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**Guest Editorial**  
**“Time and Revival”**

Wanjiru M. Gitau

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This issue of *Global Missiology* invites a reflection on one of the dynamics of revival: time. How we come to view time determines what we think revival ought to be, when it ought to come, and who we think is the agent of revival.

Take the case of John the Baptist. He comes to the scene in the style of one of the Old Testament prophets. His people have been waiting for God’s visitation for a long time. Bible scholars tell us that for 400 years there had not been a word from the Lord. That is a long time. That is just about the equivalence of the time that the children of Israel were sojourners in Egypt, enslaved for a significant part of that time. During their time of slavery in Egypt, “The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went to God. God heard their groaning and remembered... his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, with Jacob. God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them....” The ESV puts it this way: “God heard... God remembered... God saw... God knew” (Exodus 2:23-25). God then sent Moses to forcefully compel Pharaoh to release the children of Israel. What a confrontation it turns out to be before the Hebrews can experience freedom and renewal as God’s covenant people on their way to the Promised Land. The plagues, the Passover, escape through a dried-up sea, 40 years flight and sojourn through the wilderness, all the way to the Promised Land: all these are part of a package in time, *chronos* time.

The period of the Judges also lasted about 400 years. Israel, already settled in the Promised Land, went through cycles of decline, conquest, repentance, renewal. In the book of Judges, we find the pattern known as the “Judges Cycle” that went something like this: At first, Joshua settled Israel in the land. While Joshua lived the people served the Lord, but then a new generation emerged “Who did not know the Lord and what he had done for Israel.” They began to sin through idolatry. So, the Lord allowed their enemies to defeat them (Judges 2:6-10). However, every time Israel was defeated and ruled by enemies they would cry out to God. God would raise up “a judge,” essentially a charismatically gifted warrior. God would “anoint” or pour out his Spirit on this person—contrary to their own imagination about their capacities to lead a contingent of disassembled tribes—to fight their enemies and turn back them back to God-consciousness and away from idolatrous associations with their neighbors. For a time, such a leader would help re-establish the people’s relationship with God. Even in such circumstances, the writer of Judges says the nations oppressed Israel “For the testing of Israel, to know whether Israel would obey the commandments of the Lord, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses” (Judges 3:4). When the judges/charismatic leaders followed the Lord and led the people, the land was said to enjoy rest. From a revival perspective, we might see this condition as spiritual renewal, and flourishing of God’s people. Othniel, Ehud, Gideon, Deborah, Samson, Jephthah.... These are some of the names of the leaders, themselves quite problematic in character and makers of dubious decisions (except for the female leader, Deborah). What we note about the cycles is how they unfolded: the people would enter into idolatrous relationships with their neighbors and abandon God; God would get angry and allow their enemies to defeat them; the people would cry out to God for deliverance; then God would raise a judge to deliver them, and the people would turn back

to God under the tenure of that judge. To be sure, the book of Judges is designed to anticipate the uniting of the tribes of Israel under a monarchy, particularly under the most prominent king that Israel ever had, David. That framework points to the recurring renewals' ultimate focus—as well as the focus of revivals in general—on the ultimate King, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Finally, there was the 400-year “intertestamental gap” between the last Old Testament prophet, Malachi, and the appearance of John the Baptist as the messenger who prepared the way of the Lord. The biblical canon does not include material on this period, but we know from various sources that during the intertestamental period Palestine, the land of the Jews, was progressively occupied and ruled by Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians and Medes, Greeks, and finally the Romans, with varying degrees of oppression for the people. The Jews who had returned from exile in Babylon had rebuilt the temple under Zerubbabel's leadership, yet its glory could not be restored to the glory of the Solomon's temple. Jews had gradually learned to worship in local assemblies known as synagogues, where we frequently meet Jesus, and later Paul, participating in spiritual life. Zerubbabel's temple had been desecrated and destroyed, and Herod had rebuilt a temple. Israel's religious life was centered in the temple. But by the time of Jesus the temple was no more than a “a den of robbers.” At least that is how Jesus saw it when he drove the money changers out, as recorded in Luke 19: 46: “‘It is written’, he said to them, “‘My house will be a house of prayer’ but you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’” In the intertestamental period, the centuries before the Baptist, religious life had codified into crusty forms, formalized around the class statuses of the temple operatives, the Sadducees, teachers of religious law, the Pharisees, and the spiritual rebels, the Essenes. Yet missiologist historians have come to see this long *chronos* time as the period that prepared the world to experience the explosive spread of the gospel once Jesus and the movement he began came onto the scene. *Koine* Greek spread as the lingua franca of that part of the world. Pax Romana created roads and highways and trade routes and port cities that would later welcome evangelists like Paul, Philip, Barnabas, and others.

To return, then, to where this editorial began, the entry of John the Baptist captures our attention against this schema of 400 years: 400 years of Egyptian servitude; 400 years of a cycle of sin, oppression, crying out, repentance and redemption; 400 years of occupation by foreign powers amidst God's silence to his people; 400 years of anticipation for the coming of the Messiah. And when he arrives, he is nothing like what people expect. First of all, he is preceded by a prophet figure, the Baptist, who does not endear himself to anybody. He is a man of the wild, a man who eats honey and locusts and dresses in animal skins, with zero sense of finesse. He is no caricature either. He insults the most powerful. “You brood of vipers!”, he calls the crowds that come to him. He spews out the threat of a fiery judgement upon the puppet king, Herod, for his adulterous relationship with his brother's wife. But he carries forth a profoundly humbling message: “Repent!” The crowds ask, “What shall we do?” “Whoever has two shirts, share with the one who has not.” Tax collectors ask, “Teacher, what should we do?” “Don't collect more than you are required to.” Soldiers ask, “And what should we do?” “Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay.” Then strangely, this John is locked up in prison and eventually dies a gory death at the hands of a conniving woman, her daughter, and that cowardly King Herod. The incongruity of the revivalist preaching of John and the crowds that follow him, and his anticlimactic, tragic death, should not be missed by those of us who ache after prophetic revivals. When Jesus comes onto the scene, he is no John the Baptist, either. He comes quietly. He eschews public applause till the very last week of his earthly ministry. He will eventually have crowds follow him, but he goes about quietly preaching, teaching, healing, proclaiming, essentially, that

in *him* the kingdom of God had arrived, and was growing like leaven, like the mustard seed, like a hidden pearl. And he calls the few who consistently follow him to do the same—to go about healing, teaching, becoming salt and light in a world that sorely needs seasoning and lighting.

In contemplating revivals and renewal periods, I am inclined to find the paradox reflected in the extensive biblical time periods instructive. Some readers may have been making comparisons with the 400-year periods in Ralph Winter’s “Ten Epochs of Redemptive History,” discussed in *Global Missiology* a few years ago (Jennings, 2021); that comparison is not what I am referring to here. Rather, modern humans, Christians not exempted, have come to place emphasis on the autonomous subject who adulates quick gratification, revels in a sense of being in control of history, and is uncomfortable with this notion of long stretches of *chronos* time—clock time—by any stretch of the imagination, when there seems to be little that God is doing. Yet, the long stretch of historical chronological time is filled—pregnant, some might say— with God’s action. God is at work, all the time, whether we see an in-breaking manifestation of revival taking place or not. We ought to pray to discern his presence in the midst of what seems like apparent absence. God is the God of time, of space, of history. “He formed the earth; he fashioned it, he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited. I am the Lord, and there is no other” (Isaiah 45:18). God is the God of those times when there does not seem to be an overwhelming presence of his Spirit in our midst. He has a different sense of time than we do, writes the Psalmist: “For a thousand years in his sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night” (Psalm 90: 4). So in the times when we have no fires of His Spirit blazing, God has not forgotten the world he created: “He knows how we are formed; he remembers that we are dust; the life of mortals is like grass, they flourish as the flowers of the field, the wind blows over it and it is gone, its place remembers it no more, but from everlasting to everlasting, the Lord’s love is with those who fear him, his righteousness with this children’s children...” (Psalm 103:14-17).

Hope should not only be predicated on the in-breaking of the Spirit—though when the breakthrough happens, we should be ready for it. Rather, hope should be centered on the leavening impact of God’s faithful, covenantal presence in the midst of the world he made, the world he inhabits with us, working quietly, silently in the course of regular *chronos*. To borrow a lesson from Israel in Egypt, Israelite tribes in the Promised Land during the time of Judges, the crowds thronging the Baptist’s preaching by the Jordan: circumstances of oppression, struggle, suffering, and alienation always give us good reason to long for God’s intervening-in-breaking in some extraordinary way. And cry we must, whether that cry is expressed as prayer or groaning. We might even be the leader in the position of the Baptist, spiritually clued in to the fact that something unusual is about to happen. A series of events have converged. Clouds have appeared on the horizon. Yet, we still can’t bring in God’s in-breaking by sheer willpower. When Jesus is baptized, comes on the scene, and goes about quietly doing his thing, the Baptist is baffled. The Baptist sends his disciples to ask why Jesus isn’t causing a scene: “Are you the one or should we expect another?” (Luke 7:20). Why aren’t you raining judgement? Jesus’s answer is instructive: “That very hour Jesus healed many people of their diseases, afflictions, and evil spirits, and He gave sight to many who were blind. So he replies, ‘Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the one who does not fall away on account of Me’.” Jesus acts in *chronos time*. An in-breaking, sure enough, but not on a timetable, and certainly not for show.

I think a re-acquaintance with time as the *chronos* dimension invites us to a re-acquaintance with time in general. Philosopher-theologians have invited us to remember several senses of time. One is to live well in physical time, that is, to attend to all matters physical while we wait for the King and his kingdom. Ecclesiastes 3:1-14: “There is a time for everything under the sun.” Do what you are meant to do at the right time. John the Baptist did not tell the soldiers to stop being soldiers, or tax collectors to stop being tax collectors. He charged them to do right by their profession, despite the expectation that God was about to break through into time. Second, as believers who are aware that we are in a privileged relationship with God in a world that is not yet enfolded into that privilege, we are called to be aware that we occupy “covenantal time,” or “kingdom time,” or what others call “liturgical time.” One of the implications of living with such a kingdom-time awareness is the transformation of suffering, pain, and struggle that makes us long so deeply for in-breaking of revival into redemptive possibility, for us and for the world around us. In Egypt, the redemptive possibility takes the form of breakout from the status quo of life under Pharaoh. Israel will first have to suffer a little while longer while Pharaoh stubbornly digs in. Even in that situation, “God heard... God remembered... God saw... God knew.” In Judges, redemptive possibilities take the form of mobilization of unwilling or disordered fighters. During that time, while everyone is doing what is right in their own eyes, “God heard... God remembered... God saw... God knew.”

In John’s time, redemptive possibilities look like the futility of life amid a colonial occupation by a heartless Roman system. In other words, conditions of life are not necessarily ameliorated by the possibility that God is breaking through. Still, “God heard... God remembered... God saw... God knew.” Living with a kingdom-time sensibility means we are aware that God sees, God remembers, God knows. That awareness is a profoundly hope-renewing encouragement within the context of *chronos* time. God’s silent action in the long-time stretches is what prepares us to enter into what theologians call *kairos* moments, that is, the in-breaking or breakthrough of winds that come at unplanned and unprecedented times, and which serve to catalyze new eras of *chronos*. A *kairos* opportunity comes when we least expect it, but how prepared we are depends on how well we occupy *chronos* time. God hears, God remembers, God sees, God knows. And God still acts.

## References

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# An Overview of The Shandong Revival of 1927-1937

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## Abstract

This article gives an overview of the Shandong Revival of 1927-1937 in China. In addition to discussing the political background of the revival, this study examines the fruit of both the Southern Baptist mission in China and the Norwegian Lutheran missionary, Marie Monsen. The article brings to the fore the waning memory of this important revival and serves as an encouraging reminder that God is still eager to bring revival again.

**Key Words:** China, missionaries, revival, Shandong, Southern Baptist

## Introduction: Background of Shandong Province

Situated on the shores of the Yellow Sea in East China, the area that is now Shandong Province has made major contributions to Chinese history. Shandong ('east of the mountains') derives its name from its location: east of the Taihang Mountains. At the heart of Shandong Province lies the Yellow River, one of the world's longest rivers and China's second longest, running the entire breadth of Shandong from west to east as it empties into the Yellow Sea. Its mouth is located in the Dongying district of Shandong. The Yellow River basin has been the birthplace of various ancient civilizations (Little, 1905), and Shandong has long carried major economic, cultural, and religious influences in China.

Currently, Shandong's influence on China can be seen economically. The province is an economic powerhouse with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) that is similar to that of Mexico and Spain combined. According to the latest numbers, if the province were a country it would rank 17<sup>th</sup> in terms of GDP output (The World Bank, 2024; Huld, 2023). Culturally, Shandong's Lu cuisine is one of China's eight great culinary traditions and can be traced back to over two millennia ago (China Daily Shandong, 2021), laying claim to being the oldest Chinese culinary tradition.

But perhaps one could make the case that Shandong's most significant contribution to Chinese history is religion. For instance, Mount Tai (Taishan in Mandarin), located in the city of Tai'an in Shandong, has been "continuously worshipped throughout the last three millennia" (UNESCO, n.d.-a). It is the holiest of China's Five Sacred Mountains (Meng, 2023). Taishan and Dai Temple, also in Tai'an, are two of the most preeminent centres of Taoism.

