

PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION - #1

A RELATIONAL STUDY OF THE TRINITY AND THE EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS

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FORWARD TO THE 3-PART SERIES

This is the first of a 3-part series on the topic "Partnerships in Action" and the titles are as follows:

1. "Partnership" - A Relational Study of the Trinity and the Epistle to Philippians
2. Foresights of the Founder of C&MA – Albert B. Simpson
3. Historical Narrative of Partnership in Action and Diaspora Chinese – A Case Study of C&MA Ministering to and through the Chinese

These three articles are condensed from Johnny Yee-chong Wan's unpublished D.Miss. dissertation entitled "Partnerships in Action: A Relational, Historical and Diasporic Study of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) in China and Hong Kong," Western Seminary, Portland, Oregon, 2010.

For further study on the "Trinitarian paradigm," see the earlier work: "Understanding 'Relationality' From A Trinitarian Perspective," by Enoch Wan and Mark Hedinger, published in *Global Missiology, Trinitarian Studies*, January 2006, www.globalmissiology.org.

For further study on "relational paradigm," see the following articles:

- Enoch Wan, "Relational Theology and Relational Missiology," *Occasional Bulletin*, Wheaton: Evangelical Missiological Society, Winter 2007, Vo. 21, no. 1, p.1-7.
- Enoch Wan, "The Paradigm of 'relational realism'," *Occasional Bulletin*, Vol. 19, No. 2, p.1-4. Spring 2006b.
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A RELATIONAL STUDY OF THE TRINITY AND THE EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to present a relational study on partnership based on the doctrine of the Trinity and Paul's Epistle to the Philippians. Interdev¹ founder, Phill Butler, pointed out that partnership, a recent trend in the modern context of competitive and market economies, has long been operative in Christian missionary work and has its origin in the Bible.² In "The Power of Partnership-Working Together to Reach the Unreached," Butler wrote, "The Scripture, international business experience, a growing trend worldwide toward collaboration, and ordinary common sense all point in the same direction: Partnership"³ adding, "Partnership is an idea whose time has come in the world of missions." In the preface to Butler's book, McKaughan made the following observation, "Partnership seems to me to be one ... light-catching facet of God's singular jewel of revelation. Partnership is biblical, current and compelling."⁴

¹ Interdev, short for "international development," was founded in 1974 specifically for serving the Church by developing effective self-sustaining ministry partnerships globally. Interdev, "Strategic Evangelism-Working Together," Pamphlet. (Seattle: Interdev, 1999), 2.

For more information about Butler and his Strategic Partnerships ministry, see "Diplomatic Savvy for the Sake of the Unreached" by Russell G. Shubin in "Mission Frontiers" (October 1999), 14-18.

² In his article "Toward a Theology of Mission Partnerships," Charles Van Engen gives a very brief but precise introduction to the development of Christian (Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant) partnerships in mission. Charles Van Engen, "Toward a Theology of Mission Partnerships" in *Missiology: An International Missiological Review*, Number 1 (Scottsdale: American Society of Missiology, January 2001), 13-15.

³ Phil Butler, "The Power of Partnership-Working Together to Reach the Unreached," Booklet (Seattle, WA: Interdev, 1998), 5-6. In book *Partnering in Ministry*, Luis Bush has pointed out that the partnerships are everywhere, whatever it is for business, for political power, for better world, for survival and for Christian ministries. Luis Bush and Lorry Lutz, *Partnering in Ministry: The Direction of World Evangelism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 11-17.

⁴ Phil Butler, "The Power of Partnership-Working Together to Reach the Unreached," Booklet (Seattle, WA: Interdev, 1998), 3. At the back of the book, *Building Strategic Relationships: A Practical Guide to Partnering with Non-Western Missions* written by Daniel Rickett, in his recommendation Paul McKaughan highly appraises "Partnership is an essential modern day tool for global ministry."

A Trinitarian Study of Partnership

The Triune God illustrates a supreme model of partnership in His works of creation and of salvation. God acted by becoming a human, the Messiah. Before His disciples, Messiah Jesus has put into practice a divine-human partnership as an example for Christians of all generations to imitate in fulfilling His Great Commission. Thus, the Apostle Paul and the Philippians, amongst whom he ministered, followed a most excellent model of human-human partnership in mission.⁵

The Trinitarian Model⁶ of Partnership

Although little is said in the Bible regarding the intra-Triune relationships before the Creation, the pre-fall world⁷ reflected the work of the Trinitarian partnership. Before Adam was created, the Triune Persons communicated with each other, saying, “Let us make⁸ man in our image, in our likeness” (Gen. 1:26). After the world became corrupt, the divine partnership provided for human salvation through its redemptive plan. The Father sent the Son by incarnation into the world to make atonement for the world. After the Son’s resurrection, the Father and the Son sent their Holy Spirit to the world to continue that redemptive work by through the Church, the people of God during the New Testament era. Donald A. Carson commented:

