

**Contemporary Missions Issues:
Toward Renewing a Commitment to Partnership**
by William Snider

Introduction

Several years ago, I sat with a Filipino leader and discussed a new mission initiative for our city. For several months this leader spent time with a new missionary couple getting to know them as well as sharing hopes and dreams for partnership to launch a new church, I could sense his struggle. Who would be in the lead? How was this going to work? He had heard stories about working with missionaries. Would this time be different?

In the same month, I spoke at a mission conference sponsored by a large local church in Southeast Asia. The church had flown in “partners” from three Asian countries for three weeks, giving them an exposure to the church’s mission, vision and ministry principles. Being there for over a week, I could see that this was primarily a one-way conversation focused on what the local church wanted to accomplish. The dynamic that seemed to be missing were times of dialogue, listening to one another and planning the future together.

These two illustrations represent hundreds of meetings happening every day. International Mission partnerships are increasing on a worldwide scale. Churches and para-church organizations seek these strategic relationships in order to obey the Great Commission, further their mission vision and empower local initiatives. The challenges of urbanization, the increased focus on unreached peoples, the effects of globalization, the growing vitality of the Majority World Church and significant expansion in their mission efforts have all converged to encourage a climate supporting cooperative efforts. However, in spite of all the effort, and a large number of authors writing on the value and the mechanics of partnership, Kirk captures the reality that partnership is “a

wonderful idea, pity about the practice!”¹ Are there missing ingredients that can further international partnership efforts with the Majority World Church?

This article will contend that international mission partnerships struggle in praxis due to a lack of emphasis on a Biblical theology of partnership, which includes recognizing the vital role of the Holy Spirit, due to a lack of understanding the necessity of relationships based on mutuality and reciprocity where power is shared, and due to a lack of sensitivity to listen and learn what partnership means to the Majority World Church. In exploring a Biblical foundation for partnership, I will examine the meanings of *koinonia* in the New Testament, with a focus on Paul's writings. I will also identify briefly several key passages in New Testament where the Holy Spirit is an active participant in partnerships. In exploring the importance of relationships, I will review literature from contemporary authors on the significance of mutuality in mission partnerships. Finally, in suggesting what the Majority World Church can contribute to the conversation about mission partnerships, I will draw on the literature and my conversations with Majority World Assemblies of God church leaders in the Philippines and Southeast Asia. In concluding remarks, I will suggest several missiological implications for workers serving in cross-cultural settings. Initiating international mission partnerships is a complex subject. This paper is an attempt to identify fruitful areas for further discussion and research.

Partnership: Toward Biblical Foundations

There is significant evidence to believe that partnership was a vital missiological concern to the Apostle Paul. In his writing he modeled principles of working with local groups of believers. Roland Allen writes that Paul had a “profound belief and trust in the Holy Spirit indwelling his converts and the churches . . .”² This trust in the Spirit enabled Paul to call men and women to a deep fellowship and participation in the gospel. Paul mobilized and mentored fellow workers as he shared his call and life with them by means of nurturing partnerships.

¹J. Andrew Kirk, *What is Mission: Theological Explorations*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 191.

²Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods, St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1962), vii.

The word partnership is found only once in the New International Version (NIV), in Paul's letter to the Philippians, "I thank my God every time I remember you . . . because of your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now," (Phil 1:3, 5[NIV]). However, partnership comes from the Greek word, *koinonia*, which occurs many times in the New Testament and expands the idea to offer a more fully developed meaning. Kittel writes, "Paul uses *koinonia* for the religious fellowship (participation) of the believer in Christ and Christian blessings, and for the mutual fellowship of believers."³ Barclay describes *koinonia* as sharing of friendship, practical sharing with those less fortunate, and partnership in the work.⁴ According to Hauck, the noun "[*koinonos*]" means 'fellow', 'participant'. It implies fellowship or sharing with someone or in something."

"[*koinoneo*]. . . means 1. 'to share with someone (to be *koinonos*) in something which he has,' 'to take part,' 2. more rarely, 'to have a share with someone (to be fellow) in something which he did not have,' 'to give a part,' 'to impart'". "[*koinonia*], an abstract term from *Koinonos* and *Koinoneo*, denotes 'participation,' 'fellowship,' esp. with a close bond. It expresses a two-sided relation."⁵

In essence the aspects of 'fellow and participant' in *koinonia* encourages us to see a depth of relationship and mutuality of sharing between the fellows or believers and individuals and groups. A brief review of selected texts using *koinonia* or *koinonos* gives a sense of the relationship.

In Acts 2:42, (*koinonia*, fellowship): "they devoted themselves . . . to the fellowship" denotes a sharing of life. In 2 Cor 13:14 (*koinonia*, fellowship): "the fellowship of the Holy Spirit" expresses a deep spiritual fellowship or sharing of life. In 2 Cor 1:7 (*koinonos*, fellowship): "you share in our sufferings. . ." conveys sharing in suffering. In 2 Cor 8:23 (*koinonos*, partner): "he is my partner and fellow worker" denotes a partnership in ministry.

Paul also uses *koinonia* in Rom 15:26, 2 Cor 8:4 and 9:13 explicitly regarding the taking of offerings. In 2 Corinthians 9:13 (*koinonia*/

³Gerhard Kittel, ed., Geoffrey Bromily, trans., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 3, s.v. "Koinonia." (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1965), 789-809.

⁴William Barclay, *New Testament Words*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), 174.

share/contribution): "your generosity in sharing with them" (NIV) speaks to sharing material blessings. The breadth of meanings and application to relationships suggests a sharing of life in all of its aspects.

