

**“Educating Pastors Toward an Apostolic Imagination”**  
**Evangelical Missiological Society**  
**October 14-16, 2016**  
**Dallas, Texas**

**J. D. Payne<sup>1</sup>**

The history of the seminary is closely connected to the training of pastors and missionaries to serve churches and advance the gospel. At a time when the discipline of missiology is going through changes, including a change in nomenclature (Newell, 2015), how can missiologists serving in academia better prepare pastors to lead churches in Great Commission endeavors? The purpose of this paper is to address two challenges to this task and provide six guidelines to assist educators in the classroom.

Though the seminary trains students for a variety of Great Commission roles, this paper is written from the conviction that the pastor (i.e., lead pastor, senior pastor, single-staff pastor) is the most important individual when it comes to a local church understanding and engaging in the mission of God. John R. Mott stated it well in his 1904 publication *The Pastor and Modern Missions: A Plea for Leadership in World Evangelization*:

The secret of enabling the home Church to press her advantage in the non-Christian world is one of leadership. The people do not go beyond their leaders in knowledge and zeal, nor surpass them in consecration and sacrifice. The Christian pastor, minister, rector—whatever he may be denominated—holds the divinely appointed office for inspiring and guiding the thought and activities of the Church. By virtue of his position he can be a mighty force in the world’s evangelization (Mott, 1904, vii-viii).

.....

Wherever you find a pastor with overflowing missionary zeal and knowledge, you will find an earnest missionary church (Mott, 1904, 51).

.....

The pastor’s position gives him authority; his character and work give him vast influence. The pastor is the educator of the church. There is no other way to get the ear of the whole church save through him. It cannot be done through the women’s missionary society, or the young people’s society, or the Sunday-school. He has direct and influential access to all the members.

---

<sup>1</sup>J. D. Payne, Ph.D., is the pastor of church multiplication with The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Alabama. He may be contacted at [jpayne@brookhills.org](mailto:jpayne@brookhills.org), [jdpayne.org](http://jdpayne.org), or [@jd\\_payne](https://www.instagram.com/jd_payne).

Any idea which he persistently preaches and prays for in the pulpit will be gradually accepted as a rule of conduct by the people (Mott, 1904, 51).

Apart from the pastor's direct leadership and regular attention to missions, a local church is unlikely to be involved in intentional, sacrificial, and perennial global disciple making activities. The missiological education of today's pastor is critical to the Great Commission task.

## **Methodology**

Much of my research methodology is based on anecdotal evidence gathered from conversations with other seminary-trained pastors and my ministerial experience. Regarding the former, I regularly find myself in conversations with pastors discussing matters related to equipping the saints for the work of the ministry (Eph 4:11-12). Such pastors are generally quick to share their thoughts on what is needed in the missiological education of pastors.

The second source of evidence comes from my personal experience over the past twenty-five years. Of course, evidence drawn from this source is biased and limited to my formation; nevertheless, there is much value in experience. As I enter into the latter half of my third decade of ministry, the Lord has graciously allowed me to serve in various capacities that have shaped my perspective on the topic of this paper.

Much of my journey has involved simultaneous ministry in the local church and the classroom. I served as a full-time missions professor for ten years at a U. S. seminary. When part-time and adjunctive teaching are factored into my academic career, the duration of my teaching experience increases to eighteen years and counting. I served nine years with a North American mission agency, with responsibilities involving recruiting, training, and networking church planters and pastors. And over these twenty-five years, eighteen years have involved pastoral ministry with local churches. My present ministry as pastor of church multiplication includes the training of church members to be sent from our church to serve as church planters among unreached people groups and as pastors of established churches.

## **The Challenge of Defending the Discipline**

Missiologists face at least two challenges that work against the discipline saturating the hearts and minds of a younger generation of pastoral leaders. The first challenge is the tension that often exists in academia between missiology and theology and missiology and social sciences. Leaders in other theological disciplines have often seen missiology as a Johnny-come-lately. When it did arrive in the academy, according to Craig Van Gelder, the "focus was more on practices and

pragmatics than on theology and theory” and it was seen as “a type of theological stepchild” (Van Gelder, 2014, 40). Van Gelder also noted that even today the discipline “still struggles to find its voice within the larger theological curriculum” (Van Gelder, 2014, 52). Sometimes missiology is understood as a sub-category of the pastoral theological studies. Other times the discipline is allowed in its own department, yet looked upon with suspicion, considered atheological, filled with pragmatists, and being primarily concerned with telling old missionary stories about jungles and eating bugs. This can result in an inferiority complex with missiologists spending energies justifying themselves and their teachings before their colleagues while simultaneously trying to teach students.

