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# **Education that is Missional**

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## **Toward a Pedagogy for the Missional Church**

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### **About the Author:**

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores the implications of missional theology for Christian religious education in congregations. In particular, it draws on recent notable missional titles to do three things: 1) to clarify the meaning and aims of missional education as Christian education that specifically privileges the goal of helping Christians discover and live into their identity as God's cooperative partners in the *missio dei*, 2) to identify key characteristics of missional education, namely, attention to identity and acuity, life as the classroom, and Scripture as mission narrative, and 3) offer a modest proposal for missional education in the congregational setting through small communities of shared practice.

## **Introduction**

Since the publication of *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* in 1998, which popularized the m-word, authors and publishers have increasingly released titles incorporating it. According to Reggie McNeal, the “rise of the missional church is the single biggest development in Christianity since the Reformation” (xiii). While this may be sensationalizing a bit, there is no question that the missiological ecclesiologies originally proposed by Lesslie Newbigin and David Bosch, which thoroughly informed *Missional Church*, are making a significant impact. Church leaders across North America are increasingly seeking to make theirs a “missional church” as how-to books proliferate. This essay explores the implications of missional theology for Christian religious education. In particular, it attempts—drawing on recent notable missional titles—to do three things: 1) to clarify the meaning and aims of missional education, 2) to identify some of its key characteristics, and 3) offer a modest proposal for Christian education towards the cultivation and ongoing life of the missional church.

### **I. What is Missional Education?**

In order to move toward a tentative definition of missional education, it will be important to discuss the two key terms. The ubiquity of “missional” has made it especially ambiguous. My use of the term regards it as virtually synonymous with “missionary.” Thus, a church is missional when its core self-understanding is as a community created by the Spirit to participate in God’s mission to redeem the cosmos through Christ (Van Gelder 73). Similarly, an individual may be considered missional when, by nature of their membership in this missionary community, they understand their identity as most fundamentally God’s cooperative agent. This corporate and personal sense of identity manifests in “missional living” which is pluriform ministry and service, encompassing a full spectrum from care-full stewardship of creation to active evangelistic work as ambassadors of God’s reconciling love.

The second key term, education—referring specifically to Christian education—merits a fuller discussion. The earliest Christians, as Acts makes clear, were known as followers of the Way. According to the *Didache*—the earliest non-canonical source for

catechetical instruction—the Christian message is a call to a “way of life” (*The Didache*, 6:3-25). Specifically, Christianity invites all to “a life lived according to the example of Jesus and his teachings” (Groome 51). If Christianity is conceived of as a way of life, then Christian education should be thought of as education *toward* this way of life.<sup>1</sup> This education consists of any and everything that the Christian community intentionally practices, provides, or leverages for the purpose of helping Christians learn this distinct way of life.

While many are aware that Jesus’ primary message concerned the Kingdom or Reign of God, not all recognize that his central theme was more precisely the *availability* of this Reign.<sup>2</sup> Thus, they often fail to connect the Reign of God with Jesus’ actual manner of life, which manifested and exemplified its accessibility. This is a great omission, for Jesus’ way of life was as much a *demonstration* of life lived within the available Reign as his preaching was a *declaration* of it. The meaning of the intimate connection between Jesus’ way of life and the availability of the Reign of God for Christian education is that it possesses a singular, rather than dual, aim: Christian education seeks to apprentice followers of Jesus into his way of life, which was precisely life as a citizen in the Commonwealth of God.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, this begs the question of what a way of life within the Reign of God might include. I propose a three-fold answer. Thomas Groome, author of *Christian Religious Education*, asserts that the metapurpose of Christian education is to “lead people out to the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ” (35) and under this umbrella isolates “twin immediate purposes, namely, Christian faith and human freedom” (82). Reggie McNeal, suggests understanding Christian maturation as “becoming more like Jesus and blessing the world” (100). Both authors highlight my first aim of Christian education, *an outward orientation* such as that which was characteristic of Jesus’ way of life; life in the Reign is a life for others. McNeal in speaking of “becoming like Jesus,” uniquely draws attention to *spiritual formation* into Christlike virtue as a critical dimension of Kingdom life; the inner life, too, must learn Jesus’ way. This is the second element. Groome, speaking of Christian faith as a secondary purpose, points toward the third element: life as a citizen in the Commonwealth of God includes an intimate and trusting *interactivity with God*. These three elements of the way of life toward which Christian education inclines might be labeled as missional (blessing others), formational (spiritual formation in Christlikeness) and relational (relationship with God).

