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GOING GLOBAL

*A Congregation's Introduction
to Mission beyond Our Borders*

**Gary V. Nelson
Gordon W. King
Terry G. Smith**

Preface by C. René Padilla



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Editor's Foreword

Inspiration and Wisdom for Twenty-First-Century Christian Leaders

You have chosen wisely in deciding to study and learn from a book published in **The Columbia Partnership Leadership Series** with Chalice Press. We publish for

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Primarily serving congregations, denominations, educational institutions, leadership development programs, and parachurch organizations, the Partnership also seeks to connect with individuals, businesses, and other organizations seeking a Christ-centered spiritual focus.

We welcome your comments on these books, and we welcome your suggestions for new subject areas and authors we ought to consider.

George W. Bullard Jr., Senior Editor
GBullard@TheColumbiaPartnership.org

The Columbia Partnership,
332 Valley Springs Road, Columbia, SC 29223-6934
Voice: 803.622.0923, www.TheColumbiaPartnership.org

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We wish to express deep appreciation for the global partners with whom we work. You have been patient in teaching us, and passionate in your commitment to the kingdom of God. The limitations in this book are attributable to the reality that we are still learners.

We also wish to thank the people we have met who live in rural communities and urban slums. Through our staff members and our partners we have had the privilege to enter into their world. We have shared food at common tables. We have wept together at funerals and celebrated at weddings. The world has not been fair to them, but they have been gracious to those of us who represent foreign cultures and strange ways. We share their dreams for a world that is more just and compassionate. These are the visions of God's rule.

We finally wish to express gratitude to our wives (Regine, Heather, and Carla) and families who have supported us over many years. We thank them for giving up time and taking on extra duties to support the writing of this book. Special tributes go to Carla Nelson and Audrey Davies, who took our drafts and produced something better by far than our initial attempts to weave together theology, theory, and experiences.

Preface

I feel honored to have been asked to write the preface to this book dealing with a subject that is very close to my heart: the mission of the church in a world deeply affected by the phenomenon of globalization.

Three features of this book make it an exceedingly useful tool for anyone concerned about the mission of the church on a global scale. In the first place, the authors model in their own lives and ministry the message that they want to communicate. This book encases years of experience as transcultural missionaries and as leaders of a missionary agency. The authors combine minds open to learning from churches in the “first” world with hearts open to basic human needs, especially among the victims of global and local injustice. This book deserves to be placed at the top of the bibliography on the subject of the global church and its God-given mission.

In the second place, the principles and the strategies the authors promote are rooted in the biblical teaching regarding the mission of God and his purpose for human life and for the whole of creation, a purpose with which the church everywhere is called to cooperate. Who would have thought that Jesus’ parables could lay the foundation for the theology and practice of partnership in mission in the present age of globalization? I exaggerate not one bit in saying that this book proves that the “new way of doing mission” is, in the final analysis, a rediscovery of the old way in which, according to those parables, God’s missional people were originally called to follow Jesus.

In the third place, the thrust of this book is practical, not theoretical. In a shrinking globalized world, all North American Christians, as individuals or as churches, too often get excited about what they can do to help churches in the Global South. That excitement, however, fails to be accompanied by an honest recognition of how much they themselves need to learn from those they mean to help, who happen to be in the geographical area where the center of Christianity has moved. Under those circumstances, the result is likely to be a frustrated but silent partner in the South and an unrepentant but wondering partner in the North. The alternative that the authors propose is not to kill the Northern excitement about involvement in

global mission, but to take practical measures to orient the excitement toward a partnership journey characterized by Christian traits such as cultural sensitivity, mutuality, humility, and servanthood.

This is the sort of book I would like to have written myself. Had I attempted to do it, I doubt I would have attained the depth in content and the clarity in style that Gord, Gary, and Terry have attained. This book is must reading for everyone who wants to participate in what God wants to do all over the world through the global church, especially North American Christians who take seriously the missionary dimension of Christian discipleship.

C. René Padilla
President Emeritus
Kairos Foundation
Buenos Aires, Argentina

The Authors

Gary V. Nelson pastored urban churches in the center of cities for many years. Each church needed to rediscover a missional imagination. Gary has experimented with new ways mission might take place as it flows from the local church to address the diverse needs of people in the city. In a book published in Canada, he proposed that soul care and social care are part of the mission of the church.¹ More recently, his Chalice Press book engages the missional church.² Always interested in creative ways churches can be involved beyond the borders of their city and their country, he has taught the theory and practice of urban mission in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Until the summer of 2010 he led the innovative denominational global mission organization (Canadian Baptist Ministries) for which we all worked. He became President of Tyndale University College & Seminary in Toronto in July 2010.

Terry Smith is a missionary and missiologist. He and his wife Heather served for nineteen years in France. His initial work focused on urban inner-city youth and then expanded into church planting and theological education. His missional influence stretches throughout the francophone world in Canada, Europe and Africa, animating and facilitating the mission of God. He has taught urban mission, evangelism, and mission in a number of seminaries in France and the francophone world. His work challenges us to think about the implications of the gospel on culture as it shapes the mission of the church. Our staff claim Terry does not think “outside of the box” because he is not even aware there is a box. This quality makes him good at strategy. He is willing to ask, “Is there a better way?” and lead you there.

¹Don Posterski and Gary Nelson, *Future Faith Churches: Reconnecting with the Power of the Gospel for the 21st Century* (Winfield, B.C.: Wood Lake Books Inc., 1997).

