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COLLECTIVE CALLING IN THE BIBLE AND MISSION HISTORY

With Applications to Assemblies of God World Missions

WRITING TEAM

John Easter (chair), Alan Johnson, Paul Kazim,
Dick Brogden, Tim Southerland, Luke Daniels

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

This paper came together out of discussions held at a May 2013 missiological think tank in Amsterdam. During our meeting there we realized that three of the four papers produced by the think tank over a two-year period—"Definition of a Missionary," "Definition of Unreached People Groups," and "History of Our 360 Mission"—had touched on the notion of "collective calling" in some manner. In retrospect, we think this happened because as a group of veteran missionaries, we sensed an increasingly diverse set of interests about missions in both our local churches and among missionary candidates. Therefore, we felt the need to revisit and refine our understanding of the larger calling and purpose that our missionaries feel connected to. As we discussed this topic, we discovered little agreement on how to define the idea of a collective calling in the ministry of Assemblies of God World Missions (AGWM).

As a result of these discussions, this missiological committee was assigned to explore the biblical and historical evidence on this topic and provide a definitive statement that could inform our mission theory and practice. However, because the concept of collective call was contested even within our group in Amsterdam, we decided to build a working definition of it first, then explore its theological and historical components. In our quest to define collective calling, we started by searching for definitions and usage on the Internetto discoverwhat kinds of contexts this term is used in. We found that the primary use of collective calling is in the realm of business and organizations.

The simplest definition we found was "something we are all called to do." In business literature the more commonly used terms alongside this idea are associated with mission, vision, and alignment. In other words, within the business world a collective calling is a mission statement. One website defined a mission statement as presenting the purpose of an organization by answering three specific questions related to why it exists: (1) What work does it do? (2) Who does it do the work for? and (3) How does it accomplish this work? These questions echoed many of the thoughts we had during our discussions in Amsterdam on collective calling as it relates to missions. For instance, as an organization that participates in God's redemptive mission, we are given a job and a mandate, we know who we are working for, and we have specific ways to accomplish this work. If we can argue that organizations do not do everything but have boundaries in place based on their stated purposes, would it not follow that missions organizations could and should have that same level of task specificity?

Another term closely related to collective calling is the business concept of alignment. Alignment is used to describe an ideal situation where the entire organization, from the top of the corporate leadership ladder down to the lowest-paid employees, work from the same principles and with the same goals in mind. Within the AGWM context we use many terms to express this notion of alignment. When we talk about corporate vision and private vision, for example, we are encouraging alignment with our mission values and principles and also asking members to adhere to our mission and vision statements. We talk about the intention of our spiritual forefathers in missions and refer frequently to our reason-for-being statement from the second Assemblies of God General Council.

While these ideas are important to our understanding and practice of global missions, we are well aware that to use only these descriptors is to draw solely upon the language of modernity, technical rationality, and globalized business. When we do that, it may be meaningful to today's readers, but it is not representative of the Bible's terminology or cultural contexts. At the same time, we want to avoid fixing biblical "luggage tags" to our arguments in order to find the concept of collective calling in Scripture. Our method instead will be to look at the Bible, missions history, and the history of our own Fellowship for evidence showing that those working in Christian world missions were bound together and guided by something more than an aggregation of individuals with a sense of personal calling.

Since "collective calling" is a contested term and does not lend itself to having a clear set of relatively agreed-upon meanings, it would be best to start by summarizing our definition here. The remainder of the paper will build the case biblically and historically for why we have settled on this definition. Our working definition for the *collective calling* of our missions agency is as follows:

> *The overarching trajectory and purpose of AGWM to evangelize the world that is shaped by our shared Pentecostal identity, missions purpose, and values, and driven by Scripture, our unique history, and the current missions realities of our time.*

The argument here is developed in three major sections. In Part One, we explore biblical and theological evidence. Part Two moves to historical analysis. The final section examines the implications our proposed definition holds for the future direction of our missions agency.

Part 1 BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

Meta-Narrative of the Bible

Because ideas of collective calling, alignment, and corporate vision are alien to the language and cultural context of the writers of the Bible, we need to ask different questions than the traditional exegetical ones. Richard Bauckham's hermeneutic for the kingdom of God provides one way for us to "enter into the Bible's own missionary direction" (2003, p. 11). He argues:

> The Bible is a kind of project aimed at the kingdom of God, that is, towards the achievement of God's purposes for good in the whole of God's creation. This is a universal direction that takes the particular with the utmost seriousness. Christian communities or individuals are always setting off from the particular as both the Bible and our own situation defines it and following biblical direction towards the universal that is to be found not apart from but within other particulars. This is mission. (2003, p. 11)

Bauckham posits that movement in the biblical narrative from the particular to the universal is defined by three aspects: the temporal (from creation to the eschatological future), spatial (from one place to every place, Jerusalem to the ends of the earth), and social (moving from person to person and people to people) (2003, pp. 13–15). He says, "The social, or we could say, numerical movement of the biblical narrative is from the one to the many, from Abraham to the nations, from Jesus to every creature in heaven, on earth, and under the earth" (2003, p. 15).

