

# CULTURAL INSIGHTS FOR CHRISTIAN LEADERS

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**New Directions for Organizations  
Serving God's Mission**

DOUGLAS McCONNELL

  
**Baker Academic**  
*a division of Baker Publishing Group*  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Published by Baker Academic  
a division of Baker Publishing Group  
PO Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287  
www.bakeracademic.com

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: McConnell, Douglas, 1951– author.

Title: Cultural insights for Christian leaders : new directions for organizations serving God's mission / Douglas McConnell.

Description: Grand Rapids : Baker Publishing Group, 2018. | Series: Mission in global community | Includes index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017055470 | ISBN 9780801099656 (pbk.)

Subjects: LCSH: Christianity and culture. | Christian leadership. | Missions.

Classification: LCC BR115.C8 M2625 2018 | DDC 261—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017055470>

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18 19 20 21 22 23 24      7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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To the two most influential missionaries in my life,

Paul G. Hiebert and Janna McConnell.

I am forever grateful for your wisdom  
and faithfulness to the gospel.

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## Series Preface

A mission leader in 1965, not too long ago, could not have foreseen what mission looks like today. In 1965 nations in the non-Western world were gaining their independence after centuries of Western colonialism. Mission societies from Europe and North America were trying to adjust to the new global realities where Muslim nations, once dominated by the West, no longer granted “missionary visas.” The largest mission field, China, was closed. Decolonization, it seemed, was bringing a decline to missionary work in Africa and Asia.

On the home front, Western churches were in decline, and the traditional missionary factories—mainline churches in the West—were struggling with their own identities. Membership was then—and remains—in decline, and missionary vocations were following the same pattern. Evangelical and Pentecostal churches began to surpass mainline churches in mission, and then, just when we thought we understood the new missionary patterns, Brazilians began to go to Pakistan and Malaysians began to evangelize Vietnam and Cambodia. Africans (highly educated and strongly Christian) began to move in great numbers to Europe and North America. Countries that had been closed began to see conversions to Christ, without the aid of traditional mission societies. And in the midst of this rapid transformation of missionary work, the alarm rang out that most Christians in the world were now in Asia, Latin America, and Africa rather than in the West.

What does it mean to be involved in mission in this new world where Christianity has been turned upside down in less than a century?

*This series is directed at this new global context for mission.* Fuller Theological Seminary, particularly through its School of Intercultural Studies (formerly School of World Mission), has been attentive to trends in global

mission for over half a century. In fact, much innovation in mission thinking and practice has emanated from Fuller since Donald McGavran moved from Oregon to California—as the first and founding dean of the then School of World Mission—to apply lessons about church growth learned in India to other areas of the world. Since that time many creative mission professors have provided global leadership in mission thinking: Ralph Winter (unreached people groups), Paul Hiebert (anthropology for mission), Charles Kraft (mission and spiritual dynamics), and Dudley Woodberry (Islamics), among others.

This series provides the most recent global scholarship on key themes in mission, written for a general audience of Christians committed to God's mission. Designed to be student, user, and textbook friendly, each volume contains voices from around the world speaking about the theme, and each chapter concludes with discussion questions so the books can be used for group studies. As the fields of mission are changing, shifting, or shrinking, the discussions connect the church and the world, East and West, North and South, the developed and developing worlds, each crossing cultural, political, social, and religious boundaries in its own way and knitting together people living and serving in various communities, both of faith and of other commitments—this is the contemporary landscape of the mission of God. Enjoy the challenges of each volume and find ways to live into God's mission.

Scott W. Sunquist

Amos Yong

# Acknowledgments

After thirteen years in the senior administration of Fuller Theological Seminary, I decided that in the next season of life I would like to get back to full-time teaching and the work of scholarship. I am deeply indebted to President Mark Labberton and Dean Scott Sunquist for the sabbatical to make that transition. Their support and encouragement was a blessing beyond what I had hoped for or planned.

I spoke to my colleagues Amos Yong and Scott Sunquist, the editors of the *Mission in Global Community* series, about the nature of the series in light of my particular desire to reengage with missiological reflection by reading in the fields of anthropology, leadership, and organizational studies. I suggested the approach I would take and was invited to submit a proposal. After a period of rest, I began several months of reading, studying, and writing a proposal. In the six months that followed the acceptance of the proposal, my reading and writing were increasingly productive, which was a pleasant surprise. Amos and Scott were great encouragers and guides. Thanks to both of you!

I am grateful for Paul G. Hiebert's influence as my teacher, mentor for doctoral studies, fellow missiologist, and friend. His influence on my thought and practice is a treasured resource. My colleagues at Fuller Seminary continue to draw from the deep well of Paul Hiebert's knowledge, and we give thanks for the memory of his life among us.

Janna, my wife of forty-seven years, was a wonderful encourager, editor, critic, and cheerleader during the months of research and writing. She has been my missionary inspiration since November 1969, when, through her witness to the love and redemption that come through Jesus Christ, I found life in him. Part of dedicating my life to Christ was accepting Janna's call

to missionary service. In these months of sabbatical we often recounted the joys and challenges of the journey, giving thanks for the faithfulness of God. Thank you for your faithful witness and constant support!

I discovered the wonderful resources available in the Orlando area, especially the libraries of the University of Central Florida and Eastern Florida State College at Cocoa, where the lake next to the library has a sign forbidding the feeding of alligators—a caution quite different from those in our David Allan Hubbard Library at Fuller Pasadena. I was able to use the libraries of Reformed Theological Seminary and Asbury Theological Seminary, finding both places a refuge for study and resources.

A very special thanks goes to my colleagues Marcos Orison Almeida, Judy Fitzmaurice, Katharine Thompson, Melody Wachsmuth, Siew Pik Lim, Joanna Sears Lima, John Azumah, and Nam Chen Chan who contributed greatly to this book by providing significant insights through their case studies. Their contributions highlight the dynamic interaction of culture and organizational leadership from the perspective of missiology. We share a common commitment to the mission of God and a common bond as brothers and sisters in Christ.

I want to especially thank Jim Kinney, Brandy Scritchfield, Eric Salo, and the editorial team from Baker for their helpful critique and suggestions; they were gracious in sharing their significant insights with me. My experience with them and everyone at Baker Publishing Group has been encouraging.

# Introduction

Leading a Christian organization is a sacred duty. If you accept the position, you must shoulder the responsibility, and that includes being a learner. Learning will never cease to be important in that role. One seasoned veteran charged that as leaders we should “make new mistakes!” I like that approach for a couple of reasons. First, it recognizes our humanity and, therefore, the inevitability of mistakes. The world is moving quickly, and we are trying our best, but that doesn’t mean we lead perfectly. Second, we find hope in learning from our mistakes. Although we will make mistakes, we can and must set a course to learn from them and to do it better next time. Does that mean we should feel free to make mistakes? Not necessarily; instead, we should feel free to learn from others and approach the challenges as a community, not a loner. Learning to lead means learning from others, their mistakes and successes. It also means that fear of failure and the overwhelming pace of change should not paralyze us. We lead in humility, as Christians serving the mission of God, and also in faith that God is trustworthy and gracious.

Leaders today face a tremendous challenge in the increasing influence of the cultures that surround our organizations. We cannot simply learn the ways of a particular culture and then move ahead with confidence. Many cultures are at play, not the least of which is the organizational culture of which we are a part. We must become students of culture so as to lead wisely in an era of globalization. Learning is such a privilege; it is too important to squander. The purpose of this book is to explore what we are learning about culture and the implications for Christian leaders of organizations serving God’s mission. In gathering my thoughts for this book, I decided to organize it around

a central question: *What are we learning about culture that will help shape, catalyze, and propel our organizations missionally?*

An important element of the Mission in Global Community series is the inclusion of missiological reflection from a diversity of international scholars. My approach was to contact eight of my colleagues living in seven different contexts but working on issues of global concern. I asked them to reflect on the general topic from their unique position as leaders who are also scholars influencing their respective organizations.<sup>1</sup> Each sent me a case study, and I have integrated their stories and insights into the substantive discussion of each chapter. Their contributions highlight the dynamic interaction of culture and organizational leadership from the perspective of missiology.