Andrew Lord commenting on *koinonia* and its impact on understanding partnership writes "The most basic meaning of *koinonia* is 'partaking together in' a group which has a common identity, goals and responsibilities'. This picks up on the shared vision, values and functions already articulated. It is notable that *koinonia* involves both sharing the good blessings (cf. 1 Cor 12:7) and the sufferings (2 Cor 1:7; Col 1:24; Phil 3:10)."⁵

In Philippians Paul uses the word *koinonia* on four occasions: "partnership in the gospel" (1:5), "fellowship with the Spirit" (2:1), "fellowship of sharing in his sufferings" (3:10), and "share in my troubles" (4:14). In Philippians 4:15, Paul uses *koinoneo* to express the Philippians financial sharing with him in the ministry. In this one book, Paul expresses four meanings of the idea of partnership: partnership in ministry, a deep spiritual fellowship, a sharing of suffering and sharing practical help with those in need. All of these meanings are in the context of a strong missional relationship between the apostle and a local congregation.

Swift believes that the central theme of Philippians is partnership and notes, "In this epistle every single reference Paul makes to another person is made in connection with that person's *koinonia*, his partnership in the gospel."⁶ He calls Phil 1:3-6 as "the cameo of the entire epistle" and suggests that Paul's appeal in 1:27 to walk worthy was based on the premise that, ". . . to become more effective partners of the gospel they must walk in unity with one another and in steadfastness against opponents of the faith."⁷ The next chapters of Philippians then speak to unity based on the example of Christ and to steadfastness based on identification with Christ's sufferings.

⁵ Andrew Lord, *Spirit Shaped Mission: A Holistic Charismatic Theology*, (Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Press, 2005), 119.

⁶Robert C. Swift, "The Theme and Structure of Philippians", *Bibliotheca sacra*, 141 no 563 (July-September 1984): 238, 246 <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=18&hid=103&sid=8e16624d-9cf4-47e7-8445-3d2530f2e206%40sessionmgr113&bddata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbnG12ZQ%3d%3d#db=rft&AN=ATLA0000925173> (accessed on February 27, 2010).

⁷*Ibid.*, 244.

Beyond the use of *koinonia* in expressing how believers are to work together, Paul also makes use of metaphor to convey his belief in partnership. He describes the church as the body of Christ in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12-14, Ephesians 2, 3 and 4, and in Colossians 3. This is a body where “God has arranged the parts . . . just as he wanted them to be” (1 Cor 12:18). Each part of the body has an important function. One part, like the eye, cannot say to the hand that “I don’t need you” (1 Cor 12:21). At the same time, a part of the body cannot say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body” (1 Cor 12:15a). Paul’s concern in using the body of Christ theme in Corinth is to show how the diversity of gifts must work toward unity and mutual interdependence among God’s people. Whether this chapter is applied in a local setting or to the global Church, this metaphor is a classic description of partnership and the intimate relationship we are called to share with one another.

Finally, Paul’s view of partnership can be seen in how he shows high regard for his many fellow workers. (Rom 16:3, 9, 21; 1 Cor 4:17, 16:10, 16; 2 Cor 8:23; Phil 2:25, 4:2-3; Philemon 1, 24; Col 4:11). In Romans 16 alone he greets or commends thirty-six men and women and a number of unnamed believers who are serving the Lord. These expressions of cooperation and sharing of the ministry with people from many different ethnic backgrounds are another illustration of his strong view of partnership.

Partnership with local believers was a hallmark of Paul’s ministry. His choice of the word *koinonia*, his use of metaphors to express the believer’s oneness in Christ, his appeal for cooperation and his high regard for his co-workers all point to the value he places on partnership in the gospel work. The Church has drifted from the Biblical pattern of ministry relationships cultivated by the Apostle. From a western perspective, there is a pragmatic approach to collaboration which emphasizes methods, money and management. This has reduced missions to methodology, and has had the effect of “de-theologizing and de-spiritualizing missions.”⁸ The end result is mission partnerships based on business-like agreements. This will not allow for the full potential that Paul expected as he shared life with his fellow workers.

⁸Peter Kuzmic, AGTS Class “Contemporary Issues in Missions,” December 7, 2009.

The fact that we are one in Christ is the basis of partnership in ministry. But the vital role of the Holy Spirit in partnerships seems to be a neglected area as very few authors address this subject. The Spirit is the active member of the Trinity in bringing the church together. Paul writes to the church in Corinth, “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (1 Cor. 12:13). Paul is saying that it is the Spirit that has made us one. From this oneness Paul develops his body of Christ metaphor for partnership. He writes to the church in Ephesus that unity and cooperation are the anticipated norm, where there is “one body and one Spirit. . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph 4:3-6). Paul expresses this new equality to the Galatians believers, “for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:27-28). God is bringing into existence a new community not based on social or religious differences, where all stand as equals in Christ. James Stamooolis credits the Holy Spirit as the reason that partnership is possible: “Here we come to the real hub of partnership. We can partner because we recognize that they are equal members of the same family and share with us the same gift from the Father, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.”⁹

The Holy Spirit is an active participant and advocate to keep the church unified. In the first church council in Acts 15, the apostles and elders debated what was required for the Gentiles to be admitted into fellowship. God’s acceptance of the Gentiles was proven to all in that they had received of the gift of the Holy Spirit in the same way as the Jews. In their letter to the Gentiles believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia, the Jerusalem leaders conclude, “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements . . .” (Acts 15:28). The apostles and elders credit the Holy Spirit in moving the group toward a solving a problem that could have divided the church. Here the Holy Spirit is involved in keeping Christ’s body unified and working together. Andrew Lord writes, “We need to

⁹James J. Stamooolis, “The Former Soviet Union and Central Asia: Mission in the 21st Century” in *Mission at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, ed. Paul Varo Martinson (Minneapolis: Kirk House Publishers, 1999), 120.

see the Spirit as the *uniter* of communities if we are to avoid the divisions and disputes that continue to plague the work of mission.”¹⁰

Paul links *koinonia* with the Holy Spirit in 2 Cor 13:14, where “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit” highlights a life “which is the day-by-day experience of the Christians, this new solidarity which has bound them together.”¹¹ This is more than a casual relationship. There is an expectation that this fellowship or partnership is a life experience that believers share, where the Holy Spirit is intimately drawing people together.

