

GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY

PROFILE OF A THIRD CULTURE CHRISTIAN

DMIN 716: LEADERSHIP AND GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

ESSAY SUBMITTED TO

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HOUSTON, TX

DECEMBER 6, 2014

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INTRODUCTION

“I am not an Athenian or a Greek, but a citizen of the world.”

- Socrates

Christ-followers living in modern societies face similar issues: balancing work and family life, financial stewardship, relating well with their children and spouse, getting regular physical exercise, committing regular time to their devotional life, and finding opportunities to serve in their local church. But for the expatriate, a person who lives outside their native country,¹ these issues are magnified in their intensity and complexity; they must be resolved in the context of an unfamiliar culture and without the normal support networks enjoyed by believers living in their countries of origin. Because of the unusual nature of the expatriate life, it offers opportunities for tremendous spiritual growth, as well as decline. Given the right resources and support networks, these times of foreign service can serve to enhance the spiritual health of the believer and better equip them for service in the kingdom of God no matter where they live.

Expatriates may spend ten, fifteen, twenty or more years away from their home culture; living in far-away places and raising children in those places can be unsettling. No matter where you are, you're a foreigner; and even when you visit your home country it doesn't seem like home anymore. One's culture offers a sense of identity but for the expatriate that identity

¹ *New Oxford American Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 'expatriate'.

erodes; they might think: “What culture do I belong to? I don’t fit into my parent’s culture, nor do I fit in with my host culture.” Is there a third culture, an international or global culture?

While there are no international passports, there is a third culture, and this essay will explore what it means for Christ-followers and for the churches they attend. It will also surface some spiritually formative topics for future research such as: cultural dissonance and its coloration to sanctification; work-family imbalances and our need for spiritually formative friendships; high mobility and the need for a short cycle of spiritual formation; as well as, ecumenicalism and the impact of an exposure to a greater breadth of Christian practice.

This research will contribute to my dissertation, which will address the topic of spiritual formation for highly mobile, third-culture Christians, with focused attention on the role of the international church. It is clearly connected to my own experience. I served as a pastor of an international church near Bangkok, Thailand. My family and I lived in an expatriate community. My daughters slowly lost their American identity and picked up a third culture identity. My own emotional well being suffered for a time as a consequence of our transition, and the corresponding culture shock. We eventually made a healthy adjustment to our third culture and we grew in our faith by means of the spiritually formative opportunities presented. This paper offers an overview of my research, introduces expatriate acumen and an understanding of third culture Christians essential for continuing research. Future research will focus more on the international church and theology contextualized for third culture Christians. We will start this exploration with some terminology.

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THIRID CULTURE CHRISTIAN

*Jesus is God spelled out in language human beings can understand...
in every culture,
in every context,*

- J.D. Gordan, Darrell L. Witeman²

To explore this third culture topic we need unambiguous acumen. We begin with a few definitions, terms that are widely used in exploring this subject matter, starting with the word “culture.” Anthropologically speaking culture is “a system of shared assumptions, beliefs, and values.”³ It is the filter through which we perceive the world in which we live. Paul G. Hiebert describes culture as something that is “learned rather than instinctive behavior—something that is caught, as well as taught by the surrounding environment and passed on from one generation to the next.”⁴ Within Hiebert’s understanding of culture the surrounding environment plays a significant role. Sociologically speaking, environment is made up of its symbols, artifacts, manners, norms of behavior, systems of belief; all of which support one’s sense of well-being.⁵ So culture is conveyed through an environment, now imagine if that environment changes, or changes frequently. That is our starting point for what is meant by the term “third culture.”

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Drs. John and Ruth Hill Useem first used ‘third culture’ in the 1950s when they went to study American expatriates working in India. The term has become widely used among the expatriate community through the work of David Pollock and Ruth Van Reken with their popular

² Whiteman, Darrell L. "Contextualization: The theory, the gap, the challenge." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 21 (1997): 2-7.

³ Paul G. Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology*, 2 ed. (New York: Baker Academic, 1997), 28-29.