In emphasizing cultural insights for Christian organizational leaders, this book fills an important gap. Over the past three decades, missionary societies and Christian nonprofit organizations have exerted a great deal of energy in studying leadership. Workshops, formal educational programs, and a broad range of written resources have been produced to assist in the task. I have participated in all three approaches, observing the gains and gaps in our learning along the way. It is gratifying to see the gains. However, a big gap remains in our learning about the effects of culture on organizations and leadership, particularly on the organizational mission in relation to God's mission. I address this by reflecting missiologically, moving from areas that we know to areas that we are learning about, principally in the fields of anthropology, leadership, and organizational studies. To be true to the learning process, I ask not only, "What are we learning?" but also, "What should we be learning?"

## Missiology and Related Disciplines

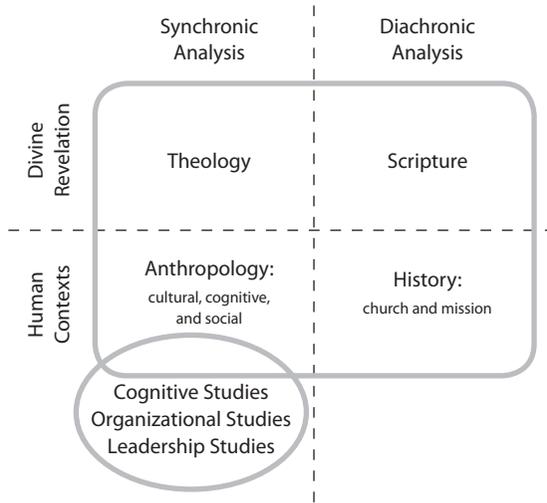
Foundational to the approach of this book is a missiological understanding of the mission of God, which we will refer to as thinking missiologically. Missiology is the integrated study of God's mission from the perspective of Scripture (biblical studies), theology, history, and anthropology (social sciences). Missionary anthropologist Paul Hiebert developed a matrix illustrating these four primary disciplines of missiological studies in two dimensions (fig. 1).<sup>2</sup> The vertical axis recognizes that missiology is concerned with

1. John Azumah's contribution, "The Five Faces of Islam," was originally written for Scholar-Leaders *InSights*. I chose to use it because it brings important insights into the conversation on religious worlds.

2. The works of Paul G. Hiebert considered in this volume are as follows: *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985); *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994); *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological*

understanding the gospel as God’s divine revelation, as it is communicated in the particularities of human contexts. The horizontal axis considers reality in reference to time, synchronic being a particular point in time (physical, social, cultural, or spiritual) and diachronic viewing the underlying story (biographical or historical).

Figure 1  
**Missiology and Related Disciplines**



Adapted from Paul G. Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 34.

Our task is to think missiologically about the function of culture in shaping, catalyzing, and propelling organizations and leadership, as illustrated in the lower left quadrant of figure 1. This approach builds on the work of missiologists in contextualizing the gospel in response to the issues raised in different cultures. In considering the contributions of related disciplines, we will pay particular attention to the influence of culture on organizations and leadership as it relates to adapting our organizations to better serve God’s mission in the changing contexts of the world.

To do so we will draw primarily on recent studies in the disciplines of cultural and cognitive anthropology, as well as studies in organizations and leadership. Additional input from the work of Christian scholars in the

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*Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008); and *The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009).

disciplines of psychology, cognitive science, and theology will help us with the missiological considerations. In addressing culture, we will focus first on the organizational culture (internal) and, second, on the societal culture (external) usually associated with the organization's national or geographic location.<sup>3</sup> Beyond the external or dominant culture, many other subcultures exercise influence—even vie for a place—in the contextual landscape; collectively, these will form the third culture of our focus. The fourth domain is religious culture, increasingly an influence on Christian organizations and leaders globally.

One of the most fruitful elements of the study to me personally was taking the time to understand the role of individuals in the process of culture formation. I always approached the subject primarily from the role of the group, leaving me with the question, What about individuals? In the end, every group is composed of individuals who, no matter how much they are products of their cultural contexts, are also unique and created in the image of God. I found the most plausible explanations in the field of cognitive studies, with support from colleagues who share my evangelical Christian faith and my recognition of the significance of the findings. As you think through the separate roles of human nature and culture, my hope is that you will also conclude that these two elements, nature and nurture, are inseparable and, therefore, interdependent. In my case, this realization has given me an even deeper appreciation of the wonder of God's creation.

## Chapter Outlines

Chapter 1 addresses the issues of thinking missiologically about our organizational mission in the light of God's mission. It begins by establishing a missiological approach personally and collectively based on the mission of God. It then moves to a missiological understanding of the wonderful mosaic of organizations as they relate to God's mission. Next it introduces leadership from the perspective of missiologists who have considered the role of leaders and followers. The chapter concludes with a case study on institutional leadership from the perspective of a Latin American leader, followed by a review of and reflection on the role of missiology in the tough missional decisions faced by leaders.

3. The choice of organizational and societal cultural categories reflects the common usage in leadership and organizational studies (e.g., for more on the GLOBE study of sixty-two societies focusing on culture, leadership, and organization, see below in chapter 7, under the heading "The GLOBE Project").

Chapter 2 builds on our understanding of culture by introducing the contribution of cognitive studies in explaining human contexts. We will consider new insights emerging in the discussion of human nature and culture as they relate to organizations and the formation of worldview. Studies on the storage and transmission of human knowledge contribute to our insights on how culture relates to individual processes as well as those of groups. Next is a case study on the importance of addressing the needs of the whole person written by an Australian medical doctor and international mission leader. The final section is a review of and reflection on the issues of culture and human nature.

Chapter 3 focuses on members of our organizations as people, human beings who are both physically embodied and culturally embedded. We explore notions of self in recent literature in cognitive studies, providing new possibilities for our care of members, particularly in relating to the people we work among as individuals. The organizational implications of these insights will be highlighted in a case study on children and the mission of God from a founding member of a global network of ministries to children at risk. The chapter concludes by reviewing and reflecting on the notions of self and others from the perspective of organizational leadership.

Chapter 4 explores learning culture from the perspective of imitation and ritual. Introducing the relational process of imitation and the nonverbal means of culture learning provides important insights for leadership development and training programs. This is followed by a case study on ritual from an intercultural leader based in Croatia. Building on the case, the chapter explores the issues of ritual as they relate to organizations and leadership, concluding with a review and reflection of the implications for leaders.

Chapter 5 focuses on the nature of authority. We explore questions of exercising authority, responsibility, and accountability as organizational realities in cultural contexts. Understanding authority raises the concept of trust and how they are two sides of the same coin. Two important contributions from international leaders help to put this into contemporary situations: the first is from the perspective of the president of a theological college in Malaysia, and the second is from an international leader based in Thailand. The chapter concludes with a review and reflection of the critical issues and their implications to intercultural organizations and leaders.

Chapter 6 considers the impact of four major cultures on our organizations and leadership. We begin by identifying religious worlds as a major global force imprinting much of our work as Christian leaders. This is illustrated in a case study looking at Islam as a complex of differing understandings and expressions. The case study is followed by an exploration of societal culture, organizational culture, and subcultures. Thus we consider four worlds that

create our intercultural realities. The chapter concludes by reviewing and reflecting on the four worlds around us.

