

5 Primary Paradigms That Continue the Mission of Jesus

Christianity is always only one generation away from extinction!

The only way the witness of Christ can continue in the earth is if His followers continue His mission. Based on my observations, there are five current models regarding attempts by Christ-followers to continue the mission of the Lord Jesus.

In order to understand this mission, we have to start with Acts 1, in which Jesus gave His parting words to His apostles before He ascended into heaven. Acts 1:1 records these words:

“The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, concerning all that Jesus began both to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

This passage states that the mission and ministry of Jesus in the Gospels was only what Jesus *began* to do. The implication is that the book of Acts shows the continuation of the ministry of Jesus through the church. Jesus then offered His followers the same power source He had to fulfill His ministry (notice Jesus did no miracle until He was filled with the Spirit—even though He was always God the Son) when He told them they would soon be baptized in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5).

However, the response of His disciples showed that they were already getting off track when they started asking Jesus questions regarding eschatology and Israel regaining their political influence through His kingdom. It is interesting that Jesus never bothered to answer the question directly but got them back to focus on the primary mission, which is taking the gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

He told them to reach the following regions:

Jerusalem: Which represented their own culture and city, a place they are comfortable with because everyone speaks the same language, keeps the same customs, eats the same food and dresses the same way.

Judea: This place represents the local church extending to have an apostolic regional outreach instead of merely focusing on its immediate community and/or city.

Samaria: This place represents a Jesus command to have a cross-cultural approach to those they are not comfortable with—to those who have some similarities with the Judaism of the original apostolic leaders but are tethered to a different ethnic, social and religious background.

To the ends of the earth: This represents a multiplication of churches and leaders with a goal to eventually reach every person and every nation in the world. This amazing cross-cultural command implies that the early church also had to employ methods resulting in a vast reproduction of the original apostolic leaders in the Jerusalem church because they would never have the capacity to be able to accomplish such a missionary endeavor with just twelve primary leaders.

This also implies the church should act like Jesus in contextualizing the gospel so that it can be understood by each people group over the course of multiple generations/outlasting earthly kingdoms and empires/until His bodily return to the earth.

That being said, we need to understand how the contemporary church is attempting to further the Jesus movement. Understanding this is essential if we are going to effectively obey the Christ mandate found in Acts 1:8-9, since we need to understand which paradigm best aligns with the New Testament pattern.

Contrasting Different Concepts of Contemporary Church Models

1. The Attractional Model

With this model, the primary goal is to try to get as many people as possible into your church building every Sunday. Hence, the goal is to gather a crowd more than to make disciples that are sent to transform the world for Christ. This “seeker sensitive” model utilizes a high percentage of their budget towards social media, marketing, lights, along with every imaginative bells and whistles that will give the church attendee a visceral experience.

In many cases, their target audience is mostly middle class, educated professionals and families. They usually produce the largest churches but often times have the least impact in the social, ethical, political and economic climate of their culture. Many churches in this category often have to import leaders from other churches that make disciples and produce leaders to plant their own churches.

This model also seems to accommodate and perpetuate the consumerist culture in the West (because the focus is drawing crowds based on catering to the needs of the believer instead of equipping them to serve their community and reproduce Christ in others). They also often accommodate Christ to culture, (they rarely preach anything counter-cultural) and change their strategies for outreach based on the values and language of people in the community so that they can do anything possible to attract them into the church services.

2. The Branding Model

This is a church that has garnered a lot of popularity—perhaps through its world-famous worship music or best-selling books the leader produces, or a prominent Christian media personality. Consequently, because of their high visibility and name recognition, they have a well-known brand—which enables them to attract huge crowds whenever they start church—irrespective of whether or not they attempt to

contextualize the gospel.

They also employ many of the same concepts and philosophies of the attractional church model because their focus is on drawing crowds, hence, they tend not to produce many disciples who will change the world. Since this model of church is similar to a franchise model as seen in fast-food chain McDonald's, very rarely do they change their approach to church because they believe people will assimilate into their culture instead of the church assimilating into and reaching indigenous cultures.

