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THEOLOGICAL DISCERNMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL CHURCH MINISTRY

DMIN 726: VISION AND VOICE IN POSTMODERN CULTURE

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Introduction

In many ways international churches (ICs) are similar to indigenous churches.¹ They can be denominational or non-denominational, traditional or progressive, high church or low church, and everything in between. Like indigenous churches, ICs endeavor to reflect New Testament patterns of ministry and evangelical ICs reflect values similar to their evangelical counterparts. However, there are also aspects that make the ICs unique; this essay uses recent IC research to identify some tangible differences. At least three differences make ICs unique and necessitate an IC ministry paradigm--a theologically discerned vision that can strengthen the effectiveness of the IC's community, discipleship and mission. The factors that make ICs unique considered here are: 1) the high mobility of congregants; 2) significant diversity of doctrine, and 3) a frequent leadership vacuum.

These unique characteristics can be approached as problems for pastoral staff and leadership. For example, research on high turnover of congregants in ICs showed that the transient nature of the congregation resulted in relational, emotional, and ministry fatigue for pastors.² However, these challenging characteristics can be perceived through a different lens—a paradigm that brings significant focus, and can strengthen the IC pastor and sharpen IC ministry: (1) the transient nature of the congregation can become the basis for several healthy ministry patterns specific to the IC; (2) the significant diversity of Christian heritages is an opportunity for

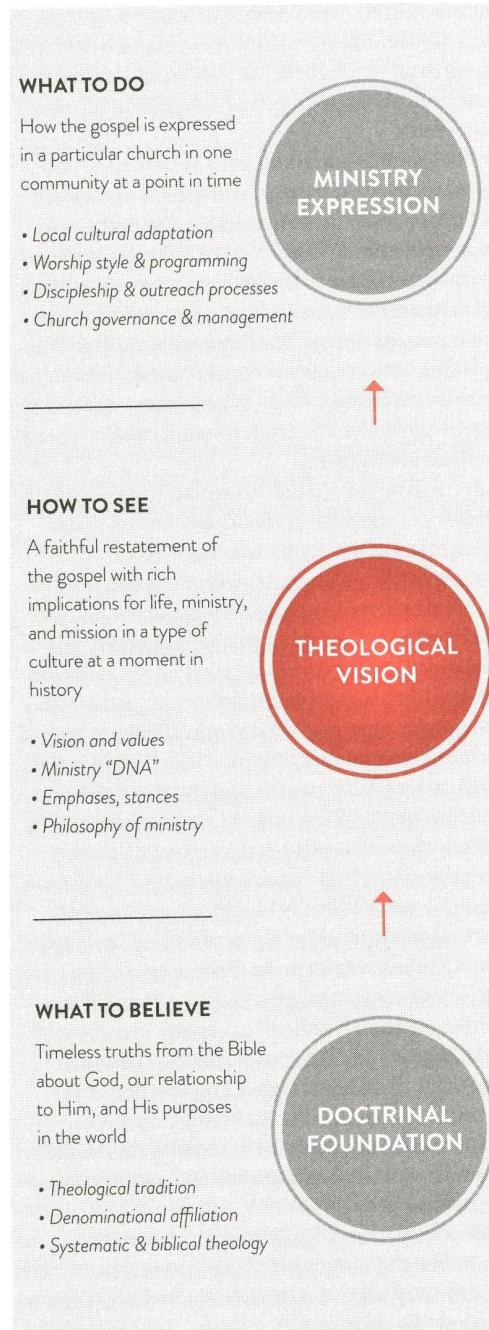
¹ “Indigenous” is used here to describe a church whose constituents are the peoples that are particular or native to that place. Whereas ICs constituents are partially indigenous peoples but the majority of their congregants are from other nations.

² In a recent survey of IC Pastors (Young, David. “IC Pastors Survey.” Survey Monkey. 15 February 2015) comments included “The toll on the IC pastor (and staff) is significant, relationally and emotionally speaking. It is a constant challenge to continue to connect with people knowing they will leave sooner, or a little later. One pastor said it is exhausting and dizzying trying to remember all names and faces; another called it ‘compassion fatigue’....”.

spiritual exploration and growth; and (3) the revolving door of church leadership provides many with hands-on ministry experience and equipping which will be dispersed around the world.