Within this challenge is the desire to justify the discipline before a generation often disconnected from the discipline. If seminarians are only required to take one or two missiology courses (if any at all!), then the missiologist oftentimes finds himself or herself spending class time giving an apologia for missiology in order to teach the subject. If missiology is not a value that permeates the academy, then in the mind of the student, those one to two courses are likely to be perceived as “hoops to jump through” on the way to receiving the coveted diploma.

Missiologists are faced with another related temptation: the desire to become increasingly scholastic to prove equivalence to mainstream sociologists and anthropologists. Should missiologists draw from the best in the social sciences? Yes. But, there is no competition. And if missiologists attempt to create a competition to prove that missiology, or intercultural studies, or whatever we are calling our discipline, is just as legitimate as something found in a secular academy, the Church will lose every time. If missiologists are not careful, the discipline will become more and more academic, eventually disconnecting from the local church. We should not feel inferior; the Kingdom does not advance with the best offerings of Levi-Strauss, Durkheim, and Weber.

### **The Challenge of Pastoral Imagination**

The second challenge is that a pastoral hegemony exists that allows little room for apostolic thought and the development of needed structures for mission.<sup>2</sup> Given the daily requirements of pastoral ministry, it is easy for the busy pastor to overlook the church’s missionary activity or atomize missionary labors to an isolated department within the church’s organization.

Even the pastor, with strong convictions regarding the evangelistic nature and practice of the church, generally filters such convictions through a pastoral perspective instead of a missionary perspective. The result is the application of strategy and methods more conducive to local church growth and pastoral care—

---

<sup>2</sup>At this point, it is worth reminding the reader that a pastor is writing this paper with high regard for the pastoral calling and ministry.

appropriate matters *after* the church is planted. Rather than seeing the need to send teams of disciple-makers to plant churches from the harvest and raise up pastors from those new churches (e.g., Acts 13-14), missionary activity is expected to be more pastoral in nature as represented in commonly asked questions such as: How do we find pastors to lead church planting efforts? Where will we find enough Christians to start a church? Do we have a praise team, children's leaders, and a bank account in the yet-to-be-planted church's name? The concern for global disciple making begins with finding long-term Kingdom citizens to self-identify as a church to then reach their community. Rather than beginning with a conviction of not building upon another person's foundation (Rom 15:20), the starting point is another person's foundation.

The heart of the shepherd should be set to care for the church of Christ (1 Pet 5:2-3). Numerous needs pull the pastor's attention in different directions. The challenge for missiologists is: *Pastors need to be taught to think apostolically while remaining pastoral in their callings.* Pastors may pay attention if value can be shown in the discipline of missiology. And one of the many ways to show value is to teach them how to develop and use an apostolic imagination.

Part of the reason for the apostolic omission in the pastoral imagination is that the Church in the United States defines ministry in pastoral concepts, methods, and strategies. Pastoral ministry is the default category, a matter that has been in place for centuries. Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim commented, "[T]he linguistic categories that an organization uses can shape how it conceives of core tasks" (Hirsch and Catchim, 2012, 12). What has been modeled before pastors is pastoral ministry. Therefore, even missionary activity, especially in the West, is now defined and organized in pastoral structures. When it comes to the missionary activity of the local church, pastors should be looking for and equipping apostolic-type individuals rather than the expected pastoral-type individuals. However, the present imagination only believes in the existence of the latter.<sup>3</sup>

If apostolic labors were not needed for global disciple making, then the pastoral imagination would not pose a challenge. However, whenever pastors are expected to do missionary activities and missionaries are expected to function as long-term pastors, problems are likely to follow. There are differing gifts and functions in the Body (Rom 12:4-6). Many pastors fail to recognize the apostolic nature and functions of the local church through her members. Practically, this means missiologists must teach pastors that missionary activity is here, there, and everywhere.

---

<sup>3</sup>An exception may be the openness of pastors to missionaries who serve "overseas." Of course, this exception reinforces the challenge-at-hand: pastoral ministry is understood as "home" ministry and apostolic ministry is "foreign missions."