The meta-narrative of the Bible, which has a "future goal towards which it moves" (2003, p. 15), is relevant to our interests in defining a collective calling because that same future goal involves those who are used by God in His redemptive mission. There is a sense in which the unique particulars of the stories of the Bible are all moving to a universal horizon (2003, p. 16); therefore, there is a collective movement of God's people toward the goals of that eschatological future.

The Missional Engagement of the People of God

We will illustrate how missions was a key character trait of the people of God in the Old Testament. The call of Abram in Genesis 12:1–3 and the promises made to him (mentioned five times throughout Genesis) have together been called the Great Commission of the Old Testament. Abram begins to fully understand the promises when God explains the purpose of the blessings. God promises a blessing to Abram and his future family. Everything that precedes the final clause happens so that all the *mishpahot* (Hebrew for families, clans) of the earth will be "blessed through you."

We see that God does respond to human pride and autonomy, as evidenced in the account of the Tower of Babel in the preceding chapter (Genesis 11); however, God also responds to faith, as evidenced by announcing His plan to bless Abram's family: to bless Abram's name, to bless all who bless Abram, and ultimately to bless all families on earth. The text does not explain how his family will bless all others, and at this point in the narrative, God's only requirement of Abram is that he leave his country and people. It is God who acts. God chose one man, who would be the father of one nation, through which all the *mishpahot* of the world would be blessed. The blessing that Abram's family received cannot be divorced from the redemption available for all nations that is found in Christ.

Ultimately, Abraham's promise extends to an international community of faith and exists for the blessing of all people. God cannot bless the Church without blessing individuals, but He blesses individuals because together they form the Church. In the New Testament we see that the key to understanding the collective dimension of God's calling is in realizing that God chose to bless the Church in order to bring Abraham's blessing to the Gentiles (Galatians 3:28–29). In other words, the election of the Church as a whole is the means by which God's promise to Abraham will be fulfilled and all families on the earth will be blessed. God's activity should not be reduced to simply the election of individuals who will be blessed. Therefore, God's people, as a collective whole, are moving in unison toward the goal of bringing the blessing of redemption to the world.

In Genesis 18:16–33 the subject of God's judgment of Sodom is discussed. This text brings additional perspective to the calling of the people of God and answers the question of how God will fulfill His promise to bless all people through Abraham. In this passage, the discussion begins with Yahweh and two angelic beings getting up to leave after having a meal with Abraham. Yahweh seems to be talking with himself

when He asks:

> Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him. (Genesis 18:17–19, NIV)

Christopher Wright notes that this passage is a remarkable text, for it puts together in a single sentence God's choice of Abraham (election), God's moral demand on Abraham's community (ethics), and God's promise to bless the nations through Abraham (mission). The Church is heir to both the promise made to Abraham and the responsibility laid on him.

The two purpose clauses found in this text are significant because they illustrate God's desires. We can see that the purpose of God's election of Abraham was to create a community that knows and walks in the ways of the Lord. The purpose of developing this community would allow the fulfillment of the promise to bless the nations ; however, without Abraham's obedience there could have been no fulfilled promise.

Further refinement of the missional role God has for His people can be found in Exodus 19. After the exodus from Egypt, God told Moses that He intended for Israel to become a kingdom of priests. "Then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5–6, NIV). One of the purposes for God's election of Abraham was to produce a nation from his descendants, and Israel was the fulfillment of that purpose. However, Israel's (like Abraham's) election also had a purpose that fit within God's plan to bless the nations.

God elected Israel so that they would fulfill priestly responsibilities. Priests serve as intermediaries between God and people and also teach the Lord's decrees (Leviticus 10:11). Here we see that God's people are to function in this kind of mediatory role to make the living God known in the world. The New Testament picks up on this and affirms this theme in 1 Peter 2:9–10 by explaining that God's people are to declare His glory.

The Rise of Missions-Sending Structures

The Old Testament theme of God's people being on the move into the world and graduating from individual concerns to Kingdom concerns carries over naturally into the New Testament. Of course, these movements of God's people find their fulfillment in those who follow Jesus and His commands. What is relevant about this to us as a missions agency is whether or not this same kind of corporate movement can be seen in the proto missions-sending structure that we see emerging in the book of Acts.