The Holy Spirit also gives the fruit of the Spirit and ministry gifts that provide foundations for dynamic and collaborative body ministry. Mission partnerships are possible as men and women allow the fruit of the Spirit to be expressed in their relationships. Partnerships that work have a foundation in love for people, survive the difficult times through the fruit of patience, gentleness and self-control, and thrive relationally as joy, peace, kindness, goodness, and faithfulness are lived out (Gal 5:22-23). These are what hold the body of Christ together. In any mission relationship, there will be times of miscommunication and misunderstanding. We will have the issues of language, cultural differences, structures, organizational priorities and expectations that can be real obstacles to partnership. Months of effort can be lost by harsh words or knee-jerk reactions. It is at that moment that Paul identifies the glue that saves the relationship—the fruit of the Spirit: “. . . clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another” (Col 3:12b-13).

Paul also states that gifted leaders are needed to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that believers may work together to become mature (Eph 4:11-13). The spiritual gifts outlined in 1 Cor. 12-14, Romans 12 and Ephesians 4 empower and enable leaders to serve the body effectively. Van Engen sees in Ephesians 4 a theology for missional partnerships. He writes that the means of mission partnerships are the unique gifts of the Holy Spirit given to the body through apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (Eph 4:11); and the goal of

¹⁰Andrew M. Lord, *Spirit-Shaped Mission: A Holistic Charismatic Theology*, 106.

¹¹Max Warren, *Partnership: The Study of an Idea*, (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1956), 51.

mission partnerships is “to prepare God’s people for works of service . . . until we all reach unity . . . and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:12-13).¹² There is strong Biblical support that Paul emphasized the role of the Holy Spirit in building and sustaining ministry partnerships. Andrew Lord agrees taking the role of the Holy Spirit in partnerships one step further: “It is important to recognize the yearning of the Spirit for unity and I want to suggest here that the Holy Spirit works to unite by the creation of partnerships and as the ‘go-between’ brings mission communities together within the movement out into the world.”¹³

Without diminishing the need for shared goals and values, structure and communication, it is vital to understand the role of the Spirit in initiating and sustaining partnerships. We have neglected this aspect of the Holy Spirit’s ministry. He is more than a silent partner. The Holy Spirit seeks to express the purpose of *Missio Dei* through the life of believers. The Holy Spirit is at work in bringing the body of Christ to maturity, where all parts offer something to the whole. The Holy Spirit inspires the exercise of spiritual gifts in ministry (Eph 4, Rom 12, 1 Cor. 12-14). The Holy Spirit develops believer’s attitudes, the fruit of the Spirit, which enable partnerships to grow across culture, gender, age and ethnic lines. Pentecostals of all people should be receptive to the role of the Holy Spirit as the initiator of partnerships.

In a brief review of Paul’s writings as well as the current literature on the subject, I have contended that we struggle in our praxis due to a neglect of a Biblical theology of partnership and by not realizing the vital role of the Holy Spirit in initiating and sustaining missional partnerships. As we allow the Bible to speak and take its rightful place in this day of mission partnerships, there is new potential for the church. Kirk writes that “partnership is not so much what the Church *does* as what *it is*. Churches (theologically) belong to one another, for God has called each ‘into the fellowship (*koinonia*) of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord’ (1 Cor 1:9) . . . Partnership is therefore not a nice slogan that some clever

¹²Charles E. Van Engen, “Toward a Theology of Mission Partnerships”, *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XXIX, No. 1, (January 2001): 16, <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=16&hid=103&sid=8e16624d-9cf4-47e7-8445-3d2530f2e206%40sessionmgr113&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZW9vc3QtbG12ZQ%3d%3d#db=rh&AN=ATLA0001334507> (accessed January 14, 2010).

¹³Lord, *Spirit Shaped Mission: A Holistic Charismatic Theology*, 116.

committee has dreamt up; it is the expression of the one, indivisible, common life in Jesus Christ.”¹⁴

Partnership: Toward Mutuality in Relationships

International partnerships also struggle due to a lack of understanding the importance of relationships based on mutuality and reciprocity where power is shared. This statement is a consequence of a clear understanding of ministry relationships based on *koinonia*. One possible reason we have missed the significance of mutuality is the origin of the word partnership. Funkschmidt writes that partnership made “its way into ecumenical thinking from its origin in the business world (‘business partners’) via the 1920s colonial discussion, when the British wanted to keep control while granting some autonomy, and coined the term ‘partnership’ to describe this new relationship.”¹⁵ From the beginning, the term was used to describe a variety of relationships that did not contain the idea of total equality. It fit well into colonial missions and the idea was easily transferred to other mission organizations. But as the colonial era waned so has the unqualified acceptance of this approach to missions. As early as the Jerusalem (1928) and Tambaran (1938) mission conferences, younger churches began to be recognized as equals.¹⁶ The push toward equality continues to this day. What lingers in practice is the basic belief that partnerships should be based on shared goals and agreements, with equality in relationships seen as an aspiration, but not a necessity.