Contextual theology starts with experience; this essay focuses on IC experience and then dialogues with doctrine resulting in theologically reflective and custom ministry expressions. To do this I will apply two contextual models; the overall approach uses a “translation model” as depicted in

Fig. 1:³ from doctrine (apostolic focus and Trinitarian praxis), to vision (IC discernment model), and concluding with ministry expression (model applied). This results in a theologically reflective IC ministry model, which I will use to filter the findings of the February, 2015, IC pastor’s survey, a process in keeping with contextual theology’s “praxis model”.⁴ The final result will be ministry insights and greater focus for IC pastors and leaders.



³ Timothy Keller, Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City, 8.9.2012 ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 20.

⁴ For further understand of the translation and praxis models of contextual theology see: Stephen B. Bevans, *By Stephen B. Bevans Models of Contextual Theology (Faith and Cultures Series) [paperback]* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 30-46, 63-80.

Apostolic focus for IC Ministry

To move toward a discernment model for IC ministry we must start with a foundation of doctrine. In this section and the next I'll focus on a broad but orthodox doctrinal structure, starting with the Nicene (Niceno-Constantinopolitan) Creed c. 381⁵. Before even the canon of scripture was complete, bishops utilized creeds like the Apostle's and Nicene to discuss orthodoxy and discern heresy. The Nicene Creed we use today is a later form, but its history is one of grappling with the doctrine of the Trinity. It also provides clarity on the nature of Christ, as well as a clear definition of the church.⁶ ICs should have an affinity for the Nicene definition of "church" as "One Orthodox and Universal, Apostolic Church...". Insofar as ICs are 1) "orthodox"—they have narrowed their beliefs down to essential Christian doctrines; 2) "universal"—they gather people from many nations in unity as Jesus' bride; and 3) "apostolic"—they have a clear mission to the diaspora and they trace their origin back to apostle Paul's expatriate ministry, insofar as these characterize the IC, they are within the scope of this paper and the research which supports it.

The word "apostle" is used some 131 times in the NT, seen in the following Greek derivatives: "apostello" meaning send; "exapostello" meaning send out; "pempo" meaning send; and "apostolos" meaning envoy, ambassador, apostle.⁷ The word translated into Latin is "missio" and is the basis for our common use of mission, missionary, and missional. The association of "apostolic" with ICs is threefold: 1) a reflection back to Paul's expatriate ministry;

⁵ The Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed of 381 as seen in: Episcopal Church (USA), *Book of Common Prayer Chapel Edition: Red Hardcover* (Church Publishing Inc., 1979). See Addendum.

⁶ For more details on the history of the Nicene Creed see: Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 151-160

⁷ Colin Brown ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology: Vol. 1 A-f. 4 vols.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency Reference Library, 1986). 126-136.

and it 2) follows the IC example of Antioch as a launching pad for urban multiethnic work⁸; but mostly 3) it's etymological roots of apostolic—to send. “Go, and make disciples of all nations...” (Matt 28:19), “be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8). The early church’s “sent-ness” was in the form of scattering: “Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.” (Acts 8:4). Jesus’ mission for his disciples was to make disciples among all nations; interestingly, it wasn’t until intense persecution that the church moved out of its epicenter in Jerusalem and Judea. This scattering, or diaspora, of believers, along with Paul’s calling as the apostle to the Gentiles, established the early church as a multiethnic, multicultural movement. It can be argued that Paul’s church planting strategy prioritized multi-cultural urban dwelling expats. They were more open-minded and receptive to the gospel than some of the xenophobic indigenous people, so many of the churches that Paul started were multicultural, urban, and largely expatriate churches.⁹

Worth mentioning here is that the IC pastoral calling brings together two roles that are usually separate: apostle and pastor (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11). The apostle, as mentioned, is about going to the nations, to foreign lands—one who is “sent out” or is an “ambassador”—and that’s why we understand missionaries to be fulfilling an apostolic calling. “Pastor” is a word that shares the same Greek word for “shepherd”—one called to teach, feed and equip his sheep.¹⁰ The shepherding calling is to gather the sheep for care and spiritual nourishment. The IC pastoral calling encompasses both gifts: following Paul’s example as one who is sent to the

⁸ David L Packer et al., *The International Pastor Experience: Testimonies from the Field* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015), 85-87.

⁹ David Pederson, *Expatriate Ministry: Inside the Church of the Outsiders*. (Seoul: Korean Center For World Mission, 1999). 7-22.

¹⁰ David E. Schroeder, *Ephesians: God's Grace and Guidance in the Church* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1998), 143-144.

nations, the IC pastor goes to the scattered peoples, gathers them together into a community of faith, equips them for ministry, which in the IC often leads to further scattering. Maybe an axiom for this dual gifting could be “*gathering the scattered and scattering the gathered*”.