Chapter 7 explores the broader studies of culture and leadership from both a missiological and global perspective. Exploring culture from a systems approach to organizational studies helps to put in context the influences on our organization and leadership. From there a series of global studies on organizational leadership will be introduced as a significant source of new insights and directions. Following the global perspective, a case study in intercultural leadership from a Malaysian leader introduces the concept of interculturality. We then consider the concept of interculturality missiologically, concluding in a review and reflection of the relevant issues applied missionally to Christian organizations.

In chapter 8 we review and reflect on the seven primary concepts of the previous chapters as they relate to the role of leaders of organizations serving God's mission. Writing this chapter offered me an opportunity to think missiologically about the implications of what we are learning from the disciplines of cognitive, organizational, and leadership studies, from the perspective of an organizational leader.

James MacGregor Burns, in reflecting on the rationale for his classic book *Leadership*, bolstered my concern to deal with the theoretical issues of culture in his introduction: "And, when we return from moral and causal questions to ways of practical leadership, we might find that there is nothing more practical than sound theory, if we can fashion it."<sup>4</sup> I do not "fashion theory" in this book, as it is intended for thoughtful practitioners. Yet in offering "cultural insights for Christian leaders," we consider many of the theoretical foundations of the major elements treated in the chapters that follow. Throughout these chapters I also reflect on the theories from the perspective of leaders from different Christian organizations as well as my own experience in leadership.

Many global developments encourage us to press on toward the call of serving God's mission. And as we are all well aware, many developments sadden us even as they beckon leaders to respond in humility and with courage. I hope that in reading this book you will reflect on your own situation and, wherever needed, make appropriate adjustments to ensure that as a leader you are learning new cultural insights to shape, catalyze, and propel your organization toward God's calling to partner in the mission of God.

4. James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1978), 5.

# 1

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## Thinking Missiologically

### *Implications for Leadership and Organizations*

During a particularly frustrating faculty senate meeting tasked with vetting a proposal for a new international doctoral program in global leadership, an esteemed colleague defended her opposition, exclaiming, “Of course I am committed to God’s purposes!” Her opposition came from the observation that new initiatives draw funds and personnel away from the already stretched programs that are core to the mission. A new faculty person in Old Testament concerned for continued funding of his position asked, “Are we sure this will be budget neutral?” After other similar questions, the senate chair, pushing to clarify the issues, responded, “We need to focus here, so let’s get back to basics by answering the question, ‘What is our mission?’” Sensing the need for a lighter moment, the vice chair led the faculty members in an impromptu recitation of the college mission statement: “To prepare men and women for worldwide service to Christ and his kingdom.” After things quieted down, a popular professor, reflecting on the scope of the school’s mission, stated the obvious: “Is there anything ruled out by that statement?”

These are tough questions, frequently asked in organizations that are clearly committed to God’s purposes. Mission statements, though important expressions of the vision and purpose of the organization, cannot answer every question. That task falls to leaders, who must ensure that a discernment

process protects and furthers the organizational mission. In this particular case, the tension was between the established programs, recognized as vital to the core of the mission, and a promising new initiative that would inevitably require and attract more resources. This common problem for leaders of Christian organizations is due in large part to the collision of the ever-changing context of the world around us with the finite resources of our operations. It follows that changes in the context require changes to our organizational practices, including strengthening core practices, adding new initiatives, and discontinuing practices that are no longer effective. The result is that leaders are regularly forced to make hard decisions.

The key question to consider in this chapter is, How should leaders of Christian organizations approach the tough missional decisions about what we should do and how we do it? Taking an interdisciplinary perspective, missiology helps guide us to a better understanding of the world around us. By thinking missiologically, we will learn more about mission and culture that will help us as leaders of Christian organizations in shaping, catalyzing, and propelling our organizations forward missionally. In this chapter we focus on the contribution of missiology to the tough missional decisions, beginning with what it means to think missiologically about God's mission. Next we explore the world of Christian organizations as missional in nature, with unique attributes as part of God's mission. Then we survey some of the contributions Christian thinkers have made to a missiological approach to leading organizations across cultures. The final section of the chapter will introduce a number of related disciplines that contribute to our understanding of culture, leadership, and organization from a missiological perspective.

## Missiology Can Help—Thinking Missiologically

Mission begins in the sending heart of the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The mission is first God's mission, often referred to by the Latin term *missio Dei*, meaning "the mission of God to bring about the redemption of the world."<sup>1</sup> This is the critical starting point. It is through God's unending love that God the Father sent the Son to redeem the world through

1. Scott W. Sunquist, *Understanding Christian Mission: Participation in Suffering and Glory* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 7. He explains the *missio Dei* as "the basic concern in studying Christian mission . . . based on historical, biblical, and theological material [as] a foundational concept that launches the church from the place of worship and fellowship into the frontiers of God's reign" (xiii).

his death on a cross. God's mission did not stop with the crucifixion and resurrection. The resurrected Christ ascended into heaven, whereby God sent the Holy Spirit to continue the work of redemption and reconciliation in the world. Redemption is God's mission from the beginning to the end. In the words of theologian Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "Christian faith proposes a solid, historically based but also history-transcending hope based on the faithfulness of God, who raised from the dead the crucified Son in the power of the Spirit."<sup>2</sup> That mission will continue unabated until the return of Christ. Thus we have hope, and in the words of Revelation 22:20, we say, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!"<sup>3</sup>

### ***God's Mission and Our Missions***

Beginning with the *missio Dei* as the reason for all mission, we turn to the Bible to build the foundation for missiology. Missiologists tend to view the Bible through the redemptive narrative of God's mission through history, beginning with creation and ending with the eschaton. To focus our attention, consider the following passages as God's mandate for mission, as Christians frequently cite them when illustrating God's redemptive mission.

#### *The Cultural Mandate*

God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." (Gen. 1:28)

#### *All the Peoples*

Let the peoples praise you, O God;  
 let all the peoples praise you.  
 Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,  
 for you judge the peoples with equity  
 and guide the nations upon the earth. *Selah*. (Ps. 67:3–4)

#### *The Amazing Love*

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. (John 3:16)

#### *The Good News*

[Jesus] unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

2. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *A Constructive Theology for the Pluralistic World*, vol. 5, *Hope and Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 78.

3. Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible, and the use of italics in Bible quotations is added.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
 because he has anointed me  
 to bring good news to the poor.  
 He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
 and recovery of sight to the blind,  
 to let the oppressed go free,  
 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4:17–19)

#### *The Evangelistic Mandate*

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:18–20)

#### *The Global Witness*

He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:7–8)

In these passages, we gain the perspective that the Triune God is working redemptively through history in and through God’s own people. God commanded humans to “be fruitful and multiply . . . and have dominion,” which we understand as stewardship of all creation. All the peoples of earth are called to praise God. God’s amazing love sent Jesus to bring the good news of redemption for all the world. The resurrected Christ in turn sends his disciples into all the world. And as witnesses, believers are indwelt by God the Spirit, who gives power for witness to the “ends of the earth.” So many other illustrative passages could be included, notably Genesis 12:1–3; Matthew 22:37–39; John 20:19–23; Acts 4:8–12; Philippians 2:5–11; and Revelation 7:9. The message is, “*Mission is from the heart of God, to each context, and it is carried out in suffering in this world for God’s eternal glory.*”<sup>4</sup>

Missiologists approach the entire Bible as the story of God’s mission.<sup>5</sup> By building an understanding of mission on the Bible, missiology fosters a wonderful global conversation that further expands and refines our biblical

4. Sunquist, *Understanding Christian Mission*, xii (emphasis original). Sunquist’s extensive work in the history of mission and world Christianity led him to the thesis that mission is participating with God in suffering and glory, an important perspective for all Christians to ponder.

