

Repositioning Paul's Missionary Band in a Postmodern World: A case for culture-bridging, missional teams as the heart and soul of the 21st century church

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I was there—Berkeley and Berlin during the student riots, the counter cultural scene of Amsterdam and Stockholm in the 70's, in France, knocking on a neighbor's door and meeting a family who said they were not in any way religious and were too busy to talk because they were baptizing their new baby. In the semi-autobiographical film, "The Jerk," Steve Martin begins to tell his story by saying, "I was born a poor, black child." To tell my ministry story, I have to begin, "I was born on a missional team to postmodern Europe."

I received my boot-training in Berkeley in 1967 where, in coffee shops, as part of a student team, I first met with representatives of those nascent postmodern tribes that now populate the 21st century. Soon after, I met them in London, at the School of Economics in 1968, then, repeatedly while I was a member of pioneering ministry teams in Paris, in Stockholm, in Helsinki and Berlin during the last few years of that decade. I engaged them up close at the universities of Orleans and Lyon from 1970-1974.

In 1975, I returned to the U.S. as a missionary and had to shift my approach and thinking from the postmodern encounters I had had in Europe to adapting to and addressing the culture of modernity and modern church structures I found in America. Just as I had to learn French to reach French students at the Sor-

bonne, and, in Barcelona, had to ignore American time frames to interact with Spanish students in bible explorations at one o'clock in the morning, on returning to America, I had to become fluent in the dialect and ways of modernism.

Our first year back was one of re-entry culture shock. It was hard to transition into and relate to the American modern approach. Then I met Donald McGavran, who also worked in non-modern contexts of India and the third world. His theories coincided with all that I had experienced at Berkeley in 1967, and as our teams engaged the various neo-barbarian tribes in London, Helsinki, Berlin and Paris. In the quarter of a century that has followed that valuable missiological training, I have worked cross denominationally (culturally) in hundreds of churches diverse in size, tradition, and geography.

However, today I come full circle in my ministry to addressing the issues that are raised for the church in reaching post-moderns in 21st century America. Flashbacks from current encounters trigger surreal sensations. Sometimes I must consciously tell myself that I have not returned for a second term of evangelizing the youth culture in Europe. The playing fields in America have changed from mono-cultural to cross-cultural and there are thousands of new tribes that are spiritually hungry. Unfortunately, they are finding answers elsewhere because the church is often seen as an irrelevant farce, confused, dysfunctional, divided, bogged down in introspection and institutionalism.

In the next few pages, I would like to look at an emerging solution that is rooted in the beginnings of Christianity, that builds on the ancient foundations of the church, but provides both message and metaphor for the future church. This solution is found in re-examining and applying the principles of Paul's missionary band. As we look at Paul's missionary band we see the first example of practical missiology and cross cultural team ministry in the New Testament, and the missionary means of implementing the great Commission. Paul's missionary band provides a helpful and appropriate metaphor for 21st century ministry and the implementation of the Great Commission in our postmodern setting.

I believe we need to develop a whole new skill set for the next generation of church leaders, because in a rapidly changing world where cultural shifts are taking place seamlessly, there is enormous confusion and ignorance about both church and mission in this new setting. We are relying on training and programs designed for a modern setting. We don't realize that in this postmodern world we need to be cross-cultural rather than monocultural and more missional than institutional.

The corrective skill sets are modeled in Scripture in Paul's missionary band. This "PMB" approach relied upon practical missiology and relational teamwork to reach the Gentiles, in contrast to the less missional Jerusalem church with its vertical structures and predominantly monocultural perspective. The skills and patterns of the original missionary band are also observed in the various waves of missionary bands throughout history.

I believe it is time to reinforce our ecclesiological foundations by introducing practical missiology and by learning from our biblical and historical origins to become a catalytic force once again. Only by understanding practical missiology, that is how we contextualize ministry, form effective cross cultural teams and address issues as a team in a particular context, can we effectively reach 21st century postmoderns.

Through this brief presentation I will begin to answer three questions:

- What is confused and dysfunctional about the way we are doing church in our North American, multicultural, postmodern context?
- Why does Paul's missionary band serve as an appropriate metaphor for clarifying, and simplifying postmodern ministry?
- How can Paul's team approach be adapted to effectively reach the emerging barbarian tribes who now surround us?

Understanding the confusion and dysfunction of doing church in our North American, multicultural, postmodern context.

At the beginning of the 21st century we find ourselves in a turbulent, multicultural, postmodern context in which, as a recent USA TODAY column proclaims, there is “Information everywhere, but not the time to think.”¹ In the church scene, there never has been a time where there are so many advocates boldly proclaiming their preferred correctives. Predictably, the backlash is already occurring. Congregational leaders are weary of hearing conflicting signals from outspoken enthusiasts, who are often perceived as contradictory, provincial and/or working at cross-purposes. At the same time, leaders of established denominations are encountering new difficulties in reaching the unchurched, and in meeting the needs of their increasingly diverse constituencies.

As these same leaders embrace the creative approaches of new tribal coalitions, such as Willow Creek Association and Leadership Network, they are often faced with strong resistance from retrenching members of their traditional wings. In some of America’s largest metropolitan areas there are encouraging signs of a new ecumenism in city reaching strategies, but the gains are often offset by unsettled theological suspicions. Finally, institutionalism continues to choke congregational life across our nation at unprecedented levels.

In trying to understand this current confusion and dysfunction, we need to look at three areas of distorted thinking and defective strategies.

