HERO, PRIVILEGE, PARTNERSHIP, INCARNATIONAL PRACTICE:
EXAMINING THE NARRATIVES OF MISSIONARY PRACTICE

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To the extent that words and stories are symbols that convey meaning, they wield power in the lives of individuals and communities.[1] The stories we tell not only reflect the perspectives of those who live through an event or tell the story, they shape the lives of the hearers.[2] Whether we speak of individuals, families, faith communities, or cultures, the dominant stories of a group or movement are deemed to be "received wisdom" and define what that group generally believes to be true.[3] However, wherever there is a dominant discourse there is at least one alternative story. What is significant about these alternative discourses is that they have the capacity to challenge the dominant narrative.[4]

The endeavor known as the modern missionary movement is a little over 200 years old. In that time a lot of stories have been told: stories of faith, stories of hardship, stories of sorrow, and stories of hope. These stories are not only shaped by the theological narrative of the Great Commission, they have created narratives that shape how people think about missions. This essay reflects on four dominant narratives: "the missionary as

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1. Charon, *Symbolic Interactionism*, 43–70; White and Epston, *Narrative Means*, 1–37.
2. Friedman and Coombs, *Narrative Therapy*, 14–18; White and Epston, *Narrative Means*, 9–13.
3. White and Epston, *Narrative Means*, 18–27.
4. Ibid., 15–16, 56–59.

hero," "the missionary as a person with privilege and power," "the missionary in international partnerships," and "the missionary in incarnational practice." The purpose is to identify (a) how these defining metaphors shape our understanding of missionary service, and (b) the extent to which each of these narratives reflects the signature characteristic of missions.

In terms of the perspective taken within this paper, we view these four narratives as definitional discourses used implicitly and explicitly in reference to missionaries and missionary practices. While we acknowledge that an argument can be made that the developmental arc of these four narratives may appear to be analogous with the historical and developmental arc of the modern missionary movement,[5] it is not our intent to develop another historical paradigm but rather to reflect on the presence and influence of these definitional discourses within contemporary stories of missionary activities. For example, a team of volunteers returning from a short-term missions trip to an impoverished country may exhibit aspects of the hero narrative as they describe the hardships of their journey, the challenges of communication, adjusting to the heat, coping with dysentery, etc.; this same team may also reflect a narrative of privilege when they describe retiring to a local hotel each evening where they were able to shower and eat Western food or when they show pictures demonstrating the material benefits accorded by the sending church's generosity; and, the team may use some of the language of partnership when they talk about laboring side-by-side with members of the host church as they built a structure or shared their testimonies at a church outreach event.

The Missionary as Hero

It is not that long ago that the stories of individuals such as William Carey, David Livingstone, and others were seen to be the stories of modern-day martyrs who gave up everything to

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5.   Cf. Beaver, "History of Mission Strategy," 228–38; Winter, "Three Mission Eras."

obey the call of Christ in a faraway land.[6] Indeed, for much of the twentieth century, the word "missionary" conjured up images of what appeared to be remarkable people whose correspondence and biographies described lives of self-sacrifice and hardship such as disease, deprivation, separation from loved ones, kidnappings, rape, and martyrdom.[7] Admittedly, the intent of these missionary biographies and correspondence has been to acquaint the reader with the life and ministry of the missionary with a view to eliciting prayer and support. Nevertheless, when these texts are read through the cultural lenses of the missionary's supporters it is understandable that the mystique of crossing frontiers, the challenges of language acquisition and intercultural engagement, as well as stories of personal sacrifice might result in at least some readers concluding that the missionary is some sort of hero or saint. When this happens, the missionary is placed at the top of a spiritual hierarchy, a notch or two above pastors who serve at home, and in a whole different class from the churchgoers who are the financial and prayer backbone of the missionary endeavor.

In this section three lines of inquiry will help us to clarify the signature characteristics of missionary identity embedded in the hero narrative. First, how do the experiences of missionaries (such as the challenges of crossing frontiers, intercultural engagement, suffering, vicarious trauma, and/or the expatriation-repatriation cycle) compare with those of other expatriate workers? Next, we consider the challenges of vicarious trauma and the expatriation-repatriation cycle to reflect on the assumption of resiliency embedded in the hero narrative. Lastly, we consider whether missionary heroism is limited to the personal sacrifices the missionary makes for the purposes of advancing the gospel, or if it may be legitimately extended to the sacrifices that others

6. Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 209–36.

7. E.g., Bentley-Taylor, *My Love Must Wait* (on Henry Martyn); Brackney, "A Good Knight in a New Crusade" (on Archibald Reekie); Burgess, *Daylight Must Come* (on Helen Roseveare); Elliot, *Through Gates of Splendor* (on Jim Elliot); Goforth, *Goforth of China*; Goytia, "Tradegy of Merk'Amaya" (martyrdom of Norman Dabbs); Judson, *Life of Adoniram Judson*; Mankins, *Hostage*; Taylor, "David Livingston."

(such as spouses and children) make as a consequence of the missionary's work.

International Displacement
When we compare the experience of missionaries with the experiences of other expatriates we note that today's multi-national corporations, like their predecessors in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, send executives to other countries to secure important contracts and oversee their operations. Similarly, many non-religious NGOs employ people and benefit from the work of volunteers who move from the developed world into the majority world with a view to using their expertise in that context. Finally, in an era when being multilingual and multicultural is an asset if not a requirement for landing their first job, university students participate in study projects halfway around the world. Each of these examples demonstrates that the special nature of the work of missions is not solely defined by the fact that a person travels to another region of the world for purposes other than tourism.

