

Christ's Missional Church - Model For 21st Century

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Whereas during the early part of the twentieth century the Church was held in high esteem, and most of society ardently followed its teachings, today, because of the Enlightenment, "its social influence for moral and spiritual values within society has been neutralized."¹ Because of this charge many believers have come to believe that the Church is destined to certain doom as society adopts humanism, secularism and "practical atheism"² as its normative conduct.

Regardless what the ungodly conjecture about the Church's relevance, it must never concede to these accusations and become intimidated from fulfilling its God appointed responsibility as 'announcers of kingdom'. The Missional Church will continue to have an continuous and uninhibited impact only as believers remember that the Church is "God's people attending to God's kingdom work in God's time as they are empowered by God's Holy Spirit."³

Characteristics Of The Missional Church:

The Missional Church is characterized by the following seven elements:

First, Missional Churches recognize that God desires to formulate an intimate, personal relationship with humanity through the 'new birth that comes down from heaven'.⁴ Therefore, it copartners with the Triune God expressing through word and deed the salvific grace of Christ which liberates those who believe in Him. Understanding this Trinitarian desire facilitates the Church to rebut the claims of post-modernity, for through the testimony of countless other believers, it can be demonstrated that the worst of all humanity can find a welcome and forgiveness at God's 'table of grace'⁵

This understanding also motivates believers to proactively pray that "God's kingdom will be present in the earth as it already is in heaven,"⁶ for when this occurs, people's hearts will be changed from being at enmity with God to being His children.⁷ By interceding for God's kingdom to come to earth, believers are asking YHWH to "manifest his redeeming activity and gain sovereign righteous rule over the heart, mind and will of humanity".⁸ N. T. Wright adds:

To speak of God's Kingdom is thus to invoke God as the sovereign one who has the right, the duty, and the power to deal with evil in the world, in Israel, and in human beings, and thereupon to remake the world, Israel, and human beings. This fresh, gracious and forgiving purpose, aimed at a new creation, is put into effect by the renewal of the covenant. When this is accomplished God's people will be fully equipped to bring everything they do into God's presence as worship, praise, adoration, and commitment.⁹

In anticipating God's kingdom coming to earth, the Missional Church parallels both Christ's¹⁰ and

1. Os Guinness, *The Gravedigger Files*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1983), p. 51.

2. Craig Gay, *The Way of the (Modern) World*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 2.

3. Class notes, November 30, 2006.

4. John 3:1-11

5. I Timothy 1:13-16

6. Matthew 6:13

7. John 1:2; Galatians 4:6.

8. Frederick D. Bruner, *Matthew, A Commentary*, Volume I, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 301

9. N. T. Wright, *The Last Word*, (San Francisco: Harper Publishers, 2004), 36-37.

10. Matthew 3:2

11: Luke 13:3 & 5.

John the Baptist's desire¹¹ who were 'charged' with this message for they knew the radical, positive, eternal change it would bring to all those that heard and believed it. Absolutely nothing was more important to them that the message of the kingdom be known, and so everywhere they went they unapologetically expounded it. Mortimer Arias provides the following:

Jesus' evangelization, then, was kingdom evangelization . . . Matthew not only confirms that Jesus' evangelization was centred "in the good news of the kingdom", but that it describes Jesus' holistic method: teaching, preaching, and healing. The "good news of the kingdom" is for the whole person - physically (healing), intellectually (teaching), and spiritually (preaching).¹²

Second, the Missional Church understands the urgency of proclaiming the gospel which 'ignites' faith towards repentance within the ungodly.¹³ Any default in this responsibility makes the Church culpable of being apostate,¹⁴ for Christ's prime reason of calling the 'twelve' was so they could preach the "unsearchable riches of Christ"¹⁵ and present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: Being fully aware of this necessity that has been placed on the Church, Paul wholehearted devoted himself to this one task, saying, "woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel."¹⁶ for he knew that "if the Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost."¹⁷ Regarding the importance of the message that has been entrusted to the Church, James S. Stewart adds:

Think of the good news that the Church has been ordained to declare. That God has invaded history with power and great glory; that in the day of man's terrible need a second Adam has come forth to fight and to rescue; that in the Cross the supreme triumph of naked evil has been turned once for all to irrecoverable defeat; that Christ is alive, and that through this risen Christ, there has been loosed into the world a force that can transform life beyond recognition. The Church has no other business on hand than to make this one message known to God's created world. If it is doing anything less than this it is not doing God's business.¹⁸