Navigating the postmodern transition

It has often been noted, that the church responds and adapts slowly to changing cultural realities and shifts, often lagging up to two decades behind in its recognition of the current thinking patterns of the unchurched. This is no less true as we begin the third millennium. A host of researchers are providing clear descriptions and definitions of postmodern people. Recent books by Leonard Sweet and George Hunter point out, for example, that churches have difficulty in connecting with postmod-

erns because so many churches have no understanding and, sometimes, even resist seeking understanding of the postmodern transition.

Sweet claims that post moderns have had it with religion. They want no part of obeying propositions and rules of institutionalized creed.² Relationship and connection are at the heart of postmodern culture and our first challenge is to understand how to connect at a heart-to-heart level. The worst thing we can do is be perceived as self-absorbed consumers. Before anyone can connect or communicate with post moderns, they must become genuine givers and servers.

George Hunter, in his book *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, introduces us to what he calls the New Barbarians and enhances our postmodern portrait with some additional detailing.

A host of New Barbarians substantially populate the Western world once again; indeed, they are all around us....Often, they are thought to lack "class." They may have unshined shoes, or body odor, or grease under their finger nails; in conversation, they might split an infinitive or utter an expletive.³

Both Sweet and Hunter describe today's barbarians as returning to and embracing pre-enlightenment identities. As these subcultures continue to retribalize they are replacing the individualistic and rational enlightenment identity which stated, "I think, therefore I am," with their mantra "I belong, therefore I am."

However, most of the church's thinking remains predominantly modern, individualistic and rational. Consequently the messages that go out to the "New Barbarians" are often perceived as condescending, culturally chauvinistic and often commercial. Instead of going out, we are pitching them to come in and join our cultural framework. Hunter, in describing how the "Old Barbarians" were won, tells how the Celtic church routinely commissioned teams to effectively enter "enemy territory." Like Paul's

missionary band, they took the message to the barbarians rather than clean up the barbarians and bring them to the message. In contrast, the Roman church's strategy was largely ineffective in reaching the barbarian tribes. Like the Romans, according to Hunter, today's churches, are, for the most part, waiting for the barbarians to somehow find us and our institutional setting. Consequently, we are missing out on one of the greatest "apostolic adventures" available to Christians.⁴

It is our ethnocentrism, I believe, that often inhibits us from confronting our culture and initiating conversations with our nearby barbarians. Our view of culture must therefore be literally turned upside down. Rather than having the condescending view that our way is best, we need to be burdened to learn how to communicate in indigenous ways following the example of Paul, which was at the heart of the Celtic pattern of bridging cultures. Unfortunately, like the Romans, our tendency towards cultural chauvinism and ethnocentrism produces defective strategies because we want first to civilize them, then to Christianize them.

What is most needed today is for us to simply take the time to understand postmoderns, who they are, how they think and how best to enter their world in order to bring them to Christ. In doing this, we need to be less monologic and more dyadic. We need to learn how to engage our barbarians in a two-way conversation that involves listening for clues and looking for people who appear receptive.

Clarifying the relationship between the church and the kingdom

The second area where there is confused thinking is in the difference and relationship between the church and the kingdom. In the past five years, I have been privileged to form the Council on Ecclesiology and facilitate personal and group discussions between diverse constituencies within the evangelical church.⁵ The Council on Ecclesiology brings together members from traditions as diverse as New Apostolic, Reformed, Holiness, Willow

Creek, African-American Pentecostal, and young leaders of new emerging Christian tribes, to interact, to pray and to clarify the nature of the church.

One of the themes that emerged in the council is how the different traditions and churches represent a contemporary Israel, with discernable kingdom "tribes." During our first council of ecclesiology the discussion at one point bogged down considerably. Some of our "tribal" representatives were neither understanding nor embracing the perspectives of other members. Ed Delph, who represents the New Apostolic Churches, summarized the situation this way. "What I hear many of you saying is that you see yourselves as Israel, rather than as Dan. You want all of the tribes to conform to your view of the church. In actual fact, we are all individual tribes who are interdependent upon one another. Each of us has a valid perspective that needs to be stirred into our overall understandings of the church and the kingdom. None of us are Israel."

For example, Charles Van Engen has written a thorough theological examination of his classic reformed view of the Church in *God's Missionary People*. However, as a member of the Council, Van Engen affirms that interaction with other tribal views, such as that of Free Methodist, Howard Snyder, sharpens our overall understanding.⁶

In my view, too many cross-tribal teams have avoided substantive discussions of this kind in recent years, for fear of it leading to divisions. Now that the barbarians are surrounding us we can no longer justify an avoidance pattern. With so many city-reaching strategies bogging down over unresolved theological suspicions, we are obligated to invest the time to collectively reinforce our ecclesiological foundations. These issues will take the illumination and intervention of God's Spirit, and much continued interaction before they can be adequately resolved.

However, one thing is certain. As the patterns of post-modernity become more pervasive, all of us will need to be clear on our God given roles as dual citizens. We need not only to know who we are in the context of our beliefs, but also we need to understand our role in the kingdom.

In the first role of citizen, every pastor and Christian leader needs to belong to a particular biblical tribe, (church, creed, denomination) be a member in good standing, make a contribution that matches giftedness, understand the tribal ways and speak the unique language, "tribaleeze." In the second role of citizen, these same leaders must be able to interact effectively among other biblical tribes, and be just as fluent in the second language of "kingdomeeze." Churches can no longer defend entrenchment, but need to invest in kingdom issues by encouraging their pastors and people to invest a certain portion of their time in kingdom activities.