Moreover, just under a two-hour drive south of Tai'an is Qufu, the birthplace of the widely influential philosopher Kong Qiu (Confucius), founder of Confucianism. The Temple and Cemetery of Confucius in Qufu are centres of Confucianism and are marked by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a World Heritage Site (UNESCO, n.d.-b), as is Mount Tai in Tai'an (UNESCO, n.d.-a). Additionally, Buddhist temples just south of Jinan, the provincial capital, were once thought of as some of the foremost Buddhist centres in China (Kelly, 2007).

Digging further into this substantial religious heritage of Shandong, one will find several significant Christian movements. On multiple occasions, the Almighty God has poured out his Spirit on this province that currently has a population of more than 100 million people. God has moved in Shandong so significantly that Paul Hattaway (2018), who has served as a missionary in China for three decades, uses the phrase "the revival province" to refer to

Shandong. One of the most significant of these Christian movements was the Shandong Revival that started in the late 1920s and culminated in the 1930s.

This discussion will next summarize the political background that led up to the beginning of the Shandong Revival before offering an overview of the revival itself.

### **Political Background of China and Shandong Before the Revival**

The 1920s were difficult years in China generally and Shandong specifically. These years were marked by “unprecedented upheaval... warfare, banditry, famine and political agitation” (Tiedemann, 2022, p. 229). During this time known as the Warlord Era, China had been divided into sections, and various sections were ruled by powerful militarized cliques. The natural consequence of this fragmentation was constant civil war along with banditry and general insecurity. In the midst of such an environment, the minds of many Chinese intellectuals were ripe for a nationalistic movement (Jordan, 1976).

One such intellectual was Hawaii-educated politician and revolutionary Sun Yat-sen. Sun’s experience of Hawaii and America influenced him to become a proponent of Chinese nationalism and modernisation (Gonschor, 2017). He therefore led a nationalistic movement against the warlords but died prematurely due to illness on March 12, 1925 (Jordan, 1976).

One of Sun’s closest accomplices, Chiang Kai-shek, took over the leadership of this movement and on July 9, 1926 launched the Northern Expedition (Jordan, 1976). The Northern Expedition was a military campaign aimed at eradicating the warlords and creating a unified China. This campaign was launched in Guangzhou (also known as Canton) in the south and, having moved northwards, arrived in Nanjing in the spring of 1927. Almost immediately mass anti-foreigner riots broke out (Worthing, 2018). It is this turmoil that caused consulates of Western missionaries serving in northern and eastern China to request them to “evacuate their interior posts and find safe haven on the coasts” (Hansen & Woodbridge, 2010, p. 148).

This political and military situation is the setting that forms the background of the Shandong Revival. During this period, American Southern Baptist missionaries serving in Shandong fled to the coastal resort city of Yantai (then called Chefoo). Among them was Charles Lee Culpepper (1896-1986), a Texan Southern Baptist missionary. Norwegian missionary Marie Monsen (1878-1962), who at the time was serving in the Central China provinces of Henan and Hubei with the Norwegian Lutheran Mission (Tiedemann, 2022), also fled to Yantai. It was this seemingly serendipitous conglomeration of missionaries that became the catalyst of the revival.

### **The Beginnings of the Shandong Revival**

Culpepper, often known as C. L. Culpepper (1971), notes that it was at this time in Yantai during the political upheaval that “missionaries and church leaders in China began to sense a great spiritual need” (p. 12). Monsen (1961) writes similarly regarding this time: “Political unrest had ploughed deep furrows across ancient traditions and prejudices, not least the mighty fortress of idolatry, and all that went with it. It was a thought hidden in the heart that all this was preparing for times of revival, which caused deep joy. And when revival came, we saw the word of promise wonderfully fulfilled” (p. 36).

The beginnings of the revival are typically understood to have occurred when the missionaries gathered involuntarily in Yantai. Culpepper, whose wife, Ola, had developed optic neuritis in one eye ten years prior and was now losing sight in that eye, made an appointment to visit with Monsen in her apartment. In this first encounter between the two missionaries, Culpepper (1971) writes that as Monsen met him at the door her first question was, “Brother



Culpepper, have you been filled with the Holy Spirit?” Despite the fact that the filling of the Holy Spirit and prayer for healing seemed unorthodox for Southern Baptists, during that first meeting Culpepper proceeded to invite Monsen to visit with them at their residence the following day to pray for healing for Ola’s eye (p. 13).

The following day, about 20 people gathered at the Culpepper’s residence. There they “felt an electric excitement, a feeling that God was preparing us for something we had never known before” (Culpepper, 1971, p. 13). After praying for hours, Culpepper anointed Ola with oil. Those present testified that it felt as though God had walked into the room. As they were praying while kneeling in a circle, some of the local Chinese workers present at the meeting started to converse among each other (Culpepper, 1971, p. 14; Monsen, 1961, p. 55). They were confessing their hatred of one another and seeking forgiveness. Convicted of their sin, they accepted Christ. Furthermore, Ola’s eye was healed. Culpepper notes that that “was the most wonderful experience in our lives. We had never known such spiritual joy” (1971, p. 14). Regarding this day, Monsen (1961) writes: “The Holy Spirit of God was so really present among us that we felt His presence.... That was the first small beginning of a revival which, a few years later, grew into the largest revival any one mission in China experienced” (p. 55).

As the inland tension began to subside, missionaries returned from Yantai and other coastal cities to their interior mission stations in the autumn of 1927. Culpepper and other Southern Baptists also returned to their mission stations in Shandong while Monsen continued with her ministry and itinerancy in North and Northeast China. After spending time in Beijing and Shanxi Province, Monsen longed to be reunited with her American friends whom she had met in Yantai. In April 1929, as she was on her way to Shandong, she was kidnapped and held captive by pirates for 23 days (Monsen, 1961, p. 55). This incident was perhaps a sign of the dangers and anti-foreign sentiment that still lurked. During her time in captivity, Monsen gained encouragement from reading Isaiah 41:10 (Crawford, 1933). Encouraged by these words of Scripture she saw the time in captivity as an opportunity to share the gospel with the pirates (Monsen, 1961; Hansen & Woodbridge, 2010). When she was released and eventually made it to Shandong, Monsen became the catalyst of the revival in that province and beyond.

The revival spread from its origins in Yantai to Southern Baptist mission stations in Shandong including the provincial capital, Jinan. Along with the filling of the Holy Spirit, one of the other prominent features of this revival was public confession of sin. In the honour-shame culture of China, such public confession was a strikingly counter-cultural event. Southern Baptist missionary Wiley Blount Glass (1874-1967) observes that “confession of sin was entirely out of character with the Chinese culture. The supreme importance of maintaining ‘face’ was bred into them from childhood” (Cauthen, 178, pp. 150-151).

### **Renewal and Revival in the Southern Baptist Mission and all over Shandong**

It is evident from Culpepper’s and Ola’s experience in Yantai that this revival took place not only among the Chinese but was a spiritual renewal for missionaries as well. In the 1920s, a decade of political and religious persecution as well as strong anti-foreign sentiment, both Culpepper and Monsen write of churches that were dead and missionaries that had become defeatist. During that time of revival, foreign missionaries as well as Chinese Christians were filled with the Holy Spirit. Mary Katherine Crawford (1888-1979), another Southern Baptist missionary serving in Shandong at that time, writes that “from September, 1931 to June, 1932, at least twenty-four missionaries and many Chinese leaders had had a definite experience of the baptism in the Holy Spirit” (Crawford, 1933, p. 40). Crawford describes her own experience as such:

He (the Holy Spirit) took right hold of me and shook me (physically) as I would shake a rag, then He opened my mouth so wide that my jaw bones seemed like they would break, and the room was filled with wind and it literally rushed into me until I felt that I would burst. This happened four or five times. Then a great burst of joyous laughter that was different from any laughter that I had ever experienced, came right from deep down inside me. This happened over and over (pp. 47-48).

The revival brought new life to churches in the region. It literally “revived spiritually-dead churches” which had stopped holding services (Culpepper, 1971, p. 62). Culpepper observes that churches that previously only met when missionaries would visit them were now having regular worship services and prayer meetings. Lay people led services as church attendance “increased many times within a few months.” Those who attended were “serious workers for Christ” (Culpepper, 1971, p. 62).

So extensive was the transformation in Shandong that one missionary noted changes in Pingdu, a notoriously unsafe part of the province. Pingdu was an area that missionaries had previously declined nightlong stays in because of the risk of possible kidnapping by bandits for ransom. The revival, however, transformed this community, and missionaries could sleep with their doors wide open (Hansen & Woodbridge, 2010, p. 150). In the spring of 1932, about 40 new Christians were baptized in Pingdu (Crawford, 1933, p. 35).

### **Revival in Schools and Hospitals in Shandong**

Foreign missionaries had established schools, hospitals, and other facilities for civic use. These facilities became primary centres for the outflowing of God’s Spirit. At the seminary in Huangxian, where Dr. Culpepper’s Southern Baptist mission was located, there was concern about the declining student enrolment. However, at beginning of the term in October 1931, enrolment increased from four students to 25. Enrollment kept increasing year by year, and “within five or six years it had increased to more than 150” (Culpepper, 1971, p. 61).

Moreover, at the Southern Baptist mission schools in Huangxian, at the beginning of a new school year in a girls school that had about 600 students, one teacher reported, “when we arrived at the school, we found the girls in groups of two or three in a room, all in deep conviction of cheating on examinations, stealing peaches from the school orchard, lying to their parents and to others, and stealing pencils, pens, and money” (Culpepper, 1971, p. 42). There was a similar experience in the adjoining boys school as well. On seeing this situation, the principal of the boys school responded by inviting a local Chinese pastor as well as Culpepper, and together they organised twice-a-day meetings at the school chapel for ten days. Students from the two schools joined together in these meetings and filled the 1500-seat chapel to capacity. By the end of this time, the wooden floor of the chapel was tear-stained and all 600 of the girls and 900 of the one thousand boys became Christians (Culpepper, 1971, p. 43).

Culpepper (1971) tells the story of a boy whom he found lying under a bench at the back of the chapel. The boy was so deeply convicted of sin that he could not face himself or anyone else and, consequently, stayed under the bench. The boy said:

Mr. Culpepper, you don’t know me. I’m a communist. We have a secret communist cell here at the school. I’ve threatened to kill you and all the missionaries, and I’ve sworn to wipe out Christianity and burn your churches. When I heard about this revival, I thought the missionaries were just hypnotizing the students and that the concept of God was foolishness... (p. 44).

After the boy ended his confession he became “completely limp,” but he was eventually able to return to “normal” (Culpepper, 1971, p. 45). He accepted Christ as did other members of the communist clique. Culpepper observes that the communist cell was destroyed and while “about half of the members were saved during the meeting, the others left the school” (Culpepper, 1971, p. 45).

The revival reached Southern Baptist mission hospitals in Shandong as well. There are reports of nurses and patients accepting Christ and being filled with the Holy Spirit (Culpepper, 1971, p. 57). The missionary hospital at Pingdu had a doctor who had graduated from a renowned missionary hospital. However, he was a sceptic of Christianity and, as such, said that he would believe only if two of his paralytic patients were healed. The patients he was referring to were women who had been paralytics for 18 and 28 years, respectively (Crawford, 1933, p. 58; Culpepper, 1971, p. 66). Both these women were miraculously healed, and the doctor, “trembling with fear and conviction, repented and accepted Christ” (Culpepper, 1971, p. 66).

### **The Maddry Challenge**

There are several documented accounts of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Shandong specifically as well as North and East China generally. In particular, Western missionaries who were participants in these events have compiled noteworthy works that offer descriptions of the Shandong Revival. These works are moving, eyewitness accounts of miraculous healings along with dramatic changes and restorations in individuals, families, and communities. Previously fragile churches were also reenergized and filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. Missionaries such as Monsen, a Norwegian Lutheran, as well as Culpepper, Crawford, and Glass, all American Southern Baptists, have written accounts of the events of the Shandong Revival.

It is interesting to note that these missionaries came from Christian denominational backgrounds that typically eschewed emotionalism in Christian expression. With that in mind, perhaps the one of the most fascinating accounts of this revival comes from Dr. Charles Edward Maddry (1876-1962). In 1935, Maddry became the newly-elected secretary of the Southern Baptist’s Foreign Mission Board. When the accounts of what was happening in China reached the United States, there was suspicion and criticism. Culpepper (1971) writes that “some people began questioning the orthodoxy of our mission” (p. 77). Consequently, Maddry was sent to China and tasked with the responsibility of investigating the practices of the Southern Baptist mission in Shandong for perhaps what seemed to be unorthodox excesses of emotion. In a meeting held after his arrival in Yantai, Dr. Maddry set a challenge to his colleagues by saying, “Reports have come to America that the North China Mission has gone to extremes in this revival. My board has asked me to investigate. What do you have to say for yourselves?” (Culpepper, 1971, p. 77).

During this meeting, missionary after missionary came forward with testimony after testimony of what they had experienced during this time. At the end of the meeting, Maddry, who was in tears, said, “Brethren and sisters, I am going back home and tell my board that God has been walking in the midst of the North China Mission, and we had better go slow in criticizing them!” (Culpepper, 1971, p. 78). As a result of his trip to China, Maddry (1935) published an article in the Southern Baptist periodical *Home and Foreign Fields*. In this article, he writes:

A glorious revival is sweeping (the Southern Baptist missions of) Northern and Interior China, such as we have not seen in America in a hundred years. We have seen it and felt its power. It is a revival of fire and burning. Sin is being burned out of broken lives and men and women are being absolutely made over. The power of Christ has come to

grips with the power of Satan and it is a fearful conflict. Satan has held sway and dominion over China for unnumbered and weary centuries. His kingdom is suddenly being challenged and broken by the power of a risen and enthroned Christ (p. 6).

