

What the Global Church Wants the West to Know About Partnership

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We live in a time when the church is experiencing some of the most phenomenal growth in world evangelization. In his book, *City Reaching—a Road to Community Transformation*, Jack Dennison speaks of unprecedented response to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

- In South America 10,000 people come to Jesus Christ everyday, which means the church is increasing its membership by 3.5 million a year.
- In Africa 140,000 people enter the kingdom of God every week. That means in 52 weeks the church would have added 7,280,000 people to the kingdom of God.
- In China every month 900,000 Chinese become Christians, and in a given year over 10.8 million people come to Christ.

Moreover, Dennison says global research shows that the *rate* of conversions is increasing. In the early nineties 70,000 per day turned to Christ worldwide. It increased to 100,000 at the mid point of the decade, and now stands at 165,000 per day.¹

This phenomenal growth of the church all over the world is evidence that God is doing something significant in our generation.

Two questions

As we look at our world today, it is important that we ask two questions: (1) “Why does there still remain a large number of unevangelized and unreached people in our world?” and (2) “What is my responsibility?”

Unfortunately, there is an overwhelming desire inside the *church* to gain recognition and popularity for what *God* is doing around the world. Instead of asking, “What should we be doing to harvest the receptive peoples and finish the task of evangelization?” many are attempting to fly their banners and establish their territories globally.

I believe that we are at a place in the mission of the church where we must stop looking for recognition. Instead, we must ask, “In order to finish the task of evangelization in our generation, what must we do in order to evangelize the unreached peoples in the world and harvest the receptive ones today?”

¹ Jack Dennison, *City Reaching—a Road to Community Transformation*, William Carey Library 1999, page 9

This is an age-old question, yet it has to be addressed in every generation under every socio-political environment so that the mission of the church can be carried out in the most strategic manner possible.

I believe there is a growing confusion in our world on what needs to be done. It is time for the church and all of its associated movements to step back, evaluate the past, understand the present, and project into the future. So before I address the matter of partnerships, we need to understand how we got to where we are.

Part I – Understanding the Past

The era of modern missions

The Reformation marked the beginning of a new era. When Martin Luther launched his revolution to challenge the Roman Catholic Church with a focus on the truth of the Biblical revelation and God's provision for salvation, he created an environment for the beginning of a large revolutionary movement for world evangelization. The church had lost its apostolic sense of missions. And it was almost an absolute embarrassment, that mission in the name of Jesus Christ was carried out in through the Crusades. But thank God for Martin Luther who broke open the opportunity for a new era that led the way for modern mission.

William Carrey, the father of modern missions, found himself motivated by the truth of God's revelation concerning how the heathen would come to know the salvation of our God. He went forward despite the criticism of his church which essentially said, "...shut up and sit down; when God chooses to reach the heathen of the world, he will do so without you..." Thank God that William Carrey did not listen to the voice of the hyper-Calvinistic theologians, but chose to go despite their discouragement.

Neither the church nor the government nor any challenge to his vision stopped William Carrey from carrying out the vision that God had planted in his heart. Carrey sacrificed his British citizenship and became a Dutch to become obedient to the vision that God had placed in his heart to go to India. He became one of God's most powerful tools in his time, using revolutionary ways to carry out the mission of God.

William Carrey found himself doing missions in the context of the colonial mindset of the British Empire. While the world was yet to hear and understand the message of the gospel of Jesus and most nations remained in darkness, he responded to God's call and began a movement. He learned a new language, facilitated the translation of the Scripture, established church movements, enabled the transformation of society, established educational institutions, and developed communities of believers—all under the leadership of expatriates to facilitate the vision and perpetuate the message of Jesus Christ.

Despite the criticism that missionaries have undergone during the history of Colonialism, God was at work. He called His church and envisioned His people. During that period, Christ established His church despite Colonialism and the compound-wall mentality of missionaries. The missionaries paid a price, and through their sacrifice churches were established all around the world. They moved from the beachheads in a period of 200 years, and went to the inlands in order that the unreached and unevangelized peoples of the world would have an opportunity to hear the gospel.

