, liturgy, and children's ministry can be utilized to educate white congregants on systemic racism and the church's historical entanglement with white supremacy. He argues that education must be paired with a commitment to one's community and location—a difficult feat considering white Christians' propensity for transience. Swanson offers practical suggestions for ways leaders can encourage white congregants to commit to their communities, including learning about the racial history of their churches and cities. As a white community learns its history and commits to changing its narrative from complacency to solidarity, new possibilities for racial reconciliation and justice are birthed.

Swanson argues that as white churches are discipled to challenge white supremacy and practice solidarity with people of color, greater potential exists for healthy relationships between these communities. Pastors and leaders of white churches are exhorted to consider how they might facilitate relationships and dialogue across racial lines. Suggestions include congregations attending a rally for racial justice after church, regularly inviting speakers of color to preach on Sundays, and planning monthly gatherings or potlucks with racially diverse congregations. Swanson states adamantly that Christian leaders cannot participate in the work of racial justice without establishing relationships with leaders of color. Because white people are often blind to their own complicity and biases, relationships of honesty and trust with Christian leaders of color are necessary to ensure that white pastors are not doing more harm than good. Developing relationships across racial lines is not only necessary in the fight for justice; it is also a Christian imperative. If God's heart is for racial reconciliation, love, and compassion between God's people, then the work of racial justice can never be separated from the call to genuine relationship.

While Swanson takes great care to emphasize the necessity of relationships with people of color alongside education and activism, readers should ensure they are educating themselves regarding the ways their racial justice efforts may inadvertently fatigue people of color. Studies have shown that, despite their genuine commitment to the cause of racial justice, white activists often increase burnout rates among activists of color. Readers should supplement Swanson's book with titles that further explore this issue, such as Austin Channing Brown's *I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness* and Jennifer Harvey's *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation*. Overall, Swanson's book advances conversations regarding white ecclesial engagement in racial justice work and provides useful strategies for how white congregations can begin this journey.

SARAH M. KEOUGH

Mae Elise Cannon and Andrea Smith, eds., *Evangelical Theologies of Liberation and Justice* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 376 pages, $36.

In a day where the term "evangelical" is often associated with a lack of social concern, might an evangelical theology alternately advance social liberation and justice? In this volume, editors Mae Cannon and Andrea Smith argue yes, claiming that an evangelical theology par excellence prioritizes the liberation of the oppressed. They suggest that Evangelicalism need not be bound by logics that exclude those on the margins of society. Rather, an evangelical identity is deeply informed by both the liberation priorities of diverse ecclesial traditions and subsequent "justice-rooted liberation praxis" (p. xi).

The chapters of this edited volume are organized into five sections. Section I opens with a consideration of liberation methodology. Paul Louis Metzger establishes a "centered-set" model, challenging evangelical methodologies that overly police boundaries of belonging. Soong-Chan Rah names evangelical captivity to the exceptionalism and triumphalism of colonial patriarchy, and Chanequa Walker-Barnes grieves the exclusion of black and womanist traditions in evangelical discourses. Section II argues that the origins of evangelicalism may be located in what Robert Chao Romero calls "Brown Theology" and, more specifically, as Alexia Salvatierra aptly demonstrates, with Latin American *evangélicos* who imagined a holistic gospel that fused commitments of social and familial

justice to biblicism and christocentric activism.

Section III shifts to evangelical outlooks on sin and soteriology as mediated through collectivist and structural orientations. Here readers are privileged to hear from Andrea Smith, Sarah Withrow King, J. Nicole Morgan, and Terry and Jeanine LeBlanc as they enumerate such understandings through indigenous, ecological, and body-positive lenses. Section IV highlights contemporary evangelical movements with liberation at the center of theology and praxis. Of particular note here are the Center for Urban Ministerial Education at Gordon-Conwell Seminary and the specific legacy of CUME's first director, Eldin Villafane; Shudra and Dalit contexts; and Black and Palestinian traditions as presented by Peter Heltzel, Pablo Jiménez, and Emmett Price III, Boaz Johnson, and Mae Cannon respectively. Section V examines subjects of liberation, such as the Bible itself with Drew Hart's work on Barabbas, global Pentecostalism with Amos Yong, and sacramental theology with Dominique Gilliard. Hart, Yong, and Gilliard then discuss how each treatment may be instructive for deeper evangelical consideration.

In presenting this work, the editors and authors have made a significant statement about the possibility of Evangelicalism to speak truth and advance justice—not merely as a matter of borrowed activism of other justice traditions but as an act of integrity unto itself. This message comes at a timely moment, as the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor have again put US evangelicals to the test. Must evangelical traditions be known for complicity in anti-blackness, defenses of racial violence, and white normativity? Or can they forge a different path, one that unequivocally rejects anti-blackness and embodies anti-racist praxis?