⁴ Ibid., 25.

⁵ David Jary and Julia Jary, *Sociology: Web-Linked Dictionary* (Collins Web-Linked Dictionary) (publication place: Collins Reference, 2006), ‘culture’.

“third culture kids (TCKs)” books, seminars and lectures.⁶ For example, my daughters spent five years living outside of the United States in Thailand. With their mixed Caucasian-Asian ethnicity they did not look Thai, however because their developmental years weren’t in America they didn’t understand themselves to be American either. They adapted a third culture mindset, becoming TCKs. Another term should also be understood as somewhat analogous with TCK and that is ‘global nomad.’ In 1984 Norma McCaig, founder of Global Nomads International, coined the term to describe “a person of any age or nationality who has lived a significant part of his or her life developmental years in one or more countries outside his or her passport country because of a parent’s occupation.”⁷ Today, ‘global nomad’ has become a popular description because it alludes to several transitions, several assignments which is increasingly the norm; an expatriate may only have had a single third culture experience, but it is common for expatriates to move readily, changing countries and thus adopting a nomadic lifestyle.

Third Culture Characteristics:

According to Pollock and Van Reken those who belong broadly to this third culture community have characteristics in common. For example, they experience a distinct physical and/or language difference, as well as significant cultural differences. Secondly, they live with the eventual expectation that they will return to their home country. This community has also been perceived to live a privileged lifestyle; historically, employees of international businesses and members of missions, the military and the diplomatic corps have been part of an elite

Commented [SG4]: How often is this expectation realised?

⁶ David C. Pollock and Ruth E. Van Reken, *Third Culture Kids: Growing up Among Worlds*, rev. ed. (Boston: Nicholas Brealey America, 2009), 20.

⁷ Barbara Schaetti “Global Nomad, Third Culture Kid, Adult Third Culture Kid, Third Culture Adult: What Do They All Mean?,” *Families in Global Transition*, accessed December 5, 2014, http://www.figt.org/global_nomads/.

community. Finally, members of specific third culture communities may be more conscious than peers at home of representing something greater than themselves; their government, their company or God.⁸

The third culture is a world filled with cross-cultural challenges and high mobility; these dynamics shape the life of third culture Christians (TCCs). One of the most difficult question for third culture individuals (TCIs) to answer is a simple one: ‘Where is home?’⁹ The question can be a stark reminder of their lack of roots. TCIs may have moved so many times and lived in so many different cultures that their passport country no longer feels like home; they experience rootlessness. Furthermore, each assignment has a temporary scope so it is common for the professional expatriate to be anticipating the next transition, the next promotion, the next assignment. This often creates restlessness. In my primary research¹⁰ I asked about a sense of “rootlessness and restlessness”, a lack of belonging; one TCC woman responded:

My faith pushes me to wanting to connect with other Christian women and in those relationships my rootlessness and restlessness diminishes. I have found that the Lord always puts me in the right Bible study at the right time to address issues I am going through.¹¹

When asked about the impact of high mobility and constant transitions, her response was

⁸ Pollock and Van Reken, 22-23.

⁹ ‘Where is home?’ Is a question that goes beyond the physical place I live, and for the expatriate, it can immediately remind them of their rootlessness. ‘Home’ needs further exploration theologically and will be a topic addressed in future research (future essay on contextualized theology).

¹⁰ In October and November 2014 I conducted a focus group and survey of current and former Christian expatriates focusing on their well-being and the role that the international church played in their overall well-being. All participants were TCCs, most of whom served in assignments across several countries, they were married and lived with their families overseas. The results were captured in the following paper: David Young, “DMIN 716: Custom Course” (Field Research Report, Houston, Texas, December 2, 2014).

¹¹ American Expatriate, emailed to David Young, November 17, 2014.