## Six Guidelines for Educating Pastors

In view of these challenges, what are some ways missiologists can serve the Church (and academy) in the twenty-first century? What are some ways educators can provide both academic credibility and also pastoral value? The following are six guidelines to assist in educating pastors toward an apostolic imagination. While important points may be added, this list serves as a starting point as missiologists prepare for this Monday's lecture, next year's course, and the future of their departments.

### Maintain High Academic Standards, but Answer the "So What?"

As followers of Jesus, missiologists must be wise stewards with their scholastic abilities. Research must continue. As followers of Jesus, missiologists do not have the option of whether or not they will apply their missiology. Missiology that matters is missiology applied. However, those interested in the discipline seem to be divided into two camps with different concerns. In an article related to the future of missiology, Charles Fensham shared:

Academics who are asking questions about teaching in the seminary and college appear concerned with graduate students in missiology and with further scholarship in the field. Practitioners and board/agency staff seem to be asking questions about pushing missiology out of the academy and more into the grassroots, where it can focus on the relationship between academy and church, and the definition of terms (Fensham, 2014, 86).

It is most unfortunate that this distinction is present. There should be no dichotomy between research and the application of such findings to the field.

While pragmatism is a philosophy that should be avoided by Kingdom citizens, Kingdom life is to be pragmatic. The Church is called to *make* disciples (Matt 28:19) and *bear* fruit (John 15:5). In order for missiology to be relevant, it *must* move from the theoretical to the practical.

As a freshman in high school, I found myself frustrated, uninterested, and unengaged from algebra for one main reason: the teacher failed to show the class how the subject connected to life. On a few occasions, some brave student would ask, "But what does this have to do with life?" The answer was something to the effect, "It will prepare you for more advanced math courses." Missiologists seeking to develop an apostolic imagination in their students need a better answer than, "It is important to know this because you are likely to see it again on the final exam."

Pastors want to know what difference it makes to gospel proclamation and sanctification when they hear of theories of orality, honor and shame societies, or the methods of Cyril and Methodius. Multivariate statistics, regression analysis, and

participant-observation are important and valuable to missiological research. But a failure to make the connection between the halls of academia and the local church is another reason pastors will refuse to find value in the discipline.

### **Listen to the Churches, but Lead to and through Blind Spots**

In an article on the application of theological studies to field practices, Arch Chee Keen Wong concluded that seminary faculty should spend more time listening to those in the field in order to have a healthy connection between the classroom and practice. He wrote: “Faculty must come to see that sustained interaction with both pastors and students must inform their teaching and scholarship if they expect their students to integrate formal learning and pastoral work” (Wong, 2009, 251).

While a strong temptation exists to teach without understanding, the Kingdom is well served by missiologists who remain in close proximity with local churches. The writer of Proverbs noted “A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion” (Prov 18:2, ESV). If the academy instructs missionaries to listen and learn so as to communicate clearly on the field, should not the academy apply such values to the classroom? Knowledge of present realities affecting local congregations is necessary for sustained influence from the missiological community. By listening with discernment, the missiologist is in a better position to assist pastors in developing an apostolic imagination.

Missiologists with an understanding of contemporary realities are likely to help pastors understand important matters affecting missionary activity. Missiologists must have the prophetic courage and humility to point churches to congregational realities in need of understanding and correction. Missiology has the potential to cause a cognitive dissonance among pastors while helping them think in terms of new paradigms and structures necessary for gospel advancement.

### **Teach Them How to Think about Global Realities**

Much to my embarrassment, I was a professor before I understood the size and influence of the Majority World Church. I was a professor before I understood the massive numbers of unreached people groups that have migrated from their countries of birth. I was a professor before I “discovered” that behind India and China, the United States is home to the third largest number of unreached people groups in the world (Payne, 2012). If it took graduate and doctoral studies and research for a book to get an understanding of these realities, what might that reveal about the present state of the pastoral understanding when it comes to global realities affecting the multiplication of disciples and churches? And what about church members’ understanding of global needs?