Overcoming institutionalism and simplifying structures

Many of us who work in front line congregational revitalization could become discouraged when we look at the scoreboard of the institutional church. After more than 25 years of seeking to overcome the entropic forces that prevent congregations from experiencing fruitfulness, we can point to a small percentage of exceptional leaders who have broken out of the pervasive pattern. For a variety of reasons the majority of leadership teams are not able to breakthrough the strong gravitational force that grips them.

In a recent workshop on team ministry designed for congregational consultants, Gary McIntosh and I asked the participants to give us words they hear from congregational leaders that describe this epidemic, entropic condition. Here is the list of synonyms we recorded:

Plateaued	Culturally irrelevant
Declining	Institutionalized
Stagnant	Broken
Dead	Wounded
Traditional	Dysfunctional
Stuck	Christendom

What is going on? Why is it so difficult to reverse these deep-seated patterns? I would submit to you that the most serious causes relate to our strategies for reaching unchurched per-

sons, for caring for new believers, and for developing leaders. Traditionally we have described this process as people flow.⁷ During the last several years I have come to the conclusion that our defective structures are perhaps even more important than people flow and leadership development. Putting it simply, our structures are strangling our churches. Congregational life is literally being squeezed and squelched by an overly complex and cumbersome governmental apparatus.

It is time to find a simpler, more life-giving means of reproducing ministry. Rather than perceive the trends as sources of despair and gloom, I choose to view them, along with Lyle Schaller, as signs of hope that can be used as contextual foundations for designing ministry in an emerging postmodern world.⁸ In the next section we will look at the solutions proposed by the Apostle Paul. The good news is that his missionary band thrived on the kind of turbulence we are experiencing in this new millennium. Here are some motivational and strategic questions that I hope you will answer in the affirmative.

If I could show you a way to

- eliminate institutionalism,
- avoid burnout among staff and lay leaders,
- drop the casualty rate among missional teams from 95% to 0,
- ignore the bell curve statistics, create sustainability in growth patterns and perpetuate healthy congregational life,
- double or triple the amount of real front line ministry for the same cost (the stewardship issue),

would you be interested?

These are the radical themes we now explore with Paul, beginning in Acts 11.

Understanding how Paul's missionary band serves as an appropriate metaphor for clarifying, and simplifying postmodern ministry.

There are a number of immediate reasons we can look to the spread of the gospel in the early church as a model for our

own...

- Paul's missionary team thrived on the kind of culture shifting turbulence that we are experiencing in this new millennium.
- Paul's missionary band was cross-cultural from day one.
- The spread of the first century church was more missional than institutional.
- It employed teams and leadership principles appropriate to our postmodern setting.
- Its' characteristics have been present in all the great historical movements of Christian revival and growth from Paul to McGavran.

I believe that in the study of Paul's missionary journeys, several important points are often overlooked. These points center around the crucial issues of selection, training and strategy.

a. Paul's selection. In Acts 11 we see that it was Barnabus who recruited Paul to join the missionary team ministering to the new Gentile churches in Antioch of Syria. As the initiating team leader, Barnabus was the one who spiritually discerned the potential of Paul and recognized his aptitude to reach those outside the Jerusalem world. Because of this talent for sensing and releasing gifts, Barnabus was able to link Paul to a highly appropriate pioneer mission.

The role of Barnabus has been undervalued in most commentaries. His leadership was critical in the team's development and outcomes. Without the spirit-filled discernment of Barnabus, there would not have been the rapid multiplication of churches through Paul's leadership. The tendency of most leadership development studies is to focus on the second or third generation leader, without recognizing the importance of the one who initially saw the potential and then acted upon those instincts.

Notice the progression. A naturally gifted man, Paul was selected by an astute and committed leader, Barnabus.⁹ The foresight and the trust modeled by Barnabus are two critical selection requirements that leadership demands. Paul then adopted this same pattern which he observed in the ministry of Barnabus. He learned quickly to discern and trust leaders, and to let go of

them early.

I see a quite different pattern in churches where I minister. Repeatedly I hear pastors tell me that none of their new converts, and very few of their volunteers are ready to assume leadership. This results in both lack of growth and internal tension. The underlying cause is the resistance of most pastors to give over their position to those who appear to them to be backward and untutored.

b. Paul's training. The way in which Paul's training was conducted is also overlooked. As Dean Gilliland points out, Paul did not train anyone *for* ministry. He trained them *in* ministry. Paul's apprenticing style was learning by doing. He believed that Christians can best learn while serving.

Matriculation took place at baptism, with appointment to ministry following almost immediately, even while engaged in the first courses of study. They were not only to be instructed, but were to teach as well, beginning with the first day after their conversion (Rom.15:14, Phil 1:5, Col. 3:16).¹⁰

Our tendency is to insist upon a sequence which delays participation in ministry until there has been what we perceive to be, sufficient, supervised learning. We over prepare and under empower. The greatest gift we can give newly formed missional teams is the right to think out and act out the Christian life for themselves.

c. Paul's strategy. Most studies of Paul's missionary journey's do not emphasize the structural pattern that was established by this pioneer team. In Acts 13:2 we read, "As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." This pioneer team, engaged in what Gilliland describes as the Cyprus and Cyrene Mission, was called to separate itself from the rest of the church for a special mission.¹¹

Ralph Winter uses the term sodality to describe these legitimate specialized teams. The other, more "normal" redemptive structure in Paul's day was the local synagogue. As Barnabus

and Paul were sent out they built upon the familiar structure of the Jewish proselytizing bands Jesus referred to in Mt 23:15, which functioned apart from the local synagogues.