To summarize, *Christian religious education is the pluriform activity of the Christian community that seeks to train Christians in the way of Jesus—life lived in the Kingdom of God. Acquiring this way of life includes: 1) cultivating a personal, interactive relationship with God, characterized by renewed identity, attentiveness and cooperation, 2) undergoing spiritual formation in Christlikeness, such that the inner life bears the fruit of the Spirit, and 3) reorientation of action toward the blessing and liberation of others and the redemption of cosmos.*

Properly conceived, all Christian education is missional. Nonetheless, by missional education, I refer to Christian education that specifically privileges the goal of helping Christians discover and live into their identity as God’s cooperative partners in the *missio dei*. Missional education is generally required as a corrective to truncated approaches to Christian education that have omitted the missional dimension, emphasizing only personal relationship with God and/or spiritual formation in Christlike character. The privileging of the missional dimension of Christian education highlights the proper nature of other two dimensions. In missional education, intimate relationship with the missionary God is seen as beginning point for discovery of one’s missional identity. It also stresses that this personal relationship is best cultivated through active attentiveness and willing cooperation. Missional education, moreover, emphasizes how other-oriented the fruit of the spirit is; presenting spiritual formation as more than a means of gaining inner peace and joy, indeed as growing in love of neighbor.

## **II. What Makes Education Missional?**

While missional authors rarely cite Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, its impact is unmistakable to one familiar with his work. Freire, writing in the midst of his experience among the poor of Latin America, conceives of education as *conscientization* —a process in which learners are enabled to “enter the historical process as responsible Subjects” (36). This transformation is most fundamentally one of identity, a change of self-concept from object to subject, from passive observer to empowered agent in the shaping of the world. For Freire, this rising awareness among the poor is what makes possible their liberation, and indeed the liberation of their oppressors (44).

A similar identity shift is a most pivotal missional learning and the key to movement toward missional living. Missional learners discover themselves to be cooperative agents with God in the renewal of all things. This very discovery constitutes, in part, the liberation of their own humanity—for as creatures made in the *imago dei*, humans are intended to manifest and participate in God's earth-tending action—and it opens up the possibility of the liberation of the humanity of others, along with the liberation of the whole earth.

For Friere, conscientization and its concurrent subjectivity result from a developing ability to see the world differently. In particular, it requires learning to see culture as human-made, “not as static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation” (83). While Friere's vision opens up an uncertain future at the mercy of human agency, missional eyes perceive an agency beyond that of humans alone. Craig Van Gelder, an author with several missional titles, poses two questions as critical for the life of the missional church: What is God doing? and What does God want to do? (118). These questions, which are meant to initiate the process of decision-making and action for the missional church, assume that the church and its individuals have learned to discern God's action and desires.

Thus, renewed vision is a core competency that missional education seeks to cultivate. I have written elsewhere on the nature of missional acuity in an essay titled “Missional Acuity: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Insights Toward a Redemptive Way of Seeing.”<sup>4</sup> In this essay, I offer a description, which I repeat here: Missional acuity is the intimate, experiential knowledge of God that enables one to see God's presence and activity in the world, especially through nature and people which are recognized as bearers of virtue and the presence of Christ. Missional vision arrives as a gift of sheer grace, but the ability to welcome it is cultivated through persistent training, resolute confession of reality as it is revealed through Scripture and Christian tradition, and contemplation of God.

McNeal highlights the centrality of missional acuity in his discussion of practices for what he calls people-development. “The practice of life debriefing will also have the spiritual benefit of helping people see that God is active in their lives every day in every sphere. This is fundamental to helping people live more intentional and more missional lives” (103). As McNeal suggests, the zone in which and for

which missional education seeks to train eyes to see God is not limited by the walls of the church. This leads to a critical feature of missional education.

The primary venue for missional education is not the classroom, but the primary places of the learner's lives—their places of work, home, and recreation. David Bosch, one of the earliest and most influential missional authors, states it emphatically: "The context [of discipling] is not in the classroom (where "teaching" normally takes place), or even in the church, but in the world" (Bosch 67). This is because it is in these places that God is already at work but also because it is in these places that God seeks our cooperative partnership. Real life is both the place where the primary missional learning takes place and the place where this learning is enacted.