²Gary Nelson, *Borderland Churches: A Congregation's Introduction to Missional Living* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2008).

Gordon King has implemented ministry from many different places of influence. He was a missionary in Bolivia involved in rural and urban church development, theological education, and leadership formation at the grassroots level. He worked for a time with the refugee board of the Canadian government and then with World Vision Canada in fund-raising and advocacy for the poor. Most recently, he became the Director of The Sharing Way, the relief and development arm of Canadian Baptist Ministries (CBM). Gordon is passionate about the poor and God's concern for them. They are not a theoretical discussion but a people of his heart. Consequently, he never allows you to lose sight of the people who God sees. We find great joy in the fact that he is the only person we know who will celebrate you with a present such as the book *The Bottom Billion*, not to make you feel guilty, but because he cannot believe you are not interested.³

³Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

INTRODUCTION

Dancing with an Elephant

Short-term mission teams currently flooding the Global South often produce inadvertent chaos. Local church members want to change the world. They passionately desire to see people experience a new relationship with Jesus. They come with money and enthusiasm and the motivational desire “to make a difference in the world,” but they too often create havoc and destructive dependency. We need to be aware of this danger.

Miriam Adeney illustrates how destructive and hurtful some mission trips can be. An African friend approached her as they were discussing these issues and said, “Let me tell you a story.”

Elephant and Mouse were best friends. One day Elephant said, “Mouse, let’s have a party!” Animals gathered from far and near. They ate. They drank. They sang and danced. Nobody celebrated more and danced harder than Elephant. After the party was over, Elephant exclaimed, “Mouse, did you ever go to a better party? What a blast!”

But Mouse did not answer.

“Mouse, where are you?” Elephant called. He looked around for his friend, and then shrank back in horror. There at Elephant’s feet lay Mouse. His little body was ground into the dirt, smashed by the big feet of his exuberant friend, Elephant.

“Sometimes, that is what it is like to do mission with you Americans,” the African storyteller commented. “It is like dancing with an Elephant.”¹

¹Miriam Adeney, *Daughters of Islam: Building Bridges with Muslim Women* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 189.

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In this book we hope to help the church to learn how to dance without being hurtful or destructive. We hope to show how the church, North and South, East and West, can form a partnership in global mission to the glory of God and the growth of the church.

The ideas we explore in this book seek to calm the chaos and bring mutual understanding between cultures as the church learns to do mission in a global age. These ideas emerged from conversations in our carpool. Each day, the three of us and another colleague drive to work together.² At the end of the workday, we get back in the car to head home. The discussions are usually lively and intense. We have never thrown anyone out of the car en route to work or home, but we have considered that option on more than one occasion.

We admit being in a carpool is not easy. It started with the lifestyle decision of each family unit to maintain only one automobile. The almost sacramental decision to stop for coffee every morning before we arrive at the office probably means we are not saving any money. However, not one of us wants to miss out on the daily dialogue, which almost inevitably ends up being about the mission of God in our world. Nothing appears to be off limits, and yet the “code of silence” within the carpool is strictly enforced. We have all become better at what we do and how we think because of the morning and evening drives.

It May Not Be as New as You Think

Our carpool conversations regularly focus on the reemergence of the church as the locus of missionary activity both locally and globally. Many years ago, Roland Allen, a British missionary, anticipated the shift that was about to take place. Convinced that people would discover that as followers of Christ we are all missionaries, he believed they would then change mission organizations and churches.³

Much of the missional literature is focused on helping the church rediscover its missional agenda in North America, but the global world seems lost in the conversation. A shift is taking place, with no going back. We need strong voices to speak for the engagement of local churches in issues that affect their sisters and brothers in Southern countries. We can no longer countenance a fortress North America

²Carmin MacMillan suffers through our heated discussions and often puts up with our rhetoric. When she enters the dialogue, we listen, for she has the ability to sum up the issue and offer a clearer perspective.

³Roland Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church* (1927; reprint, Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2006).

or fortress Europe for the church of Jesus Christ. We hope this book will help the readers nurture a vision of the future toward which the Spirit of God is leading the global church.

New themes, strategies, and initiatives around global mission are emerging. Many people believe these strategies represent a profound “new way of doing mission,” but they may not be as new as we think. They are simply new to us. We want to affirm the intuitive nature of these new initiatives, which are fundamentally saying, “There is a better way.” We suggest, however, that our generation of churches may really be rediscovering the ancient way of following Jesus, a way from which we have strayed over the years. As these patterns reemerge, we must be willing to reflect on our missional call.

The radical shifts in global mission are also driven by a desire to be relevant and effective in the twenty-first century. People have been addressing this issue from a variety of directions over the last few decades.⁴ Some propose a renewed focus on strategies and packaged programs, with slight twists in approach. Others simply describe what is happening as if that is enough. Some, however, realize the challenge is much deeper and is in fact rooted in our foundational biblical beliefs about mission itself. These seekers after the deep are calling us to rediscover the core calling of our faith to be a missional people shaped by our radical discipleship, powerless servanthood, and humble incarnational living. Here we firmly stand. We believe that discussing how we do mission is not enough. We also need to attend to how we think about mission and the position from which we approach the fundamental calling of the church.

Attending to “Promising” Practices

Embracing a new paradigm of mission and ministry does not mean exploring uncharted waters. We can easily think that God only shows up when we arrive. Thankfully, this is not the case. Both God and others have gone before us.