The tragedy of the missions during the modern missionary period was unveiled in their failure to respond to the handwriting they had seen on the wall as early as 1910. During the Edinburgh Conference, American and European mission leaders were convinced that Colonialism was fast approaching its end. However, they did not see Nationalization was on the horizon, even though they were encouraged to prepare for transition and move into an indigenous mode of operation. Yet over the next 35 years this warning was neglected and adequate leadership was not developed for this vital transition.

By 1945, Colonialism was coming to an end, and Nationalization became a reality as many nations in Africa and Asia were being set free from their European masters. But the indigenous church was found weak and without leadership. The expatriate missionaries were still in leadership and had little understanding of the concerns of indigenous national leaders relative to their leadership role and the need for national leadership to be in place.

Missions in the period of national development

After 1945 national movements began to intentionally expel expatriate missionaries. Sometimes this was done by restricting their re-entry and not providing visas. At other times it was more painfully stated with harsh words such as “Missionaries, go home!”

Because the expatriates failed to understand Nationalization and the desire for national leadership to end the presence of foreign control within their countries, mission leaders and church leaders continued to hold the fort.

As late as 1974, over 25 years after the independent movement had taken control, an unfortunate observation was made at the first Lausanne conference in Switzerland. Dr. Billy Graham, the convener of the Lausanne conference on world evangelization looked across the gathering and expressed great disappointment in the failure of church leaders to see the ability of national leadership.

Nationalization had started and was now in its prime. Yet 85% of the attendees at the conference were still expatriates. Dr. Graham strongly addressed the issue and commended the expatriates to go back and turn the leadership over to national leaders. He asked the national leaders to exercise their birthright and establish new church movements, mission agencies and parachurch organizations that represented indigenous identity — and to do so contextually, with relevant methodologies for the proclamation of the gospel in their nations.

During this period of Nationalization, missions had a slow beginning because indigenous leadership was neither developed nor entrusted as early as it could have been to carry out the efforts of the church and its mission. Yet ten years after the 1974 Lausanne Conference, the church began to see unprecedented growth. All over the world churches were growing and a strong national indigenous church and leadership began to emerge.

Jack Dennison says between the years 1960 and 1985 the Church worldwide experienced an Annual Average Growth Rate of 1%—not even keeping with the rate of global population increase. In 1985 however a sharp acceleration began which resulted in AAGR of 3%. This lasted until 1990. The first five years of the decade of the 1990s

saw an AAGR of 5%, and the next five years of this decade were expected to yield a 7% to 8% growth in the kingdom. At an AAGR of 7.5% the world would be 50% Christian within 25 years.²

This observation should teach us a very significant lesson in understanding the task of fulfilling the Great Commission: *We must not fail to empower and release indigenous, contextual and culturally relevant leadership for this purpose.*

Following the Lausanne Conference, the expatriates began to take appropriate action and the indigenous movement began to swell. This allowed God to use novice national movements to accomplish His purposes to see incredible growth that became visible from 1985 and continued on into the 21st century. As a result, many peoples of the world lost some of their perception that the message of Christ was a Western one and began to find it acceptable in their own cultures.

If the gospel is going to find reception globally, it will happen as the church encourages the contextualization of the message, builds indigenous leadership, and releases them into communities. This will allow the power of God's Word and the person of the Holy Spirit to holistically transform culture and society. This should allow national leaders to give birth to church movements that are culturally their own.

Missions in the context of globalization

Missions in the last 20 years have been incredible. For the first time in the history of the church more than 65% of the church is non-white and a large part of the church exists in the southern hemisphere. The church is truly global and mission is without boundaries.

If globalization is to teach us anything, it ought to teach us that we cannot do anything by ourselves. There is a greater empowerment when Christians work together in interdependency. We must learn to bring together our resources, people, information and ideas and unite them in a synergistic environment so that we can become God's most powerful instruments to fulfill the mission of Jesus Christ.