## Conclusion

The modern story of Shandong is one of economic might in a new age of ‘Chinese capitalism’ (Peck & Zhang, 2018; Bello, 2019). The story of the Shandong Revival seems to be increasingly fading in memory. Perhaps one reason for this fading memory was the gruesome years of war that seemed to halt the revival. In 1937, in one of the key events leading up to the Second World War, Japanese Emperor Hirohito’s Imperial Army launched a full-scale and bloody invasion of Chiang Kai-shek’s China in the Second Sino-Japanese War. Japanese communists launched a war against Chinese nationalists, and Shandong Province along with its war-strategic Yellow River were at the heart of the conflict. The brutal scale of the war crimes against Chinese civilians in this war has led some to refer to it as the “Asian Holocaust” (Todd, 2016) or the “Forgotten Holocaust” (Kang, 1995). Sadly, what followed in the aftermath of the revival was decades of war and persecution of the Church in Shandong and elsewhere in China (Hattaway, 2022). After spending much of his life as a missionary in China, Hattaway (2022) writes, “as seems the case with many revivals throughout history, the mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Shandong in the 1930s appears to have been part of God’s plan to strengthen His children before coming persecution” (pp. 98-99).

Despite wave after wave of religious persecution, it is a well-documented fact that Christianity has defied odds and grown unprecedentedly in China. Following the 1976 death of Mao Zedong and his Cultural Revolution, which was in part a brutal purge against Christianity and other ‘foreign’ religions, former British diplomat to China, Tony Lambert, writes, “No other church in the world has experienced between thirty-to-fifty-fold growth on such a scale in the short space of thirty years” (Lambert, 2006, p. 201). However, this growth of the Church has continued to be met with antagonism from the Chinese Communist Party. China’s current paramount leader, Xi Jinping, who is now president for life after the 2018 removal of presidential term-limits (BBC, 2018), is overtly critical of ‘foreign’ religions such as Christianity (The Guardian, 2015; Shellnutt, 2017). As President Xi continues to consolidate power, there has been an increasing persecution of the Church (ChinaAid Association, 2023).

Given this fact of increased persecution of the Church and what seems to be an uncertain future of ‘foreign’ religions in China, it is essential for us as contemporary Christians to jog our collective memory and encourage ourselves by remembering how our infinitely generous God lavishly poured out his Spirit powerfully in the Shandong Revival of 1927 to 1937. It ought to be encouraging to us that, just as God has poured out his Spirit and brought revival in the past, his extravagantly generous nature means that he is eager to pour out his Spirit and bring revival again. We Christians should therefore equip ourselves, just as Marie Monsen did a century ago, with unceasing prayer for revival.

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**Transforming Thailand:  
The Vision, Mission, and Impact of  
The Association of Free Churches in Thailand**

Dwight Martin

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**Abstract**

Within the spiritual landscape of Thailand, Protestantism, despite being introduced in the nineteenth century, has yet to establish a strong foothold. In contrast to its Southeast Asian neighbors, Thailand's adoption of Christianity has been more limited. However, the Association of Free Churches in Thailand (AFT), an indigenous organization, is leading a spiritual revival. Through AFT efforts, God is revitalizing the spiritual lives of the Thai people and ushering in a new era of faith through the transformative power of the gospel. This article describes the AFT's efforts and the accompanying, remarkable growth in followers of Jesus that is taking place.

**Key Words:** church planting, culture, discipleship, indigenous, Thailand

**Background**

Despite a 200-year presence of Christianity, it remains conspicuously absent in the majority of Thai villages. According to statistics from eSTAR Foundation in Thailand, an overwhelming 94% of these villages lack a Christian community (eSTAR Foundation, n.d.-a).

This absence has tangible repercussions for the dissemination of Christian beliefs; a significant portion of the Thai populace remains uninformed about the teachings of Jesus Christ. The reason for Thai people not knowing about Jesus is straightforward: the absence of Christians in their immediate vicinity.

Dwight Martin, a dual citizen of Thailand and the United States, has a unique bi-cultural heritage, having been born and raised in Thailand by missionary parents. His formative years in Thailand, coupled with his familial missionary background, have endowed him with a profound connection to the country and its religious landscape. Upon completing his high school education in 1974 Martin departed from Thailand, only to return in 2006, heeding what he describes as a divine summons.

Upon his return to Thailand, Martin assumed a pivotal role entrusted by the leaders of the Thai Protestant Church. These leaders expressed a pressing need for clarity regarding the Christian demography of Thailand, acknowledging a lack of comprehensive data on the number and distribution of churches across the nation. In response to this call, Martin took on the position of Research Coordinator, with the specific task of illuminating the obscured contours of the Thai Protestant community.

To address this informational deficit, Martin initiated the creation of the *Harvest Thai Church Database* (TUTHAI, n.d.). This digital repository was meticulously designed to collate and disseminate data related to the presence and geographical location of Protestant churches throughout Thailand. The establishment of this database represents a significant stride toward equipping church leaders with empirical insights essential for navigating and nurturing the Christian faith within a predominantly Buddhist society.

## A New Hope

In 2016, upon reviewing the sparse presence of churches and Christians in Thailand—a scenario persisting for two millennia—Martin faced an acute existential crisis. This crisis was precipitated by his decade-long, personal and meticulous observation of the Thai Church's stagnation. Confronted with the glacial pace of church growth, he was compelled to question the future prospects of Christianity's influence within the nation. It was during this period of skepticism that Martin encountered a seminal moment: the discovery of a scriptural passage that would invigorate his mission with newfound resolve and strategic focus.

The passage in question, Luke 4:43, encapsulated Jesus's purpose: "*I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose*" (ESV; emphasis added). Martin saw a connection between Jesus's preaching approach during his life on earth and the mandated town-to-town evangelistic method of Christ's body, the Church. Inspired by this divine mandate, Martin turned to the Harvest Thai Church Database, a repository of church-related data. His research extended beyond conventional statistics; he delved into the granular details, reaching down to the village level. Martin sought to discern whether the Christians in Thailand were in sync with Christ's purpose—to spread the good news of the Kingdom of God across every town and village.

His findings were staggering: approximately 95% of Thai villages remained untouched by the gospel message. This revelation became the catalyst for Martin's investigative odyssey. He sought to determine whether any organizations within Thailand were genuinely committed to bridging this outreach gap—to spreading the gospel across every town and village.

In the course of his inquiry, Martin's path intersected with that of Pastor Somsak, a fellow visionary. They shared a common goal: nationwide evangelism. Their collaboration would prove instrumental in reshaping much of the spiritual landscape of Thailand, transcending barriers and kindling a new hope. Martin's data-driven approach, fueled by Somsak's unwavering faith, exemplified the power of persistence and collective vision in reshaping the spiritual fabric of a nation.

During the same year, 2016, a powerful vision came to Pastor Somsak to significantly expand the footprint of the Free in Jesus Christ Church Association (FJCCA) footprint. Pastor Somsak is the leader of the FJCCA, a member organization under the Association of Free Churches in Thailand. Pastor Somsak's goal was ambitious: to establish 1,000 new churches and welcome 10,000 new believers by the year 2020. His vision caught the attention of Dwight Martin. Moved by the goals and the potential impact, Martin joined Pastor Somsak. Together, they embarked on a mission to bring the Kingdom of God into every village in Thailand, aiming to achieve the vision's bold targets. Their partnership became a key chapter in the AFT's story, significantly enhancing its mission to reach out and grow its community across the nation.

### Planting Seeds of Faith in Thailand's "Hard Soil"

In 2021, after successfully completing their 2016 vision, the Association of Free Churches in Thailand embarked on another mission, aiming to establish 800 more house churches by the year 2022. Leveraging the data available in the Harvest Thai Church Database, Martin realized that approximately 800 villages in the province of Phichit (approximately 300 km north of Bangkok, in east-central Thailand) lacked any gospel presence. Inspired by this alignment of numbers, Martin proposed an unprecedented initiative: to reach every village in Phichit Province and establish a house church within each one.



The strategic approach involved a systematic progression which the AFT leaders and church planters readily adopted. As AFT church planters brought the message of Jesus and the Kingdom of God to each village, they diligently formed house churches, fostering spiritual growth and community engagement. However, their mission extended beyond the village level. Once all the villages within a district were reached, the establishment of a district church followed suit. These district churches served as hubs for continued discipleship, ensuring that the seeds of faith sown in the house churches flourished and bore fruit.

Over the years Phichit Province had earned a reputation as “hard soil” for the receptivity of the gospel. Skepticism prevailed, and the prevailing assumption was that the local populace would resist the Christian message. However, the AFT church planters encountered a profound revelation: as long as the gospel was presented in a way that Thai people could understand, the people of Phichit were not resistant; in fact, they were hungry for the good news of Jesus. Their hearts longed for the transformative message of Christ. This realization infused the AFT mission with renewed vigor and unwavering determination.

By the close of 2022, the Association of Free Churches in Thailand achieved a remarkable milestone: the formation of a house church in every village and the creation of a district church in each district within Phichit Province. This concerted effort led to a profound spiritual metamorphosis, propelling Phichit from its former status as the 70th least-reached province for gospel presence in Thailand to an impressive rank as the fourth most reached.

The quantitative impact of this transformation is equally striking. In 2016 Phichit Province harbored a mere 477 church members. However, by April 2024 this number had surged exponentially, reaching a staggering 7,073 church members attending 1,010 house churches and 12 district churches. The legacy of this endeavor reverberates beyond mere statistics. Since then, the AFT has extended its reach to encompass every village in Phetchabun Province (adjacent to Phichit to the east), further solidifying their commitment to nationwide evangelism. Looking ahead, by this year's end, Nakorn Sawan Province (bordering Phichit to the south) is poised to witness the establishment of a house church in every village—a testament to persistence, collective vision, and the indomitable spirit shaping the spiritual fabric of a region (eSTAR Foundation, n.d.-b).

## **Evangelism**

The Thai cultural perspective is intrinsically intertwined with Buddhism, encapsulated in the axiom, “*To be Thai is to be Buddhist.*” This statement reflects the profound integration of religion within Thai national identity. The Thai worldview is a syncretism of Buddhism, animism, and Hinduism, together which frame life as a cyclical journey of karma and suffering. In their quest for existential answers, Thais perceive the pantheon of deities they serve as insufficient in providing an ultimate resolution. Many are in pursuit of a singular, true deity. From a Christian standpoint, we know Jesus fulfills this role.

Immersed in this rich tapestry of Thai culture, Somsak's worldview was intrinsically shaped by the enduring traditions and beliefs of his homeland. At the age of 24, Somsak and his wife found themselves in dire need of money. With three children to raise, they decided to seek financial assistance from Somsak's mother-in-law, who lived more than 120 kilometers away. When they arrived, they discovered that she was attending an evangelistic outreach meeting. So they decided to patiently wait until the service concluded to speak with her.

During this waiting period, they listened to the Thai pastor's message. The gospel message they heard was so compelling that they both made a conscious choice to follow Jesus. They received a real sense of peace and joy after they believed in Jesus, to the point that they forgot

to ask for the money! Once they returned to their home they were acutely aware that there were no other Christians within a 120-kilometer radius of their home. Their only option was to begin a journey of self-guided study and direct application of God's Word.

Their decision marked the beginning of a transformative journey. This direct and unfiltered engagement with the Bible fostered in Somsak a worldview that is "Biblical" in essence, rather than one that might be termed "Christian" in the conventional sense. The latter term often implies an accumulation of interpretations and practices that have crystallized over the course of 2,000 years of Christian history. In contrast, Somsak's stance is characterized by an immediate and personal interaction with Scripture, free from the layers of historical and cultural accretion that have traditionally shaped Christian thought and practice.

This mode of learning and spiritual growth had a distinct advantage: it allowed Somsak to interpret and practice his new faith without the overlay of Western ideological influences. This culturally congruent approach to Christianity is now a cornerstone of the AFT's strategy. The organization employs native methods of evangelism and discipleship that are both biblical and harmonious with the Thai populace's worldview.

The predominant evangelistic practices imported to Thailand emphasize a doctrine that one should "*Believe in Jesus, have your sins forgiven, and go to heaven*" formula. This approach does not resonate within the Thai conceptual framework, where "sin" is perceived as an action that exacerbates one's karma rather than an affront to a Creator God (Venerable K. Sri Dhammananda Maha Thera, n.d.). Moreover, the concept of heaven, while acknowledged as a desirable realm, is not viewed as a permanent destination in Thai belief systems (Barre Center for Buddhist Studies, 2005). Instead, the ultimate aspiration is Nirvana—a state beyond the transient pleasures of heaven (Lopez, n.d.). This divergence in eschatological understanding necessitates a tailored approach to evangelism that aligns with the Thai worldview.

Beyond these ultimate questions to life, Thais are searching for contentment and tranquility in this life. As a result, they often turn to material and temporal solutions such as wealth (despite widespread financial indebtedness), gambling, transactional rituals with supernatural deities, and the fleeting pleasures of sex and alcohol. These pursuits, however, do not provide lasting fulfillment. In contrast, the gospel message offers liberation from these dependencies, presenting Jesus as the source of true and enduring joy and peace.