A seasoned traveler can beat the directions of a Global Positioning System (GPS). Somehow, through the wonder of satellite technology, the GPS looks at all the options and presents the route this technology determines to be the best. As confidently as the GPS voice presents

⁴See books such as Carlos F. Cardoza-Orlandi, *Mission: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2006), or James F. Engel and William A. Dyrness, *Changing the Mind of Missions: Where Have We Gone Wrong?* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

the directions, they are not always the best. Neither are they always the quickest nor easiest route to travel. Seasoned travelers have tested the many options over the years during various travel cycles. They have learned the best routes. Experience has taught them how “to beat the traffic,” where it gets most congested, and which routes to avoid despite the confident advice of GPS.

This is why we need to look at some promising practices within the paradigm shift of global mission. We may desire to make a difference and passionately want to cross cultures. Such desire cannot temper the damage that can be done by unexamined methodologies and ministries. We will refer to this naïve mission activity as “the recolonialization of mission.”

Learning to Critique Ourselves

Carlos Cardoza-Orlandi critiques the missiology of most North American churches. He writes, “[M]ission simultaneously embodies the grace of God and evil human arrogance and worldly interests.”⁵ Cardoza-Orlandi, a Puerto Rican, is concerned that the mission movement from North America generally lacks self-reflection and a sense of humility. This is how he describes the need:

Christians in North America need to be aware of the *contextualized* character of the gospel. This means that the church needs to take seriously how the cultural, economic, social, political, and religious situation of its context shapes its understanding of the gospel and its missional task.⁶

To understand this is to “contribute to the liberation of the mission of the North American church from the captivity that constrains it.”⁷ He believes that there needs to be a new conversation between the missionaries, mission organizations, and people within the contexts they serve.

We believe the same. This conversation must look seriously at the framework of what it is we are doing in mission, challenging the North American tendency to want to fix things. We need to become more self-critical so as to hear the missional agenda from a global partner.

Recently, Terry spoke to a group of mission executives and staff members from a variety of organizations on concepts of partnership.

⁵Cardoza-Orlandi, *Mission: An Essential Guide*, 17.

⁶Ibid., 18.

⁷Ibid., 19.

One participant stunned him: “We have nothing to learn from our partners.” While this comment may be rare, this attitude is deeply embedded in the subconscious of many North Americans as they join in the missional task. They believe they have a great deal to offer and do. They convey an attitude that to take time to learn from the people they serve distracts them from accomplishing their agenda.

We must be prepared to ask ourselves some penetrating questions. Simply asking the one question, “What do mission practices look like from both a biblical and cultural perspective?” is not sufficient. To what extent are the motives and attitudes that drive us less than the biblical idea of humble service and selfless obedience? How do we understand God’s mission in a particular area? How do the people of that area understand God’s mission? How do we define God’s will for the people we meet or will come to know? How does God wish your church to become part of his mission in the world?

An Invitation

We invite you to join our carpool conversations about how to dance with an elephant. We believe in the church. Local churches are awakening to their central role in God’s missional activity. Mission organizations are sensing new ways to serve the local church. Churches are asking for flexibility and accommodation rather than an insistence on conformity. All of us, individually and organizationally, are trying to understand our place in this new missionary movement. Our desire is to have you join the carpool dialogue and add to the conversation.

This book is written for local churches and leaders in North America involved in global ministries of any kind. We admire your commitment to and enthusiasm for global mission as you travel on short-term ministry experiences and enter into ministry projects around the world. The question we want to ask you is simple: Is there a more promising way? We think there is. A Kenyan pastor spoke prophetically into this need to deepen our programmed activities. He said:

Short-term experiences have their place, but they need to be more carefully constructed. All too often a church says, “We’d like to come for a short-term experience.” Then they say, in so many words, “We’re going to do A, B, C, D, and we’re in charge.” We want to say, “Guys, you’re coming as our guests.” Do you know that when the President of the United States travels, his people take over all the security of

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the nations he travels to? When he came to East Africa, the airports were completely taken over by Marines. The local policemen were moved out. The attitude was, “*We don’t trust you. Your people could be terrorists. We’ll do things our way.*” Short-term missions tend to be like that: they come and completely take over the agenda, the programs, the life of the church. But that’s not the way you visit a friend.⁸

This book is written for church leaders who want to be as intentional and reflective in global mission work as they are in their local ministry. We have been disappointed by some North American churches and mission leaders. They seem to park their minds at the airport before they fly off to countries far away and participate in careless, yet well-intentioned, ministry activities. Activities they would never enact at home somehow become okay as we trample on people’s cultures and sensibilities in another context far from home. Making decisions on global ministries based on the cheapest place to travel or on the place that gives maximum exposure for the church and emotional appeal for the members is culturally self-referential and missiologically naïve. We hope to offer a much more thoughtful and deeply discipling way to make these decisions.

This book is written for historical mission organizations that intuitively fear they are being bypassed in the resurgence of the church as the mission locus of God. They search for a mission as smaller, seemingly more efficient, organizations emerge, wanting to work independently. They see local churches diverting funds from them to local church mission efforts. These organizations have faithfully served Christ, embedding long-term workers into the hard work of incarnational, cross-cultural ministry. They have learned things over the years about what is good missiology. Sometimes they find themselves “holding their noses” as they facilitate short-term mission teams who do things they would never do themselves. We believe that mission organizations need to be brokers for best practices and missiological reflection in this new paradigm. They will need to be secure enough to accept the shift and work as servants rather than gate keepers in this new role.