While there are theological problems with the claim that “God Cannot Lead You on the Basis of Information that You Do not Have,” the reality is that God often uses the Church’s knowledge of reality to lead her to the peoples of the world (*Mission Frontiers*, 2008). Pastors need to understand that for 200 years Protestant missionaries labored across the world and the Spirit did exactly as promised. But not only do pastors need to know about the Majority World Church, they also need to know of the 6,800 unreached peoples of the word (and the approximately 600—and counting—who call the U. S. and Canada home), including the 3000 unengaged-unreached groups.

Pastors need to know of the global forces shaping the face of the Church and mission (Payne, 2013; Sills, 2015; Johnstone, 2011; Pocock, Van Rhee and McConnell, 2005; Guthrie, 2000). They not only need to understand the grand issues of the day, but also how to remain in the know regarding contemporary issues. They need to be taught how to view such issues through a Great Commission lens and to develop a way of thinking that enables them to see the interconnectivity of global issues and how such matters affect the ministry of their churches in rural Nebraska or downtown San Francisco.

### **Help Them Think, but Provide Answers**

Students need to be taught critical thinking skills. Wisdom and discernment are important components to life in the Kingdom (Prov 1:7). However, missiologists absolutely must contend for the truth once delivered to the saints (Jude 3). While the Scriptures have not revealed the answers to all of life’s questions, the Christian faith is built upon propositional truth claims. While claiming to know truths with certainty—especially those about theology—is often an affront to Western societies and definitely an assault on the general academy, missiologists do not have the liberty to remain silent when God has spoken certain truths with clarity.

Evangelical pastors will fail to recognize the value of missiology if missiologists fail to speak with divine audacity about what God has already spoken. Yes, students should be led on a journey of discovery and not of academic paternalism. But if Socratic pedagogy is always used in the classroom, books, reviews, and articles, then the busy pastor is likely to assume that missiology is irrelevant to the Church, with missiologists *being a people always asking questions, never having answers*. Busy pastors are not impressed when it takes twenty-two missiologists to answer the question: “Do Muslims and Christians Worship the Same God?”—a question many evangelical pastors would find irrelevant at face value. And those pastors, if they are willing to wade through thirty-two pages of material, may become frustrated at the missiological community when they discover that many of those writers did not answer the original question, but postulated other questions for consideration (Socratic pedagogy?) (*Occasional Bulletin*, 2016).

## Teach them Theology was Birthed from the Mission of God

Missiologists must be experts in their field; this includes the realm of theology. David Kelsey wrote: “Theology is too important to leave to the systematic theologians, moral theologians, and historical theologians. Cultivation of the capacity to do theology is the task of the entire theological school” (Kelsey, 1994). If Kelsey was correct, how much more should the missiologist be involved in theological thought while attempting to equip others with an apostolic imagination?

Missiologists must lead others to the Scriptures as the source of the apostolic mindset. They must show pastors how all of Scripture was birthed from and relates to God’s mission. In many cases, this will require an interpretative shift to a missional hermeneutic. Christopher J. H. Wright wrote:

For those who affirm some relationship (however articulated) between these texts and the self-revelation of our Creator God, the whole canon of Scripture is a missional phenomenon in the sense that it witnesses to the self-giving movement of this God toward his creation and us, human beings in God’s own image, but wayward and wanton. The writings that now comprise our Bible are themselves the product of and witness to the ultimate mission of God (Wright, 2006).

This approach to understanding the Bible is likely to be a novel idea for some pastors. Two thousand years of history and well-developed pastoral ministry structures have contributed to an amnesia of the origins of the Church, Word, and theology.

Ironically, the theological academy (at times) fails to recognize the mission of God supporting and permeating the discipline of theology and the sending of the Church. I remember hearing a reputable theologian preach a four-part sermon series on the Church being “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic,” with each expository message addressing one of these four words. As a missions professor, I eagerly awaited the message on the “apostolic” nature of the church. Knowing this theologian did not have a reputation for emphasizing evangelism and missions, I hoped such a message would reveal a change in his theology and preaching. However, to my surprise, this brother managed to preach a message on the apostolic nature of the church by emphasizing the importance of the apostles’ teaching while giving scant attention to the sent nature of the Church.

If all of Scripture has been birthed from the outworking of God’s redemptive and restorative plan, then it would seem that pastors should be able to understand this matter and allow these natural threads of the *missio Dei* to be revealed in their preaching. However, culture and tradition create strong forces that pose challenges to missiologists communicating a more excellent approach to understanding the Bible.