In the process of making disciples, church planters from the Association of Free Churches in Thailand, rather than using traditional Christian or imported evangelism methods, recount their personal life stories. They describe how their faith in Jesus has provided a peace and joy they never experienced before and provided a pathway beyond the cycle of karma. They proclaim Jesus as the supreme deity, the embodiment of absolute truth, and the only divine figure who can liberate individuals from the endless cycle of sin and rebirth, thereby granting salvation. After they present their personal story, they invite others to believe in Jesus.

Upon an individual's initial encounter with Jesus and their subsequent invitation to believe, the inaugural phase of discipleship commences with an invitation to prayer. At this juncture, the individual's acquaintance with Jesus is nascent, and their comprehension is understandably partial.

At this point in the individual's experience, it is not within the evangelists' or church leaders' purview to judge the authenticity of that person's salvation. The church's mandate is to foster *discipleship*, and *prayer* serves as the foundational element of this process. Moreover, the practice of prayer—and notably, the experience of receiving answers to prayer—establishes

a conduit for ongoing engagement. This interaction facilitates the spiritual nurturing and maturation of these individuals, who are akin to “newborns” in Christ.

### **Discipleship**

Commonly, many Western trained Christians perceive evangelism and subsequent sinner’s prayer as the ultimate objective of reaching out to the unsaved. However, the Great Commission, as imparted by Jesus, mandates that the creation of disciples of Jesus, not converts, is the objective. It is through the sustained process of discipleship that the church planters of the AFT facilitate the transition of individuals from a Buddhist/Animist worldview to one that is biblically centered. This transformation is gradual and methodical, requiring persistent engagement and multiple interactions, usually over a six-month period. Only after a comprehensive understanding is achieved (as explained further below) do individuals make the decision to undergo baptism and integrate into the communal structure of a house church.

The six-month discipleship program is designed to transition individuals from an initial response to the gospel to a robust and well-grounded understanding of their identity as followers of Jesus Christ. The program is structured in the following four steps:

- *Relationship* – Working through the “Prayer Booklet” serves as the initial step, fostering a personal connection with Jesus. After praying to trust in Jesus and praying for divine help, many report miracles that have occurred in their lives. Others report other transformative experiences. However, the most common change can be described as a newfound sense of peace and joy.
- *Foundation* – “Plan of Jesus for You” is a booklet that lays the groundwork for comprehending the biblical gospel. This booklet’s effectiveness is maximized when utilized after the individual has cultivated a relationship with Jesus. Premature use may reduce it to just another tract with limited impact.
- *Confidence* – “River of Life” is engagement with the Book of John, including study and memorization of key verses. This stage provides an introduction to the Bible and bolsters confidence in the veracity of God’s Word.
- *Knowledge* – “Abundant Life” is a series of 17 foundational doctrinal lessons that build upon the established relationship with Jesus and understanding of the gospel. Topics include what it means to be born again, why we need to repent, the nature of devotions, the importance of being a disciple of Jesus, the significance of baptism and communion, and the role of mentorship.

This locally developed curriculum is designed to enhance the spiritual understanding and commitment of believers, fostering their progression towards a well-founded and mature faith. It is not within AFT leaders’ purview to determine or dictate the exact juncture at which an individual embraces belief in Jesus during their discipleship journey. The leaders’ function is to facilitate these individuals’ growth as disciples. The process of transformation is attributed to the Holy Spirit’s influence rather than human imposition.

During the initial phases of the new believers’ spiritual journeys, church leaders refrain from imposing constraints concerning customary cultural or religious rituals, such as temple visits. Leaders acknowledge that these individuals are in the nascent stages of spiritual development, akin to “infants in Christ.” Leaders expect that the new believers will of their own accord relinquish allegiance to other deities, forsaking previous practices to wholeheartedly follow Jesus alone.

The new believers publicly demonstrate their personal evolution through being baptized in the name of Jesus, aligning with the precedents set by the early disciples as documented in the

Book of Acts, Colossians 2:9-15, and Romans 6:3-4. Baptism serves as a testament to their decision to forsake previous beliefs and deities and fully commit to Jesus and His teachings.

The delineated process above describes the foundational phase of discipleship, designated as Level 1. At the conclusion of this stage, church leaders determine the participants that have a firm understanding of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ and baptize them. Within this structure, AFT leaders also discern a subset amidst the broader congregation through seeing how the Holy Spirit is using certain individuals for progression to Level 2 discipleship. These individuals are earmarked by AFT leaders for specialized training to fulfill the responsibilities of house church leadership.

Furthermore, AFT leaders identify a smaller group within the Level 2 cadre based on their passion for the ministry, abilities, giftings, and availability for advancement to become Level 3 leadership. This elite group is groomed to take on pivotal roles as senior church planters and district church leaders. This tiered framework underscores the dynamic and evolving nature of discipleship, reflecting a systematic approach to spiritual development.

The Association of Free Churches in Thailand commits to the ongoing cultivation and instruction of its members, fostering a consistent trajectory of spiritual maturation. This commitment ensures that discipleship is not a static experience but a lifelong journey of growth and learning.

### **Data-Driven Discipleship**

The AFT discipleship methodology, termed "Data-Driven Discipleship," is a strategic approach grounded in the scriptural mandates of Matthew 28:18-20 and Luke 10. This model emulates the mission of Jesus, who sent 72 disciples to various towns and villages to liberate them from spiritual darkness and introduce the Kingdom of God.

The graphical representation in Figure 1 below illustrates the *Great Commission* as the core of AFT's strategy, highlighted within the yellow circles. The operational framework involves assembling teams that mirror Jesus's selection of the 72 disciples. Each team is allocated a minimum of 20 villages, with the mandate to traverse every road and lane in search of "persons of peace." AFT's empirical data suggests that such individuals are present along every pathway in Thailand, necessitating proactive engagement to convey the gospel rather than the traditional passive approach of awaiting their discovery of our message.

Upon encountering receptive individuals, AFT evangelists share their personal relationship and experience with Jesus, and those who elect to place their faith in him are further nurtured in their spiritual journey. These "persons of peace" often become conduits for the gospel within their communities, inviting friends and neighbors to partake in the good news. This organic spread of faith culminates in the formation of a house church. When each village within a district has fostered such groups, AFT leaders then form a district church. Once this step is taken, there are hundreds of people from hundreds of villages desiring to be baptized (Martin, 2023).

The growth of these churches prompts continuous discipleship among both house and district church members, fostering the development of additional teams tasked with extending AFT's reach to adjacent districts. This expansion strategy seeks to gradually introduce the Kingdom of God to more villages and districts, ultimately encompassing the entire nation. The Anointing Church of Ranong and the Next Stop Church in Lampang have asked to join the AFT in this mission, believing that such collaboration can create a greater impact.

AFT employs a software app called “KapTrack” (Kaptrack, n.d.), a data management system, to meticulously document the burgeoning network of believers and churches. This systematic record-keeping ensures the integrity and accuracy of AFT’s data, facilitating the ongoing assessment and enhancement of its discipleship model.



Figure 1: AFT Data-Driven Discipleship

### Why This Methodology Works

The AFT mission is underpinned by a clear and universally supported vision. We in the AFT leadership are fortunate to have hundreds of dedicated volunteer church planters, driven by their passion to share the gospel with their fellow Thais. They are acutely aware that every minute, a Thai individual passes away without having heard about Jesus, and they are committed to reaching these individuals first.

The AFT approach is methodical and biblical. We systematically visit every village and road, seeking out “persons of peace.” These individuals are ubiquitous in Thailand, a country where people have been waiting for over 2,000 years to hear about Jesus. When they finally hear the gospel, it is incredibly good news.

AFT church planters maintain a comprehensive database of every new believer, recording their information. These records allow the church planters to revisit the new believers regularly for discipleship and to monitor their spiritual growth (Martin, 2024).

The AFT message is not one of legalistic religion, laden with rules and condemnation. Instead, we bring a Gospel of love, hope, and reconciliation with their creator God, a message that Thai people can readily embrace. We encourage them to immediately foster a relationship with Jesus through prayer.

The AFT recognizes that a district church can be an alien and uncomfortable environment for new believers. They may struggle with unfamiliar Christian terminology, and if they attend a church their family may object to their association with a “Christian church,” leaving them unsure of how to respond. Therefore, AFT church leaders do not compel attendance at a district church or adherence to various Christian regulations typically expected of new “converts” in the traditional sense.

AFT’s commitment is to disciple new believers with fidelity mostly in house churches, allowing the Holy Spirit to effect transformation within them. This transformation is evident over time as individuals naturally relinquish their previous beliefs. The spiritual journey is unique to each person, and we in AFT honor that individuality in our discipleship.

To address the challenges that new believers face, AFT forms house churches, providing these new believers with a spiritually safe and comfortable “home” environment in which to grow. AFT leaders return to these house churches often, discipling the people using Scriptural principles. Here, they learn what it means to be a follower of Christ and develop a “Christian vocabulary and understanding.”

Once AFT has established a house church in every village, we initiate a district church. The district church works in tandem with the house churches to facilitate their growth. When AFT inaugurates a district church, the believers from the house churches attend, filling the district church from its very first Sunday. If their family now objects to them attending a Christian church, they are equipped to “stand up” for their beliefs.

AFT leaders continue to disciple the believers with additional teaching, ensuring the continued growth of these churches. AFT does not close a house church, as it serves as the channel to guide more people to Christ.

### Interactive Mapping of the Gospel’s Reach and Church Growth

The dissemination of the gospel in Thailand through the AFT can be systematically tracked through two interactive web pages that provide daily updates through the use of KapTrack. The first page is dedicated to visualizing the expansion of the gospel’s reach by mapping the geographical coordinates of individuals’ initial engagements with the gospel message. Each dot on the map below (Figure 2) corresponds to the GPS location where a person first responded to the gospel.

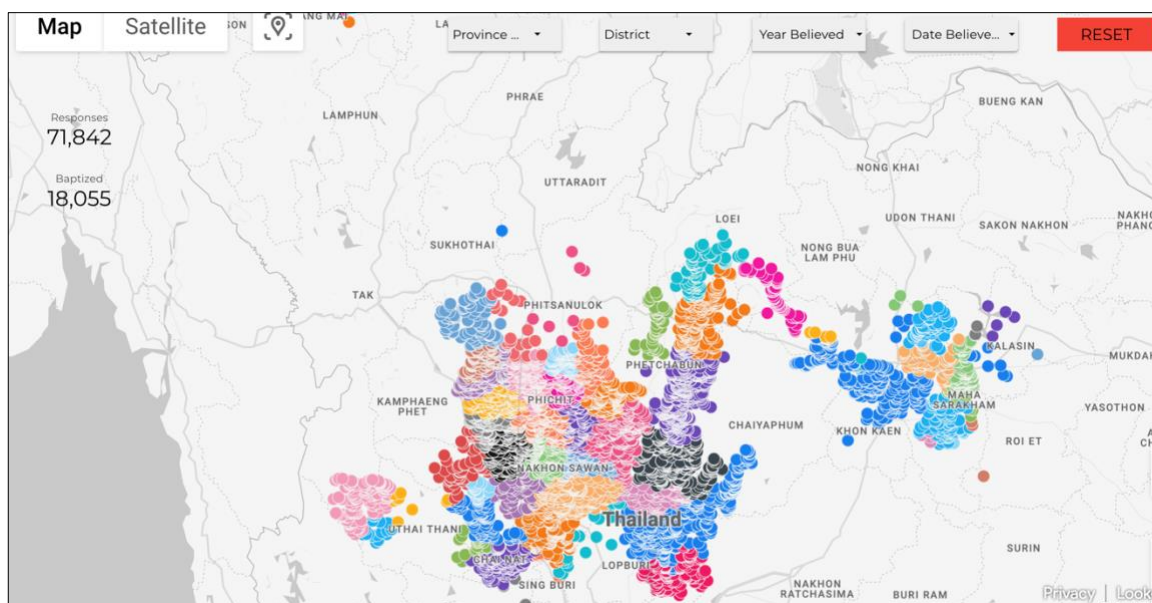


Figure 2 (eSTAR Foudation, n.d.-c)

The second page offers insights into AFT’s structural growth by charting the proliferation of house and district churches. Similar to the first web page, this second page (Figure 3) employs dots to denote the GPS locations of these establishments.