This book is written for new organizations that are springing up all over North America as part of an entrepreneurial response to the

⁸Andy Crouch, “The African Planter: Nairobi Chapel pastor Oscar Muriu on starting churches, mission trips, and working well across cultures,” *Leadership* (March 22, 2007), http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-30802299_itm.

needs that are so apparent to us in a shrinking world of media and travel. We applaud the pioneering nature of these organizations and their ability to be nimble and quick in the ministry they provide. At the same time, we are aware of how fragmented the missionary activity is getting and would call for a new sense of cooperation, pausing long enough to reflect biblically and missiologically about the task itself.

So, welcome to our carpool as we together consider the global mission we are all facing and in which we are all privileged to participate. We hope that our reflections, deliberations, and learnings will be a catalyst for you and the organizations that you serve. And we hope Mouse enjoys the mission party, too.

Dethroning the Missionary

CARPOOL CONVERSATION

We had all returned from weekend speaking engagements in churches actively becoming involved globally. Some churches were setting up independent projects fueled by a few individuals whose concerns shaped the church's global response. Others were joining franchise mission initiatives framed for continuous short-term mission involvement.

Several weeks prior, one church had commissioned over forty youth to build houses on the border of Mexico. The youth had returned burning with excitement about what they had done for the needy in that border town. It did not matter that another youth group was coming the next week or that there had been very little involvement from the local community. They were sure they had "made a difference."

Another church had adopted a congregation in Honduras. They were busily devising plans and projects without having made a visit or even having had a conversation with the Honduran church leaders. The excitement was palpable as they looked around their congregation and gathered the local expertise to make a difference to their adopted church.

A third church was moving slowly, partnering with a mission organization and an African global partner. Together, they were developing a five-year plan, including short-term mission experiences, partner visits to the church, and training and orientation for people they would send to Africa.

The carpool conversation that day naturally focused on the changes swiftly overtaking us. Churches were getting excited about the possibilities

of global ministry. Many were just not willing to wait for our mission organization to open the gates, nor were they willing to simply support our organization out of blind loyalty. We needed to understand this drastic shift and what it meant for all of us—churches in the Global South, the church in North America, and mission organizations that, for so long, had controlled the agenda of global mission. What are the challenges we face in this shift? What will effective global mission strategies look like in this new paradigm? How will this change our orientation and our strategies?

“A missionary couple will be visiting your area next month. On which Sunday do you want them to speak in your Sunday service?” When Gary was in the pastorate, he often received calls like this one from our denominational mission organization. They were framed on assumed acceptance and blind loyalty. The church was not being invited to join in a mission partnership as a valued participant. The mission organization and its missionaries were the experts in global mission. The church’s job was to pray, fund their initiatives, and basically stay out of the way.

Gary had negative responses to these kinds of expectations of the organization. Too many times the missionary visits were less than satisfactory. The congregation he served included experienced development people who had worked in various settings internationally. Some even taught in internationally focused programs at the university level. Other members of the congregation had been born and raised in the developing world. They had firsthand understanding of the challenges in their home countries. All of this experience and knowledge was sitting in the pews of the church. Yet the mission organization and its missionaries treated the congregation as being uninformed and inexperienced. Gary sensed that the paradigm of who the experts were and where they resided was beginning to shift.

The mission organization’s perspective was continuing to act out of a mid-twentieth-century paradigm. Missionaries came to local churches and presented themselves as experts on the countries in which they served. However, their presentations were often naïve and simplistic, with a dash of North American myopia. They pushed the envelope of cultural generalizations no matter how well intentioned their motives. These superficial “third party” observations often left congregational members disheartened and doubtful about missions and missionaries.

As a pastor, Gary remembers declining the mission organization's offer to provide visiting speakers. Now, as the leader of this same mission organization, he is grateful for the invitations received from churches to speak into their missional intent. However, the presentations offered by the organization's personnel have adopted a different tone.

The Lens Has Changed

To be fair, phone calls like the one described took place more than a decade ago. Our denominational mission organization has moved dramatically into paradigms that its forbearers would have never imagined. Some of the influential missionaries from the past are unsure of the changes they see. They often express their dismay. Others realize that change is inevitable. They realize that new forms are built on the solid foundations they laid in the past.

Perhaps the greatest concern for some veterans is that the missionary is no longer at the center of the activity of mission. They are right. For years, the missionary was the axis by which one understood and did global mission. They described and interpreted the country to those of us "at home" through the lens of their own experience. Many were remarkable in their incarnational and servant-like lifestyles. However, they held all the power. Everything was brokered through them. They even determined the measures and evaluations regarding mission effectiveness. They were our lens to the world and what we knew was what they told us.

This has all changed. The missionary has been decentered and is in the process of being dethroned. This change did not just occur by a decision of leadership or organizational change. It results from a shrinking world and greater global access. No longer are the missionaries the only lens through which we look. We have many angles and perspectives from which to choose. Each of them presents a different view.

Media feeds us daily images of the global world in all its stark realism. Internet and e-mail create access never dreamed possible. Travel and immigration bring the world to our door. We can no longer pretend that the strange and exotic foreign world is "over there," because it is right next door. Global citizenship is not simply a remote idea. It is a lived reality in which decisions made locally affect people in distant places. As a consequence, our lives and witness as global citizens must not be careless and uninformed.

Embedded missionaries still play a critical role. No longer the sole gateway or gate keepers to the church's global perspective and

experience, they are the navigators and negotiators for what James Engel describes as the “multiple centers of influence” of missionary activity.¹ This is not an easy task. It requires skills much different from those of the pioneering people of the past.