As the Missional Church pulsates with the desire for humanity to be saved,¹⁹ it faithfully declares the truths of God²⁰ "for it is nothing less than Christ's corporate replacement on earth through whom Christ continues His incarnation as the Word is preached."²¹

Third, the Missional Church is the 'sent ones'²² of God who "comprehend God's eternal purpose for humanity, the fullness of Christ's redemptive work, and the responsibility of being Christ's witnesses in a dark and perverse world."²³ Richard Bauckham suggests that Christ's 'sent ones' are "exiles in this world" and have been commissioned to be a counterrevolutionary force with the prime purpose being to declare the righteousness of God. He writes:

12. Mortimer Arias, *Announcing The Reign Of God*, (Oregon: Wimp & Stock Publishers, 1984), 3.

13. Romans 10

14. Galatians 1:7 & 8.

15. Ephesians 3:8.

16. I Corinthians 9:16-16.

17. II Corinthians 4:3

18. James S. Stewart, *Heralds of God*, (Vancouver: Regent Publishing House, 2001), 42.

19. Acts 2:38

20. Romans 1:16

21. Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 231.

22. John 20:21

23. H. R. Reynolds, "The Gospel Of John", *The Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 17, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), 473.

The authors of Hebrews and I Peter represent Christians anywhere as aliens and exiles among the nations, sojourning like the patriarchs in lands that are not their own . . . in modern times this notion has somewhat been neutralized by the Church, but its positive significance for the Church to be a counter-cultural movement, living for a different God, in a different way, and for a different future in view needs to be rekindled. It may be that the Church in the west may need to recognize that its own centre is in God from whom it receives ability to go out to others in proclamation and compassion, and not in itself.²⁴

Missional people, by their very nature are mission minded, and they constantly seek out opportunities in which they can cooperatively bear witness to Christ regardless of their denominational affiliation, for if believers are one in Christ,²⁵ then a spirit of unity should be detected. Co-partnering, in announcing the 'kingdom' may be enacted by more prosperous Christians providing financial aid to less wealthy countries, larger churches sending Christian workers on short term mission, and or furnishing study aids to third world churches, aiding in building village churches, or by aiding pastors from other parts of the world to attend theological studies in the west so they may be more "thoroughly furnished unto every good work"²⁶ as related to the evangelical witness. Scripture clearly delineates that the whole Church, because of Christ's singular commissioning, must work together. David Bosch opines:

Thank God, there are gratifying indications that in our missionary involvement in many parts of the world we are indeed taking seriously the rediscovered reality of our fundamental unity. The mission to and in the west dare not be recruitment to our brand of religion, not only because the task before us is too immense to be credibly and effectively attacked by a fragmented Church, but because the very nature of mission militates against this kind of empire building. Mission is, rather, the whole Church universal collectively communicating the good news about the universal and coming reign of the true and the living God.²⁷

Fourth, the Missional Church relies on the Holy Spirit, and not personal charisma, or well designed programs to enable them to accomplish the cause of mission. Often churches are seduced into believing that their 'church growth' schemes will facilitate bringing God's kingdom to earth, and, therefore, church boards often expend numerous hours concocting these. However, if Christ's Church is to effectively fulfill its commission, it needs more than these, regardless how beneficial they might appear; it needs the empowerment of the Holy Spirit who gives boldness²⁸ to those who are obedient to Christ commands and faithfully declare His message of redemptive grace.

Jesus knew the importance of the Holy Spirit. During the 'Last Supper Discourse', He promised the disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit who would be their Comforter, and who would convict the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment to come.²⁹ During His last discourse with the disciples on the Mount of Ascension, He again avouched their need of the Holy Spirit saying, "but you shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses".³⁰ Approximately fifty days later, Peter, now having received the Spirit, stood and boldly declared the Gospel in Jerusalem, and the

24. Richard Bauckham, *Bible And Mission: Christian Witness In A Postmodern World*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 2003), 80.

25. John 17:22; Colossians 3:1-7; Ephesians 4:11-17.

26. II Timothy 3:16-17.

27. David J. Bosch, *Believing In The Future: Toward A Missionology Of Western Culture*, (Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International), 1995), 58-59.