In his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Steven Covey developed the idea that all people go through different stages in life. He compared it to how a child is born in dependence. The child cannot do anything for itself; for food, clothing and care the child is dependent on the parent. Yet surely a time comes when the child learns from the nurture, observation and personal growth and becomes independent. The stronger he gets, the more confidence he absorbs that he wants to move out and go "on his own." Covey says most people get to this stage and think "I finally made it," and fail to see the next stage—interdependence. It is easy to be on our own to do things with little or no accountability, to move at a phase that we think is great and not see the strength of interdependence.

God designed the church to be a community that functions best in the context of interdependence. When we understand interdependence, we do not truly see each other as a threat but we see each other as both complementing and supplementing.

² Dennison, page 10

Part II – What Would the Global Church Like to Tell the West About Partnership?

Interdependence does not happen automatically. It is fraught with pitfalls and dangers. I would like to share several principles from my perspective as a national Christian leader trained in the West that are crucial for effective partnerships.

To be functional, partnerships must be *purpose driven*, motivated by vision, sustained by values, and implemented by strategic plans that are mutually agreed upon. Too often partnerships are developed with a little or no attempt to synchronize purpose, articulate vision and establish values so that effective strategies and methodologies can be facilitated to accomplish the objectives of a partnership.

It is important that every church, mission society or parachurch organization, seeking to enter into partnership has a clear purpose statement, established values, and stated objectives that it would like to accomplish to fulfill its missions program and vision.

If serious partnerships are to be developed, *both partners* must have a *common purpose* with objectives that will contribute to the accomplishment of the vision of both partners. Only as these are effectively matched can there be serious discussion in developing a partnership.

Every partner must bring resources to the table. If all parties do not bring resources, it is not *partnership*; it is *ownership*, and there will be controlling dynamics from the side of the owner. The Western church must begin to intentionally develop patterns where both partners state their purpose for coming together, the vision they would like to accomplish, and the strategy they would like to employ. Then, together they can determine the total resources they need to accomplish the combined objectives of the partnership, and clearly decide who is bringing what to the table.

In order for a partnership to be developed and facilitated, each participant should clearly state what kind of resources and in what proportion each will bring into the partnership. Thus it is clear from the beginning that there is joint ownership for this task and the resources are shared. Working this out ahead of time will help prevent finances from controlling the partnership.

In addition, we must always remember that *all resources* belong to God, and we are merely His stewards and are dependent on Him for everything. So regardless of who provides the finances, they must be considered as coming from God, and not merely from a human partner. In doing so, we will guard against letting money control the partnership. We must work towards the fulfillment of the missions and let *that* guide the partnership. We do not come together primarily because we have resources; we come together first of all because we have a common mission. Let that mission direct the partnership, and then let us work toward the accomplishment of that mission by making all the adjustments we can, knowing we are merely imperfect human vessels.

We must build trust in order to develop effective partnerships. It takes time to build trust in any human relationship. So in ministry partnerships it will take time for both parties to truly develop a context in which they mutually trust each other unconditionally.

Churches and ministries need to create an environment that will develop this kind of trust. We must not have partnerships that are all money and no involvement. We all

have people resources in our churches and mission societies that are seemingly so rich. We must bring all of this into the mix when we are building relationships and understanding our partners. Only when we understand the total resources of one another will we be truly accountable to each other.

If we are to build partnerships on mutual trust, there must be genuine relationship and interaction on the project. I will guarantee you there will be little or no trust established in the partnership where relationship is lacking.

Effective partnerships have clearly defined goals. Too often a mission project is supported with no defined beginning or end. For years churches have invested resources not knowing exactly what they will accomplish. As a result, nothing really is achieved, and we are found to be poor stewards of the resources that God has entrusted to us. The same holds true whether little or large finances are at stake. All must learn to identify the task and work towards the completion of the project.