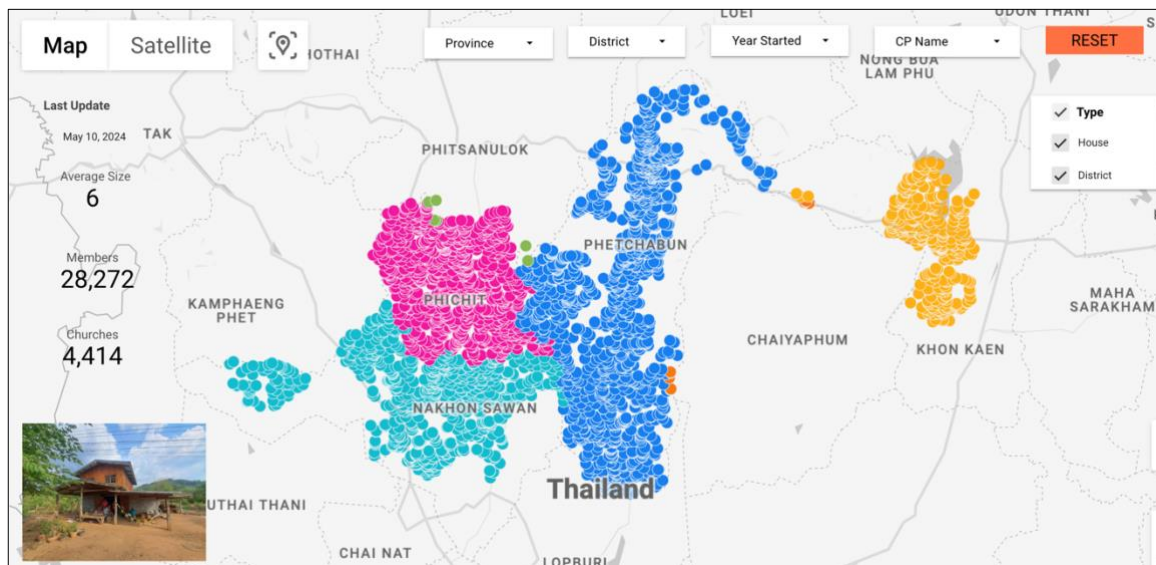


Figure 3 (eSTAR Foundation, n.d.-b)

Both web pages are dynamic, allowing users to tailor the displayed information according to their specific interests or research needs. Users can set various parameters to filter and analyze the data, thus facilitating a more personalized and in-depth examination of the gospel's spread.

## Conclusion

The AFT has had a profound influence on the lives of tens of thousands of Thai individuals who have accepted the gospel and experienced the love and power of Jesus. Remarkably, the AFT has not encountered opposition from either the government or Buddhists.

The vision of the AFT is to establish a house church in each of Thailand's 84,646 villages and district churches in all 928 districts spanning the country's 77 provinces. The AFT has already made significant strides, having reached all villages in the provinces of Phichit and Phetchabun. Their goal is to complete their mission in Nakorn Sawan by the end of 2024. By 2026, the AFT aims to reach all villages in the adjacent provinces of Khon Kaen, Chaiyaphum, and Phitsanulok. As the AFT continues to make progress in its mission, it is our aspiration that other Christian organizations in Thailand will recognize the impact of our vision and collaborate with us. With their support, we know that the transformation of Thailand can be expedited and achieved within a shorter time frame.

The AFT is reliant on the guidance of the Holy Spirit to direct their vision in disseminating the gospel across Thailand beyond 2026. This strategic and methodical approach underscores their commitment to their mission and their belief in its eventual success. We in the AFT believe that the Spirit is bringing an awakening and Kingdom expansion in Thailand, and we are deeply grateful to be participating in the Spirit's work.

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# **“The Asbury Outpouring” of February 2023: A Follow-up Report**

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## **Abstract**

Now that over a year has passed, how might the February 2023 revival at Asbury University—what the school itself has termed “The Asbury Outpouring”—be understood and described? What are the ongoing effects of that undeniably landmark event? What steps has Asbury University intentionally taken to build on, steward, share, explain, commemorate, and otherwise follow-up? What sources can help answer these and other related questions? This article takes up, in reverse order, these pressing questions.

**Key Words:** analysis, effects, follow-up, Gen Z, sources, students

## **Introduction**

In February 2023, a normally scheduled chapel service at Asbury University, located in the small town of Wilmore, Kentucky, USA, spontaneously extended into a transformative 16-day spiritual event. News of the ongoing worship, fellowship, and fervency among Asbury students spread widely through social media, and thousands from around the United States and beyond traveled to Wilmore to see for themselves and take part. The editorial team of *Global Missiology* decided to publish in our April 2023 issue a description of the Asbury event—not a premature analysis or evaluation, but a description—through select eyewitness accounts (GME, Keener, & Pachuau, 2023). Our editorial team indicated at that time that we might carry some analyses later in order better to understand, with the added perspective of time, what had taken place. As one fulfillment of that expressed possibility, and in light of this current issue’s focus on “Awakenings, Advances, and Revivals: Noteworthy Outpourings of God’s Spirit,” as editor I have compiled this follow-up article on “The Asbury Outpouring.”

## **Sources**

Different people have relied on various sources for understanding and describing what happened at Asbury University in February 2023 as well as subsequently. Those Asbury students, faculty, and staff who were either present when the Outpouring began, or joined in soon thereafter, have had their own, as well as others’, direct experiences and observations on which to draw. The tens of thousands who during the 16-day Outpouring traveled to the campus to see and experience for themselves what was going on also have had their own eyewitness accounts, be they as alumni, skeptics, sympathizers, media, or those holding other standpoints. There are the newer Asbury students, faculty, and staff who have experienced the Asbury community in the Outpouring’s wake. Family members and friends of those who were present, and of those newer Asbury community members, have no doubt tapped into the accounts given by their loved ones and friends.

What about those of us who, with various objectives and levels of interest, have observed from a distance? While some of us may have contacted a few current Asbury acquaintances—all of whom were already overwhelmed by other requests for their accounts of the “revival” taking place—I dare say that for the most part our sources have come from the array of online testimonies, videos, reports, and analyses that started appearing on social media and news outlets soon after the

Outpouring began. According to my unscientific survey, both early on and ever since those reports in general have been favorable, with many enthusiastically celebrating the revival, some mixing in caution, and a few criticizing. (It is also quite possible that some readers posted comments, blog entries, or even articles about what has commonly been referred to as the “revival” at Asbury.)

As with the April 2023 *Global Missiology* piece that compiled select eyewitness accounts, this article has chosen to rely most heavily on Asbury-connected descriptions of what took place and of what has transpired since. Specifically, I have especially relied on four sources that include accounts from different times along the way—from historically prior to February 2023 up to the present:

- “The Asbury Outpouring,” a publicly accessible section of the Asbury University website devoted to photos, accounts, and other related information (Asbury University, 2024a).
- *Taken by Surprise: The Asbury Revival of 2023*, a book published late last summer and written by historian, Asbury College alumnus, and former Asbury College faculty member Mark Elliott (Elliott, 2023). (Note: “Asbury College,” from which Elliott graduated, was renamed “Asbury University” in 2010 (Asbury University, 2024b).)
- *Generation Awakened: An Eyewitness Account of the Powerful Outpouring of God at Asbury* by Asbury’s centrally involved Vice President for Student Life Sarah Baldwin, just published in May (Baldwin, 2024).
- An even more recent (May 23) phone interview with Bridgette Campbell, Asbury’s newly created Coordinator of Outreach Ministry Teams (Campbell, 2024).

It is important to note that all of these sources acknowledge questions, doubts, and critiques of the revival and, as appropriate, offer replies to them. Forthcoming sources that are already being forecast will no doubt do the same. Also, what happened in February 2023 was centered in Asbury *University* (specifically Hughes Auditorium), not Asbury Theological *Seminary* located across the street (although the seminary community was also affected, helped host overflow services, and was otherwise connected). Finally, while “revival” has been a common label for what occurred, this article will use “The Asbury Outpouring,” the label that Asbury University settled on after the descriptor “outpouring” arose among school administrators amidst the flurry of nurturing the spontaneously bourgeoning event (Baldwin, 2024, p. 80).

### **Asbury’s Follow-up**

Eight days after the Outpouring began on February 8, Asbury University President Kevin Brown made the difficult decision to announce on February 16 that the Outpouring’s final public worship would be the previously planned Collegiate Day of Prayer service on February 23 (Baldwin, 2024, pp. 102, 108). In response to criticisms of Asbury thereby “quenching the Spirit” or “stopping the revival,” Brown noted, “We cannot stop something we did not start.” Moreover, along with stewarding the Spirit’s surprising work the university was also fulfilling its obligations to meet student’s educational needs and to protect the overtaxed university staff and town of Wilmore (Elliott, 2023, locs. 1080-1102). Asbury’s Outpouring follow-up, necessarily unclear and unplanned as it was at the time, thus was set in motion by the decision to encourage all students to resume their regular schedule of classes, chapel services, and other activities.

The return to regularly scheduled programming (which officially had never been suspended) was reportedly both tinged with fatigue from the Outpouring's intensity and enthused by students debriefing and testifying to their life-changing encounters with the Spirit (Baldwin, 2024, p. 173). To help students process what had taken place and “navigate life,” the university sought to connect students with mentors and small groups (Flynn, 2023). There were varieties of experiences among the students, including some that, unlike the many who deeply encountered God during the Outpouring, have been characterized by one university administrator as “not so positive” (Zonio, 2024). Some students, for example, eschewed the continuous worship gatherings and “stayed in their dorms trying to block out the 2 a.m. shouts from outside their window” (McCracken, 2024).

During March and April, soon after the Outpouring, Asbury students—on their own initiative—traveled to colleges and churches to witness and share with others God's special work among them (Elliott, 2023, loc. 2029). Following the students' lead and in response to the numerous requests for students to come and speak, the university brought on extra staff to arrange for “Outpouring Witness Teams” to travel, as of January 2024, “to over 50 different venues in 16 states and 8 countries” (Campbell, 2024; Asbury University, 2024c).

In line with the central roles that electronic media played in spreading news about the Outpouring, the university created a new section of its website devoted to “The Asbury Outpouring” (Asbury University, 2024a). That section currently has numerous links to recordings of Hughes Chapel worship from February 19-22, photos taken by various individuals during the Outpouring, select testimonies, summaries of “Witness Team” trips, media reports, recordings of one-year commemorations, and much more. The site also enables anyone to submit their own “testimony from the Outpouring” (Asbury University, 2024d).

Select attempts by Asbury University administrators, faculty, staff, and students to interpret and explain various aspects of the Outpouring are scattered on the internet for those wishing to explore further nuances of how Asbury has followed up on the events of February 2023 (for two also linked on Asbury's “Outpouring” web page, see Brown, 2024 and McCracken, K. 2024).

## **Effects**

One year after the Outpouring, many Asbury-related leaders were still sorting through the longer-term effects. “A year after those events, it is still challenging for me to distill the ways in which our community—and I—have been affected” (Zonio, 2024). “It is a story that we are all still learning, and it is a story that is still being written” (McCracken, 2024). “The outpouring raised a great deal of questions for me, many of which cannot be answered now” (Brown, 2024). Far be it, therefore, from this distant follow-up report to attempt any sort of definitive, much less comprehensive, description of what has resulted or changed from the February 2023 episode centered in Asbury's Hughes Auditorium.

Even so, there are reliable quantitative and qualitative measurements that suggest the extent of the effects, particularly beyond Asbury and Wilmore. Conservative estimates are that at least 50,000 (with some accounts suggesting as many as 70,000, or even 100,000) outside visitors came to the campus during the 16-day Outpouring (Brown, 2024; Tooley, 2024) and then returned to their own communities. These visitors represented a wide range of ecclesiastical traditions, including Catholics and nondenominational churches, and they came from at least 40 US states and at least 40 countries (Elliott, 2023, loc. 1994). Students from over 280 colleges and universities were among the visitors, exemplifying the “Gen Z” focus of what transpired (Brown, 2024).

Together with thousands of hearers of Asbury’s Witness Teams that have gone out, the extent of people who were affected by first-hand, eyewitness accounts are difficult to comprehend.

Media reports of the Outpouring were far-reaching as well and included some of the most widely known and accessed outlets, e.g., *The New York Times* and CNN (Asbury University, 2024a). Moreover, “Asbury has identified over 250 podcasts, 1,000 articles, and dozens of sermons and conference sessions addressing what happened. More than 100 local, national, and international media outlets visited our campus. There have been approximately 250 million social media posts related to #AsburyRevival or #AsburyRevival2023” (Brown, 2024). Add in the unimaginable number of various other electronic messages, videos, photos, and posts about the Outpouring, and God only knows the effects resulting from electronic communications.

There have been credible reports of revivals subsequently occurring on several other US campuses (Brown, 2024), as well as in Europe—part of what one analyst has termed “The Asbury Popcorn Effect” (Greig, 2023a, 2023b; Elliott, 2023, locs. 1972-1980). Continual text messages to Asbury University administration from around the world have conveyed wider interest and testimonies connected to the Outpouring (Baldwin, 2024, pp. 173-174). As for life on Asbury’s campus itself, testimonies abound about “freedom,” a “lighter” feeling, a sense of “surrender,” increased spontaneity in worship and prayer, as well as “new commitments to Jesus and baptisms [that] are part of the life of our community.” Student anxiety, depression, and emotional struggles also persist, but the overarching testimony is that “a renewed call to prayer, fresh faith, and revived surrender abides with us” (Baldwin, 2024, pp. 181-182).

Here are just a couple of the many student testimonies (Asbury University, 2024a) about the ongoing personal effects of what transpired back in February 2023:

“My prayer life has been reignited and I depend on His Spirit even more day to day. Jesus has brought me deep-seated joy and peace by reminding me of how good He is.”

“God completely changed my life through the Outpouring of His Spirit. He has placed new callings on my heart. Now, I know my job is to go and spread the fire that He released here.”

## Analysis

So how might the Outpouring be understood? Per the summaries above of select Asbury-related sources, of university follow-up, and of ongoing effects, there continues to be a widespread sense of amazement and awe at what transpired. At bare minimum, everyone agrees that “something happened,” as one student put it a year later (McCracken, 2024). The vast majority of participants and observers wholeheartedly testify that God moved in a special way that—whether or not historians end up including February 2023 at Asbury in their lists of significant “revivals”—fits the simple description of one Asbury administrator: “The Outpouring was a spontaneous work of God filled with many examples of His grace” (Asbury University, 2024a). The particular significance of the Outpouring for Gen Z students has been uniformly emphasized as well (Baldwin, 2024, pp. 10-12; Brown, 2024).