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representative of most TCIs: “I get engaged more quickly.” Professional expatriates know that life happens quickly, much more so than in their home culture. They know their life is made up of a cultural dissonance and frequent transitions. ‘Dissonance’ is a music term referring to a lack of harmony, a conflict in musical notes.¹² ‘Cultural dissonance’, is a term I’m using to describe the inner-conflict, or lack of harmony one experiences when one’s beliefs, values and assumptions are being challenged. This can be experienced as a shift in cultural foundations or, at best, unsettled cultural foundations. Along with that comes a sense of urgency from frequent cycles of transition; combined, they create a clear opportunity for TCCs to be spiritually formed.¹³ Theologically speaking this dynamic is very similar to what is called a crisis of sanctification. That is any difficult circumstance, used by God, to expose one’s hidden idolatry and advance one’s spiritual growth; Abraham’s calling to offer up Isaac is an example of a ‘crisis of sanctification’.¹⁴ I don’t mean to put forth that TCCs will experience a crisis of sanctification because of their overseas service, only that their context creates a rich environment for the Spirit to work through such a crisis.

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Commented [SG7]: one’s

Commented [SG8]: I can guess at what you mean by this, but ‘sanctification’ has various nuances in Christian theology and it would be good for you to clearly identify what you mean by that. My assumption is that you mean the process of becoming more Christ-like through life (or moving towards ‘perfection’ in a Wesleyan sense?).

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Work/Family/Faith Balance:

As mentioned at the outset, Christians need to keep Christ first in their very full lives balancing the demands of work, family and faith. Their spouse and/or children accompany approximately eighty percent of professional expatriates on their overseas assignment.¹⁵ This

¹² *New Oxford American Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), ‘dissonance’.

¹³ ‘Frequency of transition’ and any connection to one’s sanctification needs further exploration theologically and will be a topic addressed in future research (future essay: contextualized theology).

¹⁴ Gen. 22:1-19 (New International Version).

¹⁵ Guzzo, Richard A., Katherine A. Noonan, and Efrat Elron. “Expatriate managers and the

can strengthen the family's overall sense of well-being, but it also significantly magnifies the need to achieve balance. Within scholarship there are several helpful articles that have studied work-family balance for the expatriate living abroad with their family. Usually these studies have a human resources perspective; they're designed to show the impact work has on the family-life, and the impact that family-life has on work performance and retention. These articles offer some significant insights for the overall well being of the TCI.

With international assignments there are often restrictions placed on work permits, resulting in one of the spouses becoming a non-working or "trailing" spouse.

The assignment often disturbs this balance as the expatriate becomes the sole earner and provider for the family and the expatriate partner becomes a household caretaker and a stay-at-home parent, having not only lost a job but also forgone a career, financial independence, and extended family support.¹⁶

On the one hand this can also create an opportunity for personal growth and self-development; but it often comes at the cost of "loneliness, frustration, and diminished self-esteem"¹⁷ experienced by the non-working spouse. In the first months of an international assignment, the non-working spouse will often experience a new role at home, or a new function within the family.¹⁸ All of which is taking place far from the emotional and personal support of their extended family. When children are also present, they will have their own transition issues that draw heavily on the resources of the non-working spouse. Intensifying this typical experience is

psychological contract." *Journal of Applied psychology* 79, no. 4 (1994): 617.

¹⁶ Lazarova, Mila, Mina Westman, and Margaret A. Shaffer. "Elucidating the positive side of the work-family interface on international assignments: a model of expatriate work and family performance." *Academy of Management Review* 35, no. 1 (2010): 93.

¹⁷ Shaffer, Harrison, and Luk, 100.