5. For a biblical overview, see Arthur Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God’s Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).

worldview.<sup>6</sup> The global nature of missiology is exemplified in the work of biblical scholars and theologians around the world in further developing mission theology.<sup>7</sup>

Studying the mission of God in history, as well as the Bible, helps us understand that the locus of mission is in particular contexts and continues to be incarnational. God revealed his love for the world in Jesus Christ, coming to a particular place at a particular point in history. As we view the mission movement historically, we see the continuing work of God spread through particular people in particular places: our missions in God's mission. If we define the *missio Dei* as redeeming the world, it follows that "mission is through all of time and into all of creation."<sup>8</sup>

As the heading of this section reminds us, we serve God's mission in the world so that our missions, whatever they may be, are in fact part of God's mission in the present generation, according to God's timing. At the outset, God's mission of redeeming the world instructs our approach by asking how our particular mission is redemptive and how it relates to creation. While we will explore this in depth in the chapters ahead, it is essential that we move beyond the individualistic understanding of our particular mission to the broader, divine mandate of the *missio Dei*, which includes all of our individual and collective missions.

### **Culture as a Missiological Constant**

The importance of historical reflection is exemplified in the work of Andrew Walls, historian of mission and world Christianity. In his book *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, Walls provides a foundational insight into the cultural diversity of Christianity. "This diversity exists not only in a horizontal form across the contemporary scene, but also in a vertical form across history. Christianity is a generational process, an ongoing dialogue with culture."<sup>9</sup> His critical observation supports our understanding that the

6. Allen Yeh, *Polycentric Missiology: Twenty-First Century Mission from Everyone to Everywhere* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016).

7. For example, David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011); Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004); Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006); Amos Yong, *The Missiological Spirit: Christian Mission Theology in the Third Millennium Global Context* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014); Charles Van Engen, *Transforming Mission Theology* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2017).

8. Sunquist, *Understanding Christian Mission*, 24.

9. Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), xvii.

role of culture is a historical constant as well as a contemporary reality. This is also true in theology. Theologians throughout the ages have systematically posed questions of ultimate reality and human experience based on their engagement with culture at a particular time. Much is to be gained by engaging in this ongoing intercultural theological reflection because it expands our understanding of God. Three current examples of the great value of this global work are the *Global Dictionary of Theology*, the *Africa Bible Commentary*, and the *Africa Study Bible*.<sup>10</sup>

The “ongoing dialogue” between Christianity and human cultures through the interaction of the Bible, history, and theology highlights the interdisciplinary nature of missiology. In the latter half of the twentieth century, missionaries and mission scholars also began to draw on the work of the social sciences and anthropology.<sup>11</sup> Initially they drew heavily on descriptive linguistics, specifically in support of Bible translation, but it wasn’t long before the concept of culture, already well established in anthropological studies, was an important area of study to the much broader missions community.<sup>12</sup>

The initial enthusiasm surrounding the study of culture, particularly from anthropology, raised concerns that missiology was falling captive to a secular explanation of humanity. In 1980 Harvie Conn, a professor of missiology at Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia), was invited to speak on the interaction of anthropology with mission studies at the annual Missiology Lectures at Fuller Theological Seminary. From those lectures, Conn produced an influential work introducing the concept of theology, anthropology, and mission in dialogue.<sup>13</sup> The title itself provides a significant reminder: *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds*. The resolution to the concerns lies in our ability to keep our focus on the *missio Dei* while engaging in the disciplined study

10. William Dyrness and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, eds., *Global Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008); Tokunboh Adeyemo, ed., *Africa Bible Commentary: A One-Volume Commentary Written by 70 African Scholars*, updated ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010); John Jusu, ed., *Africa Study Bible* (Carol Stream, IL: Oasis International, 2016).

11. For a helpful survey of anthropology and mission, see Darrell L. Whiteman, “Part II: Anthropology and Mission; The Incarnational Connection,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 21, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 79–88, [http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs\\_IJFM/21\\_2\\_PDFs/79\\_Whiteman.pdf](http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/21_2_PDFs/79_Whiteman.pdf).

12. In 1979, Charles Kraft published a groundbreaking work on anthropology and mission, *Christianity in Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), which drew critical attention. Building on Kraft’s integrative approach, Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985); Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin K. Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986); and Louis J. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), were well received and widely read by missionaries and missiologists.

13. See Harvie M. Conn, *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds: Theology, Anthropology, and Mission in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984).

of the cultural worlds of human beings. Even using the plural “worlds” is an important step in the right direction. A broad awareness of the complexities of human existence and the various cultures that humans create is critical to the understanding of mission.

Paul Hiebert, from the perspective of a missionary anthropologist, builds on these concepts by suggesting that the triadology appropriately recognizes that our biblical worldview is also shaped by the cultures surrounding us—both our particular culture and the cultures of others.<sup>14</sup> Knowing that we are all biased by the cultures that shape our worldview allows for an honest reflection on the significance of the triadology. Instead of treating the biases as blocks to our understanding, Hiebert calls for engaging in a broader conversation across cultures, knowing that different cultures provide different vantage points for understanding. In summary, his statement on the triadology recognizes that it will produce profound insights into Scripture, into people, into the kingdom of God, and into the gospel call.<sup>15</sup>

To illustrate the impact of cultural contexts and particular groups of people on an organizational mission, consider the work of Wycliffe Bible Translators (WBT). Founded in 1942 as an organization dedicated to translating the Bible into every language, WBT came to a new understanding of their organizational mission despite what was clearly viewed as success. To quote their website, “Over the following decades, Wycliffe celebrated many milestones—from the first translation completed in 1951, all the way to the 500th translation completed in 2000. Around the same time, Wycliffe adopted a new challenge—a goal of starting a Bible translation project in every language still needing one by 2025.”<sup>16</sup> They were clear on their calling as true to the *missio Dei*. Their mission theology was appropriate, as was their understanding of the necessity of engaging cultures and worldviews. But in studying the vast number of cultures remaining, their research revealed that some languages would not require a translation due to the changing demographics, the influence of education in the lingua franca, and other factors. This new cultural reality created an opportunity to say no to certain types of new initiatives, formerly welcomed as missionally significant. In addition, technological advances have reduced the time necessary for the translation process, and in response WBT changed their organizational culture. They

14. Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 10–15. Hiebert was a professor at Fuller Seminary during this period, participating in the planning for Harvie Conn’s visit and in hosting him. Hiebert based his reflections on insights from the lecture and the resulting book.

15. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections*, 10–15.

16. Wycliffe Bible Translators, “The History of Wycliffe,” <https://www.wycliffe.org/about>.

renewed their missional commitment as an organization by setting a deadline for launching the remaining Bible translations, responding to the changing worlds in which they work.

Missiology sprouted from the soil of biblical, theological, and historical reflection on the world that is the focus of God's amazing love. In pondering the world, missiologists realized that from the perspective of the human contexts that make up God's world, we need to more deeply understand and appreciate humans in relation to one another and to the rest of creation. As a result, they drew on the efforts of the social sciences, particularly anthropology, to study culture and guide the practices of mission, recognizing that culture is a missiological constant. Turning these insights to the tough missional decisions facing an organization requires careful consideration of the cultures influencing the mission and the people whom the organization is called to serve, including the limits of the mission.