Thus far, we have identified both the *what* and *where* of missional education, but we have said little about *how* missional education proceeds. To review, *what* missional education seeks is, most pivotally, the critical identity shift toward a missional self-concept as well as the ability to see and discern God's presence and action. *Where* this learning occurs is not the classroom but in whatever places a person spends the majority of their time. We now turn to the *how* question to propose the beginnings of a missional pedagogy.

### **III. Toward a Missional Curriculum and Method**

Missional education seeks to cultivate both missional identity and missional acuity as essential attributes of those who follow Jesus' way of life in the Kingdom of God. As with any educational agenda, knowledge of certain information is indispensable toward this end. Before outlining the pedagogical processes of missional education, I will note some of the pieces of knowledge (and belief) that support development of missional identity and acuity.

The missional curriculum has a unique approach to the classic foci of systematic theology. Preceding any talk of people or churches being missional, is the development of a missional *doctrine of God*. The most basic missional claim, rehearsed tirelessly by authors, is the missionary nature of God. Guder lays the foundation by speaking of



witness as theocentric, Christocentric and pneumatological (2000, 62). In so doing, he stresses the intrinsic missional orientation of the triune persons. David Bosch is regularly invoked in this regard:

Mission [is] understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It [is] thus put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology. The classical doctrine of the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit [is] expanded to include yet another “movement”: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world (Bosch 390).<sup>5</sup>

Critical to missional formation is the knowledge that God is, at heart, a missionary and that God has been and is on a mission. This missionary doctrine of God is the foundational first principle for missional education and it sets the curricular trajectory.

Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch are often noted for the directionality in their theology, echoing a similar comment by Bosch above. They speak of beginning with Christology, which determines missiology, which in turn determines ecclesiology (Frost and Hirsch 209). While there may seem to be a discrepancy between Bosch’s call to begin with the doctrine of God, and theirs to begin with Christology, missional thinkers reconcile this by taking Christ as the decisive revelation of God. Guder defends his own Christocentricity by invoking Newbigin:

But a Trinitarian perspective can be only an enlargement and development of a Christocentric one and not an alternative set over against it, for the doctrine of the Trinity is the theological articulation of what it means to say that Jesus is the unique Word of God incarnate in world history (Guder 2000, 48).

This belief in a “missionary God” inevitably gives new texture to the whole catalog of systematic topics. *Eschatology* comes to the fore as the question is raised: Where is God’s mission intending to take creation in the end? This question drives toward an understanding of the Reign of God and leads to both a widened *soteriology* and a more robust eschatology that envisions the redemption of the cosmos (not just the soul-salvation of the elect). With this end in mind, questions

of *missiology* surface: How has God been about this mission toward that final redemption, historically? How is God working toward it, even now? This second question is where *ecclesiology* takes center stage, and missional thinking has reshaped no doctrinal foci more significantly. A key teaching in missional instruction is the missionary constitution of the church: “definitions of the church should focus on and arise out of the formation of particular communities of God’s people, called and sent where they are as witnesses to the gospel” (Guder 1998, 9).

Finally, through the missional paradigm, Scripture’s function shifts from being primarily a “devotional aid and an instruction manual” to serving as a narrative which helps the people of God understand God’s mission and their role in it” (McNeal 27). The Bible provides the story into which the church has stepped as today’s key supporting actor. Moreover, the text inspires and empowers the church to fulfill its role. Guder reads Paul’s epistles as a call to practice a missionary lifestyle (2000, 58). Newbigin exemplifies this approach to Scripture, leveraging his own Reformed doctrine of election to trace the missional vocation of God’s people through Abraham, Moses, Israel, the disciples and up to today’s church (Newbigin 68). More recently, Christopher Wright offers a wonderful reading of the Bible’s grand narrative through this missional lens in *The Mission of God*.

Thus far, we have identified some of the key learnings essential to missional curricula as they ripple through the traditional loci of theological reflection. Now we must ask “how is this knowledge gained?” Missional educators heed Groome’s warning: “Any form of manipulation or indoctrination is both bad education and blatantly counter productive to the purposes of Christian education. The educational process we use must itself be capable of promoting human emancipation” (98). As a result, while the preceding discussion of theological loci may conjure up images of a (hierarchical) seminary setting, as we have already noted, the role of the classroom is relativized by the primacy of the actual places where people spend the bulk of their lives. How, then, do missional educators equip learners to capitalize on the educative potential of their everyday settings? In truth, these environments do not become fertile for missional formation until the learner has already begun to develop missional identity and acuity. Once these begin to be acquired, even in their nascent form, they can grow to maturity in any setting in which the

learner exists. If these firstfruits are born in neither the classroom nor the everyday environs, where does the process of missional education begin?