Intercultural Engagement
A second aspect of the hero narrative relates to the efforts missionaries make to engage with those who are culturally different. To be sure, individuals such as Adoniram Judson[8] and Cam Townsend[9] are to be respected for the passion with which they engaged in intercultural dialogue and ministry. Given that the majority of Christ's followers today live in regions that were unevangelized at the time of William Carey, Christianity might have become a dying religion without the vision of individuals who dared to work outside the cultural box. However, while the church today owes much to these individuals, intercultural engagement neither began with nor is restricted to Protestantism or the modern missionary movement.[10] Within Protestantism and

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8.   Judson, *Life of Adoniram Judson*.
9.   Hefley and Hefley, *Uncle Cam*.
10.   I.e., Acts 2 and 8 describe what may be considered an E-2 evangelistic contact and Acts 10 and 17 record two separate E-3 evangelistic contacts. Similarly, one has only to read Carey (*Enquiry*, 28–37) to see that

directly preceding the modern missionary movement, the Moravian Brethren (*Unitas Fratrum*),[11] David Brainerd's ministry among the indigenous peoples of western Massachusetts (1743),[12] van Riebeeck's call for the promotion of Reformed Protestantism in South Africa (1652),[13] and an early mission to the indigenous peoples of New England (1632)[14] all serve to illustrate that religiously-motivated Protestant intercultural engagement existed prior to the time of Carey. Today, international development programs spearheaded by non-religious NGOs based in the developed world are fundamentally intercultural in their practice, utilizing a combination of national and expatriate workers to achieve their goals. Finally, in much of the developed world people interact daily with individuals from the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Latin America, and elsewhere who live among them for the purposes of study and employment. While it does point us toward an essential component of missionary identity, intercultural work is not, in and of itself, unique to the work of missions.

Suffering
The third element of the "hero narrative" is reflected in stories of physical suffering often caused by disease and oppression by the governing elites.

Disease and death: Entire generations of churchgoers were raised on the stories of missionary martyrs. Adoniram Judson

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Carey understood that the church, including the Catholic Church, had a long history of intercultural engagement.

11.   Carey, *Enquiry*, 11, 37. Cf. Moravian Archives, "First Missionaries to St. Croix—1733"; Grant, "Europe's Moravians"; Villa-Vicencio and Grassow, *Christianity and the Colonisation of South Africa*, ch. 1.

12.   Brainerd, *Memoirs*, 57; Carey, *Enquiry*, 36.

13.   Villa-Vicencio and Grassow, *Christianity and the Colonisation of South Africa*, ch. 1. The role of the Dutch East Indies Company in spreading the gospel to South Africa and beyond is also acknowledged by Carey (*Enquiry*, 36–37).

14.   Carey, *Enquiry*, 36.

buried two of his three wives and six of his children in Burma.[15] David Livingstone protected his family by sending them back to England after burying a daughter who succumbed to an epidemic.[16] Hudson Taylor buried his first wife and several children in China.[17] Archibald Reekie endured prolonged separation from his family because his wife suffered terribly from altitude sickness and his eldest child had died of diphtheria.[18] While past generations of missionaries endured diseases that often resulted in the death of a family member, it should not be forgotten that the native populations with whom these missionaries worked, not to mention non-missionary expatriates, also endured the same diseases and experienced loss of life as a result of disease.[19] In addition, it is worth noting that, thanks to advanced medical treatment, many of these diseases are now treatable and/ or preventable.

Religious and political opposition: The narrative of suffering includes stories of opposition and oppression. This dimension of suffering is seen in accounts of missionaries who experienced opposition from official sources;[20] stories of missionaries who have been harassed and kidnapped by rebel factions;[21] and, stories of missionaries who became martyrs.[22] As with the challenges posed by disease, the significance of these experiences of opposition and oppression is not that missionaries experience

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15.   Judson, *Life of Adoniram Judson*.

16.   Taylor, "David Livingston," 66–67.

17.   Taylor, *Spiritual Secret*, 161, 230–31, 271, 278.

18.   Brackney, "A Good Knight in a New Crusade."

19.   Cf. Craig, *Forty Years among the Telegus*, 121–23; Judson, *Life of Adoniram Judson*, 119, 251–52, 520, 598.

20,   Chancey, "Star in the East"; Judson, *Life of Adoniram Judson*, on persecution of national believers, 92, 100, 158; on persecution of expatriates, 217–53.

21.   Burgess, *Daylight Must Come*; Mankins, *Hostage*; Taylor, *Spiritual Secret*, 239–50.

22.   Elliot, *Through Gates of Splendor*; Goytia, "Tradegy of Merk'-Amaya."

these things and others do not. Indeed, both national believers[23] as well as non-missionary expatriates also experience these types of hardship.[24]

Like the early explorers and settlers in the days of Hudson Taylor and Archibald Reekie, non-missionary expatriates and nationals today experience the same challenges of illness and oppostion that missionaries do. The field of experience cannot be completely leveled, however, because their respective motivations can be quite different. In some cases, expatriate workers receive a danger bonus or hardship allowance that adds an economic incentive that makes the risk of danger or illness worth it. Good service on an overseas work assignment may be an important stepping stone for the next promotion. Displaced peoples usually flee violence and economic insecurity in search of prosperity and peace while missionaries have often done the opposite for the sake of the gospel. The difference between missionary and non-missionary suffering in all of these cases is not the suffering itself, but rather the motivation for the suffering. There are many heroes and many people who suffer; missionaries are heroes when they endure hardship for Christ. We explore this more fully in the final section of this paper, which explores incarnational practice.