It may be that more than two entities can engage in a partnership. It is essential in building the partnership that we have a clear vision with clear expectations, an agreed-upon methodology that can be evaluated, and a method of reporting that focuses on the task. This way, every one in the partnership understands and visualizes the progress that is being made.

Because we are weak human vessels, we must build into the system a process that facilitates reconciliation when the communication breaks down, or when failure is experienced in the vision or values of the partnership.

With expectations fuzzy, partnerships are doomed to failure. Real stewards will clearly list expectations, build a reporting schedule, and create a mechanism so that every member of the partnership understands what is expected of them and what will be accomplished if all of them deliver as planned. Build clear expectations into partnership.

Realize in every partnership we must make adjustments. It is like a marriage. The husband and wife must learn to make adjustments and develop a way to make the marriage work. In every partnership there is an adjustment period; there are bugs in the system that need to be cleaned out. As we begin the relationship, we will learn the meaning of these expectations and understand the limitations that cause delays.

In most cases, we will be working cross-culturally, so we should expect some differences from what is our normal expectation. The context of our partnerships is complex because it is not just a marriage but also a cross-cultural marriage, so greater-than-normal adjustments may be needed. We must not practice divorce but do as Jesus would, bringing reconciliation and understanding to the relationship until it achieves deeper levels and higher efficiencies.

Too often, churches, mission societies and parachurch organizations that commit to building a strategic partnership lose patience and fail to recognize the complexities involved in building that partnership. Before they can even launch into fulfilling the vision and goals of the partnership they are ready to “throw in the towel.”

In April of this year, a church released some resources to build an orphanage in India. Within two months this church asked its partner the question, “Why is it taking so long and can I have my money back?” It appeared very colonial, as I tried to resolve and bring reconciliation to the situation.

When expectations are unclear and communication breaks down, partnerships experience trauma. The Western church must understand that in working with non-Western movements, not every thing in partnership goes smoothly. If so, the church's first response should not be, "Give me back my money." Rather, it should anticipate there will be some problems, and should genuinely seek to interact with the non-Western partner before grabbing for the jugular vein. And remember, whose money is it?

Every partnership should have a written agreement so that the steps and expectations are spelled out. The document should not be written by one party for the other party to accept or reject; it needs to be jointly written so that both parties feel fully a part of the partnership, and so there are no misunderstandings regarding the vision, values and objectives of the partnership. Provision must be made for each partner to read the document, raise questions for understanding, change the wording where necessary, and finally sign. The beginning and end time to fulfill the purpose, vision and objectives of the partnership should be clearly stated.

Too often we leave our agreements in an oral form that gets forgotten, redefined, or misunderstood. Especially when working in the context of cross-cultural realities, it is very important to document everything. In preparing the agreement jointly there is opportunity for clarification, reduction of misunderstanding, a clear legitimization, and above all, a document to go back to, should things become difficult and jeopardize the completion of the objectives of the partnership.

Finally, we must remember that **we develop partnerships with the objective to finish the Great Commission**. We often fail to begin with the end in mind and miss the importance of finishing the task.

Too often churches are uninformed about the task of missions. They are historically about 250 years behind and think missions needs to be done the old way, and that it is part of the responsibility of the church to have a missions budget to say that they are doing missions. Very often pastors are confused, uninformed and desperately in need of guidance on how to go about developing missions in their local churches.

I believe if the church is going to contribute effectively to the fulfillment of the Great Commission and build strategic partnerships, the church must get seriously educated on the completion of the task and ask itself the question, "How can we effectively contribute so that we can build partnerships that will result in finishing the Great Commission?"

Whether it is by contributing to the development of indigenous leadership—or by the mobilization of a church planting movement among an unreached people group—it is important that in building partnerships, the West must ask the question, "How we are helping to finish the task?"

We must equip the church to understand that this is not about self-gratification. It is about building God's kingdom. We are only the instrument and we must learn to listen to God. We must allow Him to lead the way and transform our lives, communities and societies through the process of being reconciled to God. We are in the process of discipling our constituents to trust Him and allow the working of His Holy Spirit in their lives.