As noted earlier and not surprisingly—some might say “appropriately” or even “necessarily,” citing such biblical admonitions as I Thessalonians 5:21 and I John 4:21 to “test” any such acclaimed spiritual event—there have been skeptics and critics. Also as mentioned above, the sources cited here, and others like them, have acknowledged and appropriately responded to many

of the criticisms. Mark Elliott has provided a helpful summary of criticisms and responses to them as an appendix (“A Critique of the Critics”) in his book published about six months after the Outpouring (Elliott, 2023, locs. 2096-2515).

One qualifier to note is that most of the world, and I dare say most of the Christian world, remains unaware of Asbury University in general and of what happened there in February 2023. Pointing out that lack of awareness is by no means intended to belittle Asbury or the Outpouring. Rather, those of us who have such a monumental experience (as well as those of us who examine it) can unwittingly assume that our preoccupied focus is shared by others. The claim that “the Lord continues to move across the Wilmore community, Kentucky, the United States, and the world” since the Outpouring (Asbury University, 2024a) should not be taken as a comprehensive enveloping of all humanity. Understanding what occurred and its continuing effects needs broad kingdom perspective.

### *One Skeptic’s Criticism*

One such approach that has expressed skepticism about the Outpouring—both during the 16-day event and one year later—comes from someone with a multinational background, with extensive personal experiences of “revivals,” and with Reformed theological leanings (Sey, 2023, 2024). Against a backdrop of initial concerns about Asbury’s revivalist history, “seemingly little or no gospel preaching, the female pastors, [and] the disorderly and charismatic chaos” reported during the “revival” (Sey, 2023), “A year later, it looks like what happened at Asbury was a fad, not a revival” (Sey, 2024), the criticism asserts. That assertion is further based on reports from churches near Asbury that they had experienced no significant numerical growth or life changes in their memberships. Moreover, the approach analyzes, the Gen Zs involved likely were primarily experiencing a counter-cultural moment that lacked biblically-grounded discernment cultivated by regular, “ordinary preaching” in Sunday morning worship (Sey, 2024).

The latter, one-year-later criticism also decries the “hundreds of comments,” received after the initial skeptical analysis, carrying charges of pharisaism, Thomas-like doubting, and blaspheming the Holy Spirit (Sey, 2024).

Those directly involved in The Asbury Outpouring likely would feel (perhaps have in fact felt) a sadness and a sting upon learning of that kind of penetrating analysis, particularly since (though buttressed by intentional research and extensive, related life experience) it was offered from a distance. One would hope that, if it has not occurred already, some constructive interaction could take place around the theme of following Jesus in and through the “normal” rhythms of life, for example. As one report of the February 7, 2024 one-year anniversary chapel service notes:

In a benediction to the students after the anniversary service, Meerkreebs [Asbury’s Pastor in Residence Zach Meerkreebs, who preached at the Outpouring-sparking February 8, 2023 chapel service] left Asbury with a prayer and a challenge: “Fall back in love with the ordinary.” It was not an attention-grabbing message or a revved-up cry for the Spirit’s return. Each statement on Hughes’s stage echoed the idea that spirit was still present, even after crowds dispersed. It was a challenge to bring our memory of the extraordinary into the ordinary parts of our lives (McCracken, 2024).

Surely genuine, personal, and sympathetic interaction around that kind of theme—more than the rightfully decried one-way, online criticisms noted above and that inevitably reinforce

misconceptions—would lead to even healthier spiritual growth and even more biblically-grounded discernment.

### *Two Areas of Special Note*

How did *race relations* factor into the Outpouring? While people of color had been part of the succession of worship teams throughout the Outpouring, the administrative team that had been assembled to help meet the Outpouring’s logistical challenges began to notice a lack of representation in their own makeup. They then took concrete steps to rectify that lack in a way that has persisted (Baldwin, 2024, p. 150).

Remarkably, on the afternoon of February 7—the day before the Outpouring combusted at the conclusion of the regular Wednesday chapel service—a “Witnessing Circle” was held on campus in connection with Black History Month commemorations. That witnessing circle ceremony, led by an area pastor and some friends of Asbury, was lamenting the tragedy of people held and passed on as slaves in that region by reading mid-nineteenth-century wills of property owners. Reportedly a Haitian American participant lead the group in a heartfelt singing of the Black national anthem and in a time of weeping and repentance. This same Haitian American guest took part in that evening’s music practice and prayer time for the Wednesday chapel, having been invited to help lead the chapel music on February 8 (Baldwin, 2024, pp. 178-179; Keener, 2023).

Race relations were thus not ignored or insignificant in how the Outpouring unfolded.

Another particularly striking feature of what took place in the Outpouring—one that arguably evidenced the Spirit’s work as much as any feature did or could—concerned Asbury’s handling of *financial matters*. On one hand, as news spread about the students’ fervor, it would have been easy for the university leadership to be tempted to capitalize on the fund-raising opportunities associated with such an event. Surely many current and potential donors would have been more than happy to support the accelerated spiritual growth desired at any Christian institution. However, in order to avoid any appearance of co-opting the reported breakout of a revival for financial gain, senior leadership in fact suspended previously arranged fund-raising activities and normal donation solicitation. The administration also did not initiate special offerings by which the thousands of visitors could contribute (Baldwin, 2024, p. 92; Elliott, 2023, 1176-1181).

What, then, about the unanticipated but unavoidable avalanche of expenses associated with the flood of visitors? How were costs to be covered for security, food, water, and portable toilets, for example (Elliott, 2023, 1176-181)? As it turned out, unsolicited and seemingly spontaneous donations poured in, sometimes by cash or checks handed to administrators and staff or simply left at worship venues (Baldwin, 2024, pp. 91-92). Even the city of Wilmore received unsolicited funds to cover their associated expenses as well (Elliott, 2023, 1189-1195).

The amazing generosity exhibited by contributors is cause for much joy and gratitude. The particular point to underscore here, though, is how the university’s leadership was not driven by financial pressures as much as they were by Spirit-produced wisdom, godliness, integrity, and zeal to represent Jesus Christ in an honorable way as a Christian institution. The Scriptures are replete with admonitions and examples to pay special attention to how money is desired, procured, or managed. In all of these areas, the Spirit’s work is evident in how during and after the Outpouring the Asbury University leadership exemplified godly integrity.

## Some Concluding Footnotes

Speaking personally, I resonate with the first-hand accounts of the February 2023 Asbury Outpouring. By God's grace I, too, know the experience of the Spirit coming on a gathering in an almost indescribably powerful manner. The only response, really, is humility, repentance, awe, worship, and unity. Scripture and subsequent history are full of countless examples of God's people responding before God by falling down prostrate and then being uplifted in God's grace.

Various explanations, labels, and criticisms of such occurrences are inevitable. Moreover, how to describe, analyze, and even evaluate an apparent awakening or revival are important parts of the corporate life and witness of churches and Christian institutions, organizations, and individuals. The Spirit of God is quite capable of overseeing the panoply of human perceptions of both regular and irregular occurrences among his people. Today's distant and near instantaneous news feeds can both help and hinder how those human perceptions, and related discourse and interactions, take shape. Thankfully, while rapidly developing electronic wizardry can seem out of control and destructive, God has not been taken by surprise or lost control of how the world functions and communicates.

For those who experience deeply spiritual events, the why's, how's, and what's are entirely secondary, at least in the moment. During those episodes—however long they may last—simultaneously life can accelerate, insights can deepen, sin can be exposed, addictions can be broken, and deep wounds can be healed. The awe, wonder, and joy of knowing God is the central treasure of it all, as evidenced among the Asbury community during the Outpouring's continuous worship.

God works in multitudes of particular, complex, and changing contexts, traditions, and peoples. He displays his "manifold wisdom" through his kaleidoscopic Church (Ephesians 3:10). He will not allow any single sector of his Church (much less any other sphere's entity, be it national, political, linguistic, or anything else) to either co-opt or monopolize his redemptive work or how to describe, analyze, or evaluate it. Whether or not this report shares all of Asbury's distinctives is thus not at issue. More important is a recognition of the Spirit's presence and work in the Outpouring. Thankfully Asbury University, though willing to acknowledge the Spirit's particular work in February 2023 by settling on the label "The Asbury Outpouring," did not attempt to co-opt or monopolize that work for its own purposes; nor did they allow outside visitors to co-opt the extraordinary happening for their ends, either. Asbury's ongoing testimony is that they, joined by many others, profoundly "don't take what happened for granted; we simply continue to share our stories about what God did and is doing when people ask" (Zonio, 2024).

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# Collaborative Leadership

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## Abstract

Collaborative leadership is vital for addressing global challenges our world faces today. By leveraging diverse perspectives and expertise, it enhances innovation, optimizes resource utilization, and builds resilience. Rooted in participative leadership theories, collaborative leadership emphasizes teamwork and shared decision-making. Drawing insights from biblical foundations, modern management theories, and the author's thesis on polycentric leadership, this article highlights the relevance and practical applications of collaborative leadership. The article supplements these insights with two case studies to strengthen the argument.

**Key Words:** collaborative leadership, participatory leadership, polycentric leadership, polycentric mission

## Introduction

Collaborative leadership has become indispensable in our world due to the intricate nature of global challenges. Issues such as climate change, pandemics, and economic inequality are multifaceted and require cooperation across various sectors, disciplines, and geographical boundaries. In this context, collaborative leadership facilitates the pooling of resources, expertise, and information essential for devising comprehensive solutions.

The rapid advancement of technology has further emphasized the need for collaborative leadership. With the world more interconnected than ever, leveraging technology for effective collaboration enables organizations and individuals to share knowledge and resources efficiently. Diverse perspectives and expertise are imperative for addressing complex problems. Collaborative leadership brings together individuals from different backgrounds and experiences, fostering innovation and offering multifaceted approaches to problem-solving.

Collaboration not only enhances innovation but also optimizes resource utilization, making it possible to achieve more with limited resources. It builds resilience by creating supportive networks and sharing best practices, thereby enabling organizations to adapt and respond effectively to crises. Moreover, collaborative leadership aligns with the growing emphasis on social responsibility and sustainability within the business community today, allowing organizations to work together towards positive societal and environmental change (Heyward, 2020). Ultimately, collaborative leadership is essential for navigating the complexities of today's world, driving innovation, building resilience, and creating meaningful impact on a global scale.

Collaborative leadership has garnered increasing attention in both academic discourse and practical organizational settings. Rooted in Kurt Lewin's research on participative leadership, this collaborative approach emphasizes the involvement of team members in decision-making processes (Lewin, 1938). *Harvard Business Review* suggests, "Business in the 21st Century will be defined by having a Collaborative Advantage" (Fayad et al., 2024).

Beyond these modern management theories, this article proposes a deeper exploration into the origins of collaborative leadership, drawing insights from Scripture. By examining the trinitarian

model of leadership and various instances of shared leadership in the Bible, this article aims to elucidate the timeless relevance of collaboration in leadership.

### **Biblical Foundations of Collaborative Leadership**

The concept of collaboration finds its roots in the very creation narrative, where God, in his pluralistic expression, declares, “Let us make man in our own image” (Genesis 1:26). This divine example sets a precedent for leadership characterized by shared authority and mutual interaction. Throughout biblical history, instances of collaborative leadership abound, from Moses and Aaron leading the Israelites to the establishment of prophets to advise kings. The New Testament further reinforces this model through the development of elders and deacons, underscoring the importance of shared responsibility and mutual accountability.

At the heart of collaborative leadership lies the trinitarian relationship of God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This divine communion serves as the epitome of polycentric leadership, where distinct persons operate in unity through their unique roles and responsibilities. Drawing strength and wisdom from this triune God, leaders are called to embrace a model that transcends hierarchy and power dynamics, focusing instead on communion, service, and love. This trinitarian perspective emphasizes mutual vulnerability, joy, and participatory engagement, inviting leaders to partner with God in his ongoing mission in the world.

The very nature of God as a communal being underscores the importance of cultivating communities reflective of the divine image. In striving to emulate the trinitarian model, leaders are tasked with nurturing communities characterized by reconciliation, interdependence, mutuality, diversity, and openness. These characteristics extend not only to the relationships among leaders but also to the broader community under their guidance. The Trinity serves as a profound example of polycentric leadership, where multiple centers of authority coalesce in harmony, mirroring the interconnectedness and relational dynamics essential for effective collaboration.

In practical terms, embracing the trinitarian model of collaborative leadership requires mutual respect, appreciation, and recognition of each individual’s gifts and experiences. Leaders are called to embody traits of interdependence, self-surrender, and self-giving, fostering a culture of inclusivity and shared ownership. By aligning their leadership approach with the divine blueprint exemplified by the Trinity, leaders can cultivate communities of authenticity, unity, and purpose, ultimately advancing God’s kingdom agenda of love, justice, and reconciliation.

### **Key Principles and Skills of Collaborative Leadership**

Along with biblical foundations, contemporary literature offers valuable insights into the principles of collaborative leadership. Herminia Ibarra in *Harvard Business Review* (Ibarra & Hansen, 2011) emphasizes four key principles essential for effective collaborative leadership:

- connecting people and ideas across networks, movements and organizations
- leveraging diverse talent
- modeling collaborative behavior at the top
- providing strong guidance to prevent stagnation

These principles align closely with the biblical narratives of shared leadership, emphasizing the importance of unity, diversity, and visionary guidance.