### ***Our Personal and Collective Missional Roles***

The concept of missional roles is a foundational contribution from missiology not reflected in the triad. After years of interacting with the concept of the triad, mission theologian Charles Van Engen added the domain of personal experience to recognize the important contribution of human agency in the mission of God.<sup>17</sup> As he explains, "Each person's particular spiritual gifts, natural abilities, experiences, knowledge and personality create a unique mix. God's mission is carried out through the life of particular persons in unique ways that cannot, and should not, be reproduced or repeated (Rom. 12; Eph. 4; 1 Cor. 12)."<sup>18</sup>

In reading the biblical references, we notice that they are in the context of the body, exemplified in Ephesians 4:11–12: "The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ." In referring to personal experience, therefore, Van Engen means not only the experience of the individual but also the collective roles of Christ's followers (the body), introducing the organizational experience of those who are committed to serving God's purposes as an important focus of missiology. Each organization is integral to the mission of God, contributing to the overall mission by fulfilling its particular calling or mission. A medical mission, a church-planting mission, a publisher, a development agency, and

17. Charles Van Engen, "Mission, Theology of," in *Global Dictionary of Theology*, ed. William Dyrness and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 550–62.

18. Van Engen, "Mission," 552–53.

a school each contribute uniquely to the whole through their mission. God's mission includes all of our individual and collective missions.

### **Christian Organizations—Missional in Nature**

In discussing organizations as integral to God's mission, we need to differentiate between several terms in common use. The terms "mission," "missions," and "missional" tend to be used interchangeably, making it difficult to keep track. Apart from the context in which each term is used, it also has significant characteristics. The term "mission" in its singular form refers to an individual or organizational mission and to God's mission, or the *missio Dei*, which is the mission of God to redeem the world. For an individual or an organization to have a mission means sensing a call from God to serve in some way as another step in following Christ. From experience, I know that periodically acknowledging the call of God through personal testimonies as part of a corporate meeting powerfully reminds the listeners of God's faithfulness. The same applies to organizational missions: recounting the "tribal stories" together deepens the collective identity. Times of remembering God's calling and our obedience are important rites of intensification, as we will see in chapter 4.

A second term is the plural "missions," used primarily when referring to missionary societies. In a broader sense, however, Christian organizations, including development agencies, Christian schools, Bible colleges, seminaries, and many nonprofits, may also be grouped with missions as organizations committed to the *missio Dei*. Often the origins of these more specialized Christian organizations are a missionary society or denominational mission. For example, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School began as the denominational seminary for the Evangelical Free Church in America, and World Relief was founded for the humanitarian work of the National Association of Evangelicals. The term "parachurch" is also frequently used for faith-based Christian organizations that fulfill many of the practices of God's mission outside ecclesiastical circles, such as relief and social welfare, development, evangelism, counseling, and leadership training ministries, to name a few.

A more recent term often used in relation to local churches is "missional." "Missional churches" refers to the perspective that every church is responsible to actively engage in the fullness of God's mission to the world.<sup>19</sup> This has not

19. Sunquist, *Understanding Christian Mission*, 9. Darrell Guder edited an important collection that further clarifies the vision: *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). This understanding is also taken

been the practice of churches in general. In the broader sense, “missional” also refers to a commitment to the redemptive mission of God for all creation so that the organization is defined by its purpose to serve God through its practices or products. For example, World Vision, one of the largest nonprofit organizations in the world, helps millions annually. They work in countries around the world, tackling some of the most significant humanitarian crises. So in defining their organization’s mission, they say they are “dangerously soft-hearted. But just the right kind of dangerous. That’s because we’re a global Christian humanitarian organization. We partner with children, families, and their communities to reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice.”<sup>20</sup>

For our purposes, we should also include those for-profit organizations, businesses, or service agencies that are equally missional in their commitment, normally revealed in their mission statements or in the publicity about their organization. For example, Baker Publishing Group, a for-profit corporation, has a strong missional statement: “We publish high-quality writings that represent historical Christianity and serve the diverse interests and concerns of evangelical readers.”<sup>21</sup> Many other for-profit organizations offer important products and services addressing the life needs of people and the broader range of concerns for God’s creation. From a missiological perspective, the critical elements are the commitments and practices of the organization in response to the *missio Dei*. I’ve offered US and international organizations as examples, but many believers in the Majority World have established missional organizations and businesses to address challenges in various contexts around the world.

In the context of organizations in general, the terms “mission statement” or “organizational mission” refer to a concern with setting a common direction so that the purpose and goals of the organization are clearly shared by the entire organization. In Christian organizations, the term will normally identify the particular purpose and the accompanying outcomes of the organization in line with God’s redemptive mission. Generally, the more specific the mission statement, the better it is for guiding the work of the members in their context.

Thinking missiologically about organizations also means thinking about the church. How do these missional organizations relate to the church? In

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up at length in Mark Lau Branson and Juan F. Martínez, *Churches, Cultures, and Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011).

20. World Vision International, “About Us,” accessed May 26, 2017, <https://www.worldvision.org/about-us>.

21. Baker Publishing Group, “About,” accessed May 26, 2017, <http://www.bakerpublishinggroup.com/about>.

defining Christian mission, Sunquist puts the issue center stage: “Christian mission is the church’s participation in the Triune God through the suffering of Christ, who was sent by the Father for the redemption and liberation of the world, by means of the conversion of individuals, and cultures, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the end that God be glorified in the nations and in all of his creation.”<sup>22</sup>

We could consider the question in many ways, but perhaps we should start with the emergence of Christian organizations initially as missionary societies. Missionary societies as we know them today arose in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as part of an awakening of Protestant churches in Europe and North America. American mission leader Rufus Anderson, writing in 1837, saw these organizations as primarily leading to “the conversion of the world.”<sup>23</sup> The multiplication of missionary societies and missional organizations with broader purposes continues unabated into the twenty-first century, changing with the times and contexts; nonprofit or for-profit, specialized or general, they are still committed to the *missio Dei*. Even so, the question of the church in relation to the multiplication of missional organizations remains critical to our understanding.

### **Two Structures—One Purpose**

In 1973 missiologist Ralph Winter addressed the issue of the church and missions directly in a paper exploring the dynamics of organizational structures in the mission of God.<sup>24</sup> Winter adapted the concept of modalities (ecclesial) and sodalities (missional) as a key to understanding the expansion of Christian mission, referring to them as “redemptive structures.”<sup>25</sup> “Modalities,” as seen in the New Testament, refers to the New Testament church. Characteristically, local churches embraced all those who were redeemed through faith in Jesus Christ: adults and children, male and female, Jew and gentile. The modality included all the faithful in that location. As churches matured, they focused increasingly on clearly defined membership and carefully prescribed beliefs.

22. Sunquist, *Understanding Christian Mission*, 173.

23. Cited in Walls, *Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 241.

24. The original paper was presented to the All Asia Mission Consultation in Seoul, Korea, in 1973.

25. Ralph D. Winter, “The Two Structures of God’s Redemptive Mission,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, 3rd ed. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009), 244–53. As Winter uses the terms, “modality” refers to the church and the accompanying ecclesiastical structures under the auspices of the church or churches, whereas “sodality” refers to the “organized, but non-ecclesiastical initiatives” of Christian mission.

Over time, the churches formed alliances, denominations, formal leadership roles, and theological distinctives. The dynamic of modalities, according to Winter, is centripetal, drawing people into the church.

Sodalities are seen in the missionary bands such as Paul and Barnabas (Acts 11:19–15:41). The key difference is that they require a conscious commitment on the part of the individual to join in the mission of the group (organization) as a second act of obedience. Missionary societies, unlike churches, have open membership that facilitates the work of diverse groups of people in a variety of ministries, both lay and clerical. Free from the more rigid structures of denominations, these voluntary associations recruit members who serve as full-time workers and also volunteers who pray and give financial support, sharing in the unique vision. In many cases, those who respond to the ministries of the organization in locations where the missions serve also affiliate with the organization or the churches associated with it, whether as members, workers, or supporters.