Vicarious Trauma and the Cycle of Expatriation-Repatriation
Today's missionaries, as with their historical counterparts and their secular contemporaries, face two particular sets of challenges: vicarious trauma and the cycle of expatriation-repatriation.

23. Goytia, "Tradegy of Merk'Amaya"; Judson, *Life of Adoniram Judson*, 92, 100, 158. Contemporary accounts of the persecution experienced by national believers may be obtained through websites such as the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (http://www.idop.org/); Open Doors (http://www.opendoorsca.org/content/view/432/); and Voice of the Martyrs (http://www.persecution.net/restricted-nations.htm).

24. Judson, *Life of Adoniram Judson*, 217–53. Contemporary accounts of the types of religious and political opposition experienced by non-missionary expatriates (e.g., kidnapping and rape) may be readily obtained by means of a quick internet search.

Vicarious trauma: The challenge of vicarious trauma emerges as missionaries and international aid workers live and work in close proximity with people who have been victimized by both poverty and the injustices of war, violence, kidnappings, rape, evacuations, and torture. This raises their exposure to these stressors to a level higher than that experienced by the average North American,[25] and the experience of vicarious trauma is a source of stress to the missionary.[26] As a result, it is not uncommon for missionaries who experience traumatic stress to have adverse reactions.[27] The impact of these experiences of trauma challenges the ideal of the stoic missionary who is able triumphantly to endure all for the sake of the gospel. Indeed, missionaries may endure hardship, but the experience is more likely to feel like "participation in the sufferings [of Christ]" (Phil 3:8) than triumph.

Expatriation-repatriation cycle: The challenge of the expatriation-repatriation cycle includes the experience of being an outsider as well as facing unfamiliarity with the language, culture, and political/legal systems of a new environment.[28] In this regard, twenty-first century expatriates (missionary, NGO, and corporate) face challenges unknown to many in previous generations, as over the course of one career they may work in several different countries and learn multiple languages. In the business world, unsuccessful expatriate assignments are attributed to: culture (e.g., culture shock, language, cuisine, safety and security, cost of living, etc.); problems in family adjustment to the host culture (e.g., living conditions, schooling, health, marital strain, and parenting challenges); organizational difficulties (e.g., work

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25.   Bagley, "Trauma and Traumatic Stress," 98, 104–6.

26.   Nouwen describes the effect of living and working with the poor in Peru (*¡Gracias!*, 115–19).

27.   Grant, "Trauma in Missionary Life," 77–79; Irvine et al., "Traumatic Stress in a Missionary Population," 332–33.

28.   Pollock and van Reken, *Third Culture Kids*. Cf. Nouwen, *¡Gracias!*, 130–31, who writes of how his struggle with loneliness and his need for meaningful relationships left him feeling depressed.

practices, organizational culture); and homesickness.[29] Of particular note is the fact that family-related factors are identified as the main reason why expatriates underperform or request an early return home.[30] Thus, Selmer identifies that "pollution, limited recreational options, inferior housing, insufficient international schools, and a lack of Western medical facilities make it difficult to entice executive staff and their families to move" to many locations in China.[31]

While an expatriate's ability to adjust to a new culture is important, repatriation poses at least as great a challenge. Foreign-placed workers report experiencing a loss of status, loss of autonomy, loss of career direction, financial difficulties, and family problems upon their return home.[32] Curiously, mission agencies may do a better job of addressing the challenges of the expatriation-repatriation cycle than the corporate sector. Indeed, the corporate sector's seeming inattention to family concerns has been observed by one of the authors who discovered that while a spouse may occasionally be included in the pre-placement discussions, few supports are provided to assist either the worker or their family with the process of repatriation. Taken together, the expatriation-repatriation cycle has the capacity to challenge the emotional, relational, intellectual, and spiritual resources of the strongest. As a result, not a few missionary expatriates experience difficulty with these transitions. Indeed, the definition of a "Third Culture Kid" (TCK) or "Missionary Kid," reflects the challenges of multiple cultural transitions.[33]

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29. Anderson, *Expatriate Selection*, 568–69.
30. Ibid., 572.
31. Selmer, "Psychological Barriers," 806.
32. Hurn, "Selection of International Business Managers," 285; Selmer, "Psychological Barriers," 806.
33. Pollock and van Reken define a TCK as follows: "A Third Culture Kid (TCK) is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents' culture. The TCK builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture are assimilated into the TCK's life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background [other TCKs] (*Third Culture Kids*, 19).

The Experiences of the Missionary's Family
There is one further aspect of the hero narrative to consider. Wrapped up within the hero narrative are stories of emotional pain stemming from situations when, as in the cases of Reekie and Livingston, for the sake of the children the husband remained on the field while the wife and children returned to the homeland. To begin, it is crucial to acknowledge that neither separation from wives and children, nor the sending of children back to the homeland to live with friends or relatives, nor the education of children at a boarding school, are unique to the experience of the missionary family. For example, Wilfred Grenfell's mother, the daughter of a British military officer, was sent to England from India at the age of three to live with an aunt.[34] Similarly, the practice of sending children to boarding school was a common feature of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British education.[35] For these reasons, it is no surprise that missionaries faced with the challenges of life-threatening disease and/or located in places where they could not provide their children with a suitable education might act in the same manner as non-missionary expatriates or their peers in the homeland.