An apostolic focus for IC ministry coincides with a growing missiological focus on diaspora peoples, which has reached nearly a billion strong¹¹. The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization says: “diaspora missiology has emerged as a biblical and strategic field of missiology and is defined as: a missiological framework for understanding and participating in God’s redemptive mission among people living outside their place of origin.”¹² It goes on to appeal to church and mission leaders to recognize the opportunity for world evangelization that’s presented by the global diaspora. I heartily agree and believe IC ministry has a strategic role to play in fulfilling God’s mission to scattered peoples around the world. If ICs understand their strategic place in God’s mission, and if IC pastors perceive their special apostolic-pastoral dual calling, I believe a greater harvest will be realized.

Trinitarian praxis for IC ministry

Because ICs have different denominational affiliations (or none at all), I proposed the Nicene Creed (c. 381) as a framework for theological reflection.¹³ This creed’s development has some parallels to today’s IC calling to diaspora peoples. The early church’s wide dispersion

¹¹ According to the Global Diaspora Network, “there are now over 200 million international migrants, and over 700 million internally displaced people or close to 1 billion scattered peoples” Sadiri Joy Tira, ed. *The Human Tidal Wave* (Passig City, Philippines: Lifechange Publishing, Inc., 2013), xxi

¹² Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, *Scattered to Gather: Embracing the Global Trend of Diaspora* (Manila, Philippines: LifeChange Publishing, Inc., 2010), 12.

¹³ Based generally on the IC Pastors Survey (February 2015) and my own research, most ICs would have an affinity for the evangelical tradition. Specifically holding the four following historical evangelical characteristics identified by historian D.W. Bebbington: personal conversion, evangelism, Biblicism and centrality of the cross.

and growth meant assimilating people from diverse cultures; combating heresies and developing orthodoxy was essential to its well-being. Here is a brief summary of the heresies with which the church was wrestling during those early years, and our relational understanding of the trinity as a community of love.

Modalism is “the doctrine that the persons of the trinity represent only three modes or aspects of the divine revelation, not distinct and coexisting persons of divine nature.”¹⁴ A third-century theologian, Sebellius, advocated this position: three modes or manifestations of one divine person. This theology unpacks as the Father in Creation; the Son in Redemption; and the Spirit in Sanctification. Sebellius was eventually excommunicated;¹⁵ his ideology, however, lasted through the centuries. Intentionally or not, this line of thinking strips the trinity of its relational loving nature—because there are no individual persons there can be no communion, no intimacy, among the Father, Son, and Spirit. Our salvation is also stripped of its relational nature.

Subordination came to us through an ambitious Alexandrian elder and priest who believed that Jesus Christ wasn’t as divine as the Father. He believed there was a time when Jesus didn’t exist, and therefore his essence is less than that of the Father. It was a more nuanced belief than the adoptionalism heresy; Arians would purport to believe in the trinity but it was a trinity in which only one was truly God.¹⁶ Jesus, who isn’t eternal, isn’t fully God, so the salvation Jesus offers isn’t God taking on himself the consequences of our sin. The substitutionary sacrifice Jesus offered is less powerful if offered by a less-than-divine god.

¹⁴ *New Oxford American Dictionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

¹⁵ H. Wace, *A Dictionary of Christian Biography: And Literature to the End of the Sixth Century A.D. with an Account of the Principal Sects and Heresies*, (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994).

¹⁶ Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 147.

Arians would also reject the perfect oneness experienced by the Father and the Son, a perfectly other-centered union. Like modalism, subordination also erodes the nature of our salvation as our entrance into the divine community of love, which is fundamental to our Trinitarian reflection.

While most of the tension had to do with Jesus' nature, there were also those who were put off by considering the Spirit as fully God. Macedonius, a bishop of Constantinople, rejected the divinity of the Holy Spirit; those who believed like him were known as Macedonians and as Pneumatomachi, literally “fighting the Holy Spirit.”¹⁷ Thankfully, Macedonius had to deal with advocates of the Holy Spirit like Basil of Caesarea, a.k.a. Saint Basil the Great, who taught about the Holy Spirit and didn’t shy away from praying to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Regarding Basil, Olson writes, “Because of his work on behalf of the Holy Spirit, Basil came to be known in the church as the ‘theologian of the Holy Spirit’”¹⁸. Basil, his brother Gregory of Nyssa, and his friend Gregory of Nazianzus, fought in the defense of the Trinity and the Nicene Creed. These men and many others argued for the divinity of both Christ and the Holy Spirit and the Triune nature of God; they knew our very salvation depends upon it. ICs should follow the Cappadocian Fathers example, even though our IC posture is ecumenically inclusive; there are some doctrines that need to be defended and advocated.

