

GLOBAL CHURCH GROWTH THROUGH MULTICULTURAL MISSION TEAMS

Parnell M. Lovelace Jr.

Abstract

The globalization of ministry outreach is emerging as the church is expanding its reach beyond the local community. As a result, many congregations have embraced multicultural mission team development. As models of leadership are capturing opportunities to develop strategic liaisons globally with various nations politically, educationally, financially, and socially, there appears to be an opportunity to implement or receive initiatives that mutually benefit both the hosting country and the serving organization. These opportunities are available to the local church or a consortium of local churches. The growth of the church and its impact is readily observed through the implementation and utilization of multicultural mission collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of understanding church growth approaches from a Christian anthropological perspective has urged interest in the development, participation, and facilitation of multicultural global missions teams. Principles presented within mission and anthropology discussions and dialogue with a colleague, the late Dr. Chin Do Kham, opened new insight into the biblical mandate and the need for innovative approaches that enable the church to build global bridges of evangelism. The objective of this article is to

conceptually explore the anthropological, theological, and missiological processes that build multicultural global missions teams that facilitate training of leaders, through deploying ministry teams from the local church.

The three areas of anthropology, theology, and missiology engage the formation of such a team because all three interface with the human need of all people (spirit, soul, and body). All three give question to how one introduces universal kingdom principles, as presented within biblical discourse, while maintaining sensitivity and understanding towards the myriad of cultural distinctions that are observed globally.

Anthropology, which is derived from the Greek word *anthropos* (human being), inquires into the basic questions concerning the nature of human beings—how did they come to be what they are, how do they behave, and why do they behave as they do.

Theology is the study of God, his character, nature, and ultimately his redemptive plan for all humankind, regardless of their ethnic or cultural identity.

Missiology is a term derived from the Latin word *missio* (a sending forth with a special message to bring or with a special task to perform). Therefore, it is the study of how the message is communicated in order to present the unchanging truth of the gospel within an ever-changing world. Several synonymous terms are used when discussing missiology. Such terms are mission theory, mission science, theory of announcing the gospel, and theory of adding to the community. A theology of missions must begin with God, not humans. It must begin with the cosmic history of the Creation, the Fall, and God's redemption for all humankind. It must include God's revelation of himself to humans, the incarnation of Jesus Christ within history, the salvation he achieved through his death and resurrection, and the ultimate lordship of Christ over all creation. The history of humankind is primarily the story of God's mission to redeem sinners who seek his salvation, the story of Jesus who came as a missionary, and the story of God's Spirit who works in the hearts of those who hear.

The primary objective of missiological anthropology is to merge the study of humankind with a message that is driven by the mandate to proclaim the redemptive empowerment message of Jesus Christ, as presented by solid theological discourse, affirming God's desire to see all experience salvation and restoration. Such persuasion is motivated by such writings as that of the apostle Peter, which state that God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:1 NKJV).

The concept of a Multicultural Global Missions Equipping Team implores this objective of taking firm theological precepts and through strategic and evaluative measures, integrates innovative missiological designs that acknowledge anthropological implications influencing diverse cultures and communities. Such a team communicates the gospel message that has not changed, and it communicates this unchanging message in ways that

are relevant, understood, and that connect to the community. To further this team-building process, the following observations must be given. First, what has changed and what is changing with traditional mission outreach? Second, what is the importance of utilizing the team approach within mission outreach? Third, what is the benefit of utilizing a multicultural team? Fourth, what role does the “equipping” model play within understanding the worldview and understanding of diverse cultures? Fifth, how will contextualization benefit the team as it interfaces with people of various cultures and mores? These concepts, when engaged, provide a means by which the local church expands beyond the four walls of the worship edifice. The multicultural team has an opportunity to interface with the local community in various initiatives such as children’s programs, youth development, senior support, and health education.