According to Winter the very fabric of the Christian movement will be torn apart if either the warp or the woof does not play its essential purpose. The warps are the longitudinal, vertical or modality structures, whereas the woofs are the lateral, horizontal or sodalic structures.¹² Groups with membership restrictions such as age, gender, or disciplinary standards are sodalities; those that are non-restrictive and that in principle desire to include everyone, are modalities.

There are several characteristics of Paul's missionary strategy which illustrate the advantages of sodalities:

- Their *ability to attract the unchurched* and to incorporate new Christians is undeniably superior to the ability of modal structures.
- Although their existence has created tension for churches throughout the ages, they are not an aberration, but a *complementary, biblical vehicle* for reaching non-Christians.
- Missional teams should be allowed as much *autonomy to design and complete their calling* as church polity will permit. Bureaucratic restrictions and effective mission are incompatible.

The strategy of Paul and Barnabus was quite different from the normal, modality strategy at the Church of Jerusalem. The intricate relationship between Barnabus and Paul proved itself not only in their rapid formation of reproducing Christian communities, but also in the delicate communication with Jerusalem. Barnabus was the encourager. Whenever Barnabus found a person or a cause needing to be encouraged, he supplied all that he could.

Paul on the other hand, consistently created a stir wherever he went. According to F.F. Bruce, when Paul left for Tarsus after his 15 days in Jerusalem, they probably breathed a sigh of relief.

He had been a thorn in their flesh in his persecuting days.¹³ They were to learn that Paul the Christian could also be a dis-

turbing presence. Trouble was liable to break out every time he visited Jerusalem.

This is what missional team leaders typically do. They make things happen, and they create tensions. They also need someone like Barnabus to go before and after them. Another example of this divine partnership in action was the critical selection of Barnabus during the investigation of the rapid growth of the churches at Antioch, recorded in Acts 11:21-23.

Since the leaders of the Jerusalem church exercised supervision and control over the spread of the gospel into adjacent territories, had someone other than Barnabus been selected a quite different outcome might have occurred. There were probably some who suspected wild syncretism, since the forward movement at Antioch presented features which some members of the church of Jerusalem would have found deeply disturbing. But through the lens of Barnabus they excepted these strange developments.¹⁴ Barnabus, the encourager, found much cause for satisfaction.

Before turning to other examples of sodalities in the redemptive history of Christianity, consider these additional features of Paul's initial missionary band:

- Barnabus and Paul both had cross-cultural experience, and were able to form an indigenous ministry to the Hellenistic world. They provide the first manual in practical missiology. They formed a particular team to reach persons in a particular context.
- They complemented and completed each other as the key persons within a team-sized entourage. They recognized what the other person brought and valued the other person. They modeled giftedness, trust, healthy relationships, and Christian community.
- They were led by and in tune with the Holy Spirit. They believed in God's sufficiency no matter what the circumstances.
- Barnabus was willing to allow Paul to lead the team. He was a model of how leadership succession is supposed to work in the church.

- Barnabus went on to mentor others on teams, notably Mark. Paul, because of his own giftedness, did not perceive Mark the same way. Barnabus again saw what Paul could not see, and served as a strategic link and mentor. Every team needs these strategic links and mentors if they are to reproduce.
- Paul covered a great deal of territory. He and his team did not stay so long in one place as to become institutionalized.
- Paul learned from Barnabus to empower people early, and he continued this practice. They planted churches that became quickly autonomous and that continued to reproduce other Christian communities.
- They developed new leaders by taking them into real ministry settings. They expected people to rise to the challenge. Leaders were developed in the midst of challenging circumstances. Not all of their young disciples survived. But the best leaders emerged.
- They were able to secure authority from Jerusalem when it was necessary, by presenting their church planting approach in ways that were perceived as favorable and appropriate. They modeled how sodalities can be highly autonomous, yet work in effective partnership with modalities for a greater purpose.
- They developed an overall effective strategy, which drew upon the history and credibility of Barnabus. When the discerning gifts of Barnabus were creatively blended to the catalytic gifts of Paul, an explosive, cross-cultural movement was launched.

Summary of original team: Paul's missionary band was formed as a cross-cultural team. The story is as much about Barnabus as Paul. Together, they interacted with the more institutional, established church, in a creative and healthy manner. Because their team was both mobile and frontline, it avoided the inevitable tendency to lapse into institutionalism.

Examples of later sodality teams: The practical characteristics of Paul's missionary team have been present in all the great

historical movements of Christian revival and growth from Paul to McGavran. Additional strategic clues for reaching postmodern barbarians can be discovered in the unfolding interplay of sodalities and modalities following the first century.

Perhaps the most impressive example, and one we mentioned earlier, is seen in Celtic Christianity from the fifth to the eighth centuries. Here we can observe repeatedly the same kind of misunderstandings which Paul and Barnabus faced at the Council of Jerusalem, based upon the difference in perspectives between sodalities and modalities.¹⁵ Latourette, for example, cites the irritation by the local bishops in Ireland and all throughout the Alpine valley when encountering one of Patrick's missionary bands, referred to as the Irish peregrini. Their faith and lifestyle simply did not fit into the bishop's diocesan pattern.

According to Latourette the diocesan pattern of organization was replaced in Ireland by the monastery, probably because of the prominence of the tribes throughout the region. As home of a vigorous monasticism, Patrick and his progeny organized around this movement, preferring abbots in the administrative role, rather than the more modalic bishops. Patrick's centers of learning were unique in that their monks migrated to distant countries. They formed missionary groups both to reach pagan populations and to elevate the morals of the nominal Christian populations near whom they settled.¹⁶ The apostolic teams sent out by Patrick, beginning in the fifth century, closely resembled Paul's missionary band in the manner in which they engaged barbarians in both conversation and in ministry.