Arthur Glasser observes that in the first 12 chapters of Acts it is primarily individuals, and occasionally multi-individual activity, that bear witness to Jesus (2005, p. 300).[1] However, from Chapter 13 and onward, the writer of Acts focuses on the apostolic band of Paul, who by this point has developed a working team of church planters who consistently cross geographic and cultural boundaries. Many missiologists will point out that this is the founding of a new Christian structure (organizational culture) designed to evangelize and plant local churches (Glasser, 2005, pp. 301–302). Ralph Winter views this apostolic band as a "second redemptive structure" that God uses along with the local church (2009, p. 245). The New Testament's local church and this apostolic band each serve as prototypes for the subsequent Christian fellowships and missionary endeavors that would soon develop within the Early Church (2009, p. 245). Each of these structures have their own functions, and both are used by God to bring the good news to people in an effective manner.

Glasser's comment on Acts 13:1–4 is useful because it provides an interpretive lens for looking at the history of missions-sending structures:

> The final characteristic of this missionary church was the nature of the burden that caused its various leaders to come together, not just to worship the Lord, but to wait before Him for the revelation of His will concerning their future service. From the response and instruction given by the Holy Spirit, we infer that their burden concerned a problem they were unable as localized congregations to solve. (2005, p. 301)

There are two important details to consider in Glasser's statement that resonate well with our study on Christian missions within its broader context in Acts. The first is that we see the impetus for missions comes from a response to a missional understanding of Scripture and the work of the Spirit. In Acts, we learn that one of

[1] For instance, Peter in 2:14-40 and 3:12-26; Philip in 8:5-13.

the key elements of the gathering of believers was around the apostolic teaching (Acts 2:42). Likewise, Luke 24:44–49 gives us insight as to how Jesus taught the apostles to understand the Scriptures. Christopher Wright notes that in Luke 24:45–47, "This is what is written" does not refer to any specific verse in the Old Testament:

> [Glasser] seems to be saying that the whole of the Scripture (which we now know as the Old Testament) finds *both* its focus and fulfillment in the life, death, and resurrection of Israel's Messiah, *and* accordingly in the mission to all nations, which flows from that event. Luke tells us that with these words Jesus "opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45, NIV), or as we might put it, he reoriented their hermeneutical orientation and agenda. The proper way for disciples of the crucified and risen Jesus to read their Scriptures, is *messianically* and *missionally*. (Wright 2006, p. 30; emphasis in original)

In Acts 13, we see Paul and Barnabas called by the Spirit. From this we can infer that it was the Holy Spirit who placed burdens in the hearts of Early Church members so they would see themselves as having a missional role that stretched beyond their own locale. This also had the added effect of making the promise and mandate of the Scriptures more alive for them. Thus, the core of the "Acts 13 moment" for a local church occurs when its people understand the Bible and the burden given to them by the Spirit, leading them to understand that major accomplishments in God's redemptive mission cannot be achieved through their church structure alone. From this passage we can see that the natural response to the burden placed on our hearts by the Holy Spirit should be to wait before the Lord for His instructions on how to proceed.

The second detail to consider is that the "going" noted in this passage, which was led by the Spirit (13:4), was to places that did not have existing communities of faith. It is noteworthy that at this point in the narrative of Acts there are individual churches, or possibly networks of house churches, present in several cities and regions (Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, Caesarea, Damascus, and Tarsus in Cilicia) thanks to Paul's hard work. However, the call—as carried out by Paul and Barnabas—was to go where the church did not yet exist.

The New Testament clearly records the itinerant movement of Christians with ministry gifts to help already-existing churches.[2] However, the paradigmatic status of

[2] Some examples here would be John and Peter's visit to the work in Samaria (Acts 8), Peter's ministry among the saints in Lydda and Joppa, Barnabas going to Antioch and then bringing Paul from

this passage for missionary endeavors—along with Paul's own understanding of his calling to preach the gospel where Christ was not known (Romans 15:20) and to take the gospel to the regions beyond (2 Corinthians 10:16)—argues strongly for a foundational understanding of the work of the apostolic band in planting the church where it does not exist.

A further piece of evidence for the outward focus of the mission of the church to those outside of the faith comes from the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. While the presiding issue had to do with the relationship of Gentile converts to circumcision, James's use of the Septuagint rewording of the Amos 9:11-12 passage is instructive of his view of the Gentile mission. Bruce points out that the Septuagint change of "possess" to "seek" and the change in vocalization of Edom to *adam* (humanity) spiritualizes the passage to bring it in line with Israel's mission "to bring the knowledge of the true God to the Gentiles. It thus paved the way for James's application of the prophecy to the church's Gentile mission.... The Gentile mission, then, is the work of God: he has made it known in advance 'from of old' and now he has brought it to pass" (1988, pp. 293–294). Thus releasing the Gentiles from religious and cultural restrictions was for the purpose of facilitating them to do mission to the Gentile world rather than limiting it to within Jewish circles and those few who would become proselytes.