TRADITIONAL MISSION APPROACH

Throughout the history of the missionary movement and in America, especially since the early years of the twentieth century, missiologists and missionaries have concerned themselves with finding the best ways to approach people of non-Christian cultures. Obviously, there must be an area of some common ground, or else communication would be impossible.¹ Therefore, what is this common ground, and what can be done to discover it in order to build cultural bridges? The common stereotype of a missionary is that of a westernized, white male or female that has traveled alone or with family to some remote area of a “third world” country for an extended time. Often, the thought is that these individuals interact with the daily lives of the inhabitants of a particular area with the intent to minister the gospel, while at the same time, they ignore the specific cultural dynamics that are practiced and have been maintained for generations. While historically, there has been great influence from the sacrifices of men and women who carried the gospel to remote regions, it is also evident that there have been mistakes that have caused rifts and even rejection of the gospel within some areas. Another approach that has been more systemic, but nevertheless commonly observed, is that of denomination-initiated mission efforts that often draw from a pool of ministry candidates generally fitting the same model or criteria that has marked missions efforts for centuries. The problem lies in the fact that these paradigms often are restrictive towards the creativity and whole-person message of the gospel. They lack the ability to minister in a way that is relational, transformational, and transcends cultural barriers. To this degree, our message of the lordship and ministry of Jesus Christ is tied to our own perceptions and cultural mores, causing rejection of intervention. Therefore, traditional approaches of missions must question

¹ David J. Hasselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2005), 100.

infrastructure, placement criteria, and training designs in order to engage relevant, effective, relational, and culturally sensitive models. There is no question that one of the greatest problems viewed within Western missionaries entering new cultures has been the misunderstandings and premature judgments often made by those who have not been properly prepared to work with diverse cultures and social structures outside of their own context. One's own perceptions and realities have been projected within people groups that are very different in relation to religion, marriage, child rearing, justice, commerce, and morality. Assumptions have led to disconnect within attempts to share the redemptive message of Christ.

Doug Beachum states in a recent article that there is no question that much of the traditional influence of Western culture is beginning to wane in global Christianity.² In fact, the terminology has changed in missiology from comparing "First and Third World Christianity," to North and South Christianity. Latin America, sub-Sahara Africa, and much of Asia (all part of the Southern Hemisphere) constitute the rising force in twenty-first century Christianity with more missionaries now being deployed from global South Christianity than the traditional western deployment. Denominational organizations are reevaluating their programs, as it has been increasingly difficult to recruit missionary candidates for long-term outreach, and budgetary restraints are making it more challenging to maintain the deployment of these individuals. Beachum further shares that the vast majority of un-evangelized people live in the "10-40 Window," because many of its countries have been closed to Western missionaries.³ However, these countries are often open to non-Western missionaries, giving the South church a unique opportunity for evangelism. This may be the greatest opportunity for the innovators and the intellectually creative members of the body of Christ to initiate objectives, goals, and partnerships that could quite possibly extend the parameters and focus of missiological efforts.

Hiebert shares that one of the greatest tasks that the church now faces is that of constructing models for global church and mission relationships that have no vestiges of the old colonial stance.⁴ There is a need to affirm the autoimmunity and equality of churches and their leaders within different countries. Yet, at the same time, there is a need to present strong, organizational structures that allows a team effort in strengthening the cause of Christ within diverse cultural elements. Additionally, the idea that missionary outreaches are taken on by solo effort must be diminished. There is a change in focus that suggests that the utilization of the team approach is the most effective means by which to serve within global ministry. Fur-

² Doug Beacham, "The Church is Flat," *Ministry Today*, July/August 2007, 28.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1985), 252.

thermore, many local congregations are encouraging global networking, facilitating partnerships of national leadership and deployed workers serving together as a team in order to present effective and measurable ministry projects within the cultural construct. These types of changes presented within the aforementioned approach are a departure from modalities that have had some measure of success. However, as individuals are becoming more aware of the complexity of understanding multicultural communities, it is apparent that the church must draw upon a vast, and virtually untapped, abundance of resources that by nature question and examine other means by which to present the gospel.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TEAM BUILDING