We need to train the church to understand what it *can do* and *cannot do* in a partnership. Do not give the church the opinion that they can plant a church in five days, or through a short-term mission trip. Equip them to understand that they are one step toward completing the process. Wrong expectations will result in loss of faith and we will lose commitments if we lead them along the wrong road.

Train them to understand that some times all they can do is pray, work with small groups, and do developmental work. Then they will not get their expectations higher than they should be, thinking *they* will be the church planter and the crusade evangelist.

Missions without borders

Following the Lausanne Conference, more than ever before the church and missionary enterprise began to recognize the need to take ownership of the Great Commission. Because of the delayed transition from Colonialism to Nationalization, many years were lost in building leaders and developing values and strategies. This undermined the ability to build a sense of integrity and understanding between the mission agencies, denominations and national movements. In some cases this was never established; relationships were severed and the indigenous churches were left to take care of themselves. In other cases visas were not easily obtainable, the relationships gradually weakened, and national leadership finally had to find ways of taking over the responsibility before they were fully prepared.

This process was frustrated because in many countries the transition to national leadership led to the grabbing of power. In other situations puppet leaders were placed in position before true maturity could be developed, which resulted in great damages within the church organization. Therefore, it took almost one full generation before a healthy transition was realized. But once that transition took place, indigenous leaders with vision and abilities exercised the responsibility to mobilize the church to facilitate the vision. At last the indigenous church began to experience strength.

Through this transition, in many cases the church experienced internal conflict. Institutionalization inherited from the West had become the way of life for most churches and church organizations. Traditions were strong and innovative ideas were slow to be accepted. Despite this—or perhaps because of it—much of the institutionalization gave birth to new indigenous movements. These were birthed by indigenous leaders, whose vision facilitated an ownership that brought forth vigorous growth shown by the multiplication of churches and the fulfillment of the Great Commission globally.

Christians in Korea began to take the responsibility to train and send missionaries all over the world. Believers in Singapore not only supported and sent missionaries but also began to facilitate short-term missions on a regular basis. India is fast becoming the largest country in sending cross-cultural missionaries both inside and outside the sub-continent. Christians in China are talking about taking the journey “back to Jerusalem” and carrying the gospel through all major roads heading from China to the various nations of the world.

World missions has no boundaries. It begins anywhere and goes anywhere. We must understand that national leaders have begun to recognize their own responsibility for the Great Commission globally.

Moreover, as the economies of many of the less developed nations of the world begin to improve, we will see a growing number of them releasing larger resources to for world evangelization.

Missions is not the agenda of one nation nor is it a Western enterprise. It is the task of the global church and there are no boundaries. Every church movement in the world is ready to carry out the Great Commission, and we must ask ourselves: "How we can partner with these indigenous movements so that the greatest effectiveness can be achieved through our joint effort in fulfilling the mission of God?"

We can make a huge difference if we can become a church that is interdependent and able to partner with the end goal in mind.

Suggested strategic activities of cross-cultural partnerships that will make a difference

1. Equip national church planters with a non-formal methodology to enable them to plant churches, out of which will come 50 committed believers who can be disciplined to become transformational leaders in building God's kingdom in their Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the world.
2. Train cross-cultural missionaries to target an unreached people group with a vision to develop a church planting and discipling movement that will permeate the entire targeted group.
3. Develop tools that will help build culturally relevant communities of believers and disciple them until they are mature and skilled in discipling others to the end that God's church will be built into a strong transformational movement.
4. Join forces in developing skilled, cross-cultural missionaries for the purpose of translating Scriptures for unreached people groups.
5. Initiate partnerships to facilitate the reaching of emerging generations under the age of 30 in the context of cities and villages.
6. Establish partnerships to eradicate exploitation and injustices of minorities, and to eliminate inhumane physical conditions in communities.
7. Empower churches to serve the poor in developing communities.
8. Help rebuild disaster stricken areas so the love of Christ is demonstrated by the church.

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