The Son enjoyed equality with God before the incarnation, but, far from wishing to exploit his status, in obedience to his Father’s commission emptied himself, became a servant, and died the odious death of the cross (Phil. 2:6-11). In John’s Gospel, the Son’s love for the Father is expressed in unqualified obedience (e.g., John 8:29; 14:31). The Father’s love for the Son is displayed both in withholding nothing from him and in

⁵ These three models of partnership can be seen in Simpson’s theology of world Evangelization. See figure 1 in the 3rd article of the 3-part series.

⁶ For further study on the “Trinitarian model,” see Understanding “Relationality” From A Trinitarian Perspective,” by Enoch Wan and Mark Hedinger. Published in Global Missiology, Trinitarian Studies, January 2006, www.globalmissiology.org

⁷ The original creation was perfect and good. After finishing His creation work in the evening of the sixth day, the Bible tells us that “God saw all that He had made, and it was good.” (Gen. 1:31)

⁸ “Let us make” means that the Triune God will make man under an equal partnership with each other.

“showing” him all that he does, including commissioning him with a mission that ensures all will honor the Father (John 3:35; 5:16-30).

The Father sends the Son, the Son goes.... After his death and exaltation, the Son bequeaths the Spirit...⁹

Figures 1 and 2 below are the diagrammatical explanation of partnership and the Trinity.

Figure 1 — Partnership within the Triune God

GOD	THE FATHER	THE SON	HOLY SPIRIT
THE FATHER		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Obeys the Father's will (perfect obedience) -Intercedes to the Father on behalf of believers; Mediates the -Fathers= blessings -Mutual counsel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The Father's agent of creation -Agent of Revelation -Is the agent of God's wisdom, power and knowledge -Proceeds from the Father -Mutual counsel Gen. 1:26
THE SON	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Sends the Son -Gives him Power -Mutual love -Mutual Glorification -Mutual counsel 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Came upon Mary and Jesus was conceived (agent of virginal conception) -Filled the Son from his birth; and in baptismal and after baptism (authenticates Jesus' Messiahship) -Empowered Jess to serve -Mutual counsel
HOLY SPIRIT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -In OT, Holy Spirit sent to authenticate the anointing of the king -The Father sends the Holy Spirit as a helper to Christ's disciples to all believers in conversion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The Son sends the Holy Spirit -Jesus Baptizes with the Holy Spirit (agent of regeneration) -Mutual counsel 	

⁹ Moreau (ed.), “Trinity” written by Donald A. Carson, *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 970.

Figure 2 — Partnership of the Trinity in Mission

AREA	RE: TRIUNE GOD	DESCRIP-TION	THE TRIUNE GOD			HUMAN CULTURE	
			FA	SON	H.S.	Christian	NON-XN.
MES-SENGER / MES-SAGE	from	-divine missions of the Son & H.S. -Gospel of salvation from the Trinity	-sends the Son -loves the world-elects the saved	-sent by the Father -incarnation, atonement, the Way, the Truth, the Life	-Sent by the Father & Son-illumination, regeneration	-sent by Christ & guided by H.S.-beneficiary / bearer of the Gospel	-receive/reject the Messengers -receive/reject the Gospel
MOTIVE / MODE	for	-unity of the Trinity in love	-love: sent the Son & H.S. -grace: general for all; especial for saints	-submits to Father & incarnated: love -Immanuel, incarnation, identification	-pours forth God's love in believers' heart-habitation, guidance	-love of God-compassion for the lost	-receive / reject God's love thro Christians -saved & incorporated or judged
MANIFESTATION-MEANS	with	-Kingdom (already but not yet) -access to the Father thro Christ in the spirit	-sent H.S. as gift of the risen Christ-in Christ thro the H.S.	-in words & deeds, by miracles, etc. -by Christ's authority & in His name	-individually: fruit of Spirit; institutionally: gifts of Spirit -endowment & empowerment	-Xn. unity & love as in the Trinity -the Church: God's children, X's body & Spirit's temple	-rebellion against God or receive the Gospel

The Divine-Human Model of Partnership – A Vertical Dimension

The “cultural mandate” and the Great Commission comprise a two-fold mission since both creation and salvation are provided by the Triune God. After the creation, God commanded and blessed man to accomplish His will and plan in the world as an agent of God. The great heroes of faith described in Hebrew chapter eleven were agents of God. In his Great Commission Christ told His disciples, “I am with you” — God-human partnership in mission, and “Make disciples” — human-human partnership in mission. In the sending of the first evangelistic band, Barnabas and Saul (later the Apostle Paul)¹⁰, demonstrated how God involved the Church (Christians of all generations) to partner with Him in the mission of the Salvation.