Perhaps the key pedagogical feature of missional pedagogy is the assertion that participation in mission is not merely an aim of education but its primary vehicle and catalyst. Thus, missional education is not just education *for* mission but education *through* mission. In other words, mission is not just viewed as the outcome of discipleship, discipleship is presumed to be the outcome of mission. Alan Hirsch sources this pedagogical insight in Jesus the educator himself:

...this is exactly how Jesus does discipleship: he organizes it around mission. As soon as they are called he takes the disciples on an adventurous journey of mission, ministry, and learning. Straightaway they are involved in proclaiming the kingdom of God, serving the poor, healing, and casting out demons. It is active and direct disciple making in the context of mission (Hirsch 120).

Reggie McNeal shares a similar sentiment: “The missional church assumes that service to others is the first step, not some later expression of spirituality” (105). Since service is understood to be the “threshold where many of us learn the most about ourselves and come to see God at work in the world,” missional churches “deploy people into service as much and as soon as possible” (McNeal 106).

Missional educators embrace a praxis approach. The educational process is therefore imagined as a continuous cycle of action and reflection, rather than linearly as a move from reflection to action. While this praxis learning has a constant circulation from reflection to action and back again, the opening movement, several missional authors assert, is missionary action. According to Hirsch, “mission is the catalyzing principle of discipleship” so wherever the learner may be “the way forward is to put actions into the equation” (120/123). This is the case because, following the Hebrew concept of knowledge “we need to *act* our way into a new way of thinking” rather than the futile Greek attempt to “*think* our way into a new way

of acting” (122). This is, no doubt, a simplification of the learning process—for we can only suspect some new thought as prior to this action—but it is one that missional authors repeat.

McNeal insists that expecting people to take away something they learn at church and apply it in their lives is “backwards.” Rather, missional educators “help people examine their lives, figure out what’s going on, and distill out the issues” and thus prepare the “seedbed where learning and application can occur” (105). Missional educators are interpretive guides rather than didactic lecturers. Here again we see the subtle influence of Paulo Friere. Friere vociferously protested the “banking approach” to education, in which knowledgeable teachers deposit bits of information in passive students, declaring that this model only perpetuates the oppressive regime as it denies learners agency. He proposed radically flattening the hierarchy of these relations with new language, calling the educative partners student-teachers and teacher-students (80). According to the Friere, the educator’s primary task was problem-posing; presenting to the student-teachers, depictions of their own reality and calling forth their interpretations and thus agency (79).

Similarly, while missional education launches as direct service, it is paired with reflection facilitated by the educator. This reflection is aided by proper framing of the service at the outset, perhaps by something as simple as a shared prayer that participants might catch a glimpse of the God who always precedes mission. Because the aims of the missional educator are missional agency and missional acuity, the primary mode of speech for the missional educator is the question. With questions such as What did you see? Where did you sense God’s presence or activity? and What invitation to action did you feel?, the missional educator empowers learners to cultivate simultaneously a sensitivity to God-on-the-move and an awareness of their own role and agency within this campaign.

As learners struggle to make sense of their experience, asking questions about the plight of those they serve, the limitations of their own character and strength, and searching for the presence of God in the midst of it all, they become ready to move toward greater understanding of the missionary God who desires intimate relationality and partnership and open to God’s means of spiritual

formation through Christian practices. At this point in the learning process, bit-by-bit instruction in theology and practices becomes appropriate.

Given this high valuation of missionary action to missional education, it should not be surprising that several authors suggest missional educators ought to be practitioners, not pure academics. As practitioners, missional educators are themselves involved in educative action, thus fitting the Friar's designation of the "teacher-student". Hirsch feels so strongly about this that he allows only active missional practitioners to teach at his *Forge Mission Training Network*.

In contrast to those who would make a progression of Henri Nouwen's movements from solitude to community to ministry,<sup>6</sup> missional educators propose just the reverse. Groome, though writing before the missional language arrived on the scene, anticipates the sentiment:

...we may well speak of believing and trusting as leading to the overt doing for the "other." But the reverse is equally true and should also be stated. Our life of agape leads to believing and to trusting, with a constant dialectical relationship between what is known and what is done (Groome 64).

