

THE “WHY,” “HOW” AND “WHO” OF PARTNERSHIP IN CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Due to factors, such as globalization, rapid socio-cultural changes, increasing challenges to missions in limited access contexts, etc., Christian individuals and institutions are to have a biblical understanding of what it means to be brothers and sisters in the family of God. Hopefully, such understand will lead to partnership to fulfill God’s Great Commission by sharing resources and collaborative efforts. The purpose of this brief study is to examine the “why,” “how” and “who” of partnership for Christian missions.

The topic of partnerships in Christian missions is fairly new, so the quantity of Christian materials available was limited. The main source of research came from Phil Butler and others from within the Interdev organization tradition, which focused solely on the issue of creating partnerships for world evangelization. Luis Bush from the “AD 2000 and Beyond” movement wrote a classic work called *Partnering in Ministry*. The Lausanne movement, the World Evangelical Alliance, and the Evangelical Missiological Society produced books and topical papers dealing with specific aspects of partnership in Christian missions.

Clarification and definition of several key-terms are in order at the beginning of this study:

- **Missio Dei** is God’s mission, that is, God’s self-revelation as the One who loves the world, God’s involvement in and with the world, the nature and activity of God, which embraces both the church and the world, and in which the church is privileged to participate. *Missio Dei* enunciates the good news that God is a God-for-people.”¹
- The terms “**Mission**” and “**the Purpose of God**” in this study are being used interchangeably and defined as the *missio Dei*, God’s mission in all its fullness for the salvation of mankind.
- **Missions:** The expansion of the kingdom of God by the Body of Christ through various means and methods in collaboration with the Triune God to accomplish the *missio Dei*. **Missiology** is the science of missions. It includes the formal study of the theology of mission, the history of missions, the concomitant philosophies of mission and their strategic implementation in given cultural settings.”²
- **Partnership:** The unique opportunities in working with the Triune God and the Body of Christ to accomplish the *missio Dei* under the power and direction of the Holy Spirit.
- **Theology of Partnership in Christian Missions:** The study of the presence and intention of the Triune God in the collaboration with His Body for the salvation of mankind.

¹ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 10.

²John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith, and Justice Anderson, *Missiology*, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 8.

Below is a survey on matters of “why,” “how” and “who” of partnership.

THE “WHY” OF PARTNERSHIP

Most books on partnership began with the “why” factor. There were biblical-theological reasons, as well as the very practical reason that more could be accomplished if people worked together. Concerning this second point, John Maxwell³ and Panya Baba⁴ referred to Ecclesiastes 4:9-12. It states clearly that two are better than one and that a cord of three strands is not easily broken. McKaughan,⁵ Warren,⁶ Hahn,⁷ and Taylor.⁸ all highlighted the doctrine of the Trinity. The Godhead (its relationship, love, and unity–diversity) was seen as the starting point for understanding partnership. The literature review revealed other key concepts that informed partnership. The first focused on the unity of the family of God, as revealed in John 17.⁹ God’s family is to be one as Christ and the Father are one. A second concept looked at the body of Christ as found in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4.¹⁰ There is diversity and unity in the interconnected parts of the body as they work together for Christ’s glory. A third concept concerned the gifts of the Spirit. Van Engen¹¹ noted that Paul referred to the gifts in

³ John Maxwell and Tim Elmore, *The Power of Partnership in the Church* (Nashville: J. Countryman, Thomas Nelson, Inc, 1999), 5.

⁴ Panya Baba, “Chapter 11: A two-Thirds World Perspective: A Case Study,” *Partners in the Gospel: The Strategic Role of Partnership in World Evangelization*, (Wheaton: Billy Graham Center, c. 1992), 109.

⁵ Paul McKaughan, “Chapter 6: A North American Response to Patrick Sookhdeo,” *Kingdom Partnerships for Synergy in Missions* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1994), 69.

⁶ Max Warren, *Partnership: The Study of an Idea*. (London: SCM Press LTD, 1956), 38-39.

⁷ Geoffrey W. Hahn, *Cross-Cultural Partnerships Characterized by Grace* (Unpublished DMin Dissertation for Denver Seminary, April 2007), 24.

⁸ William D. Taylor, “Partners Into the Next Millennium,” *Kingdom Partnerships for Synergy in Missions* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1994), 237.

⁹ Warren, 68; and The Association For Theological Education by Extension and Interdev, *Partnership for Mission: a degree level course* (Bangalore:Taftee/Interdev, 2002), 53.

¹⁰ Addicott, 7.

¹¹ Charles Van Engen, “Chapter 4: Opportunities and Limitations,” *Working Together with God to Shape the New Millennium: Opportunities & Limitations* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2000), 99.