¹⁰ “The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 13:4).

A Human-Human Model of Partnership – A Horizontal Dimension

Paul and the believers in Philippi demonstrated a model for partnership in mission,¹¹ that between missionary and church. In an article titled “In Pursuit of True Christian Partnership: A Biblical Basis from Philippians,” Luis Bush pointed out that the theme of the Epistle to the Philippians is the joy in a partnership between the missionary, Paul, and the church in Philippi, he wrote:

The biblical basis of true Christian partnership is contained in the Apostle Paul’s letter to the church in Philippi. The Paul-Philippians partnership reveals the ingredients of successful partnerships for the twenty-first century. These are qualities that should be part of our partnerships, whether they be between individuals, churches, or missions.

The content of the letter uncovers the essential ingredients of the partnership that made Paul rejoice again and again and will make those involved in similar partnerships rejoice greatly. In fact Philippians could be called “a manual on genuine Christian partnership.”¹²

Bush presented some essential ingredients of a genuine Christian partnership in a progression of thought patterned on the book of Philippians:

- The Meaning: association of two or more autonomous bodies (1:1-11)
- The Goal: advancement of the Gospel (1:12, 1:5)
- The Foundation: the Triune God Himself (1:12-24, 3:21)
- The Philosophy: sharing complementary strengths (1:2-1:11)
- The Tangibles in developing Christian partnerships: sharing information and money (2:12-19, 1:9-10, 4:10-17)

¹¹ In this section, “Christian partnership” which is Luis Bush’s term in a more general sense, is equivalent to the “partnership in mission” in this study.

¹² Kraakevik & Welliver (co-ed.), 4 & 5.

- Gifted personnel (2:25)

The intangibles in developing Christian partnerships: bonded suffering, encouragement and prayer in love (2:19-4:7).¹³ These points are further elaborated below.

Partnership in the Epistle to the Philippians

Paul described his relationship between the recipients of the Letter and himself as a “partnership in the Gospel”¹⁴ (1:5). That theme can be developed as follows.

The Meaning of Partnership

Paul and the Philippians are partners, first, because both are saints, a people consecrated to God, his covenant people (1:1-2). Secondly, they are partners because both have been called to serve the living God (1:1). And, thirdly, they are partners because they have a common heritage in Christ. The root meaning of partnership is a “sacred fellowship”¹⁵ in love for Christ and in an urgency to make Him known. Bush advances a definition of Christian partnership as “an association of two or more Christian autonomous bodies who have formed a trusting relationship and fulfill agreed-upon expectations by sharing complementary strengths and resources to reach their mutual goal.”¹⁶

The Goal of Partnership

One of the strongest bonds in Christian partnership is the sharing of a common goal. Paul expressed his joy that the Philippians were partnering together with him in the Gospel. The advance of the Gospel was the common goal of their partnership which

¹³ Kraakevik & Welliver (co-ed.), 5.

¹⁴ “Because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,” (1:5 *NIV*)

¹⁵ Bush writes, “The Greek word (koinonia) used for partnership in Philippians can also be translated as ‘fellowship.’ ‘Koinonia’ is derived from the word ‘koinonos’ which means a ‘sharer.’ Koinonos in turn, is derived from the word ‘koinos’ which means ‘common.’ A koinonia is an association of those who share something in common.” Kraakevik (co-ed.), 6-7.

¹⁶ Kraakevik & Welliver (co-ed.), 7.

bound them together and kept their partnership working. This Bush calls a “focused vision”¹⁷ (3:1-16).

The Foundation of Partnership

To both Paul and the Philippians Christians the foundation of their partnership was none other than Christ himself (1:19-26). To Paul, life meant Christ; he could not think of life except in terms of Christ. The second chapter presents an inspired glimpse into the very nature of Jesus Christ. Four great acts of God are captured as simple facts: “He *made* Himself nothing,” (2:7); “He *humbled* Himself,” (2:8); “God *exalted* Him to the highest place and *gave* Him the name that is above every name” (2:9). These realities were foundational to every aspect of Paul’s life and ministry and thus were the common denominator in his partnerships. This passage directly relates to Christian partnership: “to consider others as more important than yourselves”¹⁸ (2:3).

A Philosophy of Partnership

Through the sharing of complementary gifts, each partner enables the other to grow. Each member in the Paul-Philippians partnership wanted the other to grow, so gave the other opportunity, capacity, or means to fulfill their mission. Above all, Paul pointed to the supreme example of Christ who gave Himself completely to enable believers to become more like Him (3:21). Paul describes Jesus, the model servant, as the enabler *par excellence*.