Summary

In this section, we looked broadly at a missionary hermeneutic that helps us see the movement of God's people in particular places and times toward the ultimate goal of God's redemptive plan for all of creation. We then examined three Old Testament passages that illustrate this broad trajectory and bring more texture to its substance. Becoming part part of God's family is not simply about personal benefit, comfort, or just "going to heaven"; rather, it is aligning and participating in God's mission. We also looked for evidence of this same trajectory of movement in the rise of the initial missions-sending structure of the apostolic band and found that it is also present. Finally, the Acts 15 passage shows that these early Christian leaders saw the Gentile mission as central to God's redemptive purpose.

Tarsus (Acts 11), Judas and Silas sent along with the letter from the Jerusalem church to the Gentile churches (Acts 15:22-35), Apollos's visit to Achaia (Acts 18:27), Paul's letters to churches that he did not found, such as Colossians, and his intended visit to the church at Rome.

In the next section, we turn to a historical examination of the work of missions-sending structures and our own Assemblies of God missions agency. In the final section we will explore the implications of our findings from these first two sections on theology and history.

Part 2 HISTORICAL INVESTIGATION

Collective Call and Missions-Sending Structures in Missions History

Winter observed that while the forms of missions-sending structures have changed over 2000 years of missions history, the essential functions of the apostolic band have remained. What is relevant to our search is that a look at Christian missions over 2000 years confirms the trajectory of taking the faith to those who do not know it. Norman Thomas in *Classic Texts in Mission & World Christianity* (1995) assembles key texts about Christian mission across the ages, and the consistent witness through much diversity in Christian faith and practice is that all streams of Christian faith see missions as going to where the church and faith do not exist.

In A.D. 419 Augustine answered the query of a bishop in Dalmatia who saw the spread of the Christian faith in the Roman Empire as a sign that the end was near. Augustine argued that the end could not be near on the basis of the promises of God that the whole earth would be filled with the gospel and because many barbarian tribes were clearly unreached. He asked, "So how can this prophecy have been fulfilled by the apostles when, as we know for a fact, there are still nations in which its fulfillment is just beginning, as well as nations in which it has not yet begun?" (Thomas 1995, pp. 18–19).

If we fast-forward to the modern missions era, we again find that it is the unfinished task in light of the promises of God that brought advances with the gospel. In William Carey's era the gospel was established on the coastlands of Africa, India, and Asia; in Hudson Taylor's era the challenge was taking the gospel to the unreached inland areas, and in the twentieth century the reality of ethnolinguistic groups without a witness of the gospel ignited a push to plant the church among what became known as "unreached people groups."

The vehicle used to facilitate the Protestant church in missions in the modern era is the voluntary missionary society (Walls calls it an "instrumental society"), which is "the voluntary association of Christians banding together to achieve a defined object" conceived by analogy from the organization of a company (Walls 2009, p. 257). He

makes the point that voluntary missions societies were a pragmatic solution to the challenge of world evangelization: "The simple fact was that the Church as then organized, whether Episcopal, or Presbyterian, or Congregational, could not effectively operate missions overseas. Christians accordingly had to 'use means' to do so" (p. 257). Writing 200 years after Carey, Bob Blincoe of Frontiers evinces the same vision of the pragmatic nature of missions-sending structures: they are task structures unlike denominations, and they come together to produce product (2002, p. 5).

What is the product and purpose for their banding together? The evidence is clear that it was evangelism and planting the church among non-Christian populations. Klaus Fiedler, in his work documenting the rise of the faith missions, observes that none of them wanted to work where other missions were working. They saw taking the gospel to the unreached as their only reason for existence (1994, p. 73). Walls summarizes that idea in this way:

> The missionary society was, as Carey indicated, a use of means for a specific purpose. The original purpose was what Carey called "the conversion of the heathens." The purpose of both the older and the newer societies was essentially evangelistic; in as far as it was formulated, the theory was that when the church was founded, the mission would move on. (2009, p. 261)

What do we learn from an examination of missions-sending structures from the New Testament church to the present? While the forms have varied over the years, the function has had remarkable continuity—taking the gospel to non-Christians in order to win them to faith, disciple them, and form them into local churches. The notion of missions with Christians working with other Christians as its primary focus cannot be found as the starting point of any missions structure until the twentieth century.