This brief reflection on Trinitarian doctrine springs from the belief that the Trinity is a community of love. For example, St. Augustine (354-430), in describing the Trinity, used terms of love. The Father loves the Son, and the Son loves the Father. And, according to Augustine, the bond of love between the Father and the Son is the Spirit. The Son is eternally begotten of the

¹⁷ Catholic Encyclopedia (1913)/Pneumatomachi, Volume 12, article by John Peter Arendzen, accessed on June 1, 2014 http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia_%281913%29/Pneumatomachi.

¹⁸ Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology*, 177.

Father and the love between Father and Son proceeds as the third person, the Holy Spirit. This has become known as “The Mutual-Love Theory”¹⁹. God knew community from eternity past, characterized by love, adoration, and service with and for one another. “If God were unpersonal, then he would have not known love until he created other beings. In that case, love and community would not have been essential to his character; it would have emerged later. But God is triune, and therefore love, friendship and community are intrinsic to him and at the heart of all reality.”²⁰ The apostle John made it clear, “God is love”; it’s his triune nature. God the Father honors, affirms, and glories in the Son; the Son worships, honors, and obeys the Father. Their love is so profound that it proceeds ²¹ forth as the Holy Spirit into the world and into our hearts as witness of this eternal, other-centered loving glory.

Author and psychologist Larry Crabb has been known to quip that the Triune God is the only small group that has ever gotten along. The Father pours into the Son, “delighting in Jesus with absolute freedom knowing there was nothing in the Son that would ever displease him.” Also the Son pleasing the Father, the “Son yielding himself with carefree abandonment to the Father” and we see “the Spirit forever exploding out of profound intimacy between Father and Son as the eternal Third Person in the sacred dance.”²² The metaphor of a dance isn’t original to Dr. Crabb; it too goes back to the early church theologians who’d been wrestling with their understanding of God as a trinity. They came to use the word “*perichoresis*,” which literally means to dance around—*peri* means around, as in perimeter, and *choresis* is from the same root

¹⁹ David Coffey, "The Holy Spirit as the Mutual Love of the Father and the Son." *Theological Studies* 51.2 (1990): 193-229.

²⁰ Keller, “Center Church”, 33.

²¹ Paul K. Jewett, *God. Creation, and Revelation: Neo-Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Willima B. Eerdmans, 1991), 275.

²² Larry Crabb, *Soul Talk – The language God longs for us to speak* (Brentwood, TN: Integrity Publishers, 2003), 225.

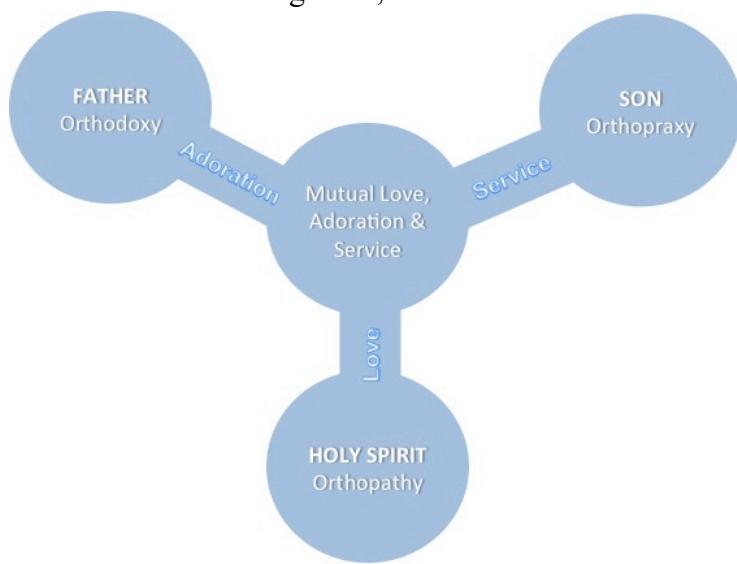
as choreography. The Trinity, they suggested, could be properly envisioned as dancing together in perfect rhythm of love.”²³

Reflection on Trinitarian theology as framed in the Nicene Creed, advanced by Cappadocian Fathers, Augustine and more recently by Barth, Rahner, and Crabb—is a rich source of praxis for IC ministry. In it we see genuine loving relationship, sacrificial service, and worshipful adoration. Understanding the Trinity as an active community of love allows us to extrapolate a methodology of discernment for IC ministry: orthodoxy (right belief), orthopraxy (right action) and orthopathy (right experience, heart, affections).