Ephesians 4 in a global context. Therefore, the gifts were given to the world church to be used for the world church. A fourth concept was that of fellowship, or *koinonia* in Greek.¹² It is a main biblical term used to describe community and the act of working together. A fifth concept was the Greek word *sunergos*, and John Stott, in his introduction to LOC#24,¹³ and Addicott, in his book,¹⁴ explained the root idea of parts working together for a common good. Paul used it of his “fellow-workers” in 1 Corinthians 3:9, Philippians 4:3, and 3 John 8. A sixth concept was *missio Dei*, which is the Triune God reaching out to a lost world.¹⁵ It is God’s idea and plan revealed through the whole of the Bible. God’s people are part of that plan and join with Him in his mission. A seventh concept was grace and love. God is love, and this love, as revealed through the Godhead, is the standard for God’s people in how they treat one another. Love is marked by grace in personal relationships.¹⁶ An eighth concept was that of the *ekklesia*, the Church. This was explored as the church local and Church universal in its relation to the *missio Dei*.¹⁷

Van Engen gave a good summary of reasons for partnership from Ephesians 4:1 - 5:2. He stated that: 1) together we belong to Christ, 2) together we belong to each other, 3) together we exercise our spirit-given gifts in ministry as we participate in Christ’s

¹² Hahn, 33.

¹³ John Stott, “Cooperating in World Evangelization: A Handbook on Church/Para-Church Relationships,” *Lausanne Occasional Paper 24*, March 1983, <www.lausanne.org> October 2, 2007, 5.

¹⁴ Ernie Addicott, *Body Matters: A Guide to Partnership in Christian Mission* (Edmonds, WA: Interdev Partnership Associates, 2005), 11.

¹⁵ Carmelo Alvarez, *Sharing in God’s Mission: The Evangelical Pentecostal Union of Venezuela and The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States 1960-1980*. Dissertation for University of Amsterdam. May 10, 2006. <<http://dare.ubvu.vu.nl/handle/1871/9807>> September 1, 2009, 10.

¹⁶ Hahn, 35-36.

¹⁷ Stott, 6-7.

mission, and 4) we grow together, as together we grow into the fullness of the stature of Jesus Christ.¹⁸

In summary, the literature presented biblical-theological concepts that explain why Christians, as the body of Christ, have the ability to work together in partnership for God's mission.

THE “HOW” OF PARTNERSHIP AND “HOW” IN CONDUCTING RESEARCH ON PARTNERSHIP

Much of the literature on partnership dealt with the “how to” of working together. These were practical reflections on overcoming obstacles to partnership. Specific research was done on the hindrances to partnership. Foundational practices for solid partnerships have been discovered. A core concept to partnership is the importance of building relationships and developing trust, especially in diverse cultures.¹⁹ Addicott's *Body Matters* and Butler's *Well Connected* covered specific methods of how to organize and run meetings, how to set goals, how to determine a purpose statement, how to come to a joint vision, what type of structure was best, how to deal with conflict management, dealing with diverse cultures, accountability systems, control, and finances. All of these issues impact partnership, as people from different backgrounds and cultures attempt to work together. Partnership is a process and hard work.

The literature revealed several methods of research used in undertaking studies on partnership. Much archival research was used in the gleaning of biblical-theological truths concerning partnership and in documenting the history of past collaborative efforts.

¹⁸ Van Engen, 85.

¹⁹ Daniel Rickett, *Making Your Partnership Work* (Enumclaw: Wine Press Publishing, 2002), chapters 5-6.

Strategic meetings and the ensuing papers from those discussions were also prominent, especially from the Lausanne movement. Lausanne occasional papers (LOP) were written in response to discussions on the tensions between the local and universal church in evangelism (LOP #24²⁰) and hindrances to partnership (LOP #38²¹). Case studies were widely used in the books of Kraakevik, Butler, and Taylor. In his dissertation, Alvarez combined archival research, participant-observation, and interviews as he examined the ecumenical partnership between two denominations. He set forth the thesis that this was a successful model of a true and mutual partnership.²²

The promotion and study of partnerships began in earnest in the 1990's. Books, articles, and dissertations began to emerge. An integrated method approach was useful in dealing with partnerships in Christian missions because of the combination of the study of biblical principles and field research. Integrated research method combines both qualitative and quantitative methods in one study. In his 2007 dissertation on *Cross-Cultural Partnerships Characterized by Grace*, Geoffrey Hahn used both qualitative and quantitative methods. He used archival research to glean biblical principles from Paul on partnership from three specific passages: Ephesians 1:4-10, Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4:1-6. He then presented the findings in a workshop. Before and after the workshop, he used survey method to determine pre- and post-understanding of partnership.