Lessons from Assemblies of God Missions History

In this section, we use the historical backdrop of the rise of missions-sending structures to look at the conception of Assemblies of God missions in the past on two dimensions: the vision of the founders and missionary placement.

The Founding Vision

Edith Blumhofer says that early Assemblies of God adherents were convinced that the apostolic faith had been restored and used what resources they had to spread the message (1993, p. 153). She comments, "They felt called to responsibility for the salvation of everyone, everywhere" (p. 153). The call to organization that went out in 1914 resulted in a Pentecostal organization that saw itself as an agency for world evangelization. This view was enshrined in the 1914 commitment to do the greatest evangelism the world had ever seen.[3] Five decades later in the 1968 St. Louis Council on Evangelism, the Assemblies of God reaffirmed this vision that the Movement exists as an agency to evangelize the world (p. 243).

The founders' understanding of their experience of the Spirit as the restoration of the apostolic faith gave them both a sense of urgency to evangelize the world and the power to do so. Thus, in the practice of world evangelism, the work of the Spirit was central to their practice, particularly on two levels. The sense of personal call was primary in both the impulse to go and where to go, while signs, wonders, and power provided the divine dynamics for ministry to bring results in the planting of the church.

Purpose and Placement

In terms of our past, two points are relevant to missionary purpose and placement. The first is that the central concern of our Pentecostal founders was the evangelization of the world and that virtually everywhere an Assemblies of God missionary went was a pioneering situation. The second is that within the first ten years, the leadership of the Movement recognized that biblical parameters needed to constrain personal call, and they put into their council minutes that missions was to be done by New Testament methods (1915) and that the Pauline example of seeking out neglected regions where the gospel had not been preached should be followed as much as possible (1921).

Historically, this puts Assemblies of God missions efforts precisely in the stream of the faith missions that arose in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Fiedler contrasts the faith missions with the independent and non-church missions movements. Independent missions started with God's call but allowed for the development of structure—institutions where missionaries could support themselves;

[3]*Assemblies of God Foreign Missions into All the World: The New Missionary Manual* (Springfield, Missouri: Assemblies of God Foreign Missions, 1999), 11. "As a Council…we commit ourselves and the Movement to Him for the greatest evangelism that the world has ever seen."

the non-church missions utilized the faith principle where support came only in answer to prayer in faith (Fiedler 1994, p. 24). Fiedler notes that faith missions took the ideas of God's call and faith for support but corrected a weakness in both the independent and non-church structures; namely, the lack of organization that facilitates missionary effectiveness (p. 25):

> Perhaps the greatest achievement in missiological terms was that faith missions (in contrast to independent missions and non-church missions) managed to develop clear and effective organizational structures, and to defend them against widespread questioning. (1994, p. 56)

Gary McGee points out that similar unresolved tensions within AGWM actually become part of the genius of Assemblies of God missions, because it kept the organization from being bound to personal calling alone while avoiding the problem of an over-organized approach (McGee 2010, p. 140). The tensions allowed the Spirit to bring continual renewal and new initiatives to the structure.

Summary

The question under consideration in this historical section was if the history of Christian missions shows specific purposes around which missions-sending structures came into being that affected missions practices. The answer is affirmative—the driving force in missions throughout Christian history has been the proclamation of the gospel and planting of the church where there is no ever-present and sustained witness of the gospel.

The related question, then, is this: Does this same purpose inform Assemblies of God missions? Again, the answer is affirmative. Like other missions' agencies that grew out of revival movements, Assemblies of God missions shares a compelling commitment to world evangelization. This trajectory has continuity with the founding of all missions-sending structures from the New Testament to the beginning of the twentieth century. The purpose in world evangelization is to take the gospel to the non-Christian world. The notion of Christian-to-Christian mission as the primary function was not part of the ethos of any missions movement growing out of revival in the modern era, nor was it part of the founding purpose of any missions endeavor from the New Testament era.

Part 3 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Proper Response to Notion of Collective Calling

The purpose of this paper was to explore biblical and historical data to see if there is evidence for the notion of a collective calling for God's people and, by extension, missions agencies that should inform our missions theory and practice. We began the paper by providing a definition of our collective calling derived from our examination of the biblical and historical material. We suggested that it is possible to define an Assemblies of God World Missions (AGWM) *collective calling* as:

> *The overarching trajectory and purpose of AGWM to evangelize the world, shaped by our shared Pentecostal identity, values, and mission purpose and driven by Scripture, our unique history, and the current missions realities of our time.*

If we accept the notion of this sense of collective call, then what is our response to it? What does this look like in actual practice on the ground in our various ministry contexts around the world? In this concluding section, we begin with a discussion of the interpretive moment that we find ourselves in regarding what world evangelization as a mission in 1914 means to us today. We conclude that discussion with our own proposal about how we should move forward. The next question we address is how to best accomplish world evangelization as understood in our proposal. This is followed by the explication of a series of metaphors that show various angles and perspectives of how diverse missionary ministry and giftings work towards the ultimate trajectory of God's glory among the nations. The final section addresses some of the questions that arise from the definition of collective call and understanding of world evangelism we proposed.