²³ Ibid.

Discernment model for IC ministry

Karl Rahner, Jesuit priest and theologian, believed that which is intrinsic to the nature of God is eternal and offers us the best understanding of how the church should function in the world and how Christians are spiritually formed.^{24 25} Our reflection highlights three dynamics expressed within the godhead. The Son gloried in the Father, *adored* the Father just as the Father adored and gave glory to the Son (John 17:20-24). The Son does the Father's will; He *serves* and obeys the Father, which in turn gives the Father pleasure (Matt 3:16-17; 26:39). The Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son bringing truth, comfort and *love* (John 14:26; 15:26; 14:23). We want our theological reflection to inform our practice: as image bearers (Gen. 1:26) whose practice includes communion with Him—as seen in the garden, as seen in Jesus' friendship with his disciples and in the kingdom to come. These Trinitarian dynamics (Adoration, Service, Love) can be connected to three religious terms necessary for our discernment model: orthodoxy, orthopraxy and orthopathy. See **Fig. 2.**²⁶ The etymology of orthodoxy is from Greek

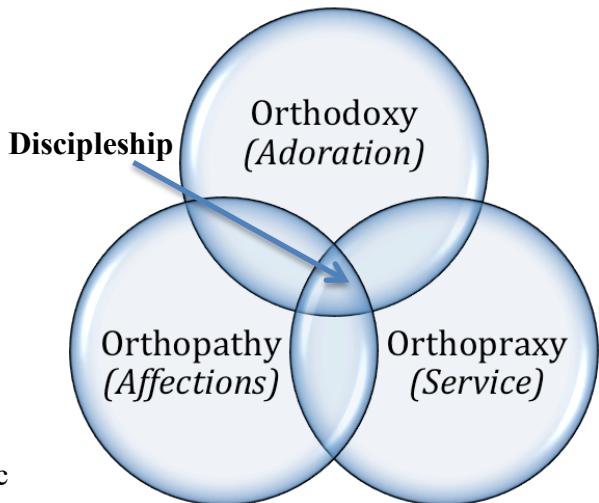


²⁴ Karl Rahner's first published this idea under a chapter entitled: Axiomatic Unity of the "Economic" and "Immanent" Trinity. See: Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997).

²⁵ In this section I'm advocating the trinity offers a model for Christian living. It's not just about understanding the essence of who God is but who we are as reflection of Him: that God as a trinity invites us to join him – join God's loving community. For a fuller explanation see: Darrell W. Johnson, *Experiencing the Trinity* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2002), 57-84.

²⁶ David Young, "Vision Sharing Sermon" (Power Point of sermon, Alliance Bible Church, Baytown Texas, March 15, 2015).

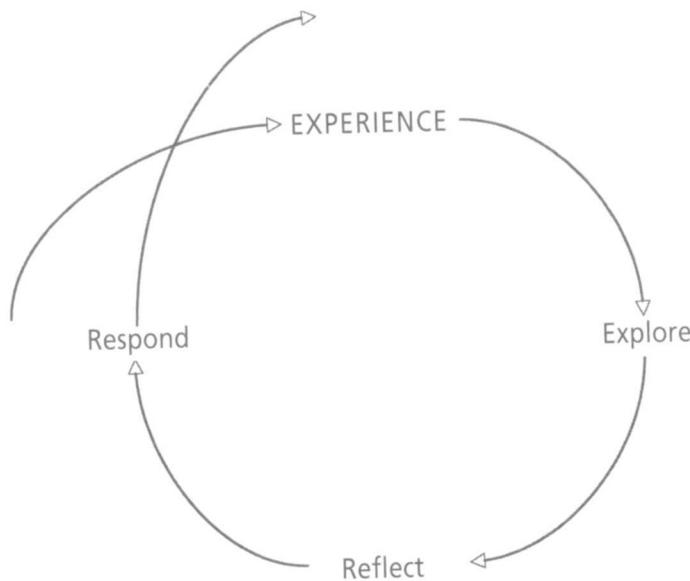
“orthos” meaning straight or true, and “doxy” meaning belief or doctrine. All truth, all knowledge, ultimately flows from the Father and our response to revelation of God is “adoration” or “worship.” “Praxis” is the Greek word for action and so Orthopraxis means right or true action. Jesus’ sacrificial service, his orthopraxis, is our example of how we are to live our lives. While Christianity has often considered orthodoxy and orthopraxy as parallel and necessary together, there is a third dynamic that’s essential to our consideration—Orthopathy. “Pathy” in Greek can mean feeling, suffering, and experience. ”Orthopathy” is not in common church use, and we could appropriately call it “right feelings” or “right passions,” but I think it better aligns with the work of the Spirit to carefully influence our heart, so I’ll define it as “*right affections*.” It’s the Spirit who helps us in our weakness and intercedes for us in groaning too deep for words (John 14:16, Rom. 8:26). It’s the Spirit who reminds us of Jesus and convicts us of sin, thereby helping us to align our affections (Jn 14:26; 16:8-11). And it’s within the Spirit’s indwelling and communion with our spirit where we experience the life of God and are connected to the triune community (Rom.8:9-11). This triad model helps us see the relationship between theology and everyday life: touching the mind (orthodoxy), the will (orthopraxy) and the heart (orthopathy); a Hebraic way of discipleship is the nexus among all three (Duet 6:4-9; Mk 12:28-34), as seen **Fig. 3**²⁷