The stories of separation recorded in missionary biographies only tell part of the story as these public sufferings of missionary families are only the tip of the iceberg when one considers the all-too-often private suffering of missionary children (MKs) who were left in the care of strangers in the homeland[36] and those who experienced emotional, physical, and sexual abuse during their stays at missionary boarding schools.[37] These private

34.   Rompkey, *Grenfell of Labrador*, 6.
35.   Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 24–31; Murray, *Lloyd-Jones*, 21–27; Rompkey, *Grenfell of Labrador*, 3–14.
36.   For example, from about 1922 until 1972 the Sudan Interior Mission (now SIM) operated the Gowan's home for missionary children in Collingwood, ON.
37.   Kennedy, "Missions: From Trauma to Truth"; Stafford, "A Candle in the Darkness." There do not seem to be any accurate estimates as to how many MKs were abused by those who were trusted to care for them. This is likely a function of the fact that MK schools were run by individual missions and as a

sufferings are problematic to the hero narrative to the extent that in many cases the children are the ones who paid the real cost as they felt abandoned by both parents and God, lost trust in their caregivers, and lived with fear and trauma. Unlike the missionary's experiences of disease, hardship, and persecution, the emotional, physical, and sexual abuse of MKs cannot be rationalized as an integral part of the call to serve Christ.[38] For this reason the struggles of MKs, both as children and as adults, represent an oft-overlooked challenge to the hero narrative.

In light of the foregoing it is clear that, by itself, the hero narrative is an insufficient meta-frame for the practice of missions. This is evident in the fact that non-missionary expatriates have historically been and continue to be subjected to many if not all of the same stresses faced by missionary expatriates, such as the engagement of other cultures, language acquisition, presence of danger, political uncertainty, etc. Next, twenty-first century realities such as advanced medical treatment, improved transportation, local schooling options for MKs, and access to wireless communication and internet all serve to mitigate the hardships experienced in previous eras. As a result we argue that the heroic experiences that make up a component of missionary identity are not unique. A person does not become a missionary hero because of an intercultural work placement, getting sick

result there is no centralized repository of data as there is in the Catholic Church. Statements posted on websites such as http://fandaeagles.com/forums/ suggests the problem may be greater than past generations may have realized or been willing to acknowledge. The current round of reports and investigations into the abuse of children at schools for MKs reflects three trends: an increased awareness within the culture of the problem of child abuse; the fact that the abuse of MKs at boarding schools is no longer a dark or hidden secret; and the fact that those who report abuse by a religious leader tend to do so decades after the incident occurred (cf. Terry and Smith, *Nature and Scope of Sexual Abuse*, 4–18). Notwithstanding the theological problems posed by the abuse of children in MK schools, it needs to be acknowledged that these experiences of abuse are mirrored in the experiences of some non-TCKs who attended other types of boarding schools (cf. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 24–31; *Why Did We Go To Feller?*, #5).

38. It is acknowledged that non-TCKs who attended boarding schools were also subjected to abuse (cf. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 24–31).

overseas, or as a result of conflict with local authorities. Indeed, some aspects of the missionary experience, such as the suffering of some missionary children in some boarding schools, are better understood as victimization than heroism. The experiences of hardships in and of themselves do not qualify missionaries as heroes; rather, it is the attitude and motivation behind these sufferings that points toward the meta-frame of incarnational service and sacrifice that we will explore as our concluding paradigm.

The Missionary as a Person with Privilege and Power

A second significant narrative in the story of modern missions relates to the use of personal, economic, and cultural power.[39] Again, this challenge is neither unique to missionaries nor is it a recent challenge. History reveals that the arrival of missionaries and church workers has frequently coincided with both the exploitation of natural resources by Western commercial interests and the expansion of Western political spheres of influence.[40] Many early missionaries lived simply and opposed abuses of power practiced by their compatriots,[41] and in these cases they used privilege and power to access knowledge and resources for the benefit of local populations. Whether power and privilege have been used in a negative or positive manner, the introduction by missionaries of Western medicine, Western models of education, the use of Western musical forms and so on has resulted in

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39.   While this section deals with the challenges of power and privilege to missionary service, this is not a universal experience for missionaries. Mission from the underprivileged to the privileged has existed from New Testament times to the present.

40.   Bryce, *Hudson's Bay Company*, 417–27; Chancey, "Star in the East"; Villa-Vicencio and Grassow, *Christianity and the Colonisation of South Africa*, ch. 1.

41.   Chancey, "Star in the East." The story of Bartolome de Las Casas (cf. Kiefer "Bartolome de Las Casas: Missionary, Priest, Defender of the Oppressed"; Stacy, "Las Casas: Man Who Made a Difference") reflects the geopolitics of the eighteenth century and is a reminder that opposition to the abuse of indigenous peoples by European powers was not limited to Protestant missionaries.

the gospel being associated with Western culture. This should be a matter of great concern for the twenty-first century missionary as the current intellectual and political gestalt values ethnic self-determination and cultural pluralism, and is distrusting of political and economic imperialism.[42] As a result it is important that those who are ambassadors of Christ embody the Kingdom of Christ, a kingdom that is not of this world.[43]

The narrative of privilege comes into sharp focus when one considers the economic disparities between the rich and the poor that are a result of the industrial era and recent technological revolutions. The reality is that career missionaries are routinely confronted with both the disparity between their lives and those they are working with as well as the actions of other expatriates. On the one side, missionaries accustomed to a North American or European standard of living are challenged by those who attempt to live simply in an effort to reduce the barriers between themselves and the poor. In a case known to one of the authors, a missionary who elected to live simply was accused by his colleagues of "going native" because he and his wife chose to live in a small house and forego hiring house staff. This story highlights how one of the challenges of status is an awareness of wealth.[44] Indeed, North American missionaries who are still working to pay off college debts and who struggled to raise support to go overseas may upon their arrival on the field find themselves the wealthiest people in the neighborhood. In the majority world this wealth comes with obligations, one of which is to employ local people and care for the educational and medical needs of their families. Whether you call them "helpers," "house staff," or "servants," the effect is the same: missionaries often have poor people working for them. It is not our point to

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42. Nouwen notes that when missionaries seek to improve the lives of those who are poor, oppressive governments are distrustful of their motives, labeling them as communist subversives (*¡Gracias!*, 29).