Based on a renewed understanding of Paul’s practices and his commitment to *koinonia*, we have a strong basis to encourage present day believers to seek a new quality of relationship. Terms such as

¹⁴Andrew Kirk, *What is Mission: Theological Explorations*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 187.

¹⁵Kai Funkschmidt, “New Models of Mission Relationship and Partnership.” *International Review of Mission* 91 no. 363 (October 2002): 558, <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=14&hid=103&sid=8e16624d-9cf4-47e7-8445-3d2530f2e206%40sessionmgr113&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtG12ZQ%3d%3d#db=afh&AN=8990960> (accessed January 14, 2010).

¹⁶Charles Van Engen, “Toward a Theology of Mission Partnerships”. *Missiology* 29, no 1 (January 2001): 14, (accessed January 14, 2010). Van Engen quotes Glasser and McGavran who quote from *The Church for Others and the Church for the World*, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1968), 14. The original documents from the Willengen conference are out of print and unavailable.

mutuality along with mutual respect and reciprocity are expressions of a desire on the part of the Majority World Church for equality in international mission partnerships. Almost a century ago Roland Allen identified quality of relationships as a failure in missions: “We have done everything for them except acknowledge their equality. We have done everything for them, but very little with them. We have done everything for them except give place to them.”¹⁷ Although there is definite progress in the quality of mission relationships over the years, I agree with Kirk when he writes: “The Church in the West . . . still possesses an incipient paternalism . . .”¹⁸ I believe this can also be traced back to the origins of the mission movement through the establishing of voluntary mission societies. Andrew Walls calls for a change, insightfully writing that the changed world situation thus requires us to examine some of the unintended consequences of a continued projection of the missionary movement . . . The original organs of the missionary movement were designed for one-way traffic; for sending and giving. Perhaps there is now an obligation of Christians to “use means” better fitted for two-way traffic, fellowship, for sharing, for receiving, than have yet been perfected.¹⁹

Lee agrees that change is needed stating, “Mutuality in mission relationships is a necessary step in moving away from the one-directional flow of the past.”²⁰ Western churches and mission organizations at times still set the agenda through the funding they bring to the table. Ray Wiseman writes that to understand partnership in mission, “you need to ask a key question asked by secular partnerships: ‘Who controls the agenda?’”²¹ His answer is that church organizations are often a reflection of their nation’s political structure and suggests that these structures must

¹⁷Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods, St. Paul’s or Ours?*, 143.

¹⁸Andrew Kirk, *What is Mission: Theological Explorations*, 194.

¹⁹Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 260.

²⁰Lee Hong-Jung, “Beyond Partnerships, Towards Networking: A Korean Reflection on Partnership in the Web of God’s Mission”, *International Review of Mission* 91 no 363 (Oct.): 578. <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=5&hid=103&sid=8e16624d-9cf4-47e7-8445-3d2530f2e206%40sessionmgr113&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZW hvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=rfh&AN= ATLA0001400855> (accessed January 14, 2010).

²¹Ray Wiseman, “The Fundamental Question in Mission-National Partnerships” *Didaskalia*, 9 no 1 (Fall 1997): 54, <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=15&hid=103&sid=3d971248-a0ca-4c49-adc0-165bde6e9bf8%40sessionmgr102&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZW hvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=rfh&AN= ATLA0000998061> (accessed January 17, 2010).

be changed for there to be effective partnerships. Beyond our mission history, our social structures effect how partnership is interpreted and implemented. To pursue mutuality will require many changes in the organization.

The cultural bias toward meeting goals rather than building relationships also makes western workers in a hurry to accomplish their vision. Add to this cultural bias the impact of globalization which brings the world and its diverse cultures closer together. One result of globalization is that the traditional missions model where agencies were the main players is changing, “local churches are becoming active participants in missions”²² and short-term trips are now the norm. For all their zeal, short term teams also bring with them an expectation that things can be accomplished quickly without understanding the importance of building culturally sensitive relationships with the local people. Short term teams often reinforce the way western workers are viewed, as people with a job to accomplish in a limited period of time. The obstacles to mutuality in relationships remain an incipient paternalism, the power of one partner to control the agenda through money, a cultural bias to completing the task rather than building up people, and the impact of globalization on the mission movement.

The pursuit of mutuality in relationships is all the more important as the church’s center of gravity has shifted to the South and East from the West. The emergence of maturing national churches presumes a new relationship. No longer does the missionary set the agenda. A western missionary’s call and personal vision is not the only factor. National leaders desire to dialogue and give leadership in setting broad goals for the missionary family which includes missionary deployment. We have not arrived at this position, but the new paradigm of relationship is clearly stated.

Many western churches also recognize that to be more effective, they need to work with local believers in least evangelized countries. Resistant people groups will more easily accept people who are closer to their own culture and background. This fact has encouraged international partnership efforts where the West is asked to provide funding for local

²²Ros Johnson, “Cutting out the Middleman: Mission and the Local Church in a Globalised Postmodern World”, in *One World or Many: The Impact of globalization on mission*, ed. Richard Tiplady (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2003), 241.

evangelists who carry the work. However, this approach also bypasses relationships and turns partnership into a monetary transaction. Another shortcut in partnership is to see the explosive growth of Majority World missionaries as an answer that gives the western church more people to use to accomplish a Great Commission vision. We must resist the temptation to use people for church or organizational purposes. Mutuality in relationships is not just a western church issue. Churches in Asia, such as the one I described in my introduction, are also guilty of approaching national leaders from the perspective of hiring them to accomplish their own church's goals.