¹⁸ For those TCCs who are making adjustments to their roles, a theological discussion of gender and a biblical view of the family facilitated by the international church would likely be helpful. This topic should be addressed in future research (future essay: International Church).

the fact that in these first few months the working spouse is learning the demands of their new assignment and experiencing the culture dissonance of working with nationals, along with significantly higher expectations that come with the new job. So while work life is intensifying, typical resources are depleting and home life may be out of sorts especially in the early phase of transition¹⁹. Therefore, work life spills over into home life and *vice versa*; just as Shaffer, Harrison, and Luk document:

The accompanying spouse, who is given increased domestic responsibilities, may begin to feel overwhelmed or neglected. Likewise, the resources devoted to a dissatisfied or maladjusted spouse may have an adverse effect on an international assignee's well-being.²⁰

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TCIs are making adjustments all the time; they can be extremely flexible to change and adaptable to their environments. However, it's worth noting that significant work-family imbalances create pressure that can negatively impact work performance. TCIs live with fewer trusted neighbors, relatives, or close friends; this can create diminished relational resources for the family, motivating the working spouse to draw more time and attention to home life. This can generate "serious conflicts between work and family, an expatriate will be more likely to disengage from that assignment."²¹ For example, I have seen this situation unfold in the life of a promising young professional expatriate. His wife had an extremely difficult transition. What made it acutely difficult for them is that she came from a very close-knit family stateside; they had never experienced an overseas assignment, nor had they made many domestic transitions.

¹⁹ There are several helpful resources in understanding culture shock and the normal transition phases into a new culture; one such resource is: L. Robert Kohls, *Survival Kit for Overseas Living: for Americans Planning to Live and Work Abroad*, 4th ed. (London: Nicholas Brealey America, 2001).

²⁰ Shaffer, Harrison, and Luk, 101.

²¹ Shaffer, Harrison, and Luk, 104.

The loss of her relational network at home, having a newborn child and a toddler, combined with the demands of his new job and the cultural dissonance they both experienced, caused him to focus more and more attention to home. Eventually all these pressures contributed to an early departure from their international assignment and, ultimately, from his employer.

One's faith, and the Christian community surrounding them, contribute to the well-being of both spouses and help them achieve 'work-home' balance. When asked about their faith one TCC commented, "God gives you a base which is your virtual home." He went on to say that his "international church also made our assignment feel more like home."²² Another TCC respondent mentioned that their small groups were very helpful in making their transition. Many of the respondents indicated that the Christian friendships made in the context of the international church significantly contributed to making a healthy transition. This indicates that the international church can play a significant role in helping TCCs make healthy transitions and improving their work-family balance by encouraging Christian community and faith. The impact the IC has on the TCCs as they transition and its opportunity to facilitate spiritually formative friendships will be explored in future research.

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Global Trends:

The workforce is making a youthful shift, and these younger expatriates will be even more nomadic, according to human resources expert Jim Matthewman. He describes a change in world demographics, where world population will grow by 5.68% in five years and that the age profile within specific countries will change as well.²³ While the population in Western Europe

²² Swiss expatriate, emailed to David Young, November 17, 2014.

²³ Jim Matthewmen, "The Global Nomad – a New Professional Cadre to Maximise Future Growth," *Financial Times* (January 19, 20011): 1, accessed November 25, 2014,

and the United States is getting older, many of the emerging countries are becoming more youthful.

Within 10 years, India is forecasted to be the most populated country in the world, overtaking China. Turkey, bidding to become the fourth largest country by land mass and population in an expanded European Union, could be the first to have 50 percent of its population aged under 25. The United Arab Emirates and Qatar show similar trends.²⁴

Matthewman's description continues by highlighting how these generation 'Y'²⁵ global nomads do not have a "home location," they go from assignment 'A' to 'B' to 'C' and 'D' in perhaps ten years, and in some cases much less. My own experience is that most generation 'X'²⁶ and baby boomer expatriates are accustomed to assignments that range from three to five years. They perceive this assignment as their new home; they transition into it intent on getting engaged quickly in community, church, and service within their host country. The younger nomads, however, are more comfortable with change. Many of them grew up in the midst of high mobility, so they are simply ramping up the pace. They are internationally schooled, have a global mindset, and speak multiple languages in addition to English. My concern for these younger global nomads is that they plug into church and spiritually formative friendships regardless of the brevity of their assignment. When an assignment is measured in 9, 12, or 18

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<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/9a1fa83c-2410-11e0-bef0-00144feab49a.html#axzz3K7DnpaaC>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Millennials (also known as Generation Y) are the demographic cohort following [Generation X](#). There are no precise dates when the generation starts and ends. Researchers and commentators use birth years ranging from the early 1980s to the early 2000s. According to: "Millennials," Wikipedia, accessed December 5, 2014, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Millennials>.