43. Nouwen relates that when the Maryknoll Missionary Society in Peru wrestled with this question in 1982 they came to the decision that they should not participate in US government-funded projects as this would "identify them with the American cause" (ibid., 107–8).

44. Bonk, *Missions and Money*.

debate whether the practice of hiring domestic help is proper, but rather to highlight that questions caused by the social obligations associated with social status and wealth are not easily resolved. Nevertheless, it is a challenge that is often faced by missionaries in the majority world and one that they are usually ill-prepared to handle.

On the other side of the equation, missionaries who are attuned to the challenges of privilege and poverty also have to cope with the actions of those who seem unaware of the complexity of these concerns, as well as the unintended effects of their actions. Within this group are the huge numbers of short-term missionaries, many of whom serve overseas for as little as a week, who greatly outnumber long-term missionary personnel.[45] The short-term phenomenon, while attempting to educate Western Christians concerning the work of missions, raises the question, "Whose needs are being met?" Some short-term projects give more attention to the spiritual and charitable needs of those who are sent than they do to the long-term needs and aspirations of the poor who receive them. When this happens, the model of ministry bears a striking similarity to colonial forms of mission. In contrast, both the receiving community and the ministry group are more likely to have a positive experience when project participants are properly prepared, both in terms of culture as well as attitude and expectations, prior to arriving at their destination.[46]

Another aspect of the narrative of privilege may be observed in the respect that is accorded to the missionary. In many places in Africa, for example, a missionary who visits a rural church is immediately ushered to one of the places at the front, regardless of whether he or she is preaching. Similarly, both in Latin America and Africa, it is not unusual for a visiting missionary to be recognized in the worship service and, at the very least, be asked to bring greetings from the wider church community. Other examples of respect include extemporaneously inviting a visiting missionary to preach, conduct a child dedication, or mediate a

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45.   Jaffarian "Statistical State," 35.
46.   Cerrón, "Short-Term Missions."

disagreement. In one such situation, a visiting missionary who was new to the country was asked to arbitrate a dispute between the pastoral staff and the women of the church over the decorating of a new chapel. Fortunately, the missionary found the grace to not become entangled in something he did not understand. Outside the church, while Christian workers entering some countries may encounter suspicious or even hostile officials at the border crossing, the opposite may also be true as the missionary may be granted easy entry to the country or receive polite encouragement from border guards with submachine guns who say, "Welcome pastor, have a pleasant visit. God bless you."

Although the extent of the power differential between missionaries and nationals varies according to individual temperaments and local culture, the narrative of privilege and power is nevertheless a consistent problem for missionaries. On the one hand, if they attempt to deny its existence it becomes one more cultural artifact that infiltrates and colors everything they do. On the other hand, if too much is made of this narrative the missionary feels self-conscious and is hampered in their work. There is a need for a counter-narrative located between these two extremes that moderates the effects of privilege and power.

The Missionary in International Partnerships

In the latter half of the twentieth century, mission agencies and national church bodies moved away from the colonial model of missions towards a model of partnership in which the national church partner plays a major role in setting ministry priorities and identifying needs within the partner country.[47] To be effective, these partnerships require that both the national church and the mission agency ensure that the skills and resources of the mission agency are compatible with the needs on the field; that each member of the partnership clearly understands the other's expectations and requirements, and that there is appropriate

47. Fraser, "Evolving Partnership"; Lindqvist, "For Better for Worse"; Marsh, "Partnership in Mission," 370–71.

oversight, review, and evaluation.[48] While these arrangements seek to address how decision-making power is used within the mission's relationship to the national church, the fact that the mission agency remains in a position where it provides finances, personnel, and expertise still puts it in the place of being a "sending body."[49] Thus it has been proposed that true international partnerships are bilateral, in that the national church body not only collaborates with the mission but makes a contribution to churches in the "sending country."[50]

Understandably, the processes of creating and sustaining these partnerships require new ways of thinking and can sometimes be problematic. Whereas spiritual vision, physical resilience, and just plain stubbornness used to be major assets on the field, the required skills for missionary work in an era of partnership include accountability and mutuality.[51] As a result, a narrative of partnership places greater emphasis on the missionary expatriate's ability to build relationships with national church leaders and to function within the structures of the national church.[52] The essential nature of these skills is underscored by the fact that workplace tensions in the international work environment compromise personal and team performance and are

48.   Hoefer, "Partnering with Mission Societies—India," 93; Lindqvist, "For Better for Worse." Models of ecclesial partnership assume that a church exists on the mission field. This is not always the case, and while schools or community development organizations can be partners for Western mission agencies, this creates a different kind of relationship for both parties.

49.   Marsh, "Partnership in Mission," 374–75.

50.   Thomas, "How Can Western Christians Learn?" An example of the lessons churches in the developed world can learn from the global South may be found in Nouwen, *¡Gracias!*, who reflects on personal lessons gained from his journey to Bolivia and Peru and invites the North American church to listen to the voice that calls it to look beyond its culturally defined frame of reference and live a life of gratitude. A second example is Pazmiño, *Latin American Journey*, who describes what he learned about the practice of Christian Education during a sabbatical journey through Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica.