The freedom to act quickly in response to the needs in a given context often results in growth both numerically and in breadth of engagement. This freedom appeals pragmatically to faithful Christians, who are often frustrated by the limitations of ecclesial structures. Generations of dedicated believers have committed themselves to the work and support of Christian organizations, whether missionary societies or the proliferation of other types of organizations. In contrast to modalities, the emphasis of the sodality is centrifugal, sending people out into the world in obedient response to the mission of God. Taken together, modality and sodality as structural dynamics continue to influence the understanding and practice of evangelicals regarding the interrelationship of the church to missional organizations. Winter's goal in identifying the two structures was to emphasize the functional necessity of both structures, not one without the other.<sup>26</sup>

### ***Voluntary Associations—Uniquely Adaptable***

One of the most important insights in the study of Christian organizations is Andrew Walls's observation that "there never was a theology of the voluntary society." Walls explains this shocking statement by saying, "The voluntary

26. The missional church movement challenges this assertion theologically. It is increasingly evident that missional churches can embrace a multifunctional approach to mission through a variety of approaches. However, in practice, the sodality function built on the vision for outreach often expands beyond the neighborhood of the local church, forcing it to attend to the regulations surrounding the specialized ministry, often resulting in the establishment of a separate organization.

society is one of God's theological jokes, whereby he makes tender mockery of his people when they take themselves too seriously."<sup>27</sup> The implication is that the pragmatic nature of voluntary societies allows them to do what the church cannot or in many cases will not do. This was particularly true in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries due to the rigidity of Protestant ecclesial structures under Christendom. In contrast, voluntary societies consistently adapted to their context in ways that influenced society well beyond the rigid boundaries of denominational traditions.

The movement outward of the voluntary societies began with missionary societies charged with the Great Commission. They contributed to the spread of the gospel, evangelizing and establishing churches. Other types of Christian organizations arose quickly to address the gaps in the church's ministries and to meet the unique needs (and market niches) of communities and regions. These characteristics of voluntary societies continue through missional churches, mission societies, and Christian organizations, as they multiply and diversify in membership, geography, and activities.<sup>28</sup> And this is a global, not simply a Western, phenomenon.

In reflecting on the reasons for this amazing multiplication of missionary societies and missional organizations, Walls further observes that, "untheological development as it may have been, the voluntary society had immense theological implications."<sup>29</sup> In responding to the mission of God, the characteristic pragmatism of founders and those who join missional organizations is not tied to the formal structures of the church, but rather to the passionate belief that they're responding to God's call directed toward human contexts and the needs and opportunities therein. Creative, unfettered by ecclesial rules and formalities, and mostly driven by the laity, these organizations are an intrinsic part of the mission of the Triune God.

Over the past two centuries, the witness of the gospel through voluntary societies has touched every corner of the earth; with remarkable tenacity, they are indeed witnesses to the ends of the earth. Sunquist, further unpacking the definition of "mission," asserts, "Mission is not centered on the individual, on the mission society, on social movements, on the local church, or even on the church universal. . . . Instead, mission flows out of the divine nature of

27. Walls, *Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 246.

28. For an important assessment of the impact of American "voluntary Christianity" in contrast to European Christendom, see Mark A. Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013). Noll makes an interesting link between the shape of the global church and the "remarkable missionary work [that] was accomplished through voluntary means" (12).

29. Walls, *Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 247.

the Holy Trinity as revealed in Scripture.”<sup>30</sup> To understand the relationship between these various organizations, the church, and your organization is to acknowledge their functional role and submission to fulfilling the purpose of the Triune God for “the redemption and liberation of the world, by means of the conversion of individuals, and cultures.”<sup>31</sup>

### **Organizational Leadership—Leading across Cultures Missionally**

Culture and leadership have been interacting since the early church. The introduction to the letter issued by the Jerusalem Council illustrates the intercultural nature of Christian leadership from the first century: “The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the believers of Gentile origin in Antioch and Syria, and Cilicia, greetings” (Acts 15:23). This missiological concern has generated a lot of attention, specifically addressing issues arising in intercultural leadership as it relates to churches, mission societies, and organizations that work interculturally.<sup>32</sup> In line with our question of how leaders of Christian organizations should approach tough missional decisions, we will consider the intercultural and interactional nature of those decisions from the perspective of organizational leaders.<sup>33</sup>

#### ***Leading Christianly***

Thinking missiologically about leaders begins with acknowledging God’s presence and mission. No matter what role is assigned to a given person within the organization, we recognize that God is the leader; we are followers, disciples, and servants.<sup>34</sup> Such a realization is the basis for genuine humility. As Christian leaders, we are entrusted with oversight of the organization or some domain within it, to move it toward the unique mission understood as significant to the broader mission of God. For leaders to live into such

30. Sunquist, *Understanding Christian Mission*, 174.

31. Sunquist, *Understanding Christian Mission*, 173.

32. E.g., James E. Plueddemann, *Leading across Cultures: Effective Ministry and Mission in the Global Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009); Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, *Leading Cross-Culturally: Covenant Relationships for Effective Christian Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008); Branson and Martinez, *Churches, Cultures, and Leadership*.

33. Several terms are used in discussions of culture and leadership. The term “intercultural leadership” (moving between cultures rather than simply crossing cultures) is the most relevant in a global context, and we will discuss it in more depth in chapter 7. The concept of interactional leadership (the relationship of the leader, followers, and situations) is taken from Richard L. Hughes, Robert C. Ginnett, and Gordon J. Curphy, *Leadership: Enhancing the Lessons of Experience*, 7th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Irwin, 2012).

34. Plueddemann, *Leading across Cultures*, 55.

an important calling, they must be committed disciples with their focus on following Christ, while leading others toward the goals of the organization collectively. The Bible assures Christian leaders that they are “gifted by the Holy Spirit,” emphasizing the work of the Triune God, instilling the leaders “with a passion to bring glory to God.”<sup>35</sup>

Leadership as a gift from God does not take away from the responsibility or requirement of diligent effort borne by the leader. The organizational leader’s role is to influence others toward the purpose and goals of the organization. Missiologists have identified this in terms of a process of taking initiative; inspiring others; focusing, harmonizing, and enhancing the gifts of others; and building the community in the process.<sup>36</sup> In this process, the leader is interacting with followers in serving God’s purpose by working with their gifts (and skills), while recognizing that they are agents of God’s mission. The process then is “influencing a specific group of God’s people, toward God’s purposes for the group.”<sup>37</sup> Intrinsic to the process is the belief that the leader can and will discern the organizational mission in intercultural contexts in ways that reflect the organization’s commitment to God’s mission.

Good leadership is critical to the success of an organizational mission. Likely you share my experience of watching an organization deliberate on the appointment of a leader to an important position such as an international director or president/CEO. Typically, the work of a smaller group of dedicated members in the search process identifies candidates who have demonstrated their ability and giftedness in previous service to a church, institution, or other organization. A prayerful discernment process follows, which identifies the person who best fits the current organizational environment and needs. Generally this process yields a leader whose calling aligns with the organizational mission, and a new era begins in the life of the organization.

A more frequent experience is the troublesome process of identifying and appointing leaders in other positions who have not yet demonstrated their ability and giftedness. Giving individuals an opportunity to learn and serve in leadership is always a challenge, particularly in intercultural contexts. I observe this often in the process of identifying local believers to take on the responsibilities of new ministries and as institutional leaders struggle to find minority candidates to fill strategic positions. This points to the necessity of intentionally developing a diverse group of leaders at various levels in the organization to ensure that our organizations do more than talk about

35. Plueddemann, *Leading across Cultures*, 15.

36. Lingenfelter, *Leading Cross-Culturally*, 21; Plueddemann, *Leading across Cultures*, 55.

37. J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1988), 213.

intercultural leadership. It requires strategic action and a willingness to deal with the inevitable financial and structural impact. Intercultural leadership is not an easy goal, but it is a core missiological goal.