Philip Thomas offers four possible modalities for partnership: declaratory, developmental, dialogical and double-swing. His premise is that "any learning experience is based on the depth and breadth of the relationship developed between partners in the exchange."²³ Each subsequent modality illustrates a growing depth of relationship. In the declaratory modality, "one community addresses another without recognition of any differences in perspective. Cultural distinctives are ignored."²⁴ Communication is one-way. In a developmental model, "it is easy, from the best of motives for western Christians to imply that partnership involves being absorbed into the West's way of doing things."²⁵ The operating principle is that the partner with the greater expertise and funding knows best. In a dialogical modality, "issues of dominance and dependency . . . begin to fade. There is a sense of meeting, of encounter, of give and take."²⁶ Honest dialogue is the beginning of mutual understanding. Thomas proposes that the double-swing modality is the model worth seeking: "it depicts a relationship marked by mutuality and interchange."²⁷ The diagram is shaped like a figure 8 conveying the fact of ongoing communication. It is through this interchange or swing that the shape of both partners changes by adding the crossover point. The two entities are coming together. These

²³Philip H.E. Thomas, "How Can Western Christians Learn from Partners in the World Church." *International Review of Mission* 92 no 366 Jul 2003, 385. <http://web.ebs-cohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=7&hid=103&sid=8e16624d-9cf4-47e7-8445-3d2530f2e206%40sessionmgr113&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=afh&AN=10529586> (accessed January 14, 2010).

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid., 387.

²⁶Ibid., 388.

²⁷Ibid., 389.

modalities serve as an evaluative tool encouraging a church or organization to ask which diagram represents their work. They also help to illustrate the importance of listening as well as talking, of learning as well as teaching. Thomas writes, “The theological question ultimately addressed to any partnership must be, ‘How have you been changed as a result of your relationship with each other?’”²⁸ That can only happen in a dialogic or double-swing modality.

In the search to find a way to describe the desired partnership relationship, looking at modalities is helpful. But modalities must be worked out in real life experience. John Rowell, in *To Give or Not to Give*, addresses the need to move beyond the three-self formula of mission work, but also offers a particularly helpful approach to mutuality that replaces the business partnership paradigm with a focus on developing “covenant relationships.”²⁹ This term, although not new to the literature, places equality and trust in the center of the picture. Rowell outlines nine aspects of a covenant commitment that his church and his Bosnian partners entered into. This covenant places mutuality as the key element, stating that “we work alongside Bosnians as brothers and sisters (in covenant) rather than as partners in a contractual relationship.”³⁰ It is a power giving approach where “*the most contextually relevant parties take the lead,*” and “the national leaders have the final say in strategic planning for most new initiatives.”³¹ A commitment to Biblical relationships and releasing control or leadership are the key features in Rowell’s approach. There is also a joint commitment to long term involvement, and placing the covenant principles in writing which emphasize the objective of mutuality. His approach of working together as God’s family resonates in my Philippine cultural context. The accepted approach toward any project is working as a group. For over two years, the leadership of the Philippine Assemblies of God and I have dialogued about an urban church planting initiative. The first step occurred earlier this year as the General Superintendent called thirty pastors and leaders together for an *Urbanidad* gathering. The result of this three-day meeting was forming a working group or company of

²⁸Ibid., 390.

²⁹John Rowell, *To Give or Not to Give: Rethinking Dependency, Restoring Generosity, & Redefining Sustainability* (Tyrone, GA: Authentic Publishing, 2006), 155.

³⁰Ibid., 156.

³¹John Rowell, *To Give or Not to Give*, 159.

pastors who agreed to move forward together in planting urban churches and training future leaders. Nothing happened until a segment of the family met together and agreed. Also, Rowell's emphasis to put an agreement in writing is a culturally important action. National leaders in the Philippines on several occasions have asked our mission to put in writing what we had discussed casually in a meeting. The *Urbanidad* meeting will produce a written document of agreement. A written document has a finality that builds trust and allows everyone to move forward.

Sherwood Lingenfelter echoes Rowell's call to covenant relationships and offers an additional perspective that will move relationships forward. In *Leading Cross-Culturally: Covenant Relationships for Effective Christian Leadership*, he writes that cultural biases and issues of power and control "create obstacles to effective leadership and ministry partnerships."³² Lingenfelter's answer to overcoming these biases is the covenant community and power giving leadership. A covenant community is based on a "three way agreement of relationship—between people and people, and between people and God."³³ He emphasizes the presence of the Holy Spirit as the critical factor in bringing a new quality of relationship to the group. Lingenfelter stresses that instead of "giving first priority to attaining vision, meeting goals, and productivity, they must rather give highest priority to the formation of a community of trust and then doing the hard 'bodywork' of creating both community and trust."³⁴ With a covenant relationship as the starting point, the desired outcome over time will be both community and trust.

Community is something that is seriously lacking in western society. Peter Kuzmic observed that in the USA the emphasis "on materialism and individuality is toxic, destroying community."³⁵ The bias toward individuality and personal vision in missions creates tensions in a partnership and presents an obstacle for dialogue. The Lausanne covenant offers an alternative that fosters community and trust: Christ's

³²Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, *Leading Cross-Culturally: Covenant Relationships for Effective Christian Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 8.

³³*Ibid.*, 74.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 80.