51.   Engel and Dyrness, *Changing the Mind of Missions*.

52.   This attitude of collaboration is not unique to the missionary enterprise. It is a critical factor that affects an international business manager's ability to work effectively with international teams (cf. Hurn, "Selection of International Business Managers," 281, 283).

very expensive to rectify in terms of human resources and finances.[53]

While this new narrative of partnership has many benefits, including the fact that it can serve to balance the narrative of privilege and power, an ethos of collaboration can also place the missionary in a position of vulnerability. Used to making decisions and feeling confident in what they believe to be good leadership and bad ethics, missionaries may be placed in situations where there are different rules for what is considered to be good leadership and effective management.[54] In some situations, differences in culturally accepted leadership practices may mean that a missionary feels powerless in the face of what is perceived to be moral and spiritual ambiguity. The following case study illustrates how this shift from colonial models of mission to partnership can exacerbate a missionary's own social or psychological vulnerabilities, especially if the missionary bears the brunt of any dysfunctional partnerships.

In a case known to one of the authors, a missionary was asked by the national partner to help manage the finances of the denomination. It was a junior position in the denominational finance department. The sending mission acceded to the request. Within a few years the missionary became assistant treasurer for the association of churches. In many ways, this was partnership at its best. Indeed, through his service the missionary earned the respect of his national colleagues and developed genuine friendships with many of them. Things turned sour, however, when for personal reasons the head treasurer cut off a monthly "under the table" payment from the denomination to the head of the denomination. After stopping this payment, the head treasurer left the country for several months, leaving the missionary in charge of the finances. The denominational leader asked the missionary to reinstate the payment, and when he tried to pass the responsibility to the head treasurer who had made the decision the president threatened the missionary with the end of his ministry and expulsion from the country. To yield to such a request would

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53.   Anderson, "Expatriate Selection," 572.
54.   Blunt and Jones, "Exploring the Limits."

have ended tensions with the national partner, but would have put the missionary in violation of the moral and ethical principles that guided his mission agency.

Managing the vulnerability of the partnership model is challenging for mission executives but the real stress falls on the missionaries who may feel that they are being asked to cover up, ignore, or tolerate the theft, corruption, cheating, or adultery of a denominational representative *because he/she is in ministry* and/or to tolerate what are seen to be the inefficiencies and incompetence of the national partner. In the developed world, denominational representatives would be fired if such accusations were proven and there would be a moral obligation on the part of denominational employees to speak about unethical behavior. Few missionaries, however, are prepared for this challenge to their own cultural values and ethics. In the majority world many missionaries serve at the invitation of a national church. As a result, the missionary must avoid resorting to a colonial mentality in which the (wealthy white) missionary is always right, and the mere threat of completely withdrawing funds or personnel can be used to reinforce any demands for change. Instead, partnerships require the missionary to acknowledge that the mission agency may place a higher value on the long-term partnership with the church than on an isolated failure in its leadership. Caught between the desire to do what he or she feels is right and the feeling of powerlessness to do anything at all, the missionary may be left to pray and hope that national church leaders will step into the conflict to speak for change.

One of the advantages of creating international partnerships is that these arrangements can serve as an effective counter-narrative to the amount and type of power exercised by the missionary. As the case study illustrates, however, sometimes these partnerships only serve to shift the locus of power away from the missionary and onto the national church. Although the practice of international partnerships offers a different experience of

privilege and power, these qualities continue to define the narrative of contemporary missions.[55]

The Missionary in Incarnational Practice

Reflection on three themes of the story of missions (i.e., "the missionary as hero", "the missionary as a person with privilege and power", and "the missionary in international partnerships") suggests that while these capture aspects of what it means to be a missionary none of these themes may be considered the signature characteristic of missions. In the remainder of this article, we reflect theologically on missionary partnerships and make the case that a missiology of incarnation provides a framework for handling the personal and ethical dilemmas that occur within missionary partnerships.

In the history of the modern missionary movement the "sending narrative" that has defined the practice of missions has been shaped by the church's understanding of Matt 28:19–20, Acts 1:8, and, to a lesser extent, John 20:21–23 and Luke 24:46–49.[56] Traditionally, these "commissioning texts" have been exegeted so as to focus on the following: Christ commanded us to tell others the message of the gospel and make disciples of them; Christ's disciples are to take the gospel to other communities; the propagation of the gospel is to be done in the power of the Spirit; and this activity is to continue until the end of the age.[57] This exegesis draws heavily on Matt 28:19–20 and Acts 1:8 so as to

55.   Duane Elmer and Mary T. Lederleitner have each explored the theory and practice of intercultural conflict, leadership, and partnership: Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Conflict*; Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Servanthood*; Lederleitner, *Cross-Cultural Partnerships*. Lederleitner includes strategies for creating healthy partnerships that can foster fiscal accountability while avoiding paternalism.

56.   There is one additional "commissioning text," Mark 16:15–18. However, this text is rarely employed because of questions surrounding the authenticity of the text.

57.   Cf. Allen, *Matthew*, 305–8; Bruce, *Acts*, 38–39; Dods, "John," 865; Knowling, "Acts," 57; Marshall, *Acts*, 60–61; Morris, *John*, 746–50; Thomas, *Matthew*, 559–60; Michaels, *John*, 1009–15; Moloney, *John*, 534–36; Peterson, *Acts*, 108–13; Schnackenburg, *Matthew*, 298–300; Witherington, *Acts*, 110–11. Westcott, *John*, 294–95.

clearly define the "who, what, where, when, how and why" of Christ's command to make disciples.[58] However, John's account, which begins with these words, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21, TNIV), highlights at least three dimensions that have frequently been overlooked in the story of modern missions. To begin, ministry is not only conducted in the name and power of Christ, it is to be performed according to the pattern of Christ's ministry here on earth. In other words, those who minister are to incarnate his life, work, character, and message within their work.[59]

Drawing on John 20:21, David Bosch describes the church's task as "a mission of self-emptying, of humbling service."[60] It is only through such sacrificial service that Jesus' sending of his church into the world can reflect the Father's sending of Jesus into the world. In this way, an incarnational missiology is attached to the character and call of the disciple rather than to the technique and activity of the missionary. We might add that it is only character, call, and motivation that can give significance to missionary experiences of sacrifice, power, powerlessness, and intercultural partnership. It is worth noting that Jesus' sending in John 20:21 is closely related to Thomas's confession of Jesus as Lord in 20:28.[61] As women and men identify with Jesus, they are drawn into the redemptive purpose of God for the world.[62] Unless Christ's life, character, and message are incarnated in missionary service, there is very little to identify such service as uniquely Christian.