²⁶ Generation X, commonly abbreviated to Gen X, is the generation born after the Western [Post-World War II baby boom](#). Demographers, historians, and commentators use beginning birth dates ranging from the early 1960s to the early 1980s. According to: "Generation X," Wikipedia, accessed December 5, 2014, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Generation_X.

month increments one could have the mindset of “I don’t have time for close friends,” “I can’t get involved in the international church,” or “I don’t have time to serve in this community, in just a few months I’m moving again.” This is a challenge for the international church to embrace, creating a cycle of spiritual formation that can be memorable and impactful in as few as nine months.

Commented [SG13]: I think there’s something missing between ‘embrace’ and the comma. Perhaps, ‘embrace (or engage with?) those in this more transient community’?

Personal example:

In October 2006 I moved my family, my wife and two elementary age daughters, to Bangkok, Thailand. We had taken an assignment with an international church to be their lead pastor. This would be our first overseas assignment; and while the initial agreement was three years, we completed five years. In this transition we left behind our country, both of our families, our relational network of friends, and the support of a loved church. We moved to an international, English-speaking expatriate neighborhood north of Bangkok called Nichada Thani²⁷, comprised of almost a thousand families from every part of the globe. At the center of that community was the K-12 International School of Bangkok²⁸, the main attraction of this particular neighborhood. Completing the little “western English-speaking enclave” was a western style grocery, country club and even a Christian church. This was our new church, and as gracious, kind and generous as the people were, it was still radically different, causing increasing stress.

We didn’t know how to shop, how to bank, how to pay our bills. It seemed like we didn’t

²⁷ “Nichada Thani the Expatriate Town of Thailand,” accessed November 27, 2014, <http://nichada.com/>.

²⁸ “ISB: International School of Bangkok,” accessed November 27, 2014, <http://www.isb.ac.th/>.

know how to do anything. I had been pastoring fairly conservative, homogenous, small, white suburban churches in America. Nichada, and the church in it, was not conservative, far from homogenous and was “multi-everything:” multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-denominational and diverse economically, albeit primarily affluent. On the outside I was doing my best to pastor this dynamic church, while on the inside I was stressed by the cultural dissonance. In fact, the stress caused me to exhibit neurological and muscular symptoms in my first months. Culture shock diminishes one’s emotional and analytical resources because you are constantly making internal adjustments to the new culture. Culture shock drains you. Several times I would break down into tears wondering if taking my family halfway around the world was a mistake.

My point is that this difficult transition, with its cultural dissonance, made us extremely vulnerable; if it weren’t for our faith and our church we wouldn’t have made it.²⁹ My wife jumped into the life of the church; she got involved in women’s ministry and women’s bible study and in a few short months she made a healthy adjustment, making friends she expects will last a lifetime. However, it took me about nine months to go through the five stages of transition: 1) **Involvement**, I’m comfortable where I am; 2) **Leaving** where I begin to lose emotional ties, **backing away from responsibilities and relationships**; 3) **Transition** where everything becomes chaotic, a phase marked by dysfunction; 4) **Entering** it’s less chaotic, emotions still fluctuate; and 5) **Re-involvement** I’ve adapted, I’m a part of this community.³⁰ I got involved in leading a small group and started to make some friends inside and outside the church, both of which helped my transition. The transition experience was completed after a

²⁹ ‘Vulnerability’ and the experience of feeling weakness needs to be explored theologically. Expatriates tend to be very capable, self-sufficient people, therefore, vulnerability can be an opportunity for spiritual formation. This topic should be addressed in future research (future essay: contextualized theology).

³⁰ Pollock and Van Reken, 61-72. These stages of transition should be reflected on more deeply in future research (future essays: International church and contextualized theology).