A Proposal for our Interpretive Moment: The Meaning of World Evangelization for AGWM

Standing 100 years away from our founders, we seem to be at a crossroads moment of interpreting the reason for our existence as a missions-sending agency. That the founders pledged themselves to the greatest evangelism the world had ever seen is clear, but precisely what that means in today's missiological reality of where the

church exists and does not exist is currently contested. In this section we consider some of the reasons why we are standing at an interpretive moment and then make a proposal based on our definition of collective call for how AGWM could understand and position itself toward world evangelization in the twenty-first century.

Reasons Why We Stand at an Interpretive Moment

We do not think that it is at all strange that a mission with a 100-year history should be working through issues related to purpose, vision, and values. Here we suggest three reasons which are not meant to be comprehensive, but which show the need for coming to a solid consensus on what world evangelization means for us today.

The first reason is the reality of a natural shift in the emphasis and focus of missions agencies over time. Fiedler documents that missions movements arise as a consequence of revival, noting that while revivals "start at a given point in church history and, after a time, fade out, they do not disappear. Their teachings, their institutions, and the fellowships they created continue to exist even after the revival fervor has waned" (1994, p. 113). What this means for us is that people coming into our mission 100 years after its founding are going to be different in their vision than those of the first generation.

A second source of change is the success of missions itself. Walls observes that, theoretically, early missionary societies were supposed to move on once the church was founded, but this did not happen:

> As new churches appeared, the society remained as a natural channel of communication through which flowed aid, personnel, money, materials, and technical expertise. The societies, as we have seen, developed other roles as educators of church and public, and as a conscience for peoples and governments. All these roles were already established in the missionary societies before 1830, and they are all there still. (2009, p. 261)

Winter calls these early missionary societies and their offspring today "standard missions" that have broad and comprehensive interests ranging from evangelism and church planting to social concern and development of Christian institutions. In the twentieth century other types of sending structures have grown up around the standard missions to either serve them (as with service agencies such as Wycliffe or Mission Aviation Fellowship), work in areas where they are less capable (such as

agencies specializing in relief and development), compete with them (such as those that advocate "national missions" as a less expensive alternative to sending Westerners or congregational in which direct sending bypasses missions agencies), or use them to facilitate their own version of missions (such as the short-term service phenomenon). Natural growth then leads to concerns about nurture and slows down evangelism. Other kinds of supportive ministries begin to occupy more time, attention, and finance in order to support the mission. What this means is that starting in the twentieth century, forms of missions have arisen that no longer share the idea that Christian missions is to the non-Christian world. Again, it is natural that people coming to our organization will be influenced by these trends and the result will be varying understandings of the goals of mission.

A third issue is the phenomenon of the social turn in North American Christianity. Until the 1950s there was a consensus that mission had to do with making disciples and planting the church. With the social turn, many Christians see mission as issue-based, focusing on some particular social problem. Those who take a more integrated approach would still maintain a strong connection to evangelism, church planting, and discipleship in the pursuit of responses to these social issues. However, for many people a conversionary agenda is seen as either improper or something that others do while they work on the issue they have chosen. We can no longer assume that people coming into AGWM share our values of reach, plant, train, and serve as an integrated whole of how we accomplish our mission to evangelize the world.

A Proposal for Defining World Evangelization

For the reasons suggested above, AGWM stands at an interpretive moment about how we will understand the vision of our founders to do the greatest evangelism the world has ever seen. The key becomes how should AGWM understand world evangelization today? Our proposal, based on the components in the definition of collective call and our foundational missiology of the indigenous church and partnership, is that the AGWM call to world evangelization means:

> *Proclaiming the gospel and planting the church in the power of the Spirit among every people where re-producing local communities of faith are not present to give life-giving witness to Jesus Christ.*

In what follows, we will give our reasons for this particular definition. First, cross-cultural missions at its core has always had taking the gospel to where faith and the church are without witness and presence. Note that this vision has grown from

Christians reading the Scriptures and the mandates given by the Lord Jesus Christ to His church in the five commissions (Matt. 28:18-20, Mark 16:15; Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:8). Second, the vision of the founders was to evangelize the world. They saw Pentecostal organization as mission-sending structure which included the entire world. The only reason to organize was to better work on world evangelization. By the 1922 General Council they were already shaping the work of missionaries by saying the Pauline model of going to the regions beyond should be followed. "Regions beyond" are indicative of where Christ is not faithfully proclaimed and the church has no expression of life, meaning, or relevancy to a people. Finally, our current mission realities and core concept of developing indigenous national churches means that the focus of all our missionaries and the existing national churches should be establishing church planting movements among those in our world who have the least access to the gospel.