While we will deal with the cultural and organizational aspects of leadership in subsequent chapters, we must not overlook a core theological issue in the process: the role of the Holy Spirit. In recognizing leadership as a gift, Romans 12:6 and 12:8 say, “We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us . . . the leader, in diligence,” to which Plueddemann adds, “We are assured that the Holy Spirit gives this gift wherever and whenever it is needed.”<sup>38</sup> Along with other necessary gifts, the gift of leadership requires the community of faithful believers not only to identify the leader but also to faithfully support that person’s leadership. Leaders learn to lead in communities that learn to follow. The two are inseparable.

### ***Leaders and Followers as Communities of Trust***

Intercultural followers, by definition, come from a variety of backgrounds and cultures, each representing worldview differences that flow through their participation in the group. In some cases, these cultures highly affirm the role of group as a collective responsible for the work; in other cases, they may be very individualistic, thereby showing individual initiative and less interest in the group. The emphasis on building community will be natural for some and unnatural for others, but from the perspective of missiology, the relational community is an integral part of a biblical understanding of our service to God’s mission. Leading interculturally carries the expectation that the leader’s task is to work with the diverse group of people in ways that inspire them to participate as a community of people, not simply as task-oriented workers. Equally, the followers’ response is to be a vital part of the community of trust in order to reach the goals according to the purpose set out in the organizational mission.<sup>39</sup>

Intrinsic to this approach is the assumption that as a follower of Christ, the leader draws on Jesus’s life and teaching in a way that provides the resources both spiritually and practically to engage in leading.<sup>40</sup> It also recognizes that the challenge of creating a community of trust with people who come from different cultural traditions means that the work of leading lies in developing the followers’ trust in the leader and then their trust in one another as a community, based on the shared vision. In other words,

38. Plueddemann, *Leading across Cultures*, 173.

39. Lingenfelter, *Leading Cross-Culturally*, 19.

40. Lingenfelter, *Leading Cross-Culturally*, 16.

the community must focus its “attention to God, to each other and to the world that God loves.”<sup>41</sup>

Peter Kuzmic, missiologist and expert in European studies, introduced me to a new dimension in building trust through work with leaders in the Balkans. In the years after the fall of the Iron Curtain, pastors struggled with any efforts to work together across local church or denominational lines. The trauma of war and fear of the strong hand of government left them distrusting others outside their own congregation. Attending a regional conference of the Evangelical Alliance, in which Kuzmic was a featured speaker, I was able to observe the manner in which he drew people together so that they moved toward deeper commitment to Christ and, therefore, to one another. During a plenary session, under a banner stating, “All one in Christ Jesus,” Kuzmic called three pastors to the stage representing the peoples of three of the most war-torn countries in the Balkans. After a brief introduction, each of the pastors testified to the healing and sustaining power of Christ in that pastor’s life and nation. Their concluding embrace was a vivid reminder of the redemptive power of the gospel in reconciling former enemies.

On a practical level, examples of redemption and reconciliation have great power as part of the narrative of the Christian mission of any organization. The stories offer hope to those we serve through a local church, a Christian institution, a business, or any other organization. It is right to make statements about the missional purpose of our organizations, but when that purpose touches humanity at the point of greatest need, it demonstrates the power of God and brings substance to the missional claims. The witness of communities of trust in a world so divided and in turmoil is a wonderful testimony to God’s love in action; it is truly good news. It behooves us as leaders to observe and tell the stories of God’s work in and through our lives, bringing credibility to the work and glory to God. Equally important, we must not shy away from testifying to insights gained from weakness as well as strength.

Leading interculturally is essential to the mission of God for the redemption and reconciliation of the world. Thinking missiologically, therefore, requires that we continue to ask biblical, theological, and historical questions while focusing very specifically on the leaders and followers within a given context as trust is built and the mission of God reaches out in redeeming people and cultures. It follows that leading intercultural organizations in a missional direction also requires carefully considering the changing worlds around us with an unwavering commitment to the eternal mission of God.

41. Branson and Martínez, *Churches, Cultures, and Leadership*, 60.

To demonstrate the complexities and challenges these contextual realities pose to organizational leadership, we will consider the case of institutions in Latin America as documented by my friend and colleague Marcos Orison Almeida. I asked Marcos to reflect on the challenges of institutional leadership from his position in Brazil, giving an important global context often overlooked in discussions of organizational missions.

## The World of Institutions

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Marcos Orison Almeida, Brazil<sup>a</sup>

The universe of institutions in Latin America and in other countries of the Majority World lives in the midst of an inevitable cultural conflict. Part of this conflict has its origin in the formation of the countries, and part results from the influence of globalization. It is fair to state that Western culture strongly shaped the political and economic arenas in Latin America.

After the Second World War, the Western capitalist bloc acted on both of these fronts. Almost all countries suffered the consequences of the dispute between North American capitalists and Soviet communists. The scenario was painted with *coups d'état*, revolutions, military governments, and dictatorships. The economy was structured by multinational companies and banks, leading Majority World countries into a huge international debt. In this sense, the main institutions of society were developed under Western patterns.

### Institutional Influences

From a religious perspective, two main movements indicate the way Christian institutions are perceived in Latin America: the Catholic support of Portuguese and Spanish colonization starting in the sixteenth century, and the modern Protestant missionary enterprise after the nineteenth century. In many other Majority World countries, one can notice a very similar phenomenon that resulted in those countries being deeply influenced by European and North American culture.

On the other hand, if we consider the main, basic institutions of society, such as family and some kind of government—religion can also be added—they tend to determine a platform for all other institutions. The cultural models of parenthood, leadership, priesthood, and so on are projected onto those other institutions. Even the patterns of relationship, behavior rituals, and core values are naturally transferred to the institutional structures.

With this background in mind, we observe a very complex environment in Latin American institutions, both religious and secular. Companies, churches, schools, missionary agencies, and so on have inherited their structure and mode of operation from Western culture. However, at the same time, people reinterpret and adapt the functionality of these institutions in light of their own cultural values and habits. Therefore, institutions end up living in a conflictive and often unintelligible environment. The effort to meet the foreign criteria of operation, performance, evaluation, and so on requires greater formation and training of people; this effort also favors certain profiles of personality and professional ability.

For instance, Latin American cultures tend to be more relational, more personal, and less objective. The personal aspect stands out, in comparison to the functional aspect. In work meetings, criticisms are usually interpreted as attacks on the person who presented the idea being debated rather than on the idea itself. This hinders the expression of disagreement or even opinions that are intended to contribute something constructive. Often such a gesture is understood as expressing enmity. Even when it is necessary to evaluate someone's performance, objectivity takes second place, and the level of relationship influences the outcome. When local institutions that have a professional relationship with foreign institutions submit evaluation reports initiated by a Western culture, the reports will in fact contain results influenced by personal relationships. The same happens when people from a Latin American culture are asked to write letters of reference. The personal aspect of relationship does not allow the degree of freedom called for by Western culture in the evaluation of the applicant. As a result, the letter of reference will fall far short of its intended purpose, especially when read by people from a Western culture.

In a similar way and for similar reasons, personal relationships tend to overlap with processes. The rigidity of projects, plans, and actions and the goal of predictability give way to the fluidity typical of what happens in relationships. Therefore, we commonly notice difficulty in complying with plans, schedules, deadlines, and targets. It is not uncommon to see Latin American institutions that have never thought about their development through any kind of structured planning. Institutional life ends up happening in the midst of informality, leaving most of the actions to the last hour, with heavy improvisation and adaptation to everyday contextual situations. The positive side of this phenomenon is a great use of creativity and flexibility in the face of challenges. Considering the political, social, and economic instability of many of these countries, this factor helps people find solutions to their problems.