³⁵Peter Kuzmic, AGTS Class "Contemporary Issues in Missions", December 9, 2009.

evangelists must humbly seek to empty themselves of all but their personal authenticity in order to become the servants of others, and churches must seek to transform and enrich culture, all for the glory of God.³⁶

For almost a decade, I have been in a partnership with three mission groups from Europe and Asia. We usually meet twice per year but also use electronic communication as needed. Time and circumstances have refined the original vision that brought us together. The factor that keeps us working together in the face of distance and disappointment is mutual trust and a commitment to our Asian brothers. We developed this trust of one another through dialogue and agreement, through keeping promises and commitments to one another, through being together on site at the project, through times of prayer and through simple activities like sharing meals and being tourists together. Mutuality shapes our relationship; there is no leader, but facilitators who are empowered by the group.

In addition to the covenant community, Lingenfelter focuses on how the group handles issues of authority and control, the essence of power. He contrasts power giving leadership with power-seeking and again credits “the life changing power of the Holy Spirit and the transforming power of Jesus, the Living Word” in changing the leadership focus.³⁷ Emphasizing that people are more important than control, I suggest a servant leader approach: “Instead of powering outcomes, the relational leader builds trust and influences followers through integrity of character and depth of relationship.”³⁸ Mission partnerships are a unique type of relationship. Mutuality requires that power be given to the group, that outcomes are not determined by the partner who brings the funding. This requires a deep trust in the Holy Spirit who is working in the lives of national leaders as well as the mission body. Accepting the validity of covenant relationships and power giving leadership will force partners to set aside time for dialogue and quality sharing.

³⁶“The Lausanne Covenant” in *Proclaim Christ Until He Comes* ed. J.D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1990), 19-24.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 111.

³⁸*Ibid.*

Partnership: Toward Learning from the Majority World Church

The global revolution in Christianity is happening outside of the awareness of the much of the western church world. This was popularized by Philip Jenkins when he wrote, “the center of gravity in the Christian world has shifted inexorably southward, to Africa, Asia and Latin America.”³⁹ Tennent believes that we are living on the seam of history where we are “able to witness one of these great cultural and geographical transmissions of the gospel.”⁴⁰ The dramatic growth of Christianity in the south and its decline in North America and Europe will eventually influence the whole spectrum of theology and activity including the future of world mission. Rey Calusay, General Superintendent for the Assemblies of God in the Philippines stated the reality: “The next generation of the missionary church will have a brown face.”⁴¹ Already the number of missionaries from the Majority World exceeds the western missionary force. Sanneh calls this phenomenon a “worldwide Christian resurgence . . . that seems to proceed without Western organizational structure.”⁴² The growth and vitality of this church begs the question: what can we learn from the Majority World Church about partnership? I believe that dialogue with Majority World church leaders is essential if we will further mission partnerships. This process will also enrich the western church.

It is interesting to note that with the exception of a few books and selected quotes from national leaders of international standing, the conversation on partnership primarily comes from western writers, the western organization and the western mindset. This is consistent with Tennent’s observation concerning the absence of theological writers who are not from the West.⁴³ Having the time to reflect and the organizational funding to publish, the current history of writing on this subject is decidedly slanted to a western perspective or is in response to a western agenda. It is my belief that partnership will have a different emphasis if

³⁹Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 2.

⁴⁰Timothy C. Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 7.

⁴¹Rey Calusay, Personal Communication, February 2009.

⁴²Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 3.

⁴³Timothy C. Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 11.

it is being defined by an Asian as compared to someone from the West. The defining of partnership in an Asian context is a part of making theology understandable to a given culture or people. This is the essence of contextualization. The western partner must be willing to listen and understand what is important to the host culture. Referring to what the church in the South has to offer, Thomas writes, "For such a contribution to be realized, it is necessary for the church in the West to demonstrate that it is ready to receive what is offered, it is also important for our partners to know of that receptiveness."⁴⁴ In other words, we must open the door for the dialogue.

Sherwood Lingenfelter illustrates the importance of receptiveness in describing a workshop he led in Africa in 2000 among African church leaders and expatriate mission leaders on their ideas of cross-cultural partnership. The thoughts expressed by the two groups were radically different. The missionaries consistently described partnership in terms of task and time, while the African leaders described it "as a person-focused and lifelong relationship . . . reciprocal and related to their whole lives."⁴⁵ The fundamental difficulty was a failure on the part of both groups "to understand and accept the rules and processes of the others."⁴⁶ From my experiences in the Philippines and broader Asian context, these same cultural biases between missionary and national leaders would apply. Stanley Kruis identifies another partnership tension in the Philippine context, "The first tension is that between dominance and mutuality. There is the tendency for the western mission agency to dominate the partnership, even though both partners desire a relationship of mutuality."⁴⁷ This is an important observation. In trying to develop partnership, we can inadvertently dominate the relationship. Discovering a way forward has many challenges.

⁴⁴Philip H.E. Thomas, "How Can Western Christians Learn from Partners in the World Church." *International Review of Mission* 92 no 366 Jul 2003, 384 (accessed January 14, 2010).

⁴⁵ Sherwood Lingenfelter, "Power Giving Leadership: Transformation for a Missional Church", *Appropriate Christianity* ed. Charles H. Kraft, (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2005), 285.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Stanley D. Kruis, "Ecclesiological Assumptions and International Mission Partnerships: A Philippine Case Study." (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2009), 5. In ProQuest dissertations and Theses, <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?index=0&did=1850734041&SrchMode=2&sid=2&Fmt=2 &VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=PQD&TS=1267349122&clientId=68566> (accessed January 29, 2010).

Broad generalities are difficult to sustain but more often westerners are focused on the task, even if partnership is the task, and Asians place a higher value on the relationship. The important principle if we are going to develop meaningful partnerships is that missionaries will need to understand non-critically what a partnership looks like in the host culture through patience, listening, and dialogue. Thomas provides a guiding principle that will move the dialogue forward: “It is not just a matter of good practice but of theological principle that partners in the world church should ask themselves, “How much are we expecting *them* to be like *us*?” . . . The theological question ultimately addressed to any partnership must be, “How have you been changed as a result of your relationship with each other?”⁴⁸ Partnership will change how you view yourself and the world.