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58.   Cf. Hauerwas's interpretation of Matthew 28, which stresses the ethical implications of Christ's commission (*Matthew*, 249). See also Keener, *Matthew*, 718–21.

59.   Beasley-Murray, *John*, 379–84; Michaels, *John*, 1009–10; Moloney, *John*, 534–36; Morris, *John*, 746–50; Neyrey, *John*, 44–45. See also Bosch, who notes that Protestant missiology was characterized by an underdeveloped theology of the incarnation until liberation theology began to inform missiological discussion in the 1980s (*Transforming Mission*, 512–13).

60.   Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 514; Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1203–4.

61.   Wright, *Mission of God*, 126, 535; cf. Keener, *John*, 1210–13.

62.   Köstenberger and O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, 207–8.

This aspect of ministry is seen in the apostle Paul's personal testimony (Phil 3:4–8), which parallels his description of Christ's setting aside of his eternal power and authority for the sake of becoming the sacrifice for the sins of humankind (Phil 2:5–8). Thus, just as Christ laid aside divine privilege in order to incarnate God's presence here on earth, so too Paul saw his ministry as setting aside privilege for the sake of incarnating Christ.[63]

Next, John's commissioning narrative reveals two additional characteristics of missionary service (vv. 22–23) when Jesus bestows the Holy Spirit on the disciples[64] and charges them with the task of forgiving sins.[65] Considered in the context of John's Gospel, these words echo and build on Christ's words to his disciples in John 13–16 and Christ's prayer for his disciples in John 17.

The surrender of self and a reliance on the Holy Spirit for missionary service are linked in an incarnational missiology. In John 20:21–23, the Holy Spirit is the one who accompanies the disciples in their continuing mission.[66] They are told to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Spirit (Luke 24:49) so that they will be made ready for the coming task of witness. Despite the fact that most mission textbooks make very little mention of the Holy Spirit, Wilbert Shenk reminds us that it is not possible to

63. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 79–96, 136–48; Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 329–37.

64. Thus John's narrative echoes Luke's version of the Great Commission (Acts 1:8) in that both emphasize the central role of the Holy Spirit in equipping the disciples to continue the ministry of Christ. Cf. Peterson, *Acts of the Apostles*, 110, who notes that "Jesus himself was anointed with the Spirit as God's chosen Servant and now he promises that his apostles will shortly be empowered by the same Spirit to share the Servant's ministry."

65. The emphasis on forgiveness in John's commissioning narrative appears to extend the ministry of forgiveness beyond relations between members of the community of faith (cf. Matt 18:15–35) to include those who are in need of God's forgiveness (cf. Matt 9:1–8; Luke 7:36–50). Cf. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 382–84; Michaels, *John*, 1013–15; Moloney, *John*, 535–36; Morris, *John*, 748–50; Neyrey, *John*, 43–44.

66. Cf. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 380–82; Moloney, *John*, 535; Morris, *John*, 747–48; Michaels, *John*, 1010–12.

understand the mission of God without the role of the Holy Spirit. As the Spirit of Jesus continues the witness of Christ through the church, the Spirit bestows spiritual gifts on the church in order to carry out that mission.[67] Looking towards Christ's second coming, this missionary empowering of the Spirit continues the missionary incarnation of Christ's earthly ministry.

The apostle Paul also employs this theme of "loving surrender of oneself to others for the sake of the gospel" in Eph 5:21 and Phil 2:1–4. Significantly, both of these passages appeal to Christ's self-sacrificial act as the theological basis upon which this mode of relating is to be modeled and built (Eph 5:25–28; Phil 2:5–8).[68] Central to Paul's account of the life of Christ, his vision for Christian community (Phil 2:1–4), and his vision of Christian marriage (Eph 5:22–30) is a conviction that to be God's agents of reconciliation in the present age means relinquishing everything the world values, relinquishing all sense of entitlement and privilege, and relinquishing those methods that the world uses to create and maintain power. In other words, Paul understood that self-sacrifice for the sake of glorifying God is the defining mark of those who are engaged in Kingdom service.

This naturally raises the question, "What might this look like within the context of contemporary missionary practice?" To begin, encounters with sacrifice, intercultural challenges, power, and powerlessness present opportunities for mission executives, national church leaders, and expatriate Christian workers to grow in their faith as they exercise forgiveness, humility, and especially patience for the good of others and for the benefit of Christ's church, whether it is overseas or in one's culture of origin. Christians in the sending countries who learn to incarnate Christ in the face of their powerlessness experience spiritual growth and are better prepared to identify with and pray for missionaries. For

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67.   Shenk, *Changing Frontiers of Mission*, 14–15.

68.   As Hoehner notes, Eph 5:21–28 is not the beginning of a new section explaining household rules, but a conclusion to the wisdom and infilling of the Spirit described in 5:17–18 (*Ephesians*, 716).

expatriate missionaries, a reliance on God's Spirit and Christ's example when facing the challenges of culture, travel, sickness, suffering, and power serves to define their lives as distinct from those of tourists or expatriate business executives.