Some missionaries find the changes difficult to bear. Losing a place of significance and authority is not easy. They facilitate teams from “home” who come for short periods of ministry involvement. They watch in frustration as team members leave the field believing they are now experts on the country they have visited. They know that these teams go back to their home churches and share their experience with confidence and enthusiasm. The shortness of their visit seldom tempers the evaluation and presentation of their trip. The impact of embedded incarnational workers who dedicate years to ministry often is lost on the short-term adventurers. The bottom line is that measurements of success, accomplishment, and overall impact have shifted. The storyteller (once the missionary) is now a two-week short-term mission participant whom the permanent worker oriented, facilitated, protected, and served as tour leader.

These changes and many more are happening whether we like it or not. Navigating and negotiating in this strange new world requires us to acknowledge the numerous storytellers describing what the world is like. Add to this the fact that the church in the Global South is alive and vibrant with much to teach us, and you have a shift so seismic that virtually everything must be open to examination and change.

Living in a Shrinking World

Globalization is experienced on a daily basis. A chicken becomes infected in Thailand and impacts the local poultry industry in your hometown. Bankers pursuing unrealistic financial returns for American investors threaten the whole world with economic collapse. Failure to acknowledge our global interconnectedness is tantamount to committing global suicide.

We can no longer assume that “our way” of looking at things is the “only way.” For example, our North American perception of World War II is very different from that of those people whose experiences were dissimilar from our own. For many Europeans and North Americans, Pearl Harbor and D-Day lie at the center of that time in history. For the Chinese, it is very different. Their stories contain events such as the “Rape of Nanjing.” This tragic event

¹James F. Engel and William A. Dyrness, *Changing the Mind of Missions: Where Have We Gone Wrong?* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 26.

resulted in hundreds of thousands of civilians raped and killed in the span of seven days by the Japanese occupation forces. It is burned into the Chinese narrative of those years. People are shaped by their environments and, as a result, perceive reality in distinct ways.

The disciple Peter can help us come to understand this shift of paradigms. In Acts 10, he struggles with the new thing that God is doing through Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. His worldview and his understanding of God were shaped around cultural and national identity. The invitation to visit and share table fellowship in the home of Cornelius required Peter to examine fundamental issues of his identity.

Living in a global world necessitates a constant questioning of our assumptions and our prejudices. It is futile to attempt to construct the international order on the backs of our preferences. The church must learn to engage the other and build society together. This will demand a newfound humility that facilitates a deeper encounter with people who are different than ourselves.

When the Borderlands Are “Over There”

Gary has introduced the idea of the borderlands² as places where “faith, unfaith, and other faiths intersect.” In the borderlands, followers of Jesus capture our sense of identity and purpose. Mission is not lived inside the walls of the church, but rather as the people of God move out and live their lives in the “borderlands.”

This is certainly not a new concept. It echoes Jesus’ good news that the kingdom of God has drawn near. This message was not simply a spiritual notion of encouraging people into heaven; it was a revolutionary call to live as followers of Jesus who daily demonstrate the possibilities of God’s reign incarnationally and communally. Today the challenge of this message encourages his followers to actively engage in communities and worlds of their lived experience outside the walls of the church.

Under God’s reign in Christ, the whole world was and is being redeemed. “Don’t just work to change the world,” Marva Dawn states. “Work to anticipate the kingdom.”³ Lesslie Newbigin wrote, “In every culture Jesus is introduced as one who bursts upon the culture’s models

²Gary Nelson, *Borderland Churches: A Congregation’s Introduction to Missional Living* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2008).

³Quotation from a plenary talk by Marva Dawn at the IVCF National Workers Conference, May 2001.

with the power of the wholly new fact that God reigns over the whole world through Jesus Christ.”⁴

The church becomes both an instrument and sign of what God wants to do in this kingdom that Jesus brought to earth. The purpose of the church and its mission is to incarnationally point to what it might look like when a community of people become alive under God’s reign and seek to join in his redemptive plan. God is out there ahead of us, and we move to discover and join in what he is doing.

We have noticed that as churches become aware of this missional call in their local worlds, they gradually begin to mature in their thinking of the borderlands that are “over there”—places that cross linguistic, cultural, national, and geographical boundaries. They perceive themselves as a sent people connecting with the world around them. Accordingly, to begin to ponder the implications of that connection beyond their own local context is a natural extension of borderland living. These churches increasingly nurture a global concern about the world. The result is an emerging faithful desire to engage in that new borderland “over there.” They desire to go global with their borderland discipleship and missionary witness. They are no longer satisfied to let the “professional” missionaries do it for them.

Sorting out the Responses to This New Shift

In the past century, pursuing mission activity “over there” meant to pray and financially support individuals who felt a particular call to international mission activity. Most radically, it was to become one of these individuals who then looked to the local church for prayer and support. These two choices of response to the mission call have been replaced in recent years with a plethora of options ranging from short-term missions opportunities to delivery of tangible gifts such as shoeboxes, with innumerable other opportunities.

These choices emerge from the twenty-first-century inclination toward a much more incarnational desire for people to touch and directly experience mission for themselves. Intuitively intimate, personal engagement has become more highly valued than simply passive participation. People want direct contact and instinctively resist the need to go through a “mediator” to get there.

This has not been an easy transition for historical mission organizations. Their responses have not always been healthy:

⁴Lesslie Newbigin, quoted by Robert Webber, in *The Younger Evangelicals* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 103.

they vary from outright rejection to capitulation. Too often good missiological strategy becomes diluted. On-field missionaries may have to neglect their assigned work to guide the short-term visitors. Mission organizations that resist these changes are, however, on a futile journey.