²⁷ Woodbridge, Noel B. "Living theologically-towards a theology of Christian practice in terms of the theological triad of orthodoxy, orthopraxy and orthopathy as portrayed in Isaiah 6: 1-8: a narrative approach." *HTS Theological Studies* 66.2 (2010): 1-6.

As we reflect on the Trinity we find direction for IC ministry practice, a source of a theologically rich vision for ministry and discipleship. ICs discern the essentials of their beliefs are, their orthodoxy. Discerning and holding the essentials promotes unity. ICs also advance a clear orthopraxy, knowing how it draws together God's scattered people to equip them for service and engage them in mission. Every IC must create genuine family, a home of faith shaping our affections. In the next section we will consider three common IC ministry issues through the lens of this model, and discuss how problematic circumstances can open up avenues into fruitful ministry practices

Model applied



In this section I will follow a “praxis” approach to contextualizing theology, as seen in **Fig. 4.**²⁸ This process can often open new possibilities, or enables a broader understanding. “*Experience*” represents the real-life situation or crisis that initiates the process; for our purposes I’ll

use examples from the IC Pastors survey. “*Explore*” is looking at the situation from various viewpoints, thinking through the consequences, research, etc. “*Reflect*” considers tradition,

²⁸ Laurie Green, *Let's Do Theology: Resources for Contextual Theology; Completely Updated and Revised*, 2 ed. (London: Mowbray, 2010), 42.

theological reflection, scriptures, wisdom from friends and mentors. “*Respond*” brings well-informed theology into real-life practice. In this section I generally follow that process as we 1) explore IC specific challenges; 2) reflect on our apostolic focus and our Trinitarian praxis, and; 3) consider new response to those situations and changes based on that reflection.

High mobility and community

Within the IC the *transient nature of the congregations* can be perceived as an ongoing crisis, an unyielding challenge. 37% of ICs experience an annual turnover rate of 11-20%, while another 37% experience an annual turnover rate of 21% - 30%.²⁹ Smaller percentages see regular turnover greater than 40%. In surveying IC pastors, we asked them to “describe how high turnover impacts the pastoral staff.” Here are some responses: “it’s tempting not to form meaningful relationships with newcomers since they’ll leave shortly;”³⁰ another said “constantly having to find volunteers is the biggest challenge;”³¹ “it wears on staff and becomes harder to develop teams with trust”³². Another pastor said, “It’s sad investing time in developing relationships and then seeing people move on,”³³ and “compassion fatigue is significant with staff and long-term members”³⁴.

Compassion fatigue, sadness, lack of trust—with a flood of new people every year, the attempt to have room for new relationships, as well as the grief of departing brothers and sisters in Christ—this emotional/relational rollercoaster is a very real issue. While larger churches may

²⁹ Young, David. “IC Pastors Survey.” Survey Monkey. 15 February 2015.

³⁰ Ibid, respondent #3.

³¹ Ibid, respondent # 8.

³² Ibid, respondent # 11.

³³ Ibid, respondent #26.

³⁴ Ibid, respondent #15.

find stability within their own staff and long-term members somewhat mitigating this issue, for small and mid-size churches with high annual turnover, the issue can be especially acute.