28. Acts 14:3

29. John 16:8

30. Acts 1:8

“Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved.”³¹ Paul also recognized the need of the Holy Spirit in Christian ministry. To the church at Corinth he stated, his “speech and teaching was not with enticing of man’s wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit”³² because he wanted their faith to stand in the wisdom of God. Missional Church spiritual and numerical growth should be expected today. But for this to transpire the Holy Spirit must be given His sovereign authority to soften the hard heart of humanity and makes it receptive to Christ’s redemptive love.

The people of God can tell the world about salvation in Christ for the next century, but unless they rely on the Holy Spirit, their efforts will be futile for, “no one comes to the Father except the Spirit draws him.”³³ Regarding the necessity of the Holy Spirit in church related ministry, Paul Finkenbinder adds:

God expects His church to have a lifetime of uninterrupted, fruitful ministry, but genuine and long-lasting success comes only as it depends on the Holy Spirit and His anointing on His followers lives – not on our own gifts . . . therefore, we must seek the fullness of the Holy Spirit each day. As bearers of the most important message the world will ever hear, the message of eternal redemption, we have a great responsibility. Let us under God, be faithful to that responsibility by seeking each day of our lives the fullness of God’s Holy Spirit.³⁴

And C. Sumner Wemp contributes the following:

The people of God must live a Spirit-filled life. Individuals cannot manipulate people into getting saved. The Holy Spirit alone convicts and converts unregenerate humanity. Someone suggested that it takes a thousand laymen and six preachers to win one soul per year. No – a thousand time no! It just takes Holy Spirit-filled Christians faithfully sowing the seed for hundreds to come to Christ day after day.³⁵

The Holy Spirit also aids the Missional Church in holistic ministry within the body of Christ as it disciplines believers to share their witness, as it seeks direction in what areas of the community to minister, and He will prevent the missional church from giving way to despair if and when its desired ends of ministry are not realized. Christ’s church continuously will be confronted with seditious, negative assaults from within and without the church. Although leadership skills and insights should not be ‘tossed out’ as nonessential for church growth, neither should they be considered as being the catalyst for missional church growth. Without the love of Christ, without obedience to the word, and without full reliance on the Holy Spirit, Christian works, regardless how sincere and biblical these might be, may be regarded empty and demonically driven.³⁶

Fifth, the Missional Church recognizes the human dignity of every human being regardless of his ethnic, religious, political or socioeconomic background, and further understands that meeting the needs of the human crisis may be peremptory to presenting an effective witness to faith in Christ. Jesus perceived this as is demonstrated by the parable of the Good Samaritan,³⁷ and He taught the implications of this

31. Acts 2:47

32. I Corinthians 2:1-5

33. John 6:44

34. Paul Finkenbinder, “The Holy Spirit and the Evangelist” *Decision*, (Billy Graham Association – October 2000), 13.

35. C. Sumner Wemp, “Practical Steps To Personal Evangelism”, *Fundamentalist Journal*, (February 1984), 32.

36. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost Of Discipleship*, (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1995), 194.

37. Luke 10 - Jesus wasted no time attending to the injured physical needs - human compassion often illicit conversation regarding spiritual concerns.

principle to His disciples in saying that when they offer a cup of cold water to the disenfranchised in His name, they are doing it unto Him.³⁸

James complements Christ's counsel when he states, "pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."³⁹ In light of the foregoing, regardless how well-versed, how well educated, how sincerely devoted to Christ one might be, if he sees his fellow man naked, destitute of food and clothing, or homeless and is not moved with compassion to facilitate improvement of the person's plight, his Christian witness is hollow, hypocritical and futile, "for faith without works is dead".⁴⁰

To effectively minister to the socioeconomic needs of the disenfranchised the Missional Church needs to assess the needs of the community, train compassionate godly care givers, and then commission them to work on the streets, in prisons, detox treatment centres, food banks, palliative care wards, so that through their practice the Church can effectively demonstrate God's compassion, grace and mercy. This might necessitate becoming stained with the 'dirt of the desolate', identifying with the hurts of the wounded, and it may even mean being "ripped off financially", but even these mitigating factors are not sufficient reason for the Church to have a non-empathetic, careless attitude towards the poor. J. Douglas Ousley comments:

On-the-spot aid to chronic victims of addiction and delusion does little to heal their wounds over the long term. The loving Christian response to these unfortunates may not be Band-Aid assistance based on the model of the Good Samaritan. Rather, we might put our energy into programs which help the homeless or which advocate new government responses to the problem. Even if they do not provide us with immediate satisfaction of the handout, they are, especially giving the magnitude of the problem, important ways to ultimately demonstrate compassion even as Christ would.⁴¹