²⁰ "Cooperating in World Evangelization: A Handbook on Church/Para-Church Relationships," *Lausanne Occasional Paper 24*, March 1983, <www.lausanne.org> October 2, 2007.

²¹ William H. Sunderland and Issue Group No. 9 on Partnership and Collaboration, "Partnership and Collaboration," *Lausanne Occasional Paper (LOP) No. 38*, (Pattaya 2004. Copyright 2005) <www.lausanne.org> October 2, 2007.

²² Alvarez, 8-9.

The idea of strategic partnerships for the Gospel became well established in the 1990's and continues to this day. The research reviewed²³ on the subject primarily dealt with practical implementation, such as structure, procedural issues, culture, conflict resolution, and how to run meetings. They all referred to biblical-theological principles of partnership and often referred to the same passages. Unity was a constant theme, as was the body metaphor. Several authors mentioned biblical words and phrases like *koinonia* and *synergo*. In terms of theology, the Trinity and the church local/universal were discussed. All of the biblical-theological issues revealed in the review of the literature were helpful. Five key theological issues emerged that need to be explored in the context of partnership in missions in the Arabian Peninsula. First and foremost is the Trinity. This is the foundation for the other four theological issues and, therefore, partnership itself. The other four issues flow out of the Trinity and are keys to informing partnership. They are the purpose of God (*missio Dei*), the body of Christ (which will include *sunergos*, *koinonia*, grace and love), the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the Church. There is value in concentrating on these five theological issues and gathering them into one body of work.

²³ See * entries in the Bibliography.

THE “WHO” OF PARTNERSHIP

In 1991, through the leadership of Phill Butler (Interdev) and James Kraakevik (Billy Graham Center), a working consultation was held to discuss the topic of partnership in world evangelization. The four areas addressed were: 1) Integrated Partnerships to reach the least evangelized; 2) Church-to-Church Partnerships, which included Western churches and foreign counterparts; 3) Mission-to-Mission Partnerships, which included traditional Western agencies, as well as new emerging non-Western agencies; and 4) Two-Thirds-World Partnerships. More than sixty people, coming from five continents and twelve countries, participated in the working consultation. There were forty-eight mission agencies and twelve North American churches represented. The format included presentations on biblical foundations, case studies, and basic principles relating to each of the four major areas. The book, *Partners in the Gospel: The Strategic Role of Partnership in World Evangelization*²⁴ was a result of these presentation materials and the reports from the working groups. The four categories listed gave a solid overview of the different kinds of partnerships that could be undertaken. In addition, Bush claimed that Philippians was a book on partnerships, and it revealed Paul’s partnership with a specific church, a group of churches in a region, and individual people for the sake of the Gospel. The special partnership between Paul and the church at Philippi included: partnering in the Gospel (1:3-5), partnering in the Spirit (2:1), unity in

²⁴ James H. Kraakevik, and Dotsey Welliver, eds. *Partners in the Gospel: The Strategic Role of Partnership in World Evangelization* (Wheaton: Billy Graham Center, c. 1992).

partnership (2:2), partners help each other to grow (2:4-8, 3:20,4:21), partnership in suffering (3:10), and financial partnership (4:16).²⁵

Warren explored “Partnership and the Ecumenical Idea.” He mentioned some historical gatherings, such as at Edinburgh in 1910 and at Evanston in 1954, as examples of gathering for the sake of the Gospel. He also touched on the relationship between Eastern and Western Christians and the great commission.²⁶ In the book *Working Together with God to Shape the New Millennium*, Tom Sine referred to the AD 2000, Lausanne, and WEA International gatherings.²⁷ Chapters four through seven of that book were dedicated to exploring theological issues of working together across traditions. They recognized and voiced the differences within the universal church.

In summary, partnerships can be formed between individuals, churches, mission agencies or any combination of the above. Each entity in a partnership is unique, and the level of collaboration for the Gospel may vary according to the task and the entities’ ability to work with others.

CONCLUSION

This study is divided into three sections: the “why” of partnership, which deals with biblical-theological issues; the “how” of partnership, which deals with the practical workings of a partnership; and the “who” of partnership, which focuses on the potential partners and their task.

²⁵ Luis Bush and Lori Lutz, *Partnering in Ministry: The Direction of World Evangelism* (Downer Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1990), 22-30.

²⁶ Max Warren, *Partnership: The Study of an Idea* (London: SCM Press LTD, 1956), chapter 4.

²⁷ Gary Corwin, and Kenneth B. Mulholland, *Working Together with God to Shape the New Millennium: Opportunities & Limitations* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2000), 33.

An integrated method combining archival and survey methods is fitting for this study. The result of this research should build on the platform of existing biblical-theological knowledge and inform toward a theology of partnership in Christian missions.

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- *These are helpful works on the topic of “partnership.”