Let's reflect on the pastor's calling, and then the church member's mobility. The pastor needs to know that God has called him or her to the IC; the transient nature of the congregation is the calling. This is a bit counter-intuitive; pastoral gifting is to bring sheep into green pastures, draw them together for teaching, community, and service. In indigenous churches this happens over years; it isn't uncommon to see families spend generations in a single church. So the relatively short cycle of gathering and sending out again seems counter-productive. The pastor and staff must own both the gathering into community and the scattering out into mission as their apostolic calling.

ICs are typically in global cities; most members are professionals, expat, and national. These professionals will have very busy careers that include long work hours, travel, and the knowledge that the next assignment is around the corner. With little margin and the next departure looming, building genuine relationships and living in community may seem like an impossible commitment. Yet as we reflect on our triune God we see that loving, other-centered community is intrinsic to His nature and therefore how we are designed. God's scattered people—away from family, away from their culture—desperately need relationships at the heart level. The IC Pastor's survey shows that *Spiritual formation and growth are best facilitated in groups where genuine relationships form and heart-level communication is encouraged.* The transient nature of the congregation might mean limited involvement in such groups and relationships—as short as nine months—but what is gained in that brief engagement is essential to their continue growth and well-being. It is in genuine relationship, however brief, where the issues of compassion fatigue, sadness and trust are turned into growth.

Diversity of doctrine and essentials:

Let's explore a second IC reality—diversity.³⁵ When asked to describe how a *diversity of Christian thought and doctrine* had been a challenge, respondents said: “We range from Reformed to Pentecostal, with differing expressions of gifts, the role of Scripture, different understandings of grace, of women in ministry, etc.”³⁶ “Our biggest challenge and greatest sadness is when very conservatives come and demand changes to make things ‘right’ and then leave”³⁷. Another said, “Probably the biggest challenge is the diversity of doctrine surrounding the charismatic gifts and neo-Pentecostalism...”³⁸ Doctrinal diversity creates a challenging and at times divisive environment, especially for the pastor. As one lead pastor said “It puts a responsibility on me to be sensitive to the doctrinal views and Bible interpretations of others, without compromising my own convictions in preaching, teaching and actions.”³⁹ However, many ICs didn't see this as a concern, having identified their doctrinal essentials and determining to be up front about them, several stressing their core beliefs. For them, the question, “what is core?” has been answered.

Every IC needs clarity on its orthodoxy; for this essay and as an example I've offered the Nicene Creed as our doctrinal foundation in as much as it's Christ centered, Trinitarian and vetted by multiple early church councils. Creeds provide broad statements of belief and allow variations in interpretation within those statements. Likewise, every IC needs to promote either a doctrinal creed (Nicene or Apostles) or its own statement whereby it identifies the essentials of

³⁵ It's worth noting that diversity of ethnicity doesn't tend to be a problem, only a blessing. ICs are primarily English; language might cause some logistical challenges but cultural and ethnic difference are easily embraced by third culture Christians.

³⁶ Young, David. “IC Pastors Survey.” Survey Monkey. 15 February 2015. Respondent #4.

³⁷ Ibid, Respondent # 17.

³⁸ Ibid, Respondent #36.

³⁹ Ibid, Respondent #35.

the faith. Whereas most IC practices are eclectic and broad, trying to be representative of the wide scope of its congregants (ecumenically diverse practices), the doctrinal creed or statement should focus on essentials.

As an example, a benefit of having the essentials orthodoxy clear would be the Great Commandment facilitating and empowering the Great Commission. Our model encourages Trinitarian reflection as the catalyst behind the ICs apostolic purposes. The deliverable from this could be clear and passionate vision for the IC.

Leadership vacuum and service

So far our IC considerations have leaned on the orthopathy and orthodoxy as described in our model; now let's look at a common IC ministry challenge that leans into orthopraxy. One of the greatest challenges in the IC is the leadership vacuum. A personal example can set the context. I started pastoring an IC in northern Bangkok in October of 2006; the pastoral search committee was made up of eight ministry leaders, all but two of whom had moved out of country by June, 2007. Likewise, this church had a governing board of eight deacons; only one continued in country after June, 2007. While leadership turnover is a reality in every church, the annual vacuum in the IC can be shocking.⁴⁰ In indigenous churches, character and leadership qualities can be observed over a number of months, if not years. When asked about identifying leadership, one IC survey respondent said; "if they worship more than 3 Sundays, they look attractive for leadership."⁴¹ IC pastors, staff and ministry leaders are always discerning who can

⁴⁰ It is again worth noting that there is some difference with the larger ICs; while they likewise have a leadership vacuum they also tend to have staff in key ministry positions and may have a larger number of long-term members in positions such as deacon and elder.