### **Institutional Leadership**

In reference to leadership, people from Latin American cultures typically express admiration for leaders who are charismatic, autocratic, and self-reliant. Power tends to be centralized, and decisions tend to be made by a single person, with little interaction with or participation of others. Collaboration or teamwork is more common among peers. In the presence of the leader, people tend to withdraw their contribution. Thus, super leaders and super pastors arise, unquestionable in their visions and decisions, making the processes of succession, transfer of responsibility, and continuity of institutional projects very difficult. It's not uncommon for a leader to feel insecure when preparing a successor, because the incumbent fears the successor's importance, and the incumbent's control will diminish when the successor takes over.

Historical heritage, like leadership, can compromise the continuity and sustainability of institutions. Many institutions that were founded and sustained by missionaries for decades suffer during the transition period when responsibility shifts to the local leaders. The reason for the crisis is not only that foreign resources are suddenly cut but also that, because of a history of paternalistic subservience, leaders and communities did not mature. The result is two common problems. First, people come to think resources will always be available without their having to work for them. Second, in many Latin American countries, a culture of exploitation grew out of the process of conquest. Colonizers extracted and removed valuable resources, leaving a minimum for local people. The landlords profited and gathered for themselves and their families, while most of the population existed on the leftovers. Lack of attention to building a society for all and promoting the common welfare weakened the practice of giving, donating, and offering. This scenario directly affects Christian institutions for the relief of the needy that depend almost exclusively on donations, such as orphanages, asylums, and hospitals. The same applies to theological schools, which are not profitable businesses and yet attract mostly poor or low-income candidates.

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### **Reviewing and Reflecting on the Issues**

Almeida's case study from a Latin American perspective sheds a very different light on the contextual issues facing organizations both domestic and international. We referred to the questions asked in the faculty meeting at

the beginning of this chapter as “tough questions,” and Almeida’s reflections emphasize how these questions can be especially difficult when it comes to cultural and historical considerations. Any organization must listen and respond to these issues with wisdom and integrity if its missional commitment is to reflect the mission of God. Another important reason for including this case study is that it emphasizes the need to better understand culture with all its implications in order to better fulfill our individual and organizational missions. We live at a point in history when unchallenged entitlements and privilege can no longer be included in the strategic development of organizational missions. Fellowship with one another and with God as members of Christ’s body in the interconnected world of the twenty-first century should be characterized by the truth of 1 John 1:7: “If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”

### **Reviewing**

We began this chapter with the question, How should leaders of Christian organizations approach the tough missional decisions about what we should do and how we do it? Recognizing that our mission, whether individual or collective, finds its purpose in God’s mission moves us beyond an individualistic understanding. The unique mission of the organization is the starting place for the tough decisions facing leaders. Given the magnitude of God’s redemptive mission in the world, humility should be our default response, since we know that we are depending on the Triune God to lead and guide.

Thinking missiologically, therefore, requires us as followers of Christ to acknowledge our call—not only our individual calling but also the mission of our particular organization—to God’s mission of bringing redemption to the world through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. It is God’s mission from beginning to end. We submit to the authority of Scripture as the norm for understanding and critiquing all realities. We must also be aware of the historical and theological implications of the work we do and why we do it. Acknowledging that God works with particular people in particular places, we move forward collectively to take “the whole gospel to the whole world.” Building on our missiological understanding, we move to consider the missional nature of Christian organizations.

We applied the concept of missional to organizations with an orientation toward the mission of God in order to make it clear that such an organization is defined by its purpose to serve God through its practices or products. This includes a wide range of Christian organizations, large and small, high profile

and low profile, but always characterized by their commitment to serving God. An organization committed to serving God must continually ensure that its practices and products are honoring to God. Thus to think missiologically about organizations is to consider their significant contribution, in all that they are and do, in relation to the mission of God.

Understanding the unique mission of the organization is the starting place for the tough questions such as that of new initiatives versus core commitments. Knowing what we do that fulfills the mission of our organization is vital to deciding between strengthening core initiatives and pursuing new initiatives. The process of discernment begins with the question, What are we called to do? The next step in the process is to consider leaders and followers in relation to the mission of God.

By looking to God for guidance to fulfill the mission, intercultural leaders interact with followers while discerning the processes of decision-making and of action or no action. In turn, followers work together with leaders in building a community of trust so that the organizational culture reflects the beliefs and values in harmony with their Christian commitment to mission. So in faith, we trust and lead.

Tough decisions require tough questions. Here are a few that can be used to focus attention missionally.

1. How does this new initiative or core initiative further our organizational mission?
2. Does it fit with what we are learning about God's mission in relation to our mission?
3. Will the new initiative make a unique and significant difference in the changing world? If so, does it require more of our resources? If not, the missional answer to the new initiative is no.
4. If a core commitment is no longer relevant, then what is the time frame for completing our commitment?

Knowing what we do that fulfills the mission of our organization and how that fits with our commitment to God's mission is vital to deciding between strengthening core initiatives and pursuing new initiatives. In my experience, the process is not a one-time event. It is the discipline of continued renewal of leaders, followers, and organizations. Experience teaches that intercultural leadership of missional organizations is not a job for the faint of heart!

The case study illustrates the complexity of culture we face in the mosaic of human contexts as we respond to the question, What should we do and how do we do it? Contrasting a general description of organizations in the Latin American context with a description of the context in the United States is like contrasting the games of soccer and baseball (appropriately so, given the world-class Brazilian soccer team and American baseball teams).<sup>42</sup> Pushing this a little further, without a clear mission and understanding of the contextual differences highlighted in Almeida's case study, leading an organization that works both in Brazil and the United States can feel like playing soccer with a baseball team or baseball with a soccer team. Although the illustration is humorous, it brings important insights to light. Leaders who are serious about God's mission must accept the degree to which God takes redemption of people and cultures seriously. One of the key issues in making tough organizational decisions is determining what particular abilities, skills, or products our organization offers to the world and how we should approach the missional exercise of our contribution in each context. Needless to say, the quest for cultural understanding is foundational to the process. Almeida responds very candidly to the issues relating to contextualization.

### **Reflecting**

Before moving on, we should personally reflect on the issues before us. If we are to make the tough calls between core practices and new initiatives, we need to consider carefully how our actions fit with what God is doing in the world.

1. How does God's mission affect your organizational mission (or one you are close to)?
2. How do you use the concept of culture in explaining your mission?
3. Do you ever discuss how your interpretation of the Bible is impacted by the organizational culture? Or how, in the local context, observable cultural factors affect how people read the Bible?
4. To what degree are your missional goals impacted by cultural biases?
5. How is your organization struggling with the nature of the eternal gospel in the changing world?

Next, reflect on your organization or one that you are familiar with, such as a seminary or a social ministry. To think missiologically about organizations

42. Using a sports analogy to compare the social games of two different cultures is taken from Lingenfelter, *Leading Cross-Culturally*, 57–66.

is both to affirm their significant contribution to the mission of God and to acknowledge that other organizations are also vital to God's mission. These questions will help us do that.

6. Is your organization part of a historical Christian movement or mission, and if so, what have you inherited from the previous generations?
7. How does your organization relate to the church, locally or globally, and to other Christian organizations in the regions where it is working?
8. Are you and your organization faithful to the mission of God, and how do you measure such faithfulness?

The complexities of culture in the mosaic of human contexts are worthy of much deeper reflection. To that end, we move to chapter 2 to consider how culture is made, stored, and transmitted, which, interestingly, will help us better understand human resources.