This dramatic shift from passive mission supporters to engaged mission participants alters everything in congregational life and ministry. At one time, congregational leaders were to provide comfort and security for congregants as they nurtured their faith. Contemporary churches moving into the frontiers of unexplored ministry opportunities want direct involvement. Leaders are now called to move their people out into the borderland of missional living—the place where “faith, unfaith, and other faiths intersect.” The skills required for crossing over local and global borders are similar to those required by the missionaries of old—personal inconvenience, language acquisition, and creativity. Talking about mission locally or globally is not enough.

Robert Wuthnow calls these globally responsive churches “transcultural congregations.” He describes them this way:

Transcultural congregations give priority to programs that honor their commitments at home but also seek to be engaged in the lives of others around the world. A transcultural orientation connects local commitment with churches, communities, organizations and individuals in other countries... They contend that a congregation that focuses only on itself becomes insular.⁵

Churches involved in local missions naturally want to expand into global mission. They are repositioning themselves back into their rightful place at the center of the mission activity of God. The inability to discern how culture plays out in a particular context can damage this across-the-border witness of the local church.

Before venturing into the borderlands, churches need to examine the kinds of cultural and socioeconomic differences they will face over the border. Understanding and anticipating how your ministry activities may foster inequities or create bad images of North Americans is critical. Ignorance to these glaring dissonances is extremely unhealthy.

⁵Robert Wuthnow, *Boundless Faith: The Global Outreach of American Churches* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 6.

Before going across the cultural borders, the local church should have a plan for action approved by veteran missionaries, agencies, and/or national leaders. Every member of the local church traveling party should be oriented to the plan and should agree with the plan. The local church representatives go as a team, not as a group of individuals doing their own thing.

In the fix-it-now framework of North American life, churches seldom take the time to reflect on mission theory, purpose, and results. Often the problems and solutions seem so obvious that the church leaps into action without reflection, investigation, or consideration of the opinions and knowledge of the people they go to serve. This is one reason that so many North American churches have become involved in orphanages that separate children from their extended families and communities without investigating other options. Containers of used clothing have been shipped rather than strengthening local economies through sewing machines and micro-credit loans. Worship leaders have been sent to offer expert advice without regard to traditional instruments and forms of adoration of God.

In this book, we argue that it is critical to understand the mission context your church is entering and to anticipate how your best intentions might actually have negative consequences and foster inequities. The desire to “do something” or “make a difference” is so strong that expediency trumps strategy and deep cultural reflection. Patience, openness, and a commitment to dialogue are vital for effective missional engagement in any international context.

Mission Organizations and Churches in Partnership

We can find fertile ground for a new partnership between the mission organization and the church. The experience and expertise of the mission organizations is invaluable to churches. Over their years of service, mission organizations have learned something important about effective mission across cultural barriers. They find the goal to be leading people to Jesus for transformed lives, not for transformed culture.

The mission organizations’ experience and resources remain needed, but their monopoly on mission work is quickly disappearing. Since churches will no longer allow themselves to be marginalized into a supporting role, mission organizations will need to move over and share the decision-making processes and program implementation that takes place. Mission organizations and churches must humble themselves to partner together.

What Is So Wrong about Simply “Doing”?

Christianity Today interviewed Oscar Murui, pastor of Nairobi Chapel in Kenya in an attempt to understand a Global South perspective on the shifts occurring in mission. He made a devastating observation as he reflected on the benefits of short-term mission:

The greatest benefit is that you come and you learn. Unfortunately, not enough short-termers are listening to the two-thirds world who receives them. Americans tend to be very poorly informed about the world. America generates enough news on its own that its news organizations don't have space for international news. Yet America exports so many movies and so much news that everybody around the world knows about America, whereas America knows about nobody.⁶

As disturbing as these words may be, they point to another area that requires humility—the realization that churches of the Global South have much to teach us. In the arrogance of our North American living, we might do well to ask ourselves this question: If our methods of ministry and mission are so effective, why is the church in North America in decline and the church in the Global South growing? The church in the Global South is alive. Philip Jenkins drives this idea home.⁷ He points out, “A largely secularized First World confronts a rapidly growing ‘South’ in which religion thrives and expands... Christianity is flourishing wonderfully among the poor and persecuted, while it atrophies among the rich and secure.”⁸ This is not to suggest that everything about the church in the South is good, but simply to suggest that the church in Africa, Latin America, and Asia has much to teach us in our nominalism and stagnation.

The multinational nature of the global church also mirrors another trend in global mission: the churches of the majority world are sending the majority of missionaries into all types of transcultural mission. Christopher Wright notes, “More than half of all the Christian

⁶Oscar Murui, as quoted in Andy Crouch, “The African Planter: Nairobi Chapel pastor Oscar Muriu on starting churches, mission trips, and working well across cultures,” *Leadership* (March 22, 2007), http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-30802299_itm.

⁷Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 56.

⁸*Ibid.*, 96, 220.

missionaries serving in the world today are not white and Western.⁹⁹ These new global missionaries represent a different framework of power. They work from a place of passion and relative simplicity and vulnerability. Their issues are dramatically different.

Awareness of the vibrancy of the church in the so-called developing world and their growing missionary involvement goes a long way to transform the way we do mission. As we enter into worlds of difference, as we cross borders, we have much to learn, and may actually have less to give than we think. The reality that we are wealthier does not mean that money is always the solution. Economics may be part of the problem and a way of distracting us from the learning that needs to take place in our own lives. Truly crossing the borderlands “over there” inevitably changes you. Teacher becomes student, and benefactor becomes beneficiary in God’s upside-down global kingdom.