The Celtic achievements as a movement were astonishing. As Hunter's study substantiates, Patrick's bands multiplied mission-sending monastic communities, which continued to send teams into settlements to multiply churches so that within two or three generations all of Ireland had become substantially Christian.

Celtic monastic communities became the strategic "mission stations" from which apostolic bands reached the "barbarians" of Scotland, and much of England, and

much of Western Europe.¹⁷

Ultimately, what caused their disappearance in the two centuries following the Synod of Witby in 664 was the control of the Roman way over the Celtic way. The Romans were more conservative. They insisted upon cultural uniformity rather than allow for shifts in methodology. Celtic Christianity adapted to the people's culture, in matters such as hairstyle.¹⁸ The Romans wanted Roman cultural forms imposed upon all churches and people.

A few examples of missionary teams can be observed after the 9th century, such as the Frenchman Peter Waldo. The Poor Men of Lyon, initiated by Waldo multiplied discipleship communities rapidly through Spain, Italy, Germany and Bohemia at the end of the 12th century. The Pauline pattern of reproducing Christian communities was further developed by John Wesley during the mid-18th century Evangelical Revival in England and the United States.

But it was not until William Carey and a colleague sailed for India to initiate the first undertaking of the Baptist Missionary Society that rapid cross cultural missionary activity returned to the level of the Celtic teams of the fifth and six centuries, or to Paul's first century missionary band. Carey, after the greatest of effort and patience in persuading the non-conformist Baptist that a new structure was necessary for mission, settled in Serampore, a Danish possession near Calcutta. His "Serampore Trio" translated and printed the Bible into several languages and founded a school for the training of Indian Christians.¹⁹

As Winter points out, Carey was not the only pioneer who encountered resistance in launching a structure for mission.

Indeed all down through history, structures for mission have, by and large been greeted with great reluctance by church governments, and have generally required the additional impulse of Pietism, Wesleyanism or revivalism. Somehow the older and more settled a denomination, the more likely the church government itself is going to be fully occupied merely with the task of staying on top of things.²⁰

It is crucial that we understand the interplay of these two redemptive structures in history. In retrospect we can see two strategic principles. First, the need to emphasize the explosive potential of the upside. Second, the need to avoid the debilitating, and potentially schismatic downside.

One of the greatest examples of under appreciating sodalities can be observed in Luther. Not only did he reject the Roman church, but specifically the Augustinian order, and with it the very concept of an order. His opposition to Roman control over the German diocesan structure was understandable and necessary. But in an unfortunate overreaction, he entirely abolished the horizontal Protestant structures as well. In a bold assessment of reformation history, Winter suggests that perhaps the most significant Protestant schism was not the disconnection of the German and Scandinavian churches from Rome, but rather the drastic and seemingly permanent rift between the horizontal and vertical structures.²¹

If William Carey can be credited with rediscovering the advantages of Paul's missionary band, Donald McGavran must be recognized for taking the strategic insights to the next logical level. As early as the 1950's, McGavran's investigation of indigenous strategies and people movements clearly confirmed the upside of sodalities.²² In the tradition of Paul and Barnabus, McGavran also made things happen, and at the same time created tensions. He rocked the boat in India as field secretary, questioning whether schools and hospitals had taken up so much energy and money that evangelism had been forgotten. And he later rocked the boat in numerous speeches and articles challenging both the priorities and the structures of the conciliar movement.²³

Although McGavran was an early adopter in his conceptual understanding of Christian movements, he was a late bloomer in forming his own missionary band. In fact, his call from David Hubbard to form the School of World Mission team did not come until he was 67 years old, a time when most of his peers would have expected him to retire on his Oregon farm.²⁴ But once the call came McGavran's ideas converged quickly, especially as

they were shaped and communicated by Tippett, Orr, Winter, Wagner, Glasser and Kraft. The combined ripples of McGavran's pioneer team literally changed the way in which churches developed in the last half of the 20th century.

Thirty-five years after McGavran launched the church growth movement in Pasadena, we have reached a new level of understanding of Paul's missionary band. I am hopeful that we can influence others to heed and to adopt this metaphor. Adjustments in structure and strategy are urgent, because our culture has shifted, with a new generation of lost tribes who are highly unlikely to respond to an institutionalized church.

Understanding how Paul's missionary team approach be adapted to effectively reach the emerging barbarian tribes

What does the dynamic equivalent of Paul's missionary band look like in our postmodern, multicultural reality? In my article "Mega-shifting to a Team Ministry Approach,"²⁵ I describe the characteristics of teams, how to shift to a team mentality and ways in which teams function within the church. The principle underlying the article is that there is a difference between the institutional, programmatic use of groups and committees and the focus on teams that lead to decentralized leadership, task orientation around a compelling, owned vision. I define team ministry this way, "... team ministry is ownership and self-initiated vision in which members carry out plans they themselves have conceived or have had a part in conceptualizing."

- The vision is grassroots initiated and owned.
- Staff roles (both professional and lay) are different.
- Team members are connected to a compelling, owned vision.
- The teams are often fluid and focused on a task.
- Team members acquire a deep-seated belief in the power and synergy of teams.
- Team members experience a climate of trust.

- Team members practice open and honest communication.
- Conflict is viewed as a normal means of creatively exploring new ideas.