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brief summer vacation; I was reminded of my calling to the church in Thailand and went back and embraced what God wanted to do there in and through us as third culture Christians, ministering through a dynamic, international church.

THE INTERNATIONAL CHURCH

International churches (ICs) are those churches that are scattered around the world, usually in global capitals, comprised of people from many different nationalities, different church heritages and are primarily, but not exclusively, English-speaking. These churches are rich in diversity, in theological perspectives and in Christian practices; they can be non-denominational or associated with a denomination (Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, etc.). But their ethos tends to be more inclusive than their American counterparts, welcoming people and helping them with their transition in-country tends to be a strength of a healthy IC. Crane and Carter have identified over a thousand such international churches in 182 different countries.³¹

ICs can feel like a home away from home. In a world of cultural disconnect, they can be an oasis of community and connection. The amplified need for community while displaced from one's home country, or from one's relational network, can be rebuilt within the body-life and ministry of the IC. One research respondent shared the following in describing the role the IC played in their transition:

Leaving my support system impacted me greatly; however, I felt my future overseas friendships became even stronger, deeper and more fulfilling. My pre-expat relationships offered spiritual support and deep connections. I was invited into our [IC] by a new

³¹ Michael Crane and Scott Carter, "Gateway to the Nations: The Strategic Value of International Churches in a Globalized Urban World," accessed October 6, 2014, <http://micn.org/2014/08/gateway-nations-strategic-value-international-churches-globalized-urban-world/>

friend and I felt energized from the start. Most of my new friends were part of the church and my friendships blossomed immediately. The church became a central point for our family and our transition into the international community was seamless. Our IC's many activities were, hands down, a driving force in our positive adjustment in our new and foreign community.³²

The IC creates an environment where the fact that one is “international,” or even third culture, can be embraced, offering the experience of diverse community.³³ The congregation I pastored in Bangkok represented 20 different nations, a sister church in downtown had a regular Sunday attendance of over 1,000 participants from over 40 different nations.³⁴ In the midst of the high-pressure lifestyle of the global nomad, the IC can provide a new identity and a sense of belonging within a community of diverse Christ followers; the experience of “home” but nothing like home.

While globalization and modern missions has made ICs visible, ICs are not a recent phenomenon. In fact, we can look back to the international church of Antioch as the original IC and as a biblical model. The Antioch IC played a pivotal role in the development of the early church. Jesus’ last words to his disciples as recorded in Acts 1:8: “*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*” Jesus calls his followers to go to people who are different and people who are at a distance. He sends his Spirit to fill and empowers the believers for this calling, yet most believers remained in Jerusalem; remained where they had been

Commented [SG15]: See previous comment on biblical texts in essay. This is appropriate, but doesn’t need to be italicised.

³² American expatriate, emailed to David Young, November 17, 2014.

³³ This topic of diversity and specifically ecumenicalism as a facilitator of spiritual formation should be addressed in future research (future essay: contextualized theology).

³⁴ “History,” Evangelical Church of Bangkok, accessed December 6, 2014, <http://www.ecb.asia/about/history/>.

initially.³⁵ Acts unfolds for several chapters of God growing his church locally and regionally, it was most likely several years before the believers spread to distant and different peoples; the diaspora of Christians beyond their homeland now ministering internationally because of local persecution.

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.³⁶

Jerusalem hears of this great work of the Spirit and sends Barnabas to Antioch. Barnabas gets Paul (still known as Saul) and together they work at developing this great work of God at Antioch for a year.³⁷ The Antioch church grows. **It is non-Jewish, influential and, right from the beginning, made up of nationals and expatriates.** In Acts chapter 13 we begin to see its influence and growth. Luke describes a leadership gathering at the Antioch church "Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul."³⁸ IC pastor Jacob Bloemberg points out that "each of these men came from a different nationality", and that the Antioch church was an urban international church.³⁹ The Antioch IC reached Jews who were TCCs in Antioch, Greek-speaking Syrians who were locals in the city as well as Europeans and

Commented [SG16]: This is where it would be good to cite some biblical scholars to back this up – particularly as to the non-Jewish nature, because the early church (c.f. Acts 15) are still wrestling with this.