Recently I had dinner with a national church leader in a Southeast Asian country. Toward the end of the meal, I asked my friend, what kind of missionary do you need today in your nation. Without hesitation he went back to the 1950’s describing how the colonial power of France had ruled his country. He went on to speak of how the United States had followed in that role. With history as a backdrop, he went on to say, we want people who will work with us, not tell us what to do, and who will support our vision for the future of the church.⁴⁹ My view of partnership changed on that day. I could sense the feelings he held toward the past and his sincerity about the present and the future. My friend was asking for a relationship based on mutuality, not dominance. In many nations where missionaries serve, we live with the results of a colonial past. There is also the legacy of previous missionaries and mission activities that still effect a national’s perception. This past continues to shape our current efforts and relationships.

In *Searching for the Indigenous Church, a Missionary Pilgrimage*, Gene Daniels gives national believers the opportunity to speak, even as he admits his own mistakes and weaknesses in doing missions in an unreached Muslim city in Central Asia. After a lengthy conversation with a Muslim follower of Christ that lasted for several hours, where the author was patiently waiting to seek advice on a shopping list of

⁴⁸Philip H.E. Thomas, “How Can Western Christians Learn from Partners in the World Church.” *International Review of Mission* 92 no 366 Jul 2003, 390 (accessed January 14, 2010).

⁴⁹Rev. Samuel Lam, Personal Conversation, October 5, 2009.

problems, he quotes his friend, “You came to see me without a plan, and that’s the right way to do things in our culture. When someone comes to me with a list of things to discuss, they show that I’m only their ‘business’, a project to be done. But ministry is not business, it is all about relationships.”⁵⁰ In another conversation, Daniels quotes a believer who exclaimed: “Missionaries are often difficult to work with...they don’t treat us with very much respect . . . Sometimes they ask our opinion, but they don’t really want to know what we think. They actually just want us to agree with their ideas and plans.”⁵¹ Is this what partnership looks like to a national believer? Daniel’s admitted,

I could push my own agenda by exploiting the tremendous respect I am given as a missionary, or I could draw on this respect and influence the ideas that arise indigenously . . . until now I had actually missed the meaning of the word *indigenous*. I had failed to see that it means a way of thinking that I as a foreigner would never completely understand.⁵²

Listening to the Majority World church will be painful, but this is also the first step in the opportunity for healing. Seeing the world through the eyes of the host partner will take time. Daniel states that “real friendships are built on equality and reciprocity, things that do not develop when everything is a one-way street.”⁵³ Patrick Sookhdeo, writing in *Kingdom Partnerships for Synergy in Missions*, says that Biblical values must transcend our past mistakes and issues of culture, “Relationships are the crux of *koinonia*—biblical fellowship and community—and it is on the concept of *koinonia* that the Biblical understanding of partnership in mission is centered.”⁵⁴

At a minimum, if the western church is receptive, members of the Majority World Church can teach about corporate relationships which are more in line with the Biblical model of *koinonia*, as well as influence or temper our western emphasis on individualism.⁵⁵ As western workers we will learn the value and strength found in the group and

⁵⁰Gene Daniels, *Searching for the Indigenous Church: A Missionary Pilgrimage*, (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2005), 28.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 87.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 90.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 66.

⁵⁴Patrick Sookhdeo, “Cultural Issues in Partnership in Mission”, in *Kingdom Partnerships for Synergy in Missions*, ed. William D. Taylor (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1994), 54.

⁵⁵Timothy C. Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 15.

interdependence. The western church may also learn how to relate more effectively with the growing number of immigrants who continue to flood western nations. If we will listen, we may learn how to reach people that are different culturally and religiously than we are as well as how to be salt and light in pluralistic societies. I agree on a macro level with Tennent that “the Majority World church may play a crucial role, not only in revitalizing the life of western Christianity, but in actually contributing positively and maturely to our own theological reflection.”⁵⁶ On a micro level, we will be enriched by being part of the community, being accepted as cultural insiders rather than independent operators. Bringing this thought back to the Scripture, listening to the Majority World church is an expression of obedience to the Biblical paradigm of *koinonia*.

Conclusion and Missiological Implications

In this brief paper I have sought to contribute to the contemporary discussion of partnership in missions. Through a review of Paul’s writing as well as selected current literature on the subject I have contended that international mission partnerships struggle in praxis due to a lack of emphasis on a Biblical theology of partnership. This includes a lack of recognizing the vital role of the Holy Spirit, a lack of understanding the importance of relationships based on mutuality and reciprocity where power is shared, and a lack of willingness and sensitivity to listen to and learn from the Majority World Church and the host culture.