One of the key components towards strengthening the core of mission dynamics is the use of the team approach. God designed us to work best in teams, not in solo acts.⁵ My belief is that team dynamics within the missions paradigms allows for the weakening of potential cultural stereotyping and dichotomizing that is often associated with individualistic conceptualization. Such activity is often left unchallenged by current approaches and schools of understanding. The individualistic lifestyle further detaches itself from many cultures based upon its value placed on materialism and other non-essential elements. Hiebert states, “Self-reliance is not necessarily a positive value in much of the world. In the Orient and Latin American, where there are strong attachments to family and immediate groups, it marks a loner—someone who is antisocial.”⁶ Many countries that implore a more communal concept of identity would find such interaction to be not only unacceptable, but also counterproductive for both the individual and the whole. I also found some interesting insight from Hiebert on the concept of voluntarism, as viewed by many societies. In many cultures, the voluntarism concept is difficult to grasp because much emphasis is placed on family and community loyalty as the means and basis for connectivity within many cultures.

An inferred accountability, when present, encourages open dialoging and collaborating within set objectives. Recently, Bayside Church of Midtown and Center of Praise Ministries of Sacramento, California, have taken this approach. Both multicultural congregations are collaborating with Compassion International with outreach into the nation of Kenya. It is believed that such infrastructure will ensure the quality, focus, and modeling aspect that will influence those who are served on the mission field, and other organizations locally, nationally, and internationally will be encouraged to develop such ministry partnerships.

⁵ Wayne Cordeiro, *Doing Church as a Team* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2004), 79.

⁶ Hiebert, 124.

The complexity of multiplication of leaders and of vision requires team dynamics that embrace dialogue, communication, and internal evaluation in order to assess effective means of interface with people of various communities and cultures. Additionally, the team composition serves as a valuable resource that may have significant impact when shared with emerging congregations and organizations. Teamwork serves as the relational bridge that implements trust and understanding between local pastors and national leaders.

MULTIETHNIC TEAMS

Immediate strength is given towards a missions outreach group that not only emphasizes team dynamics, but also reflects diversity in ethnicity, culture, and gender. The transcendence within the team infrastructure models an intrinsic message of unity and Christlikeness. The development of the team, though intentional in formation, also reflects the leading and direction of the Holy Spirit. Hence, the team represents calling and not mere human contrivance. This model, in essence, shows that God is seen within various expressions and cultures. Therefore, when ministering to a particular people, the approach may be either less threatening or received based upon the curiosity shown towards the makeup of the team. The ability to transcend ethnic and social barriers is also evident throughout the Scriptures. The church in Antioch demonstrated a multiethnic “leadership team” (Acts 13:1) which probably included two Africans, one of whom was black (Niger), and a well-placed person with connections to Herod’s court. In addition, the Syrian community grew out of a mission that preached Jesus as Lord (Acts 11:20).⁷ The missions team at Center of Praise and Bayside Midtown reflects openness to learning from one another as they represent an African-American, Anglo, Latino, and Asian cultural presentation. The depth of contextualization is broadened with such representation as each brings his or her own observations and unique interface with specific cultural groups.

The contextualization that takes place through the multiethnic team paradigm is inherent to the mission and purpose of the church globally. The book of Acts tells the story of a church whose very identity involved expressing the good news about Jesus Christ in multiple settings and among new groups of people.⁸ Thus, the multiethnic team approach provides an opportunity for those who are receiving the ministry to inquire through exposure of those who are represented on the team from various people groups.

⁷ Hiebert, 17.

⁸ Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 2005.

CONTEXTUALIZATION AS AN EQUIPPER

It is important to note a major distinction that is presented with Center of Praise and Bayside Midtown focus. The goal is to work with diverse cultures through the process of sharing ideas, resources, concepts, and guidelines, helping national and international churches and organizations to become strong and vibrant through the equipping process. It is my belief that through understanding various cultures, along with providing training to church leaders and their teams, vital and healthy growth principles emerge.