3. The Incarnational/Contextual Model

In this model, the church attempts to reach community by being present in the life of their city, serving their city, celebrating their city and being in proximity to those native to the church's context and culture. For example, if they are in a poor community, they will work closely amongst the poor; if they are in an affluent community, they will be a part of the life of that community's art, music and entertainment and celebrate what they can celebrate with the city without compromising their identity and godly witness in Christ.

Thus, the goal of this model of church is to be so ingrained into the life and fabric of their community that the people will get to know Jesus through their proximity, even more than through employing evangelistic outreaches. Along with this paradigm, they are also strong on doing life with people as a primary methodology to make disciples. (God commands us to instruct people as we walk in the way: Deuteronomy 6:7—even as Jesus organically did, as seen in the Gospel narratives.)

This model of church continually changes based on the community, context, culture and values of the people they are ministering to. (The methods always change, but the gospel message always stays the same.)

In my opinion, this paradigm of church, as well as the next

model we will study, is the most effective when it comes to reaching and establishing new converts in any particular community.

4. The Jesus Movement Model

The Jesus movement model also employs the incarnational contextual model as stated in the previous point; however, they go even further in attempting to replicate the first-century New Testament church. This is due to the fact that (unlike some Incarnational churches) they utilize the fivefold ministry function in order to equip the saints for the work of accomplishing the mission of Jesus (Eph. 4:11,12).

Since they are usually charismatically inclined, they usually employ and practice all the gifts of the Holy Spirit (as found in 1 Cor. 12:4-8) in order to validate and spread the mission of Jesus (just like the church in the book of Acts).

Furthermore, they have a Christological focus as well as a focus on manifesting Christ's reign on the earth through every sector of society (hence, they do not "divide the gospel" by separating the religious from non-religious or in separating the sacred from the secular; for more on this, see my new book *The Divided Gospel*). They believe every Christ-follower is called to be a minister representing Jesus in their particular sphere of influence on the earth.

In closing out this paradigm, I believe that the gospel message and demonstration of the message through the power of the Spirit never changes; however, our methodologies should always adapt and change based on the culture of the people we are attempting to reach.

5. The Para-church Model

By para-church model, I am referring to doing ministry either as an extra local extension of the church (like a network of churches or a denomination) or a ministry entity that operates

outside of—but in cooperation—with the local church.

In my estimation, many para-church ministries think that because Jesus made disciples in the Gospels without having a church, they can also make disciples without the local church being front and center. They do not understand that Jesus always had the church in mind when he was shaping His original 12 disciples and knew that they were ultimately going to continue His mission by building His church. (See John 14-16 to see how Jesus told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would continue His ministry through them after He was gone. Plus, the fact that He told them in Matthew 16:16-19 that the apostles would build His church.)

Consequently, the local and extended church was always God's plan for reaching the world! As good as para-church ministries are, they could never fully make disciples apart from the "deep drill" of the local church. Furthermore, while a para-Church ministry is an organization, the local church by its very essence is supposed to function as a "family of families" meant to shape individuals and families from the cradle to the grave—something para-church models can never do!

Consequently, the para-church model is only as strong as its ability to be a secondary leader, with a call to help local churches fulfill their mission. When this is in reverse—when the para-church demands that the church support their vision in order to fulfill the mission of Jesus—then it will fall short until the local church is again placed in the front and center of its mission.

Unfortunately, church history shows that after the first century, the local church was very rarely the front and center of the mission of Jesus, which is why we have largely failed in our quest to reach the world with the gospel. Perhaps because many expressions of the church lost their original zeal to win the lost and make disciples, other entities have supplanted the local church in our goal of reaching the

nations with the gospel of Christ.

For example, we often send missionaries to the nations through missionary agencies, not through a local church. We often train pastors and leaders in the church by sending them away to a theological school instead of using the local church for theological and leadership development (I believe we need both to partner together to succeed in this endeavor). Finally, we have been trained in the church to immediately ship people out to a psychiatrist or psychologist for counseling instead of first giving biblical counseling in the context of the local church.

In conclusion, if we desire to see the results of the book of Acts for the sake of the mission of Jesus, we need to follow the same strategies employed by the New Testament church; hence, we need to jettison methodologies that do not comport with these biblical patterns handed down to us from the way of Jesus and His apostles.{eoa}

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