These characteristics are sodalic rather than modalic and are similar to the characteristics of the missionary bands in the early church. Just as we have seen in our brief historic overview, they were characteristics of missional, people movements, and they are emerging again as some of the strategies and skill sets to reach postmoderns. Eddie Gibbs, in his most recent book, *ChurchNext*, confirms that in a culture of chaos teams are better able to take risks, experiment and move churches through the stormy waters of change.²⁶

One of the greatest needs in the church today is to discover how to integrate sodalities into a complex variety of church structures. Fortunately, there is at least one laboratory in America which helps us to picture how Paul and Barnabus might have contextualized their strategy for reaching barbarians in a world that increasingly resembles their own.

New Hope Community Church in Honolulu, HI, has discerned an approach of reproducing missionary teams that resembles Paul's missionary band more than any I have personally investigated. Under the leadership of Wayne Cordeiro and his Barnabus-like partner, Dan Shima, New Hope has grown faster, has planted more churches, and has produced more radiant, reproducing missionary teams in their first five years than any other American church in recent history, including Willowcreek Community Church, Saddleback Community Church and Ginghamburg United Methodist Church.

To put it simply, New Hope has discovered how to reposition sodalities at the very heart of the church. The two redemptive structures have been fused into catalytic missional teams that are penetrating numerous barbarian tribes with a transforming, indigenous Gospel in Oahu and throughout the Pacific Rim.

Strategies for Radically Repositioning

What is New Hope doing differently from the last generation

of church growth laboratories? In many respects they have borrowed the best of what they have learned from Willowcreek and Saddleback. But in another respect their strategies are much more than mere refinements. They represent a visible return to the ecclesiological foundations of Paul's Missionary Band. New Hope's ministry is a simple and creative blend of relationship building (they call it "heart to heart"), servant leadership, and discipleship teams that rapidly reproduce.

New Hope's distinctive discipleship teams represent an advancement in the way they have combined the two most fundamental parts of a church, fellowship and witness. I call the ecclesiological essence of this catalytic hybrid simply "reproducing discipleship teams." In actual fact, they have discovered the means to fuse the best of the cell church technologies with the best team-building technologies. It is the equivalent of connecting both the sodality wire, and the modality wire on a jumper cable to a Book of Acts energy source. Once the two redemptive structures are attached a Christian movement ignites. Let's now look more closely at New Hope's story and their remarkable results.

Pastors Wayne Cordeiro and Dan Shima opened New Hope Christian Fellowship's bank account in Oahu on March 5, 1995 with a wealth of hope. Between May 1 and July 8, a P.O. box was issued, an office was leased, letters were sent out in search of those called to pioneer New Hope, an orientation meeting was held, and an initial "practice" worship was conducted. On September 3rd, 1995, at a leaders' evening service at an intermediate school in Honolulu, leaders were assimilated into seven ministry teams: front lines, sound, children/youth, greeters, ushers, parking and prayer.

Five hundred were anticipated at the inaugural Sunday morning service on September 10. Over 800 people arrived to a standing-room only service. By February 4, 1996 there were 1563 worshippers. At the end of the first four years, New Hope had grown to over 6,000 weekend attendees, with 4,800 receiving Christ for the first time. During the first five years they have planted 20 churches. Ten churches were planted between East-

er 1999 and Easter 2000. Five of these were in Honolulu, two in Japan, and one each in Montana, Samoa and the Philippines.

Perhaps the most significant statistics relate to staff ratios. With 6200 in current attendance, they have 32 full time staff and 31 part time staff and 526 volunteer team members. These ratios are less than half of the equivalent ratios at Ginghamburg United Methodist Church, one of the America's most streamlined team-based ministries in Tipp City, Ohio. New Hope's ratios are less than one third of the comparable ratios at Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois. In other words, these favorable comparisons mean a great deal more ministry is being facilitated by staff at New Hope, for less time and money than at these other two extremely healthy ministries. Also, New Hope appears to have reached an optimum level of rotating teams in order to provide adequate lead time and rest, thereby avoiding much of the burnout associated with lay involvement.

One final set of scores relate to conventional health indicators. Most of New Hope's disciples are young, first generation native Hawaiians that mirror the diverse demographics of the greater Honolulu area. During an eight day visit which included Easter weekend, plus the following weekend services, my wife and I experienced a level of Christian contagiousness that was the highest we have ever experienced. The joy and radiance of Christ manifested through lay leaders using their gifts in and around the service was overwhelming, and more impressive than any other feature we observed, including excellent preaching, drama, and music.

We detected no indications of institutionalism, or leadership burnout during interviews with staff and lay leaders at New Hope. Because of their unique system of deploying and caring for team members, New Hope's casualty rate appears to be insignificant, if not zero. Most important, there is no reason in theory why such multiplication of teams and churches cannot be sustained, in a pattern reminiscent of Paul's missionary band and the Celtic Christians, for several centuries.

Based upon the advances at New Hope, and the lessons from history, how can we reposition Paul's missionary band in

our multicultural postmodern context?²⁷ Here are a number of radical innovations that will facilitate this type of ministry.