¹⁷ As a contemporary application, Bush writes, “First, focused vision attracts attention and commitment from others. Secondly, focused vision allows international partners to position themselves within their history and their own context. They are not intimidated. They establish trust in other Christian partners. They function with reliability. Thirdly, international partners with focused vision empower others as Paul did.” He adds, “One of the hopes for the church in the West today is the spiritual empowerment that it can receive from the church in the Two-Thirds world as it seeks to empower the Two-Thirds world partners materially. Mutual empowerment comes when they have a mutual goal of advancing the gospel.” Kraakevik & Welliver (co-ed.), 7-8.

¹⁸ Kraakevik & Welliver (co-ed.), 8-9.

From this model Bush applied several principles of enablement to healthy Christian partnerships.¹⁹ From Philippians chapter two he underscores Paul's application of the believers' "high calling" to:

Look out for the interests of your partner (2:4).

Develop a servant attitude, with Jesus is the supreme example (2:5-9).

Continually seek to meet your partner's legitimate needs (2:8).

Identify with your partner (2:7).

Recognize that enablement is costly. You may have to renounce some of your own rights (2:8).²⁰

Tangibles of Christian Partnership

A trust relationship grows out of a properly-formed partnership and leads to a sharing of resource for ministry which included information and money (2:19, 1:9-10). Epaphroditus brought information from the church to Paul, and Timothy took information from Paul to their partner in Philippi. Pertinent information is a precious resource. Every partnership calls for a transparent sharing of information about success and failure in the overall task of advancing the gospel. Paul's honesty in sharing information about his own ministry is evident throughout his letter. Accountability, the flip side of trust, is built upon an open sharing of information, for it is difficult to trust someone who is unwilling to be accountable, just as it is humiliating to be accountable to someone who does not trust you. Accountability is scriptural, and Paul made proof of his honesty and integrity. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul wrote about money, recognizing what every Christian partner must, that the ultimate source of all supply is God Himself. God is a giver, having His own purposes and wisdom, and has chosen to bless individuals, organizations, and societies with an abundance of funds, holding them responsible as stewards in charge of His property. Ownership does not belong to a steward. As funds are released for God's

¹⁹ Kraakevik & Welliver (co-ed.), 10.

²⁰ Kraakevik & Welliver (co-ed.), 10. Bush, 27-28.

work, they return to His control. A steward's accountability to his master does not imply mistrust. Rather accountability of time and money not only helps partners maintain trust but gives opportunity for rejoicing in God's work and provision.²¹

Intangibles of Christian Partnership

Three intangibles of a partnership bonded in love include suffering, encouragement, and prayer. Firstly, regarding his "partnership in suffering" (3:10), Paul was willing to pay whatever any price to know and serve Christ fully, knowing that as he suffered, Christ would not forsake him. Every pain would help him better to know and identify with the suffering that Christ had endured for him.²²

Secondly, there was a "partnership of encouragement" (2:19-30, 1:14). The church had heard about Paul's arrest in Jerusalem and wanted to encourage him. So they sent Epaphroditus to assist Paul with his needs (2:25). Apart from bringing an offering, Epaphroditus stayed with Paul and ministered to him, so much so that he himself became ill (2:25-30).

Thirdly, Paul and the Philippians partnered in prayer (4:5-7, 1:3-11, 1:19). This passage teaches that intimate human relationships and the motivation to pray are intricately interwoven. Paul's warmth of love and emotion pours itself out in fervent, frequent prayers of praise for what this partnership meant to him. He prayed that they would love more, learn more about spiritual truth, and gain discernment to make the right choices in their upward walk.²³

²¹ Kraakevik & Welliver (ed.), 10-12.

²² Bush, 28-29.

²³ Kraakevik & Welliver (ed.), 12-14.

Paul may have met the Philippians face to face only two or three times, yet they had been working together in partnership for some ten to twelve years.²⁴ Although their communications were probably through letters and by a few travelers, they maintained a genuine and effective partnership in Gospel, for they were bonded by love in Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Triune God is Himself the source and foundation of Christian partnerships. By their love for Christ, The Holy Spirit initiates and empowers believers, members of the Body of Christ, the Church. They are a living and working community witnessing to the world for the advancement of the Gospel through partnerships, sharing complementary strengths, both informational and financial.

CONCLUSION

In this study, a relational framework has been employed to discuss the theme of “partnership” which began with the doctrine of the Trinity and ended with Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians.

As a sequel to this 1st piece, the next two articles of the 3-art series will be entitled as follows:

- Foresights of the Founder of C&MA – Albert B. Simpson
- Historical Narrative of Partnership in Action and Diaspora Chinese – A Case Study of C&MA Ministering to and through the Chinese

²⁴ Bush, 24.