⁴¹ Young, David. "IC Pastors Survey." Survey Monkey. 15 February 2015. Respondent #8.

be engaged in leadership, always plugging people in, often after only brief periods of being known and engaged.

As we reflect on the IC's apostolic posture, we understand that it's a community of God's diaspora; its mission embraces gathering in and sending out. Its people aren't rooted as in indigenous churches. The constant openings available in the IC get more people engaged in leadership, and more deeply in their faith than they had experienced in their home country. Consider our Trinitarian praxis: the Son humbled himself in doing His Father's will. The divine family is completely other-centered. Likewise, we have the opportunity to engage more people in humble, other-centered service—it may be the most spiritually formative practice they'll know. The IC leadership vacuum needn't be a liability; it is one of the characteristics that make for a vibrant, dynamic church.

Concluding comments

Like any church, without doctrinal clarity the IC will drift. I've offered the Nicene creed as a doctrinal foundation in the spirit of "majoring on the majors". IC pastors likewise need clarity in their calling; they are more than gifted pastors—they need to embrace their apostolic role too. They've responded to an Acts 1:8 calling and they have an opportunity to facilitate an Acts 1:8 lifestyle in their highly mobile church.

Praxis based on the Trinitarian reflection has rich implications for Christian living and the ICs philosophy of ministry. Specifically, we've seen that intrinsic to our triune God is other-centered service, unlimited adoration, and genuine love or affection: orthopraxy, orthodoxy and orthopathy respectively. An example of an IC that has sorted through this philosophy of ministry like this would be Hanoi International Fellowship.⁴² Their vision statement starts with "*to glorify God among the nations*"; a statement befitting any diverse IC and sourced in Psalm 96:3, Matt 28:19 and Acts 1:8. It continues to state how they will do this: through unified worship (orthodoxy), genuine relationships (orthopathy) and transformational outreach (orthopraxy).

Finally, there may not be any more challenging or exciting calling than that of an IC pastor. The challenges are formidable but, seen through a different lens, theologically tense moments become spiritually formative, ministry vacancies bring vibrancy to the church, and gathering scattered people into genuine community offers a family away from family.

⁴² Jacob Bloomberg, "Hanoi International Fellowship, Welcome," accessed March 30, 2015, <http://www.hif.vn/welcome/>.

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Addendum: Practical Application

The preceding essay offers two unintended benefits. It was my original intention to create a theologically reflective guide by which any IC pastor or leader could think anew about their ministry concerns. But what was also offered is a philosophy of ministry for the IC pastor. It's a philosophy that builds on two doctrinal foundations: God as a triune community of love, and the apostolic nature of the IC—their witness of Jesus to the diaspora. That doctrinal focus can become the DNA of the IC. This clarity could help streamline and shape the IC's ministries of discipleship, mission and community.

Another unintended benefit is a sharper focus on a distinct calling of the IC pastor(s). Certainly ministry vocation is a matter the Spirit's leading and gifting; nothing in this essay argues otherwise. However, the IC pastor should carefully consider not only the two traditional pastoral roles of shepherd (nurture, protect) and teacher (understand and explain), but should also consider catalytic role the apostle (sent one) plays in the IC as one who lives a sent life and inspires the sending of others into new contexts. I don't want to suggest that every IC pastor must have both gifts, but when the apostolic gift is missing, every effort should be made to add such a gifting to the leadership team.

Reflecting on Ephesians 4 (Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Shepherds, and Teachers), Alan Hirsch talks about developing “apostolic imagination and practice”⁴³. This involves seeing the church as a movement, allowing growth in any context, facilitated by creating missional ministry. His apostolic and generative ideology resulting in missional ministry has the potential for taking the conceptual ideas presented in this essay and making them far more tactical. I recommend further research in the third term to attempt a more tactical methodology.

⁴³ Alan Hirsch, “What Is APEST?,” The Forgotten Ways, accessed April 23, 2015, <http://www.theforgottenways.org/what-is-apest.aspx>.

Addendum: Nicene Creed

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

—[Episcopal Church Book of Common Prayer](#) (1979), [The Book of Common Prayer](#). New York:
Church Publishing Incorporated. 2007. pp. 326–327. Retrieved 2013-02-18.