How is World Evangelism Best Accomplished?

If we accept the idea that world evangelization should focus on planting the church of Jesus Christ among peoples where viable church-planting movements do not exist, then the next critical question is how do we as AGWM best accomplish that task? In line with our proposal we want to bring together two key elements that are central in AGWM missiology but are often considered separate from one another.

When it comes to ministry, Pentecostals see the personal call of the Spirit as central. It is the Spirit who calls, equips, empowers, and guides our service. Pentecostals also hold Scripture as being the rule for our faith and practice and base their work in mission on the call to the Church to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. Thus Acts 1:8 for Pentecostals is not only the prologue to the book of Acts that sets the frame for what happens in that book, but it becomes programmatic around our two central ideas of the Spirit and the Word. The call to go to the ends of the earth comes from the Scriptures and the empowerment to bear witness comes from the Spirit.

We propose here that the best way to work on the task of church planting is to bring together the personal call to ministry from the Spirit with the ultimate trajectory of God's glory among the nations in the Scripture. It is the Bible that sets the trajectory of the Spirit's call to the individual, and this means that the individual's call is embedded in the mission of God. The way we see a unifying trajectory rooted in God's mission and our Pentecostal heritage of Spirit baptism to do world evangelization does not eliminate personal call but shapes its understanding and gives it location and riverbanks.

The role of the mission agency is thus much more than facilitation of personal call, nor is the practice of mission to be shaped by personal interest, issue-based mission (e.g., human trafficking or other social justice concerns), mission-as-project views, or short-

term ventures. In the same way the work of the mission agency and its cross-cultural workers is not a managerial enterprise based on rational calculation and efficiency alone. Rather the Spirit is calling people to participate in the mission of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in their redemptive mission to all the tribes, tongues, peoples, and nations of the earth.

Our mission efforts through reaching, planting, training, and serving advance the goal of developing indigenous national churches that we then join in partnership with, which means that wherever missionaries find themselves working along a continuum of non-Christians—all the way up to robust indigenous national church movements—they can make a vital contribution towards this ultimate trajectory.

Notice that in the view we are proposing here the weight lies on the historical vision of world evangelization and makes personal calling find meaning and application in that setting. The overarching theme or motif in our work is taking the gospel to those who have least access where our mission team is working through the primary vehicle of establishing vibrant and reproducing church-planting movements. Reaching, planting, training, and serving becomes the methodology empowered by the Spirit as to how we holistically accomplish it. In this view, workers must align with the motif and pursue their understanding of their personal call within that backdrop.

Discussion of Issues that Arise Around the Notion of Collective Call

In this final section, we address some questions that have been raised regarding the idea of collective call. We look under four primary areas of concern and attempt to provide a perspective of how these concerns can be addressed while holding to the idea of collective call to an ultimate trajectory as a mission.

For some, having a focal point in mission such as "proclaiming the gospel and planting the church among every people where reproducing local communities of faith are not present" automatically introduces a division into the ranks of the mission team. Those more directly involved in church planting where no viable church planting movements exist are seen as more important and strategic than those working with the church. How do we address this concern?

First, all missionaries can have strategic importance as they align their work with God's ultimate redemptive trajectory. Most of our people are not used to explaining their ministry in terms of how it fits into the ultimate trajectory of God's mission. We can explain its importance in micro-terms but are less comfortable with the macro. The point is not whether we are in direct or indirect ministry in partnership with a national church

or are at the frontiers of faith, but whether we are working along lines that move us in a common trajectory of establishing viable church planting movements with whom we partner to advance the gospel in their nation and beyond.

Second, we all need to remind ourselves that God's mission requires the whole body of Christ and all the gifts; it is the Harvest Master who positions us where He chooses. Our significance comes not from our labors but from our relationship with God as sons and daughters, and our strategic import comes from our obedience to what He has asked us to do in His redemptive plan for the nations.