What Groome calls the "life of agape" and I have referred to as "missional living," naturally calls for and leads to the development of theological awareness. As both Hirsch and Guder note, quoting Martin Kahler, "Mission is the mother of theology" (Kahler 190).<sup>7</sup>

Just as taking steps forward in mission will drive one toward a deeper understanding of theology, it also leads one toward both intimacy with God and utilization of spiritual disciplines for character formation. Dallas Willard, though not a missional author, suggests a similar pedagogical strategy. When asked what someone should do to grow spiritually, he suggests that they set about to simply do "the next right thing," suggesting that nothing will drive a person into the Kingdom of God like trying to do the next right thing.<sup>8</sup> Pretty soon, he insists, they will find that they can't just do it; they need God's power and this is when spiritual disciplines will begin to make sense. Similarly,

missional educators believe, participating in redemptive action is bound to spark a journey of theological investigation and renewal of the inner life.

#### **IV. Missional Education in Practice**

With the success of *Missional Church*, pastors who resonated with the missional ecclesiology began calling for more practical and actionable resources. One of the earliest and most direct responses to this cry was *Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness*, also released by The Gospel and Our Culture Network.<sup>9</sup> As the collaborative project of six authors, including *Missional Church* contributors Darrell Guder, George Hunsberger and Lois Barrett, *Treasure in Clay Jars* examines nine congregations on their way toward being missional and identifies eight patterns common to these churches. Our interest in this work will engage only the patterns most relevant to educational practices.

The first pattern in these nascent missional congregations is their commitment to *discerning missional vocation*. This attribute is linked to both missional identity and missional acuity. Missional vocation is missional identity plus a discerned call to participation with God in a particular dimension of mission. Thus, missional vocation is the outcome of missional identity and missional acuity. In this chapter, Hunsberger identifies four questions that missional churches attend to and they are critical for missional learning: *where* are we (geographical, social and cultural context), *when* are we (in the flow of history and change), *who* are we (vis a vis their tradition) and *why* are we (God's general and specific purposes)(39). Practices based on engagement with these questions include use of social science data and analysis (where), congregational and community storytelling (when), theological mining of the tradition and spiritual gifts assessment (who), and reflection on congregational vocation through prayer walks, small group discussion or annual retreats (why).

Pattern two, *biblical formation and discipleship*, bears directly on the processes of missional education. Guder, the author of this chapter, considers discipleship to be "all about" living "in accordance with scripture" and "experiencing the daily renewal of our inner natures" (60). Here we see linkages to the formational end of Christian education. As Guder is quick to point out, "not all Bible study

is missional formation” (60). Missional education often takes place in small groups or the “core congregation” which practices a “high level of discipline and commitment (67-68). Importantly, the questions that are brought to scripture are shaped by the missional formation sought. Rather than asking “What can I get out of this?,” “the missional approach asks, How does God’s Word call, shape, transform, and send me...and us?” (69-70). This question calls for self-analysis and self-criticism which move learners toward what the Bible calls repentance (72).

*Practices that demonstrate God’s intent for the world* is the fourth pattern identified in missional churches. These practices include 1) listening to one another, 2) active helpfulness, 3) bearing with one another, and 4) crossing boundaries, welcoming the “Other”. While these are oriented toward those within the church community, they are no less missionally educative, for they enlist individuals in God’s other-blessing mission. Additionally, they make the church distinct and visible as “the sign and foretaste of God’s reign of justice, freedom and love” (85).

Pattern eight highlights the crucial role of leadership, or *missional authority*, in missional congregations. Interestingly, “missional leaders did not necessarily lead through their “office”” and missional leadership was typically given by a “community of multiple leaders” (140-142). These observations reinforce the flattened hierarchy in which missional educators and learners operate, as suggested earlier. These leaders focus on missional vocation and foster missional practices, publicly living out the implications of missional identity through a distinct lifestyle and challenging others to join them (146-148).

Several other patterns have significance for the educational task. Pattern three indicates that missional churches *take risks as a contrast society*, particularly through practices of generosity (rejecting materialism), practices of commitment to community (against individualism), and reaching those on the edges of society (risking safety and comfort).<sup>10</sup> Pattern five highlights the *missional character of worship*; “concern, involvement, and commitment to persevere in their missional engagement is motivated and sustained in their worship” (113). Pattern six, *dependence on the Holy Spirit*, is manifest largely through the centrality of prayer practices, not merely for devotional purposes, but in pursuit of missional discernment and

empowerment.<sup>11</sup> Finally, pattern seven notes that missional churches often resonate with the theme of the *Reign of God*, and understand themselves as an incomplete expression of it.