In addition to principles, collaborative leaders require a diverse set of skills to navigate complex organizational landscapes successfully. These skills include

- balancing motivations across different groups
- adopting an adaptive leadership approach
- possessing contextual awareness
- integrating across networks
- demonstrating strong interpersonal and relationship management skills.

These traits, rooted in humility, empathy, integrity, and effective communication, enable leaders to foster trust, facilitate collaboration, and drive collective action.

### **Practical Applications**

Herminia Ibarra and Morten Hansen's article on "Collaborative Leadership" (Ibarra & Hansen, 2011) and Stanley McChrystal's book *Team of Teams* (McChrystal, 2015) offer practical frameworks and case studies to illustrate the application of collaborative leadership. Moreover, Gitte Frederiksen's TED Talk (Frederiksen, 2022) underscores the importance of flattening hierarchies, sharing knowledge, and fostering kindness and empathy in collaborative environments. By embracing collaborative leadership principles and practices, organizations can nurture innovation, create safe spaces for experimentation, and foster meaningful relationships that drive sustainable growth and societal impact.

Accentuating these approaches also includes the importance of integrating these principles into practical leadership strategies, emphasizing adaptability, contextual intelligence, and relationship management. Furthermore, the role of creating safe spaces and fostering relationships are essential components of collaborative leadership. Humility, integrity, and effective communication are vital interpersonal skills for leaders to cultivate. Leaders must embrace a "servant first" mentality, eschewing hierarchical titles in favor of inclusive collaboration.

#### *A3/SIM Case Study: Collaborative Leadership in Japan*

A3 (A3, 2024a), the mission organization I serve as president, in 2011 forged a strategic partnership with SIM to deploy missionaries to Japan. This partnership leveraged SIM's operational support and mobilization alongside A3's extensive experience in Japan. Subsequently, in 2020 control of A3's religious status in Japan transitioned from A3 International (A3i) to A3 Japan (A3J), with A3i retaining supervision of the missionary team.

#### governance structure

The partnership's governance structure involves A3i overseeing and supervising, A3J strategically deploying missionaries and managing legal status in Japan, and SIM's Sending Office handling employment, financial accountability, and HR policies. Additional stakeholders include missionaries' local church partners in Japan, missionary sending churches, and SIM International. This structure exemplifies the trait of connecting people and ideas across networks, as it facilitates the exchange of resources, expertise, and networks, enriching the missionary deployment process.

Japanese leadership (A3J) sets the directional priorities and works in partnership with A3i to deploy missionaries across Japan in partnership with Japanese pastors. A leadership team from A3i, sent by SIM, works hand in hand with Japanese leaders to find appropriate churches to place the missionaries (called "missional partners" by A3i) to serve with and under the direction of the

local church. The SIM team selects, and trains the missional partners in their sending offices but the local leadership team equips them for their field assignment. The synergies between Japanese leaders, A3i and A3J's missional partnership leadership team with SIM work in collaboration to serve the overall mission to help serve God's kingdom in Japan.

#### benefits

The polycentric structure allows each entity to focus on its strengths, promoting efficient deployment and resource utilization. The structure also fosters a collaborative environment within which multiple organizations contribute to the fruitful ministry in Japan. Leveraging diverse talent from various entities involved, including A3, SIM, local church partners, and sending churches, enhances the effectiveness and adaptability of the missionary team in navigating the complex challenges of mission work in Japan.

#### challenges

Key challenges include facilitating collaboration and strengthening relationships among organizations. Divergent lines of reporting and accountability create communication hurdles and potential policy conflicts, as evidenced by internet security and candidate screening issues. To address such challenges, the organizations' leaders must model collaborative behavior, actively engaging with each other, resolving conflicts amicably, and prioritizing the common mission over individual interests.

#### policy and strategy examples

Instances of misalignment between A3i and SIM policies highlight the need for collaborative resolution without undermining authority or trust. Similarly, disagreements over candidate screening underscore the importance of building relationships and fostering communal leadership.

#### themes and reflections

The partnership exhibits strengths in values-based decision-making, freedom in governance, and diversity among stakeholders. However, challenges persist in achieving collaborative, communal, and relational goals due to limited communication and relationship-building opportunities. Providing strong guidance from leadership is essential to prevent stagnation and ensure progress within the partnership. By providing clear direction, setting strategic priorities, and offering support and resources to address challenges effectively, leaders empower teams to adapt to changing circumstances, innovate, and continue advancing the mission in Japan.

#### future considerations

As the partnership expands, leaders must address scalability, manage ambiguity, and invest in strengthening horizontal connections. Questions regarding leadership responsibility and overall benefits of polycentric governance remain pertinent for ongoing evaluation and improvement.

Collaborative leadership in polycentric governance presents both opportunities and challenges in missionary deployment. By addressing communication barriers, fostering relational connections, and continuously evaluating the model's effectiveness, leaders can navigate complexities and maximize the partnership's impact in fulfilling the mission in Japan. The integration of key traits of collaborative leadership, such as connecting people and ideas across

networks, leveraging diverse talent, modeling collaborative behavior among leaders, and providing strong guidance, is integral to the success of this partnership.

#### *Anonymous Mission Case Study: Nurturing Collaborative Leadership*

In 2017, our organization embarked on a transformative journey, transitioning from a traditional single leadership model to a collaborative International Director team (Anonymous, 2023). Rooted in principles of trinitarian theology, teamwork, trust, stewardship, and diversity, our approach to collaborative leadership has emphasized the importance of connecting people and ideas, leveraging diverse talent, modeling collaborative behavior, and providing strong guidance to prevent stagnation. This case study explores our experience, highlighting how these key traits have shaped our journey towards effective collaborative leadership.

#### Trinitarian theology

Central to our approach is the principle of trinitarian theology, which underscores the interconnectedness and mutual deference among equals. Just as the Trinity embodies perfect unity amidst diversity, we have sought to foster connections across networks, movements, and organizations. By embracing a holistic view of leadership that transcends individual silos, we have endeavored to create synergies and foster innovation through collaboration.

#### team

At the heart of collaborative leadership is the recognition that diverse talent is a valuable asset to be leveraged. By assembling a team with complementary skills, experiences, and perspectives, we have sought to harness the collective intelligence and creativity of our members. We believe that embracing diversity not only enriches decision-making but also fosters a culture of inclusion and belonging, where every voice is valued and heard.

#### trust

Trust is the bedrock of effective collaboration, providing the foundation upon which relationships are built and ideas are shared. As leaders, we have endeavored to model collaborative behavior by demonstrating transparency, integrity, and accountability in our interactions. By fostering an environment of trust and psychological safety, we have empowered team members to take risks, challenge assumptions, and innovate without fear of judgment or reprisal.

#### stewardship

Effective collaborative leadership requires strong guidance to steer the collective towards shared goals and objectives. As stewards of our organization's mission and values, we believe that we provided strategic direction and clarity of purpose to prevent stagnation and ensure forward momentum. By articulating a compelling vision and setting clear expectations, we have inspired confidence and commitment among team members, enabling them to align their efforts towards common goals.

#### diversity

Diversity is not only a hallmark of effective collaboration but also a source of strength and resilience. By embracing diversity in all its forms—cultural, ethnic, gender, and ideological—our leadership team has fostered a culture of inclusion and belonging where everyone could thrive. Recognizing the inherent value of diverse perspectives, we have actively sought out input from

across the organization, leveraging the collective wisdom and insights of our members to drive innovation and excellence.

structure

Our (anonymous mission) structure distributes its leadership, starting with a team from across many nations. Ever since long before this global team was in place, our teams have operated independently in settings across the world. Each team has had a leader and a team leader overseer to ensure alignment with our overall objectives, but the teams have been independent and autonomous in making most decisions based on the local realities. The team leader overseer has simply provided coaching and support when needed and usually has held a monthly call and periodic visit to ensure the teams were operating well. In this way collaboration has occurred in multiple ways:

- through the global leadership team providing the overall directional leadership for our mission;
- through our team leader overseers working in collaboration between the global team and local teams; and,
- through the local team leader and team structures in hundreds of locations worldwide.

This distributed leadership structure has fit well with our (anonymous mission) collaborative leadership approach.

challenges

Addressing common questions and concerns, we have sought to clarify the practical aspects of our collaborative leadership model. From decision-making processes to division of responsibilities, we have emphasized the importance of modeling collaborative behavior among the leaders and providing strong guidance to prevent stagnation. By integrating these key traits into our leadership approach, we have sought to create a culture of collaboration and empowerment that inspires excellence and drives results.

As we reflect on our journey towards collaborative leadership, we are reminded of the transformative power of connection, diversity, trust, and stewardship. By embracing these key traits and integrating them into our leadership approach, by God's grace we have cultivated a culture of collaboration and innovation that transcends individual boundaries and fosters collective success. Moving forward, we remain committed to nurturing and strengthening collaborative leadership within our organization and beyond, knowing that together we can achieve greater impact and create positive change in the world.

### **Conclusion: Importance of Collaborative Leadership in Today's World**

Collaborative leadership is indispensable in addressing the multifaceted challenges of today's world. From climate change to pandemics, complex issues necessitate collaborative efforts across sectors, disciplines, and geographical boundaries. Rapid technological advancement further underscores the need for collaborative leadership to leverage diverse perspectives and expertise, foster innovation, and maximize efficiency. Moreover, collaborative leadership promotes social responsibility, sustainability, and resilience, aligning with stakeholder expectations and driving positive change at scale.

Collaborative leadership emerges as a timeless and indispensable approach to navigating the complexities of leadership in today's interconnected world. By drawing insights from biblical narratives and contemporary management literature, this article underscores the significance of collaboration, diversity, and visionary guidance in effective leadership. As organizations strive to address global challenges, foster innovation, and promote social responsibility, collaborative leadership offers a transformative pathway towards achieving shared goals and creating a more inclusive and sustainable future.

As I shared in my book *Polycentric Mission Leadership*:

Success for mission leaders hinges on dependence on God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is in this trinitarian relationship that a polycentric model draws significance. God the Father sends the Son and Holy Spirit to lead using their own unique roles and responsibilities. Together, they form a triad of leadership operating in unity through their diversity. It is in this style that leaders draw their strength and wisdom, knowing that only in being connected to the vine will we bear fruit (Handley, 2022, kindle location 165).

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## Call for Papers:

### “Lausanne IV: Reviews, Analyses, and Projections”

For Publication in *Global Missiology*, [www.globalmissiology.org](http://www.globalmissiology.org), April 2025

The April 2025 issue of *Global Missiology - English* will examine the Fourth Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, or “Seoul-Incheon 2024,” that will have taken place in September, 2024. Lausanne I-III gathered in 1974 (Lausanne), 1989 (Manila), and 2010 (Cape Town), hence Lausanne IV (Seoul) marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Lausanne Movement. The following topics are examples of requested articles:

- The Lausanne Movement and the Worldwide Christian Movement
- Preparations for the Lausanne IV Congress
- Participant Experience of Lausanne IV
- Analyses of Lausanne IV: Historical, Biblical-theological, Missiological, Religious, Socio-economic, Political
- Immediate and Future Effects of Lausanne IV

Proposed titles with approximately 100-word abstracts are due October 31, 2024. Full manuscripts of approved paper proposals will be due January 31, 2025. Manuscript guidelines, including a template for formatting, can be found on the *Global Missiology* website at

<http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/about/submissions#authorGuidelines>.

Please address all submissions and questions to [globalmissiologyenglish@gmail.com](mailto:globalmissiologyenglish@gmail.com).

## Book Review

### **Aila Tasse and Dave Coles, *Cabbages in the Desert: How God Transformed a Devout Muslim and Catalyzed Disciple Making Movements Among Unreached Peoples***

Reviewed by Mark Naylor

Published in *Global Missiology*, [www.globalmissiology.org](http://www.globalmissiology.org), July 2024

Tasse, Aila and Coles, Dave (2024). *Cabbages in the Desert: How God Transformed a Devout Muslim and Catalyzed Disciple Making Movements Among Unreached Peoples*. Richardson, Texas, USA: Beyond, 363 pp., \$16.99, paperback, ISBN-13: 979-8987020739; \$9.99, ebook.

#### **Abstract**

*Cabbages in the Desert: How God Transformed a Devout Muslim and Catalyzed Disciple Making Movements Among Unreached Peoples* by Aila Tasse and Dave Coles provides case studies and explanations from in and around Kenya about Disciple Making Movements (DMM). Through his Lifeway ministry Aila Tasse has empowered many DMM practitioners who have established ongoing Disciple Making Movements. The case studies by these practitioners provide details and examples of contextualized and faithfully practiced disciple-making principles through which the DNA of fruitful movements can be established, multiplied, and sustained.

**Key Words:** DBS, disciple-making, DMM, movements, multiplication, simple church

#### **Introduction**

*Cabbages in the Desert* is a collection of epiphanies and paradigm shifts for Christian ministry that were worked out and acted upon across several African countries resulting in dramatic movements to Jesus in many communities. The shift to Disciple Making Movements (DMM) is portrayed through a series of case studies interspersed with sociological and theological reflections. The case studies reveal how God has used disciple-making principles and practices to establish his kingdom among people groups considered resistant to the gospel. The practices illustrated in the case studies are not given as an apologetic for a DMM methodology; rather, they are powerful descriptions of how a faithful and persistent appeal to the Lord of the harvest results in workers (Mt. 9:38) and are a fulfillment of Jesus's call to join him in his mission (Mt. 28:19, 20).