For the greater part society contends that the 'underdogs of society' rightly deserve their present plight of dejection, deprivation, despair, and destitution because they have not prudently managed their affairs. This might be the unregenerate's judgment for the destitute, but God's people, as channels of His compassion, must 'step to the plate' "to shoulder the whole range of human problems as testimony to the saving concern of God,"⁴² and care for humanity as God does.⁴⁷ Realistically the Missional Church cannot solve all the social problems, but it can be an oasis of refreshing in the desert of despair and confusion for those who will accept the offer. Christ, through His Church "binds the broken hearted, sets at liberty the captives, comforts those that mourn, and gives the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness"⁴⁴ to all those that will respond to Christ's message of hope. For those who will not partake of these blessings, the Church weeps, but for those who do because of both the Church's humanitarian and spiritual concern, the Church rejoices and gives glory to God.

Sixth, the Missional Church understands the need to disciple all members of the congregation as Christ's witnesses. Regardless how insignificant an individual is, or how insignificant his gifts appear, every believer must be trained to "be ready to give an answer in love for the hope that lies within them,"⁴⁵

38. Matthew 25:36

39. James 1:27

40. James 2:20 & 26.

41. J. Douglas Ousely, "Being A Neighbour To Street People", *The Christian Century*, (January 3-10, 1990), 7.

42. William B. Fraszier, "Guidelines For A New Theology Of Mission", *Mission Trends*, No. 1, (New York: Paulist Press, 1972), 30.

43. Jim Wallis, *God's Politics*, (San Francisco: Harper Publishing, 2005), 194.

44. Isaiah 66:1-4.

45. I Peter 3:15

for the gospel shows no tolerance to the ‘hidden witness of faith’ by those who claim that the gospel is the “power of God unto salvation.”⁴⁶ Missional Churches must be ‘safe places’ in which both the introvert and extrovert are encouraged to study the Scriptures and are provided with mentors whereby new opportunities for sharing the Gospel are explored.⁴⁷ The plumber, the carpenter, the lawyer, the doctor, and the street sweeper who names Christ as Lord must recognize that communicating the Gospel Monday to Saturday is as significant as hearing the Word on Sunday.⁴⁸ Reflections On God’s Missional Church.

The Early Church knew the significance of this, and so “day by day, in the temple courts and from house to house they went about teaching and proclaiming that Jesus is the Christ.”⁴⁹ Christ has commissioned the whole Church to evangelism, not just a select few.⁵⁰ Knowing this, it now becomes the clergy’s responsibility, as the under shepherd of the flock, to train and liberate the whole body of Christ for this ministry, even as Christ did His disciples. Colonel Glen Shepherd, Chief Secretary of the Salvation Army sees training of the laity as the crucial determinate for local church survival. He contributes the following:

I am not sure if I am witnessing the demise of the Salvation Army or its renaissance. The answer is in our own hands. As the Church evolves, as the Army changes, we hang on to Jesus’ promise that He will build His Church, and that nothing – not even the gates of hell will prevail against it. The important thing is that God is at work through ordinary people like us, calling us to be His fellow workers. The mission is bigger than roles or structure, bigger than ranks. There is a place for all of us as God’s fellow workers. Let us find our place, and fill it with joy.⁵¹

Jakob Spener, founder of the German Pietist Movement, understood the Biblical admonition to collective Church witness. In attempting to impress upon his followers the far-reaching implications of Luther’s recognition of the priesthood of all believers he wrote:

This arrogant monopoly of the spiritual estate, together with the debarring of the laity from the Scriptures, was one of the chief means under the papacy by which papal Rome established and where it still holds sway, and maintains its power over poor Christians. Hence, no severer blow could have been given to it than when Luther showed that all Christians if they wish to be real, are duty bound to fulfill them . . . Accordingly all Christians are obligated not only to offer prayer, thanks, good works, alms etc., for himself and what pertains to him, but also to study the Word earnestly and to teach, reprove, exhort, convert and edify others, especially those of his own house, as grace is given to him, to observe their life, to pray for all, and as much as possible to have a care for their salvation. If people were shown this, everyone would become active in those things which pertain to his own and his neighbour’s salvation.⁵³

The New Testament is replete with narratives of the laity telling and retelling what Christ did, and how the world was turned ‘upside down to right side up’⁵² because of their faithful witness. When the