Though there is precious little to critique about this already superb volume, it might have been further enhanced by expansions in a few areas, for instance, attending in section III to how an evangelical theology of liberation might reformulate conventional understandings of Christology, the cross, or biblicism, alongside the book's existing focus on rethinking sin, soteriology, and conversionism. Here venturing deeper into concepts such as a Neplanta Christology or Wang Weifan's cosmic Christ or delving into postcolonial evangelical hermeneutics might have proven fruitful. Further, featuring and interacting with more expressions of world Evangelicalism in Part IV, would have been welcome. Here movements come to mind such as the evangelical house church movement in China, the Cambodian evangelical Ratanak Ministry working to combat sex trafficking, or the interfaith justice work of the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services in Egypt. (See, for example,

Mark Noll, "World Cup or World Series?" in *Evangelicals: Who They Have Been, Are Now, and Could Be.*)

Throughout the volume, further attention might have also been given to the interrelation between evangelical liberation praxis, disability, and queer advocacy. The tragedies of ableism and transphobias are briefly mentioned, but the volume largely omits questions regarding how queer theology might coexist with evangelical theologies of liberation. The late theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid and Brazilian evangelical churches like Igreja Cristã Contemporânea or Comunidade Cidade de Refúgio embody such coexistence. If evangelical theologies are to be truly liberative, one must also inquire whether they must be truly intersectional—and, correspondingly, whether they can be truly intersectional if they are not willing to critique heteronormativity along with colonialism, hyper-capitalism, patriarchy, and nativism.

In the end, this book largely succeeds in much of what it sets out to do, namely, reworking the "evangelical" frame to be more broadly inclusive, especially of liberation priorities that elevate attention to oppressed communities. It also aptly showcases many existing schools of evangelical liberation praxis. One is left to wonder, however, whether the very traditions, movements, and communities the authors describe as inclusive to Evangelicalism would themselves be amenable to such a classification. Moreover, the question remains whether the vision of such a volume will prove convincing to evangelicals firmly committed to a more bounded Evangelicalism. In any case, all pastors and practitioners should purchase and critically engage this important text. The future of evangelical flourishing in our world may well depend on it.

MARK TAO

Walter Brueggemann, *Preaching from the Old Testament*, Working Preacher Books (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2019), 250 pages, $19.

This first book in the Working Preacher series is also the last book Walter Brueggemann says he will write. While that is not happy news for his readers, it is good to see that he has directed his attention once more to preaching, following on *Finally Comes the Poet* (1989) and *Cadences of Home* (1997). In one sense, all of Brueggemann's writing has had that focus. In his 1990 presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature, he claimed that the biblical text "is inherently agonistic and makes its advocacy in the face of other advocacies."[1] As such, he con-

cluded, biblical scholarship can be neither objective nor neutral.

Now he reminds preachers that they enter into that same conflict with a redemptive purpose: "It is the conviction of the preacher and the hope of the church that there is a better narrative….Under good preaching, we are always again invited into the counter narrative that refuses the death sentence we love too much" (p. 40).

Although Brueggemann chooses not to use the schemes of law-gospel or salvation history, he is committed to reading texts in their canonical contexts. References to Genesis made by Moses, Isaiah, Ezra, and Luke all figure into his reading of an alternative story rehearsed in the face of distorted desire, violence, and empire: Babylon and Persia then, consumer market ideology now. Blessing and curse run throughout Genesis, along with the tension of being both recipient and carrier of blessedness, of being chosen and sharing the blessing with the world.

A chapter on "the Moses tales" of Exodus opens with five pages on the Pharaoh who never has enough and his food czar, Joseph the sellout. The liberation and wilderness wandering present a stark picture that must not be sentimentalized. "The preacher's task is to be honest about the risky terrain of departure and discipleship. And then to tell this amazing story of flourishing life given outside of Pharaoh's totalism. It is inexplicable and unexpected" (p. 51).

However, such preaching is not easy; ask any pastor who has been told to stick with what is spiritual and leave politics (or any social concern) alone. To attend to the prophetic texts is to observe that attempt at silencing (think of Elijah, Amos, Jeremiah). Therefore, Brueggemann claims that prophets say what those in power want to keep unsaid; "prophets *utter the unutterable*" (p. 75). He inserts a number of examples to let the poetry have its say, setting those texts into Jeremiah's "mantra" of judgment ("to pluck up and tear down") and hope ("to plant and build").

Preaching from the Psalms helps Christians and congregations find a framework for expressions of sorrow and joy in their life stories. After showing how psalms allow for that "performance of emotional extremity" (p. 125), Brueggemann presents his classic framework of *orientation*, *disorientation*, *reorientation*. Few psalms display the entire pattern: some voice the order of orientation, others the pain of disorientation, and still others the elation of living in newness. This master plot allows the

[1] Walter Brueggemann, "At the Mercy of Babylon: A Subversive Rereading of the Empire," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110, no. 1 (1991): 20.

preacher to select a psalm and ask which part of life is addressed and for whom.

The rest of the writings (*ketuvim*) are represented by the wisdom books. Proverbs presents an orientation of moral clarity but not certainty, where actions have predictable but not guaranteed outcomes. A number of proverbs (Proverbs 16:1–2; 19:21; 20:24; 21:30–31) speak to the inscrutability of creation and its God. Job follows one man through the psalmic process of disorientation and reorientation. The preacher is privileged and called to sit with the Jobs in her congregation and offer space for lament. Ecclesiastes weighs its world-weariness against the benefits of wisdom, small joys of living, and fear of God. Each book in turn represents a greater willingness to engage the unpredictable and vulnerable life of faith.

In reading this book I had the sense of sitting in Brueggemann's Old Testament classes, hearing his many asides for those learning to preach. "The preacher knows that these thick texts never 'meant' in any original way. Rather, they always 'mean,' present tense" (p. 26). Each of the five chapters will challenge some view the reader holds dear, and this alone makes this compendium of Brueggemann's scholarship and teaching important reading.

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