³⁵ Acts 2:1-13 (New International Version).

³⁶ Acts 11:19-21 (New International Version).

³⁷ Acts 11:22, 25-26 (New International Version).

³⁸ Acts 13:1 (New International Version).

³⁹ Jacob Bloemberg, "Global Nomads: Expats On Mission in a New Urban World" (Int'l Society for Urban Mission, Unpublished Chapter, 2014).

Asians who were the unreached peoples of that day. It was influential, missional and international while living out Jesus' Acts 1:8 calling; it is a biblical model to build on.

While I've touched on several positive attributes and qualities of ICs, there are some inherent weaknesses as well. The frequencies of transitions can mean that a third or more of the congregation moves each year, leaving a void in leadership.⁴⁰ ICs become adept at raising up new leaders but it is a tremendous and taxing challenge on the pastoral staff. The movement in and out of the IC can also make church polity unclear and diminish a sense of history. If care is not taken to document and communicate polity and history they will erode. My wife and I often described our experience with our IC in Bangkok "that it was like planting a new church every year". Maintaining a relational ministry, or body-life, in an environment of frequent transitions can become emotionally exhausting, an exhaustion that impacts longer-term IC members, as well as, staff.

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SPIRITUAL FORMATION FOR THIRD CULTURE CHRISTIANS

As indicated, future research will delve more deeply into a theology for TCCs, but with just a cursory look at TCCs in the context of the IC we can already see several opportunities for IC ministry and TCC spiritual formation:

1. The cultural dissonance that one experiences in any new culture creates an experience of uprooting, or being unsettled, in one's beliefs, values, and assumptions. This lack of equilibrium at the level of one's convictions initiates the will for inner change; that desire or will to change and learn opens one up for spiritual formation, and specifically greater receptivity to the Spirit's work of sanctification.
2. Work-family imbalances are especially acute during the first several months of one's

Commented [SG18]: Good point

Commented [SG19]: Another good point

⁴⁰ This topic of identifying and developing spiritually mature leaders in the context of fast turnover needs be addressed in future research (future essays: international church, contextualized theology).

transition in country. Both spouses experience heightened levels of stress; their typical schedule and family roles may be in flux. Additionally, a child's transition in country will also weigh heavily upon their parent's hearts and minds. These typical stressors create an emotional vulnerability and possibly volatility, where family-work imbalances spillover: family to work and work to family. Rebuilding a relational network of TCCs through the ICs small group ministry, or by initiating spiritually formative friendships, will be supportive if not restorative for both spouses.

3. The third culture Christian community is one of high mobility; if a third or more of the congregation leaves each year it impacts the approach to spiritual formation. ICs should consider a strategy of spiritual formation that can be assimilated within nine months: offering greater depth and ministry equipping in subsequent years.
4. TCCs will have a much greater experience with diversity of Christian practice. The IC can use this diversity as a means of spiritual formation, eclectically exploring different traditions. For example, a southern Baptist might not have any experience with the annual liturgical calendar, or if one has a high church background, they might not have experienced the structure of contemporary worship. Such exploration can open one up to greater growth and depth of practice. In "Streams of Living Water", Richard Foster describes various traditions of the Christian faith; he rightly describes God's Spirit as bursting forth a broad river of unconditional love for all peoples.⁴¹ ICs are uniquely positioned to leverage different traditions and Christian practices, and TCCs are more open to such ecumenical exploration when they are away from their home church.

Commented [SG20]: A further good point.

Commented [SG21]: Something to be seen as both a challenge and an opportunity.

These are some of the formation opportunities and insights that this research has surfaced, all of which will be explored in greater depth during future research.