46. Romans 1:16

47. I Peter 2:9

48. R. Paul Stevens, *Equipping The Laity*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 35.

49. Acts 4:42

50. Matthew 28:16-20

51. Glen Shepherd, “Everybody Has A Job To Do”, *Salvationist*, (November 2006), 18.

52. Philip Jakob Spener, trans. Theodore G. Tappert, *Pia Desideria*, (New York: Fortress Press, 1964), 93 & 94.

53. Acts 17:6

Church rekindles this same witnessing zeal, all believers will become “channels through which Christ mediates His life to the whole world as active believers in His name.”⁵⁴ Christ chose ‘twelve ordinary men’, which most business executives would reject, disciplined them, empowered them, and then commissioned them to be His witnesses so God’s kingdom message would be promulgated throughout the world. His plan has not changed; He still invites ordinary people to do His special work as He empowers them. John MacArthur comments:

Christ chose twelve ordinary men. Yet with all their faults and character flaws, these men carried on ministry after Jesus’ ascension that left an indelible impact on the world. Their ministry continues to influence us even today. God graciously empowered and used these men to inaugurate the spread of the gospel message. Ordinary people, like you and me, became the instruments by which Christ’s message was to be carried to the ends of the earth. Those men were merely instruments in His hands - just like the people of God, regardless of their background - can be today.⁵⁵

Seventh, the Missional Church contextualizes the Gospel to the culture in which it is ministering while maintaining a true representation of message contained in it. Contextualization is necessary because it formats the Gospel “into a more understandable, culturally relevant form including elements from a target culture’s customs, language and traditions,”⁵⁶ without requiring the evangelized to take on a foreign cultural life-style to be Christian. Contextualization also translates the Christian faith into a ‘language’ to which the receivers can relate and interpret with full meaning so that it can be “more deeply lived, celebrated and shared.”⁵⁷ The gospel, therefore must be contextualized to the socioeconomic, educational, cultural, and age group of the audience for if it is not “clothed in time-specific cultural forms”⁵⁸ the audience will not comprehend its message, and there is little likelihood intended transmittal of the Christian faith will occur.

Paul understood the need for contextualization of the Gospel as he traveled throughout Asia Minor, and, therefore, he willingly became “all things to all people that by all means he could win some.”⁵⁹ He was aware that he could not offer the Gospel the same way to the variant crowds he encountered, and changed his approach where necessary. Therefore, to the pagans Paul quoted pagan poetry, talked about the weather, commented on their suspicions that their idols could not save them, and disputed over Gnosticism in the market place. Christ’s Church today could do well to follow Paul’s example of contextualizing the Gospel in the missional outreaches it embarks on.

Conclusion:

Christ’s Church must reevaluate if it has comprehended Christ’s commission to be His witness a light and salt within the world, and then re-engage whole-heartedly as obedient servants in this call. When this is done, the Church will move from being a ‘care centre’ for the redeemed and it will become a ‘career

54. Greg Ogden, *Unfinished Business – Returning The Ministry To The People Of God*, (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 2003), 17.

55. John MacArthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men*, (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2002), xiii.

56. David Racey, “Contextualization: How Far Is Too Far?” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, (Volume 32, No. 3, July 1996), 305.

57. Darrell L. Whiteman, “Contextualization: The Theory, The Gap, The Challenge”, *International Bulletin Of Missionary Research*, (Vol. 21, No. 1, January 1997), 2.

58. Mike Frost, *Translating The Gospel*, (Internet Download: <http://guide.gospelcom.net/resources/frameforlinks.php?id=http://www.cegm.org.au/articles/translating-the-gospel.html>), Downloaded Dec. 1, 2006.

59. I Corinthians 9:22.

centre' in which the whole people of God will be coached as 'announcers of God's kingdom' to those that are still at enmity with Him. Christ has chosen His people to be His authentic voice of righteousness within this world; now, therefore, it is the Church's responsibility to announce His compassion to the world. God help this generation in Christ's Church to collectively and cooperatively attend to the Biblical mission of announcing redemptive grace remembering that as "one man plants, another will water, but God will give the increase. Jesus indicated that "the fields are indeed white unto harvest,"⁵⁹ and the night is coming "when no man shall be able to work."⁶⁰ Knowing this, believers have no other option that to move out and redeem the time while opportunity still exists.

60. John 4:35

61. John 9:4

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