It is vital that we move beyond the present situation. We do harm to the body of Christ and his vision for the Church if we do not take seriously the Biblical mandate of *koinonia* in partnership relationships. Paul’s writings provide principles relevant to mission partnerships today. A fresh understanding and application of the Biblical concept of *koinonia* is needed, where sharing life and mission involves fellowship in the work, in the Spirit, in suffering and in troubles. Paul’s partnerships were based on equality and reciprocity. Paul’s principles speak to the difficult issues of money, sharing power, communication and culture. Equally important is recognizing that partnership flows from a commitment to *Missio Dei*. It is God’s mission in which the whole

⁵⁶Ibid., 13.

church is called to participate. Colin Marsh, in a research study of the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, found that when people understood that all Christians are equal participants in God's one mission to the world, there was success in partnership. This required *sharing* to displace *sending* as the primary motif of the mission agency.⁵⁷ This is what Andrew Walls stated in his historical analysis of the western missionary movement, adding that "the conditions that produced the movement have changed, and they have been changed by the Lord of history . . . what is changing is not the task, but the means and the mode."⁵⁸

The Church in the past century has rediscovered the person and work of the Holy Spirit. But I believe we have not seen clearly that the Holy Spirit is our *Paraclete* when it comes to working in international partnerships. The Holy Spirit is not a silent partner but is at work bringing the body of Christ to maturity where each part offers something to the whole. Andrew Lord writes, "It is the Holy Spirit, working in the hearts of individual believers that brings them together for the work of mission."⁵⁹ The Spirit seeks to unite believers and initiate partnerships. The gifts and fruit of the Spirit enable ministry and provide the special qualities that sustain relationships in ministry.

If partnership is to move forward, it must be more than conversation. If we are to move relationships toward mutuality, this must include a willingness to forgive past hurts, to be open with one another and to be willing to give up control. Thomas writes that "Dialogue involves finding a meeting point in which both partners can recognize each other's uniqueness."⁶⁰ Transparency occurs as trust is built. I have found that trust comes in learning from one another, praying for one another and as we share common experiences. Several years ago, I was in Latin America for a mission's conference with two Philippine national leaders. One morning over breakfast, we began to dream about the future of the

⁵⁷Colin Marsh, "Partnership in Mission: To Send or To Share?" *International Review of Mission*; Vol. 92 Issue 366 (July): 380, <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=12&hid=103&sid=4b15ad43-ca7e-46fd-bf28-78df76f4ec3c%40sessionmgr109&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtG12ZQ%3d%3d#db=afh&AN=10529579> (accessed on August 25, 2008).

⁵⁸Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 261.

⁵⁹Andrew Lord, *Spirit-Shaped Mission*, 108.

⁶⁰Philip H.E. Thomas, "How Can Western Christians Learn from Partners in the World Church." *International Review of Mission* 92 no 366 Jul 2003, 389 (accessed January 14, 2010).

Church. The Holy Spirit energized our conversation. Breakfast lasted over three hours. We missed the morning session of the conference, but something happened in our relationship with one another that day. In the past months, we've reminisced about that morning. There was a measure of transparency. We experienced sharing of life with each other.

Mutuality in partnership includes sharing decision making power. Often our ministry partners in the Majority World Church bring human resources but not financial resources to the table. Mutuality says that we should value each gift. western mission agendas need to be tempered and new roles accepted. Lazarus Chakwera, former president of the Assemblies of God of Malawi, stated, "the new western missionary must come as a team player knowing there are other members on the team who have giftings as valuable as their own."⁶¹ Lee writes that sharing power is a spiritual act:

Empowerment is not a method or a strategy but a liberating gift, a fruit of the Spirit. Partnership in mission could be transformed in this manner, by a genuine act of surrendering power. In reality, an equal representation in the decision-making structure can be a way of expressing self-emptying spirituality.⁶²

Discovering the way forward in partnership relationships will not be easy. Many articles have been written on the mechanics of developing ministry partnerships, all of which add value. But my sense is that without the Spirit's advocacy and inspiration, along with the necessity of spiritually mature leaders, we will not reach the level of trust.

Finally, mission workers from the West must take seriously the life and vibrancy of the Majority World Church and enter into a different kind of relationship, one of listening and learning. Thomas writes, "It is not possible to prescribe the lessons that western Christians must learn from partnership links in other parts of the world. What is important is to be genuinely open to the possibilities of learning, and alert to the

⁶¹William A. Kirsch, "A Report Theological Education in Africa Responding to a Pentecostal Tsunami" (paper presented at the Asia Pacific Theological Association's General Assembly, TCA College, Singapore, September 10, 2008).

⁶²Lee Hong-Jung, "Beyond Partnerships, Towards Networking: A Korean Reflection on Partnership in the Web of God's Mission," *International Review of Mission* 91 no 363 (Oct.): 579 (accessed January 14, 2010).

possibilities of doing so, as well as prepared for some of the outcomes to be unexpected.”⁶³ I believe we will learn about community and sharing life. Our bias toward individuality and our cultural ethnocentricity will be tempered and we will learn the strengths that come from interdependency. Many years ago, Max Warren described the New Testament church as “an adventure in partnership.”⁶⁴ The way forward will involve returning to a Biblical foundation found in the shared life of *koinonia*, being open to and welcoming the Holy Spirit as the initiator and sustainer of partnerships, seeking deeper covenant relationships with ministry colleagues, and in being willing to learn from the strengths of the host church. Thomas writes and I believe that the new things to emerge from partnership links will depend largely on the pains and patience that western Christians are willing to expend on learning together with believers from other cultures. Another African nation builder, Kenneth Kaunda, put it this way, “The problem of sharing partnership with Europeans is that it is like sharing a small three-legged stool with someone who has a very big backside.” For Western Christians, the challenge of partnership is to find better ways of sitting together with the world Church.⁶⁵

This is a strategic moment in mission where the western church has the opportunity to renew our commitment to partnership.

⁶³Philip H.E. Thomas, "How Can Western Christians Learn from Partners in the World Church. *International Review of Mission*, Vol 92 no 366 Jul 2003, 391 (accessed January 14, 2010).

⁶⁴Max Warren, *Partnership: The Study of an Idea*, 52.

⁶⁵Philip H.E. Thomas, "How Can Western Christians Learn from Partners in the World Church," 392.

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