Considering theology for TCCs surfaces an important question: in as much as TCCs and ICs embrace diversity how are inevitable doctrinal differences handled? For example, Christianity has a very diverse and rich historical understanding of "salvation." Views will differ based on your heritage: Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic or Protestant. Some doctrinal

⁴¹ Richard J. Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: HarperOne, 2001), xv.

differences can be insignificant, but there is an intensification of interest and concern around our understanding of salvation, necessitating the IC to take clear positions on such core doctrines.

It's my experience that clarity of the IC's position on core doctrines documented in the ICs doctrinal statement, introductory literature, and taught in the ICs membership or connection class is helpful to TCCs. Everyone will not agree with every position, most TCCs wouldn't expect to, but they need to know where their IC is coming from; both the IC and the TCC can be very respectful of their differences allowing continued fellowship and overall unity. The IC I pastored in Bangkok, for example, practiced an adult believers baptism by immersion. When it came to infants we would dedicate them to the Lord in a public ceremony but not baptize them. This information was taught in class and from the pulpit in such a respectful way that those who believed differently would work with their IC pastor to find another pastor who would perform the baptism they desired. The same kind of tone and practice towards theological distinctions also made several Roman Catholic families comfortable and receptive theologically in what was clearly an evangelical protestant IC.

Commented [SG22]: Individual IC's doctrinal statement.

CONCLUSION

Diplomats, business people, short-term volunteers, NGO workers, military personnel and various global nomads such as refugees and low-income guest workers are making host countries their homes away from home. These expatriates tend to be very bright, ambitious, successful and influential in their spheres of work and life. Their work may provide them with an elite lifestyle, or barely enough to survive. For many, being disconnected from home, family, and country of origin creates a pressure; a pressure to connect, to try new things, to make a temporary home and family away from home. Into that fray comes the international church, and with it comes the potential to impact the spiritual direction and maturity of these influential and diverse third culture Christians.

There are unique spiritual formation opportunities for the TCCs in the framework of the IC: cultural dissonance, work-family imbalance, high mobility and diversity (ethnically, Christian practice, and doctrine) are some of the challenges that can be leveraged for God's purposes in the life and growth of third culture Christians. It is incumbent upon IC pastors to embrace their ministry to TCCs; they have the opportunity to shape their spiritual formation during a time when these TCCs are likely to be open to the work of God's Spirit. With vision, leadership and humility, IC pastors can develop and mobilize Christian leaders who will impact the world.

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ADDENDUM: PRACTICAL APPLICATION

The preceding pages offered a rough sketch of a typical third culture Christian. Such a generalized description is bound to result in exclusions. Many Christian expatriates will not perceive that they fit in the description offered. There is no intent to describe everyone, only a generalized description that would be applicable to the majority. The understanding offered of the TCC, their context and the potential for spiritual formation creates a foundation for future research. This essay is not addressing a singular research problem per se; rather, it is an attempt to survey applicable literature, apply primary research, and describe the cultural reality of TCCs while identifying some formative opportunities they encounter.

A clear problem statement will need to be shaped for my dissertation. My initial impression is that it will address high impact TCC dynamics like “high mobility” or “cultural dissonance” that TCCs often experience. These stressors can be leveraged for spiritual formation, if the IC has a strategy or practice for addressing them and ministering through them. It would be valuable to survey ICs to identify the dynamics they see most frequently, and determine those with the greatest potential for spiritual formation.

My dissertation will develop a model of spiritual formation designed for third culture Christians and facilitated by international churches. This model will be applicable to an IC’s spiritual formation strategy and practice; it will be customizable to the unique characteristics of the specific IC, such as theological distinctive. Initially, my perception was IC pastors would facilitate such a spiritual formation model in the strategy of their church. However, it might be more effective if such a model was both useful to IC pastors and also provided hands-on resources that TCCs could directly apply, resources that would fit together with the IC strategy.

Commented [SG23]: This is good – it helps to narrow down the research to particular aspects of the TCC life.

Commented [SG24]: Do you envisage these resources also being an aid to the pastors’ own spiritual lives too?