Beyond this survey of patterns, two explicit references to missional education in this book are worth highlighting. In a parenthetical note, Guder says “The “mission trip” has become a favorite form of missional education in prosperous churches of the West. There is no denying its value, though questions must be raised about the approach” (135). While often yielding questionable benefits for those served, mission trips have the potential of cultivating both missional identity through a week in which participants are self-consciously “here to bless others” and the potential of developing missional acuity if regular times of reflection are led with an eye toward helping participants discern God’s presence and activity. In the concluding chapter, editor Lois Barrett asserts that in the missional church “education will be oriented toward proclaiming and being a sign of the reign of God” (151). Indeed, as I have suggested, proclamation and demonstration of the Reign are both ends and means of missional education.

## **V. A Proposal**

While *Treasures in Clay Jars* offers hints regarding the concrete practices of missional education, it intentionally avoids putting forward congregations as models or its descriptions as prescriptive. Jumping into this gap, among others, is Alan Roxburgh, a contributor to *Missional Church* and prolific author, church consultant and head of The Missional Network.<sup>12</sup> Roxburgh offers a straightforward proposal for congregations desiring to “become missional” in *Missional Mapmaking*.<sup>13</sup> I draw largely on what he has put forth in my own proposal for a praxis of missional education toward development of missional agency and acuity.

The beginning of a congregational process of missional education assumes that someone, preferably a leader, already has the seedlings of either missional identity or acuity, if not both. As Roxburgh notes, movement toward missional identity begins with “rediscovering some basic habits and practices of Christian formation critical for discernment and the capacity to name what we are seeing



God do in our time and place” (137). The first steps will be for this individual to begin to develop some practices for cultivating further missional identity and acuity and to draw others into this experience.

The new practices I suggest, while modest, are the beginnings of a change of lifestyle. First, a daily morning prayer of commitment and intercession (ex. “Lord, allow me today to bless those I will meet today as your representative, including, Joe, at work who needs encouragement and Mary, on my bus, who is trapped in a painful relationship”) and a daily evening prayer of Examen (ex. Where did I sense God’s presence or activity? What invitation to cooperative action did I experience? How did I respond?). Second, a monthly practice of hosting an acquaintance for dinner and exercise of deep attentive listening. Third, cultivation of friendships with non-Christians and the needy, for whom intercession is made daily. Fourth, weekly in-depth engagement with the biblical story through missional questions, preferably in a community context.<sup>14</sup> Of course, it can be exceedingly difficult for an individual to make such a lifestyle change alone, so it will be essential that they invite others to share these commitments.

How can others be drawn into this experience? If the individual is not aware of others that the Spirit is moving in a similar way, they should invite whomever they can to action-reflection events. These events would be service or exposure experiences—such as serving at a soup kitchen or prayer walking through a poor part of town—that include appropriate group prepping and meaningful space for reflection afterward. The prepping might be as simple as a reading of Matthew 25: 31-46 (The Sheep and the Goats) and a prayer for “eyes to see” Jesus in those they encounter. After the experience, the budding missional educator should pose questions such as: What did you see? Where did you sense God’s presence or activity? and What invitation to cooperative action did you feel? From these events, the missional educator can invite people to join a small group committed to the practices outlined above, as well as a weekly meal to share their experiences. It would be in the context of these small groups that the most intentional missional reflection would take place.

I am aware that this proposal cultivates *individual* but not—at least initially—*shared* missional vocation. Participants would, I believe, begin to see God at work and begin to see themselves as God’s missionary partners, but this would not immediately lead to their congregation as a whole, being in any meaningful sense a missional

church. After some months, the small group should be invited to entertain corporate questions such as “What needs are we seeing *together*? What action of God are we seeing *together*? What action are we being called to *together*?” Small group projects may emerge from these conversations. If more than one such small group exists, there should be opportunities to reflect as one large group along these lines, and from this context, larger church-sponsored, projects might begin to take shape.

While projects ought to arise as the result of a maturing of communal missional identity and acuity, it must be remembered that a church is not missional on the basis of any number of mission projects or service activities. Rather, the adjective refers to the *character* of a church. A church only becomes missional as the people (the church!) gain missional acuity and identity, not as the institution takes on mission projects.