What’s the Point?

Our thesis is becoming clear. Radical shifts are taking place as the local church regains its rightful place as God’s agent of mission and as the global church is involved in the missionary movement, not simply as deliverers, but receivers as well. No one feels it more deeply than mission organizations. They are transitioning from being just program providers to a role of facilitation and brokering. As they embrace this new role, they aid in stimulating and maturing the local congregation’s missionary imagination.

It will not be easy. North American churches must be ready to rearrange priorities both economically and physically. We must lay aside comfort and convenience so we can join God, who is already out ahead of us in his work. Despite the difficulties, we must embrace the Global South church with its perspectives and strategies as partners in God’s activity. If we do, mission can be deeply effective.

Too often, large Christian mission and relief organizations have failed to involve global churches in the name of efficiency for program delivery. Large mega-churches have parachuted into cross-cultural contexts with little, if any, awareness of the need for cultural sensitivity or promising missional practices. The result has been a weakening of effective witness and ministry by the local church in a given country even while programs flourished. When churches are

⁹⁹Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 43.

tied to a Western expression of the Christian faith that is too often linked to the globalization factors of economics and power feared by so many in the Global South, they may accept the help given with good intentions but experience a deep sense of alienation.

During the genocide in Rwanda in the early 1990s, refugees flooded into the region around Goma in the Congo. Emergency medical teams from around the world descended on the country with humanitarian relief. Medical teams arrived with state-of-the-art medical equipment, often setting up their large triage tents with total disregard for the local medical clinics right next to them that had provided care previously. Out-dated equipment, sometimes in disrepair, within the clinics was left untouched, and local medical personnel were ignored. The result was mayhem! A shadow of disrespect grew within the local population toward their own doctors and nurses—if the doctors and nurses from Goma were being ignored, locals thought these native medics must not be of good quality. Local citizens pretended to be refugees to receive the medical attention of the emergency teams to the extent that local clinics suffered as a result.

The solution was quite simple. Deciding to enter the crisis with an attitude of companionship with the Goma medical professionals as colleagues would have made all of the difference. Recognizing the presence of Congolese medical professionals should have been a first concern.

What Will It Take?

The writings of Latin American theologian René Padilla have proven to be prophetic in both their predictions about where things are going and in prescribing what needs to take place. He describes four priorities that a church must enter into if it is to mature and reach its potential as a missionary people.¹⁰ The life God calls the church to live out becomes dynamically alive as these themes mature in congregations in both attitude and practice:

- The church proclaims and lives in the light of the fundamental belief that Jesus Christ is Lord over all human life and creation.
- The church teaches discipleship as a missionary lifestyle to which God calls each member.
- The church embraces its calling to live as the new humanity God is forming in the context of its historical moment.

¹⁰C. René Padilla, “Making the Crossing,” *Mosaic* (Spring 2006): 6.

- The church develops and encourages the use of gifts for ministries in which its members fulfill their roles as God's co-workers in the world.

This type of ministry demands a remarkably Christ-centered approach to mission in which a genuine encounter, mutual learning, and transformation takes place. The result is a church and its members who mature in such a way that they no longer simply ask the question, "What can we do for them?" They also wonder how God will change them by the encounter. They understand that true ministry takes place when they join together as co-disciples and co-learners in discovering God's way forward in mission and ministry.

Where Does It Begin?

For some, becoming a missionary people begins with a short-term mission experience that, upon their return, stimulates a new way of seeing. Suddenly their eyes are open to the needs and mission opportunities around them in their home context. New insight and passion for missional living opens the door to opportunities at home.

For others, the missional living starts at home. The congregation matures in their ministry and incarnational living within the community where God has placed them. They embrace "hidden" people who are wounded, vulnerable, and in need of grace. As their servant discipleship develops, a stirring of global awareness and concern emerges.

For a number of years, a congregation on the West Coast of Canada has flourished as they engage the people around them in a winsome and winning way. It grows as people find faith and as they in turn engage the borderlands around them. Through a series of events, this thriving dynamic congregation committed to a ministry partnership with our mission organization. They began to companion with a congregation in the Mathare slum of Nairobi, Kenya, under a partnership agreement between the Kenyan churches, us as their home denominational mission organization, and themselves. The experience has transformed the local church and its members. Over a series of trips to Kenya and several program failures and successes, new passion has welled up inside them. It has even affected the way they see their own community. All of a sudden they begin to ask where God is at work and where they might join with that activity.

The result of learning in Kenya is the courage to address a conversation that has been ignored for years. They had been blind

to the needs and missional opportunity of the Aboriginal/First Nations people that live literally across the street from them. Many congregants have come to see this part of their borderlands for the first time. Stimulated by mission activity “over there,” God places more local concerns on their heart. The lessons learned in Kenya about listening and incarnational living become the beginnings of their exploration of ministry engagement locally.

Integral Mission

René Padilla calls this biblical approach to the mission of the church “integral mission.”¹¹ The idea is simple and profound at the same time. The local church acts as God’s servant in the world and bears witness to its faith through service to the people in the community in both word and deed. An integral approach to mission takes seriously the biblical teachings that economic poverty so often results from political and social oppression on the part of those who exercise power and possess wealth. To bring all things under God’s rule requires the engagement of individual Christians and churches in God’s redemptive plan.