A related concern for those working in the church is that some will wonder if their call to work among the existing church is legitimate. As we have tried to show in the series of metaphors, work among the existing church is critical. Working in God's redemptive mission is not simply the domain of those who are called as cross-cultural workers. The indigenous church that is planted is a vehicle of accomplishing the mission in God's hands. Missionaries working in partnership with national churches and local Christians in reaching, planting, training, and serving do so with a view to help them to fully participate in God's mission themselves.

It is also important to reinforce that while God calls people to work among the already-existing church, this does not mean that every possible kind of work in those situations is equally strategic or aligned with the ultimate vision of getting the gospel to all the tribes, tongues, and peoples of the world. It is inherent in our ideas of the indigenous church that the mission band does not do everything that local church movements do. Rather the missionary team plants indigenous churches that then pursue God's mission among their own people and beyond. When cross-cultural workers do what local Christians or churches can or should be doing, they are no longer facilitating indigenous ministry and it is not true partnership. Partnership is not a rhetorical term to employ to "do what I want to do" in ministry. It means working with the national church movement to forward its goals of reaching and serving their people and helping them as a movement to work towards the vision of God's glory among the nations. The call to world evangelization is both in the depth of harvest and the breadth of harvest. But in pursuing that depth of harvest where a national church exists, for the missionary to be doing what local Christians can do and are doing, is to move away from indigeneity and not towards it.

This illustrates the fact that our mission principles of indigeneity already put constraints on personal call. John Bueno, in his report to the General Presbytery on August 11, 2010, shows this balance between personal call from the Spirit and the parameters that are given by the Scriptures:

> But I believe that not only Scripture but the practice of the Assemblies of God missions testifies to the fact that real growth appears when Spirit-led men and women follow in obedience to the promptings of the Spirit according to the precepts of the Word. We do, of course, have guiding principles in this action. It isn't just a free-for-all for anybody who wants to do what they want to do.

The idea of a collective call to plant the church where there is no life-giving witness of Jesus Christ does not delegitimize callings to work among existing national churches; in fact, by our notions of indigeneity it requires them. But by the same token it also makes more explicit a parameter that we have tended to hold tacitly: the promptings of the Spirit have to align with the precepts of the Word. The collective call notion puts the macro scope of God's redemptive mission among humanity as central to our reason-for-being as a missionary body.

Another area of concern is that collective call could mean managerial mission rather than being inspired by the Spirit. In our view, having a larger ultimate goal does not impede the sovereign call of the Spirit to ministry in any way. For instance, our core elements of reaching, planting, training, and serving provide definite boundaries for ministry, but are not seen as constricting or repressing personal call.

Finally, there is an issue that has affected those in Latin America and the Caribbean and Europe. It happens as a result of Assemblies of God U.S.A. pastors coming into contact with the missiology of unreached people groups and particularly as it is expressed in the popular concept of the 10/40 window. These well-meaning pastors want to be strategic in their giving and numbers have decided to cut support to all missionaries not working in the 10/40 window. These decisions have not been based on the kind of ministry being done in LAC or Europe, but rather on geography alone. We believe that framing the idea of a collective call that focuses on *planting the church where there are no viable reproducing communities of faith* offers a convincing apologetic as to why AGWM missionary efforts continue to be strategic in these regions.

Our hope is that a clear and compelling communication of the collective call as we have defined it will actually serve to help pastors grasp and appreciate more than ever the strategic role of those working among existing church movements as they connect their work with the ultimate trajectory of God's mission.

CONCLUSION

For early Pentecostals, who saw their experience of the Spirit as a restoration of the apostolic church, the call was everything. Historians of Pentecostalism in the United States tell us that the radical evangelicals who first experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit were predisposed already to distrust all forms of human organization. They looked for a final revival that would lead to world evangelization that would usher in the return of Jesus. In the midst of that early explosion of renewal what they got right was the connection between their experience of the Spirit and the evangelization of the world. However, many of the things they initially believed or expected would happen now look to us in retrospect as very naïve and biblically suspect. What ended up lasting out of this renewal, no doubt to the shock of these first Pentecostals, were groups that banded together, even when the majority around them made dire predictions about their demise when they let "man" get involved in organizing. Without that organizing, cooperation, and biblical shaping that began with the founding of the Assemblies of God and continues to this day, we would not be where we are as a movement in the U.S.A. and as the World Assemblies of God Fellowship around the globe.

Looking back, it seems unavoidable that it was the moderation and tempering of individual callings and initiative by the Spirit through cooperative organization and biblical parameters that provided the environment for successful and lasting missions work. We suggest that when considering the primary sources of Scripture, missions history, and our unique Pentecostal experience, aligning AGWM ministries and personnel called by the Spirit with the central motif of evangelizing where the church does not exist provides the surest way to best fulfill the vision of our founders and keep our mission focused on the desire of God's heart.

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