1. *The primary texts are Exodus 18 and II Timothy 2:2.* The number 10 is a regulatory and optimum sized number for groups. New Hope uses the formula $1 + 4 \times 2 = 10$ to identify one facilitator (team leader), four persons who bring complementary gifts, and any available spouses, to form discipleship teams with a maximum of ten persons. The facilitator's primary role is to disciple each member as the team accomplishes its mission, and to multiply teams by finding faithful men and women who will find faithful men and women, etc.
2. *New Hope's mission statement is divided into four functional parts.* Four persons who serve on Wayne Cordeiro's leadership team at any given time are responsible for multiplying discipleship teams within page one, page two, page three, or page four.²⁸ Each member of every team begins by training a shadow to take their place so that they will be available to move to another team. Teams are then reproduced within each of the four pages. Multiplication occurs rapidly and one team which is responsible for a particular mission soon becomes four teams, so that ministry and discipleship are multiplying simultaneously. Alignment of teams within the overall mission is automatic and continuous.
3. *All ministry is done by teams with a clear goal and mission* If an individual gets an idea that fits the overall mission, New Hope does not launch the ministry until a balanced and qualified team is properly prepared.
4. *All teams are sodalities (specialized teams) with minor modality responsibilities.* Since every team has a singular mission that is definable and measurable, each team can pursue that mission with a minimum of encumbrances or distractions. The central task of any team, however, does not override the importance of valuing and caring for each team member.
5. *All members of teams are missionaries and emerging*

leaders. Evangelism occurs on virtually every team. Many of the service teams invite pre-Christians they meet along the way to join their team and to help them serve in various capacities. The attraction of the team's contagious, transforming and authentic faith serves as a powerful witness that proves to be highly fruitful.

6. *The entire congregation is a missionary organism (sodality vs. modality focus) rather than maintenance-minded institution.* The focus of each ministry is sodalic in nature. The overall sense is more like a missionary movement than a large local church. New Hope's sodality mindset has permeated and transformed a modality organization into an indigenous movement among a variety of postmodern peoples.
7. *Spiritual renewal and organizational replenishment is ongoing.* Members grow as they go. Approximately 20% of the focus of all care groups for new Christians is devoted to team-like activities. Each group determines among themselves how they can focus strategically on others. Service as a Christian core value is built into the discipleship DNA almost at inception.
8. *Accountability and placement are strengthened and simplified.* Only on an exceptional basis can a person be on more than two teams. Most of New Hope's leaders are being disciplined on one team and at the same discipling others on their own team.
9. *Territorialism and hierarchical thinking are irrelevant.* Because of the rapid movement of individuals and the constant multiplication of teams, individuals do not develop cherished positions, or set up their own turf to defend.
10. *The greatest congregational value is to be apart of a team that is sent out to form a new congregation.* No one is forced to be involved in a church plant, but everyone is encouraged. When a leader senses that their time has come to begin a new work, their divine call is vigorously celebrated.

11. *Contributing to this continuous exodus of teams is the belief that one's gifts can best be maximized by experience on a variety teams.* Individuals move with ease from being disciplined in a team-like care group, to joining a real team as a leader in training. They are taught immediately to train another person to take their place. As soon as this first step is completed they are free to make a lateral shift according to their interests and burdens. In most churches such rapid movement by an individual among several teams would result in chaos, and be interpreted as a lack of faithfulness or commitment. At New Hope, lateral shifts are encouraged as a spiritual way of discerning one's gifts and gaining the necessary experience on several teams to become an eventual team leader.
12. *Small groups are feeders to teams, rather than self-contained units which reproduce other small groups.* Specialty teams are able to reproduce more quickly than conventional cell groups because there are fewer skills to learn. Cell groups are more like a modality, since they function as a house church, or a complete reproducing entity. In contrast, specialty teams have some secondary modal responsibilities, but they focus approximately 80% of their energy on a single mission.

A few additional guidelines will be helpful to maximize Paul's missionary band approach, as it relates to our multicultural postmodern reality.

Realize that the transition usually takes two to three years for the average established congregation. There is a normal sequence of understanding, embracing, adopting and implementing any radical ideas. However, change should be encouraged throughout an organization, wherever there is receptivity. The shift to teams should permeate an organization at any and all levels gradually, rather than proceed systematically from the top down or, from the bottom up. Sometimes several pockets in the middle or at one side are the best place to begin.

Be sure to make the focus on reaching receptive groups of

barbarians rather than on individual nominal Christians. Important clarifications from Van Engen should be considered at this point in regards to forming contextual strategies to reach emerging postmodern groups. The planting of multi-ethnic churches, according to Van Engen, should be considered as an appropriate alternative to homogeneous churches in an increasing number of North American settings. Since the church is both particular and universal, recommendations should be determined by contextual analysis more than theoretical dogma.

I believe the primary criteria on which models should be evaluated is the extent to which they are able to preserve a contextually-appropriate balance between the UNIVERSALITY and PARTICULARITY of the Church. We should seek to avoid both cultural blindness and cultural imposition.²⁹

One of the best ways to reach indigenous groups is to emphasize hospitality as a critical frontline gift, and as an essential skill for all Christians to acquire. Wayne Cordeiro places a major emphasis on food, fun and relationship building activities at virtually every church gathering. In a nutshell, New Hope is not a program, but a heart to heart ministry, where one heart touches other hearts constantly through service and sensitivity. This relational reproduction of teams can be described as adopting more of the outgoing, hospitable style of St. Patrick than the cerebral style of St. Augustine.

Adopting the Pauline approach enables congregations to shift from complexity to simplicity. Any one who attempts to track the flow of people at New Hope, or to sketch an organization chart, will likely be disappointed. Individual leaders flow from one team to another through an almost invisible, yet spiritually discerned signal, by those who are relationally in tune with large numbers of leaders.

The criteria of selection of leaders is also reduced to a short, easily discernible list of three: Ability to facilitate teams, loyalty/comfort with team leader; some expertise in the area ministry. In contrast, most congregations in America, still require a long

list of leadership competencies, and assume that the most talented or experienced player will be the best team leader.