## **VI. Conclusion**

In this essay, I have proposed conceiving of the *telos* of Christian religious education as training into the Kingdom way of life that Jesus announced and demonstrated. I identified three dimensions of this way of life: the personal (intimacy with God), the formational (renewal of inner life), and the missional (other-blessing orientation). Missional education seeks particularly to train disciples into the third, missional, dimension of Jesus’ way of life, while integrating with both the personal and formational dimensions. The two key competences for missional living, I have suggested, are missional identity or agency (the self-concept that I/we am/are God’s cooperative partner(s) in the redemption of the cosmos) and missional acuity (the ability to discern, or see, God’s presence, activity and will). Together, these two are the chief aims of missional education.

Toward these ends, missional educators employ a praxis pedagogy, in which mission and reflection exist symbiotically. Emphasis is placed on the priority of active engagement in mission without prerequisite training. Missional educators, themselves learners and practitioners, stress the out-of-classroom environments as the primary context for learning, and facilitate reflection primarily through question-posing intended to cultivate agency and discernment

of God's presence, action and invitation. As learners develop a hunger for greater understanding and an inner-life that can sustain missional living, educators introduce key theological concepts and practices.

The missional congregations studied by *Treasure in Clay Jars* enact missional education in diverse ways but share common patterns. They purposefully seek to develop missional vocation through analysis of their geographical, socio-cultural, traditioned and redemptive context. Missional congregations approach the Bible as the key source of missional empowerment and rebuke, often in small group cohorts. Practices of welcoming, listening, helping, and bearing-with one another develop missional identity and make the community a sign of the Kingdom. Leader/educators exist in community and foster missional practices through public exemplification of missional living.

Finally, I proposed a way of initiating missional education in a congregational setting through the purposeful commitment, by individuals and small groups, to practices which cultivate missional identity and acuity: prayers of commitment, intercession and Examen, hosting acquaintances for dinner, cultivating friendships with the lost and needy, and missional engagement with the Scriptural narrative. I conclude with McNeal's charge to those who would undertake missional education:

We must change our ideas of what it means to develop a disciple, shifting the emphasis from studying Jesus and all things spiritual in an environment protected from the world to following Jesus into the world to join him in his redemptive mission (10).

## Notes

- 1 I have elsewhere explored this theme in greater depth in an essay titled “Conversion as Skill Acquisition” available at <http://www.jesusdust.com/2011/02/conversion-as-skill-acquisition.html>
- 2 Dallas Willard made this observation in a public interview with John Ortberg at Catalyst West 2010. The video of this interview is available at: <http://www.jesusdust.com/2010/07/john-ortberg-interviews-dallas-willard.html>
- 3 I appropriate the phrase “commonwealth of God” from Brian D. McLaren who proposes it, among others, as contemporary language analogous to the “Kingdom of God.” <http://bit.ly/dZ05GI>
- 4 This article is published in *Witness: Journal of the Academy for Evangelism in Theological Education*, vol. 26 (2012).
- 5 As noted in *Missional Church*, Bosch’s formulation follows Western tradition, but Orthodox Christians affirm the missionary nature of God while emphasizing that the Father sends both the Son and the Spirit.
- 6 For example, see Neil Michells’ *How to Hit the Ground Running: A Quick-Start Guide for Congregations with New Leadership*. (2005). Church Publishing, Inc. p. 63.
- 7 Guder invokes Kahler on page 21 of the *Continuing Conversion of the Church*. Hirsch does not credit Kahler, but appropriates this quotation on page 125.
- 8 Heard on several occasions, including Catalyst West 2010 and in services at Menlo Park Presbyterian Church on December 11, 2009. Relevant audio available at <http://bit.ly/l85FgZ> and <http://www.mppc.org/toughquestions> under “How do I find God?”
- 9 The Gospel and Our Culture Network: <http://www.gocn.org>
- 10 These practices serve as what Brian McLaren calls “counter-curriculum to teach people the art of living in this new way” against the “covert curriculum” of the dominant societal system. *Everything Must Change*, 284.

- 11 Craig Van Gelder explores this Spirit-led characteristic throughout The Ministry of the Missional Church.
- 12 The Missional Network: <http://www.roxburghmissionalnet.com/>
- 13 See my review of Missional Mapmaking in Witness: The Journal for the Academy for Evangelism in Theological Education (2011).
- 14 These proposed practices have much in common with Roxburgh's on pages 151-162.

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