This point is critically important because integral mission affirms God’s reign over the world and is rooted in a faithful discipleship lived out in particular contexts. God desires to redeem his creation. Scriptures are a story of how fallen creation in all its broken and painful actions is being made whole and new in Christ. Padilla describes integral mission as follows:

When the church is committed to integral mission and to communicating the gospel through everything it is, does, and says, it understands that its goal is not to become large numerically, nor to be rich materially, nor powerful politically. Its purpose is to incarnate the values of the Kingdom of God and to witness to the love and the justice revealed in Jesus Christ, by the power of the Spirit, for the transformation of human life in all its dimensions, both on the individual level and on the community level.¹²

The ministry of Jesus of Nazareth provides the model. Jesus proclaimed the coming of the kingdom as good news for the poor.

¹¹C. René Padilla, *¿Que Es La Mision Integral?* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Kairos, 2006). An English language interview with Padilla can be found at: <http://lareddelcamino.net/en/images/Articles/whatisintegralmissionrcpadilla.pdf>.

¹²Padilla, “Making the Crossing,” 6.

Jesus' actions were a powerful witness to the emergence of God's active rule in first-century Galilee. These acts included dramatic confrontations with evil through exorcisms, healings, the feeding of the hungry, and the exercise of power over creation in the storm narratives. The appropriate response for all people was repentance and discipleship based on Jesus' teaching. The ethic of the kingdom was based on the double love command (Mt. 22:34–40), which represents a summary and culmination of the teachings of Hebrew Scriptures. Jesus' teaching contained special implications for those who enjoyed privileged positions in society. It required those people to practice mercy and justice on behalf of the marginalized and powerless. The conversion of Zacchaeus, the tax collector, accompanied by his generous restitution of funds to people he had swindled and generosity with the poor, was a sign of God's transforming encounter through Jesus affecting all of life (Lk. 19:1–10).

The New Testament presents Jesus' resurrection as a pivotal moment in which the new creation erupted into human history. Paul extends the radical ethic of Jesus into the heart of the Roman Empire by, as Padilla points out, speaking to the issues of slavery, the oppression of women, and physical hunger—all of which were present in the Christian communities of the early church.¹³

The combination of the proclamation of God's rule and the practice of a radical social ethic combining justice and mercy can be found, albeit sporadically, in the history of the mission of the church. Padilla offers as eighteenth-century examples Zinzendorf and the Moravian missionary movement and the revivals associated with Wesley and Whitefield.¹⁴ The greatest period of Christianity's geographic expansion came in the decades preceding and following World War II. Padilla observes that at that time, the church began to abandon its social consciousness, concentrating on numerical growth rather than transformation of individuals and societies.¹⁵

Padilla notes that the evangelical missionary movement that arrived in force in Latin America was primarily concerned about evangelism and church planting. The mission of the church was to

¹³C. René Padilla, personal conversation with Gordon King, November 6, 2007.

¹⁴C. René Padilla, "Hacia una definición de la misión integral," in *El proyecto de Dios y las necesidades humanas*, ed. C. René Padilla and Tetsunao Yamamori (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Kairos, 2006), 20–23.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 23. Padilla also notes that the values of the Enlightenment led to an exaggerated individualism, the privatization of religion, and a corresponding decline in social commitments.

“gain souls” and establish churches. Salvation was understood as an experience that was personal and subjective, with little attention given to the historical context in which new converts lived out their faith. Church members who suggested that mission might include other essential elements were often viewed with suspicion and eventually marginalized.

To correct that myopic view of the mission of God, two theological perspectives are foundational for integral mission. First, God’s purpose is to redeem all creation. God’s historical project with the world we inhabit is not simply to secure souls for heaven. He will put all things under the authority of Jesus Christ and bring about cosmic reconciliation by making peace through the blood of the cross. The purpose of mission is the transformation of the person and structures so that God is glorified in all dimensions of life, including relationships with God, others, and creation itself. The goal of evangelism is not simply conversion; it also includes the creation of communities that confess Jesus Christ as Lord of all aspects of life and that live out this confession in word and deed.¹⁶

The second theological perspective is the recognition of the full nature of being human. According to Scriptures, human life in its very essence is body, soul, and spirit. Accordingly, the mission of God cannot be reduced to so-called spiritual needs such as forgiveness, or to physical needs such as adequate nutrition. Integral mission is concerned with all the basic needs of people, including God’s grace, loving relationships, shelter, clothing, mental and physical health, and a sense of human dignity.¹⁷

We agree with Padilla that the Christian church has a global representation and, consequently, a responsibility unparalleled by any other organization. Christians in the North and South are called to form alternative societies that incarnate the values of the kingdom of God in solidarity with the broken, marginalized, and spiritually lost of a global world. This requires the church to engage at a profound level with the world outside the church. This mission must hold in tension two great themes of witnessing discipleship: word and deed. Ministries of compassion are held in tension by a clear yet sensitive commitment to the sharing of the gospel of Jesus Christ by word. Both ministry and verbal gospel witness are essential to an integral approach to mission.¹⁸

¹⁶Ibid., 29–30.

¹⁷Ibid., 31–32.

¹⁸C. René Padilla, *Economía humana y economía del Reino de Dios* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Kairos, 2002), 97.

Jesus calls us, his disciples, not just to an incredible task, but to a radical life project as the sent people of God. Discipleship demands an acceptance that each is “to go.” It requires decision-making that is consistent with that which Jesus himself believed and practiced. It assumes a stance of humble sensitivity, one that always listens first because it acknowledges that God is already at work in the other.