Perhaps best and most radical of all is the distillation of a single primary measurement of leadership effectiveness. In future 21st century team based ministries I believe the most important question to ask at the end of each year of ministry, is how many discipleship teams have you reproduced in your ministry this past twelve months?

Conclusion

Current postmodern writers often describe the frustrations and the difficulties in entering the world of the postmoderns and engaging them with the gospel. Wayne Cordeiro has put Paul's missionary band into action in 21st century Hawaii. New Hope has creatively contextualized the theories of McGavran in a postmodern expression of tribal Celtic Christianity. Advances by the teams at New Hope provide the biblical means to accelerate effective ministry among the emerging postmodern tribes in North America.

The great commission has not changed. The gospel has not changed. According to McGavran, God's unswerving purpose from the creation of the world has been for the salvation of persons of every race and tribe, every language and clan (Jn. 3:16; Is. 45:22,23; 49:6; 55:1,2; I Jn. 4:15; 5:1-2; Gal. 2:16). God commands a discipling of "ta ethne" in all lands, to the ends of the earth (Ro. 16:25ff; Mt. 28:19ff; Gen. 12:3; Phil. 2:10-12).³⁰ Churches should press forward, making sure that every tribe, kindred, tongue and nation has growing within it a vigorous Christian Church.

Like Wayne Cordeiro, this must be our core ecclesiology. Missionary bands (sodalities) can once again become the heart of a reproducing ministry. The two indispensable parts of a Christian church are fellowship and witness. Reproducing discipleship teams is a better and a biblical way to fellowship and witness, to grow as we go, to become a force, rather than a farce.

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NOTES

1. Elizabeth Weise, "Information everywhere, but not the time to think, *USA TODAY*, Thursday, October 19, 2000, Section D.
2. Leonard Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century World* (Broadman and Holman, Nashville, 2000), 112-113.
3. George Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach The West Again*, (Abingdon, Nashville, 2000), 96.
4. Hunter, 21, 121.
5. Additional information on the Council on Ecclesiology can be located at www.Ecclesiology.org.
6. For other perspectives, compare *God's Missionary People* (Baker, Grand Rapids: 1991), with Howard Snyder, *A Kingdom Manifesto* (InterVarsity, Illinois, 1985), *Liberating the Church: The Ecology of Church and Kingdom* (Wipf and Stock, Oregon, 1996), Bill Hammond's *The Eternal Church* (Christian International Publishers, 1981), Rodney Clapp's *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society* (InterVarsity, Illinois, 1996) and Dwight Perry, *Breaking Down Barriers: A Black Evangelical Explains the Black Church* (Baker, Grand Rapids, 1998), Brian McClaren, *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1999), and John H. Armstrong, *The Compromised Church: The Present Evangelical Crisis* (Crossway, Wheaton, 1998).
7. See Dan Reeves and Ron Jenson, *Always Advancing, Here's Life*, (San Bernardino, 1984). Carl George also builds upon this model in his meta-church framework. See for example, *Prepare Your Church for the Future*, 73-75.

8. Lyle Schaller, *Discontinuity and Hope: Radical Change and the Path to the Future*, (Abingdon, Nashville, 1999), 11.
9. For a technical profile of Barnabas, see Laura Raab and Bobby Clinton, *Barnabas, Encouraging Exhorter: A Study in Mentoring* (Barnabas Resources, Pasadena, 1985).
10. Dean S. Gilliland, *Pauline Theology and Mission Practice*, (Wipf and Stock, Eugene, 1998), 214-216.
11. Gilliland, 91.
12. Ralph Winter, *Warp and the Woof* (William Carey, Pasadena, 1970), 3-4, 55.
13. F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1978), 94.
14. Bruce, 167-8.
15. Winter, 32.
16. Kenneth Scott Latourette, *History of the Christian Movement* (Eyre and Spottiswoode, London, 1954), 332-333.
17. Hunter, 41.
18. Hunter, 35.
19. Latourette, 1033.
20. Winter, 33.
21. Winter, 20-23.
22. See, for example, McGavran's first book, *Bridges of God* (Friendship Press, New York, 1955).
23. See, for example, Donald McGavran, *The Conciliar-Evangelical Debate: The Crucial Documents* (William Carey, Pasadena, 1977).
24. Dan Simpson, "Celebrating Donald McGavran and Church Growth," *Ministry Advantage*, Fall, 1997, 1-3.
25. R. Daniel Reeves, "Mega-shifting to a Team Ministry Approach," *Ministry Advantage*, Vol. 8:1, Winter 1998, 1-4.
26. Eddie Gibbs, *ChurchNext, Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry* (InterVarsity, Downers Grove, 2000), 34.
27. For an additional description of what Wayne Cordeiro calls fractal teams, see his *Doing Church as a Team* (New Hope Resources, Honolulu, 1998).
28. Gary McIntosh's research confirms five people as the optimum number for a team in terms of efficiency, exchange and cooperation. *Staff Your Church Program for Growth: Building Team Ministry in the 21st Century* (Baker, Grand Rapids, 2000), 105.
29. Charles Van Engen, "Is the Church for Everyone? Planting Multi-Ethnic Congregations in North America," *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth*, Vol. 11, Spring, 2000, 17, 48, 54.

30. These statements were noted during an Advanced Church Growth lecture by Donald McGavran in 1977. For an additional digest of how McGavran's mission theology is to be practiced, see R. Daniel Reeves, "What a Biblical Theology of Mission Does," *Church Growth Bulletin*, Vol. 9:1, September, 1977, 152-156.