Next, those who lead or direct mission agencies would do well to remember that "partnership is undoubtedly linked to questions of power."[69] A model of incarnational missionary service does not relegate the missionary to the status of passive responder to challenges on the field. Indeed, Christian mission agencies need to seriously reflect on how partnership can be possible when one of the partners has all the money and the other has all of the need. The practice of true partnership comes at a price for the missionaries on the field who work in closest proximity to their national partners. While we rejoice that in many instances true mutuality based on the model of Christ's self-emptying has been ardently sought after by Southern and Western partners, we need to consider the negative aspects of some contemporary practices of mission that allow one of the partners to wash its hands of any involvement in the moral ambiguities of overseas involvement. How can we practice integral mission founded on honesty and integrity (Mic 6:8) when, by our silence, partnerships enable and empower the moral ambivalence of Christian leaders? Mission partnership cannot simply be a theory to direct the board room discussions of mission agencies or the receiving churches; it must be practiced on the field. Agencies cannot afford to allow incarnational practice and mutuality to result in a policy of non-involvement in anything that could become messy. True partners need to be able to speak honestly, graciously, and openly about the weaknesses of individuals and institutions with the goal of both partners walking closer to Christ.[70]

69. Kirk, *What Is Mission*, 194.

70. Gibbs, *Church Next*, 97, addresses a similar concern when he cites Mike Regele as saying, "Where are the strong visionary leaders? Where are those in training who are moved by a passion for the kingdom of God? In which classroom do we tell theological students that the church of the twenty-first century needs visionary leadership able to think big and bold? Where do we instill in them the level of courage necessary to face a world that is

Mission agencies also need to be careful about assuming that just because the Western churches that support the missionary overseas are working to be missional in their own contexts that these churches really understand long-term overseas missionary service. Long-term missionaries experience a particular set of stressors, including high mobility, intercultural challenges, and multiple separations that have generated a formidable body of literature.[71] These potential sources of tension are all closely interwoven with the missionary's own understanding of leadership and servanthood. For this reason, those who lead mission agencies need to understand (conceptually and experientially) the challenges of power and powerlessness that attend missionary experience and locate responses to these challenges in an understanding of character and call. Missionary heroism is not fundamentally linked to geographical displacement, intercultural experience, sickness, or suffering, but to a lived-out motivation to serve God and others ahead of self.

While most of this paper has been written from the perspective of the expatriate missionary, it is worth inviting church leaders from nations that receive missionaries to identify a parallel set of concerns that need to be informed by the self-emptying of Christ. In an era of partnership, national church leaders who may have once experienced powerlessness are now faced with a need to be aware of the challenges related to a healthy use of power in true partnership. National church leaders make the same journey as the expatriate missionary, are faced with the same challenges of power, deal with the same potential moral ambiguities, and wrestle with cultural misunderstandings. For this reason, national partners of Western sending agencies are also called upon by Christ to adapt their own aspirations for the benefit of mutuality. In true partnership, we meet together at the foot of the cross in our mutual powerlessness to seek the glory of our Savior.

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antagonistic to the church? We have taken Jesus' model of servant leadership and reduced it to insipid peonage."

71.   Cf. Foyle, *Overcoming Missionary Stress*; Schwandt and Moriarty, "What Have the Past 25 Years of Member Care Research Taught Us?"

Churches that receive missionaries may need to address practices that grant missionaries special status or power. Identifying these expectations when the missionary arrives on the field can go a long way towards avoiding future misunderstandings. This conversation should be sponsored by the sending agency as the missionary prepares for departure and continues throughout the months and years of the partnership.

Finally, today's Western missionaries can work to reject the vestments of colonialism, paternalism, cultural imperialism, and individualism that are part and parcel of other models of missions. In many ways this means redefining the ideals of sacrifice and martyrdom. Gone are the days when these ideals are defined primarily in terms of hardship, language acquisition, cultural adaptation, disease, deprivation, or even separation from loved ones. Rather, incarnational practice reframes sacrifice as the practice of setting aside one's own ambitions, agenda, timing, protocol, and expectations in the service of national partners. Those who are able to embrace this definition of their mission set aside ideals of status based on outdated missionary myths as well as demonstrate that their overseas Christian service is different than working for a multinational corporation or secular agency.

Conclusion

We have argued that if missionaries understand their own ministries to be expressions of missionary heroism, gifts of privilege and power, or expertise in international partnerships, when difficulties arise for either the missionary or receiving church, these meta-narratives will be found wanting. At its heart, missionary service must be incarnational, characterized by the self-emptying of Christ.

Like their secular peers, today's missionaries can work to reject the vestments of colonialism, paternalism, cultural imperialism, and individualism that are challenges to international work today. Unique to the work of the gospel, however, is an understanding that is rooted in Christ's birth, life, and death: the ideals of sacrifice, and even martyrdom, that most missionaries

fall so short of in their comfortable existences. But perhaps in sacrificing their own ambitions, agenda, timing, protocol, and expectations in the service of their national partners, they can participate in God's mission in ways that their pioneering mentors did not anticipate.

Understanding and experiencing sacrifice, partnership, and power is an opportunity for Western Christians serving overseas to really grow in their faith as they exercise forgiveness, humility, and especially *patience* for the good of others and for the benefit of Christ's church. Thus an attitude of self-emptying engages the missionary in a way of thinking and living that confronts the struggle with power and powerlessness that is ever present in intercultural and interpersonal ministry settings.

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