The missiological equipper is challenged with the task of acknowledging, understanding, and in some instances, embracing cultural mores as a means to effectively translate and communicate God's care towards others. Such acknowledgement may be best demonstrated by pinpointing the need within the community. Such needs as healthy water supply, the cultivation of vegetation, housing, and medical and dental care serve as a means by which the equipper may study a culture to determine its values and traditions tied to the daily living of individuals within the community. Any attempt at integration of kingdom principles and cultural mores must be whole-person oriented. The whole-person context is defined in the anthropological broad sense—integrated understanding of human beings that deal with the full range of human existence.⁹ Therefore, the goal is to facilitate processes that introduce life-transforming realities that incorporate the idea of developing the whole person—spirit, mind, and body. The equipper must understand that God's mission is to be glorified by all peoples on earth. However we serve him, wherever we serve him, and whatever role we serve him, we must be able to know and to see how it connects that service of his mission to all people. Hiebert shares, "The process of indigenizing Christianity in another culture requires an incarnational approach to crossing cultural barriers. Just as Christ left heaven and entered fully into a human culture, so the missionary must identify with another culture to communicate the gospel in ways people understand."¹⁰ Through such communication, contextualization within the equipping process is encountered as a means of countering one's ethnocentrism that lead to a disparaging assumption that other cultures are evil or less civilized. The equippers' contextualizing of the gospel is missional, ecclesial, and transformational. The effective equipper will adapt the gospel to new circumstances that reflect ethnic, cultural, and social mores. Yet, there lies lateral transformation of lives upon believing the message of the gospel. The unchanging message of the gospel is reflected through the plethora of cultural expressions presented by the multitude of nations. Thus, the Scripture is fulfilled, "Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of

⁹ Hiebert, 17.

¹⁰ Paul G. Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), xxi.

heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (Rev 14:6).

One of the important objectives of a true equipping global ministry outreach team is that of creating synergy. Among the more intriguing approaches to Christian outreach, adopted by many highly effective organizations, is that of developing partnerships with other organizations and churches to facilitate community cooperation.¹¹ Therefore, the establishing of partnerships between the local church and the medical and educational institutions serves as the catalyst and influence of the global equipping team.

Once the appropriate preparation has taken place, the process of training national church leaders and their emerging teams begins. Again, the key factor is innovation that incorporates cultural mores, assuring receptivity and understanding. The team, having a vast amount of resources (medical, social services, and educational) may also implement such programs as day clinics, workshops, home building, children and senior services, or other communal activities that would benefit the people. Church growth conferences may simultaneously be conducted with church leaders along with evangelistic worship services.

CONCLUSION

The approach of missions may look quite different as organizations such as Bayside Midtown and Center of Praise formulate effective kingdom partnerships. The distinction will be that of sowing into the lives of the people with an appreciation for our own cultural diversity and that of the engaged community or country. It will be imperative to implement an evaluation process that periodically measures the effectiveness of methodologies that are presented. Furthermore, such collaborative must affirm the power and ministry of the Holy Spirit to his church. The One who unifies the hearts of his people must be center of all that is affirmed as team ministry. He is the captain of the team. Finally, there will be greater understanding and less stereotyping as such teams seek to bridge the divide that narrows perspective and diminishes effective evangelical outcomes. Such multicultural global equipping teams of ministry are not only pleasing to the Lord, but they also shall usher his second coming as his prayer of request is exemplified, “that they would be one ...”

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About the Author

Parnell M. Lovelace Jr. serves as the founding pastor of the Center of Praise Ministries, a congregation of 3500 weekly attendees in Sacramento, California. He is the lead consultant of Lovelace Leadership Connection, a national church consulting organization designed to train leaders to lead healthy churches (lovelaceleadership.org). Parnell served for fifteen year as a certified social worker and advocate for diverse populations within the child welfare and medical field. He has earned an A.A. degree (American River College), Bachelor of Social Work (Oral Roberts University), Master of Social Work (University of Oklahoma), Master of Practical Theology (Oral Roberts University), and a D. Min. degree with an emphasis of Leadership and Church Growth at Talbot School of Theology (Biola University). He is member of the Society for Church Consulting.