It is clear that this disciple-making process exemplified in *Cabbages in the Desert* is dependent on the movement of the Holy Spirit, the convicting power of the Bible, and the obedience and initiative of ordinary believers who answer Jesus's call to make disciples who make disciples. This multiplying mobilization, based on a vision of God's mission, has resulted in extensive growth in the kingdom of God. The importance of this book for churches and agencies worldwide lies in the paradigm shifts that provide a pattern and pathway for those called to obey the Great Commission by multiplying disciple makers.

#### **Notable Features**

*Cabbages in the Desert* is organized into eight sections with three appendices. The first two sections walk the reader through Aila Tasse's journey towards a commitment to DMM principles and practices. The DMM principles introduced in chapter 8 are illustrated by two case studies

(“testimonies”), which conclude the second section. The remaining sections dig deeper into these DMM principles. Each section begins with a chapter from Tasse explaining a particular concept followed by chapters describing case studies of flourishing movements that outline how the movements began and present the key principles and practices that were significant to the movement catalyst. The concepts explored in these sections are:

- Catalyzing Disciple-Making
- Biblical Foundations for Disciple-Making
- Disciple-Making in Practice
- The Disciple-Making Journey
- Unleashing Disciple-Making Leaders
- Disciple Making Movement Dynamics

Appendix A continues Aila Tasse’s personal story with a description of how the gospel impacted his family. Appendix B provides an overview of the training used by the Lifeway ministry to equip DMM practitioners. Lifeway is the mission organization started by Tasse to do outreach and plant churches, and whose primary focus today is to encourage Disciple Making Movements. Appendix C provides a series of “Creation to Christ” Bible passages for Discovery Bible Study (DBS) gatherings.

The book’s primary DMM multiplication orientation and process is described in the “Catalyzing Disciple-Making” section, supported biblically in the next section and analyzed as a seven-step process in chapter 20 in consideration of the “disciple-making journey.” Additionally, there are two practices detailed in the final two sections that reveal how the disciple-making multiplication process grows and is sustained. In the “Unleashing Disciple-Making Leaders” section, one practice focuses on levels of leadership development and outlines how to equip and empower DMM practitioners who train others to become disciple makers. These levels are illustrated succinctly in a graphic on page 284. The key to reading this diagram is to realize that it does not represent a hierarchy of status or power; rather, the diagram pictures positions of influence developed through relationships of trust as believers are empowered to create disciples who are also disciple makers. The relationships are expressed through an ongoing dialogical, discovery process as leaders at different levels meet to discern God’s will.

The second practice worth considering for any DMM practitioner is a determined response to potential breakdowns in the multiplication process that is explained in the “Disciple Making Movements Dynamics” section. For a movement to be sustainable, the disciple-making multiplication DNA must be passed down to each generation. Each movement has a life cycle and, in any generation, the multiplication DNA can be undermined so that the movement will plateau or even die. The fourth generation is critical “when fresh equipping needs to begin.” Equipping hubs “prevent the plateau and decline of the movement” (p. 317).

A chart in the conclusion summarizes the DMM process in “three critical areas—starting, multiplying, and sustaining” (p. 340). Although the chart is a helpful reference to the multiplication DNA that creates movements, it is the explanations and case studies in the rest of the book that capture the imagination and excite aspiring disciple makers. What brings the chart to life is active participation in the process.

### **Aila Tasse’s Life and Ministry**

The primary disciple-making case study is Aila Tasse's life and ministry. His personal testimony of coming to Christ and his rejection by his Muslim family and community described in chapters 1-4 is followed by a narrated series of evangelistic and ministry attempts. Eventually Tasse let go of his approach and "embraced the idea of movements" through the "conviction and urging of the Holy Spirit" (p. 84), as described in chapter 8. In 2007, Tasse's "calling was ... clarified to multiplying disciples" (p. 92), and the "Lord inspired [his Lifeway team] to understand that if we multiplied disciples it would lead to multiplication of cell groups, leaders and ultimately churches" (p. 86). This vision of multiplication in disciple-making led to a comprehensive process that developed commitment (heart), strategy (head), and action (hands) in all levels of leadership, from the facilitators of DBS groups through to those designated "Global Catalysts" because they have successfully initiated a movement and are now launching new movements by using their experience to "catalyze, mentor, and coach the movement leaders" (p. 282).

Several experiences and epiphanies had prepared Tasse for this significant disciple-making shift. In chapter 4, he relates a three-part vision that shaped his life and future ministry. First, he discovered the release to love others through a time of prayer and forgiveness for all those who had persecuted him. Second, he was given a vision of a potter, which he interpreted as God's call to use him and shape him. Third, Tasse received the vision of cabbages in the desert that has given this book its title. The vision meant that God would bring eternal life to a place where life seemed impossible, and he understood this life-bringing task to be the one granted to him. The gospel was revealed as the water of life that changes people hostile to the gospel based on God "doing a new thing" (Isa 43:18-20).

Another key experience came after a successful evangelistic campaign when a woman came up and demanded, "Now who among you will remain behind to teach us about this God you've told us about?" (p. 51). Tasse confesses that "Her question haunted me, echoing in my heart and mind." It led to a conviction that the task required a move "from decision-making to disciple-making," through which he must multiply himself into the lives of others (p. 52). Indigenous people must reach their own group to be effective, and DMMs achieve sustainability when people embrace the gospel as part of their identity and not as something foreign.

### **Describing DMM**

Each of the remaining 14 case studies ("testimonies") are from a "Global Catalyst" within the Lifeway network (p. 99). The case studies are intriguing due to their repetitive nature. While each has unique elements due to its context and obstacles faced by each team, the similarities underscore the importance of the DMM pattern for establishing a multiplying disciple-making process. Team-based problem-solving structures are established within each movement when leaders are called together to "evaluate the health of the movement" and identify weaknesses, strengths, and shortcomings (p. 254). However, there are few details of current struggles and how previous problems were overcome. Examples of problem-solving processes as well as a description of the difficulties that were overcome through this process would be helpful for those facing similar troubles.

The DMM process from start to movement is repeated throughout the case studies with some variation, but the basic outline is as follows:

When we introduce people to Jesus, they begin a journey of discipleship which involves making more disciples. It includes prayer, caring for others' needs, finding those who are

open (persons of peace), starting Discovery Bible Studies, gathering believers into groups, developing leaders, and catalyzing continuation of the process. We keep on encouraging that kind of multiplication. When successful, this process yields disciples who repeat the same process with others (p. 176).

Tasse describes a Disciple Making Movement as occurring when “the Spirit of God empowers teams of ordinary people to lovingly obey Jesus and rapidly multiply disciples who make disciples to at least the fourth generation, resulting in more than 100 simple churches” (p. 179).

### **DMM and the Holy Spirit**

What is the relationship between this human organized methodology and the power of the Holy Spirit? Tasse insists that “Obedient disciples play an active role in the advance of a movement, but no human can control a movement or make it happen” (p. 179). Few would disagree with the theological underpinnings of Tasse’s position. God uses his people to accomplish his mission and has given Jesus’s followers commands, such as the Great Commission, to participate in his mission. However, the promised helper is the Spirit (Jn 15:26-27), without whom people’s hearts cannot be changed. From this orientation Tasse provides “Characteristics of Disciple-Making” (p. 179), a list that views DMM as a process not a method, fits with New Testament patterns, focuses on disciple-making as opposed to decision-making, insists on group discovery rather than experts sharing their knowledge, and measures success as obedience to God.

What is the difference between method and process? Tasse maintains that disciple-making is a process because it introduces “a person to a relationship, to follow Jesus.... [It is a] life-on-life experience...., [not] a program with Lesson 1, Lesson 2, and so on, until the student finishes the last lesson....” He further explains, “Method is a particular way of doing something. Process is the step wise actions involved in implementing the method” (p. 175). Tasse seems to be saying that DMM is not an automatic template that works like an algorithm. Rather, there is a relational, integrated focus that depends on the response of the person and the working of the Spirit. That is, there is a relational component through which a person does not merely learn *about* the Bible and *about* Jesus but through the Bible comes to know and believe in Jesus through obedience. This relationship includes a growing commitment to Jesus’s mission of making disciples.

### **DMMs: Anomaly or Normative Ministry?**

Does the book’s DMM process have wider validity or is it context dependent? That is, are there factors in Tasse’s and the other case studies’ contexts that have led to such positive results—factors that may be missing elsewhere? Such a difference seems to be the case when we read in this book that disciple makers find people “open, very receptive” (p. 209), presentations of the gospel result in an elder of the tribe encouraging people to believe (p. 50), “people hear what’s happening in one place, and they send an invitation: Can you come and do the same in our community?” (p. 209), or a movement catalyst comments that “In our experience, a DBS often multiplies” (p. 202). All these scenarios would be considered unusual in some other contexts, e.g., many Western contexts familiar to some readers.

DMM catalyst “Mark” (chapter 21) makes the observation that culture determines how “best to enter a community” (p. 256), and this reality could imply that some people are more open and easier to reach than others and therefore movements are more likely to arise among them. However, his conclusion is not that a movement cannot happen in some contexts but that cultural

differences call for research, creativity, and prayer. If receptivity is the work of the Spirit, then it is inappropriate to assume that some people groups are “hard” and others are “receptive.” Even though most people in a community may not be receptive and many may be actively opposed, in these case studies there are always some people who are spiritually sensitive and hungry to hear about Jesus’s salvation and how to enter God’s kingdom. The question is understanding how a DMM practitioner can enter the harvest to identify and appropriately connect with those who are sensitive to God’s call to follow Jesus, with the intention to follow up with commitment and perseverance.

Furthermore, receptivity is only half of the issue. The other half is to use the right approach and process. Like landing an airplane, there are many ways to get it wrong and few ways to get it right. What these case studies emphasize are those key practices and orientations that cultivate impacting disciple-making DNA so that people respond positively and view the message as relevant to their lives. The right approach will provoke interest and provide a culturally resonant pathway to come to faith in Jesus.

The authors also emphasize that DNA drift from generation to generation is a constant danger (p. 254ff) through which groups lose the disciple-making commitment. Perhaps many churches in the West have been caught up with other pursuits so that disciple-making is not a priority. These DMM examples are then a challenge for such churches to awaken to the reality that they are missing Jesus’s primary calling to “make disciples.”

### **The Place of “Church” in Disciple-making**

Throughout the book there is evidence of a struggle around the concept of “church” within DMMs. Both ecclesiological and pragmatic issues are addressed, but they are never fully resolved. Clashes with established denominational churches and pastors can be divisive and controversial (e.g., p. 88, p. 298), since DMM radically reinvents the forms and practices that constitute “church” in contrast to traditional and denominational models. The DMM model of “church” is described in biblically functional terms (p. 87), and Tasse (p. 189) considers the contrast an “organizational” (therefore cultural?) issue rather than theological: “The prevailing paradigm [of ‘church’] common in many churches makes church leaders and members see life and ministry through the lens of an organization. Anything that does not fit the organizational paradigm feels like a threat to the church system. Making reproducing disciples requires a paradigm shift.”

Lifeway attempts to mitigate this clash by emphasizing disciple-making rather than “church planting.” A discipleship emphasis is more acceptable to those committed to traditional models (p. 92), and in many of the movements the term “church” is avoided in favor of the more neutral term “gathering” so that “denominational thinking” (p. 203) is avoided. Unfortunately, the term “gatherings” does not carry the same weight or status as a “church” designation. Thus, many of the movements describe a “transition” from DBS group to identity as “church.” However, such a transition threatens the multiplication DNA of DBS groups since traditional “church” practices and beliefs about biblical organizational structures contend for dominance. Even though there is a professed emphasis on maintaining the discovery process as the primary engine for disciple-making, there is also a tendency in some of the case studies towards developing larger groups in which the discovery dynamic is diminished and lectures/sermons become a competing method for teaching Scripture. As “Ruth” notes, “If someone puts a preacher up front, the fruit is zero! That church will not grow as a disciple making church” (p. 106).

Tasse also adopts the term “Simple church” (p. 118 Footnote 32) to emphasize the radical ecclesiological shift that is at the core of the DMM process. The claim—and the evidence given in the book—is that traditional and denominational church models are much less fruitful in terms of disciple-making and expanding the kingdom than DMM. Tasse would like DBS groups to identify as New Testament churches but without the baggage associated with common understandings of “church” and without alienating those still committed to denominational models. This tension will require more dialogue to discover if the distinct expressions of church can exist with appreciation for each other.

## **Conclusion**

Anyone in the worldwide Christian movement desiring to obey Jesus’s command to “make disciples” should take seriously the invitation extended in the conclusion to “come and join God in making disciples that make disciples” (p. 340). The DMM insights, guidance, and examples provided here are a gift and a challenge to those who are frustrated because they do not see multiplication within their ministry setting. In these pages we find a proven process that can be acknowledged by proponents and critics alike because it is not just a call for people to give their allegiance to Jesus, but a pathway by which people are invited to discover Jesus, embrace the call to be disciple makers, and so fully participate in Jesus’s mission to multiply God’s kingdom. God “takes things that look impossible and makes them possible. And he calls us to ... play our role in fulfilling that call” (p. 345).