Mott was correct when he noted, “The pulpit treatment of missions should not be restricted to stated missionary sermons. The preacher must feel that missions is his domain, and not that he goes out of his way to preach on the subject” (Mott, 69). If evangelicals fail to encourage a missional hermeneutic, then it should come as no surprise if missions is included in only a few sermons each year. A missional hermeneutic should not be an exceptional matter in the pulpit.

### **Teach Them to Stand on the Bridge**

The wise missiologist must understand the call to be a pastor involves a call to stand between the church and unreached peoples. This locus of ministry is a good thing. In general, pastors are not called to apostolic ministry. And pastors with an apostolic imagination recognize this reality and are comfortable with it. They know their role in the Body and the role of the ones sent from their churches. The church needs pastors; the unreached groups need missionaries. Pastors with an apostolic imagination recognize that apostolic-workers are members of their churches and need to be equipped and sent *across the bridge* to the unreached.

Pastors with an apostolic imagination recognize these members go with the gospel and simple disciple making methods and church multiplication strategies. They cross the bridge into a context that is not home to their pastor. They are sent as ordinary believers, filled with the extraordinary Spirit. Many are sent with their marketable skills and degrees so as to remain in their vocations while making disciples. Pastors with an apostolic imagination understand that church members are not sent to reproduce the complex ecclesiological structures modeled by their home church. These laborers keep their practices thoroughly biblical and highly reproducible among the unreached peoples.

Missiologists must teach pastors that apostolic labors are not primarily defined by geographical boundaries. The other side of the bridge may exist among an unreached people group across town or within another country. Teaching pastors to stand on the bridge with an apostolic imagination will require missiological thought that removes the dichotomy of North American and international missionary activities.

### **Conclusion**

The education of today’s pastors is one of the most important responsibilities of the missiologist. Few people have the influence to develop pastors with apostolic imaginations. The missiologist faces significant challenges in this process. However, recognizing the need of the hour, understanding some of the challenges, and knowing a few guidelines is an excellent way to begin the transition to a new way of thought and action.

## Bibliography

Fensham, Charles. "Group Discussion Conclusions on the Future of the Discipline of Missiology: Annual Meeting of the American Society of Missiology." *Missiology* 42 #1 (January 2014): 80-86.

Guthrie, Stan. *Missions in the Third Millennium: 21 Key Trends for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, revised and expanded. UK: Paternoster, 2000.

Hirsch, Alan and Tim Catchim. *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012.

Johnstone, Patrick. *The Future of the Global Church: History, Trends, and Possibilities*. Colorado Springs, CO: Biblica, 2011.

Kelsey, David. "Rethinking Theological Education." *American Theological Library Association Summary of Proceedings* 48 (1994): 123-34.

*Mission Frontiers*, January-February 2008 [on-line]  
<http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/archive/god-cannot-lead-you-on-the-basis-of-information-that-you-do-not-have>; accessed 11 October, 2016.

Mott, John R. *The Pastor and Modern Missions: A Plea for Leadership in World Evangelization*. New York: Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1904.

Newell, Marvin J. "Symposium: The 'De-missionization' of Missions." *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 51 #1 (January 2015): 46-51.

*Occasional Bulletin*, Evangelical Missiological Society, special edition 2016; [on-line]  
[https://www.emsweb.org/images/occasional-bulletin/special-editions/OB\\_SpecialEdition\\_2016.pdf](https://www.emsweb.org/images/occasional-bulletin/special-editions/OB_SpecialEdition_2016.pdf).

Payne, J. D.. *Pressure Points: Twelve Global Issues Shaping the Face of the Church*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2013.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Strangers Next Door: Immigration, Migration, and Mission*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012.

Pocock, Michael, Gailyn Van Rheenen, and Douglas McConnell. *The Changing Face of World Missions: Engaging Contemporary Issues and Trends*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005.

Sills, M. David. *Changing World, Unchanging Mission: Responding to Global Challenges*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015.

Van Gelder, Craig. "The Future of the Discipline of Missiology: Framing Current Realities and Future Possibilities." *Missiology* 42 #1 (January 2014): 39-56.

Wong, Arch Chee Keen. "How do Pastors Connect Their Academic Learning with Their Pastoral Practice? Negotiating the Tension between Theory and Practice." *Practical Theology* 2#2 (May 2009): 241-52.

Wright, Christopher J. H. *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006.