

## “And What Do You Do Here?”

### A Theology of Vocation and Its Missiological Implications

*Mans Ramstad*

**A**fter, “Where are you from?” the most common question I am asked by local people in my country of service is, “And what do you do here?” In sum, my answer is, “I am a Christian working in the field of public health.” This response is honest and invariably leads to open discussion, often on the meaning of the word Christian, or on how things are going in my area of work. I thank God for a vocation in my host country that people can understand, and which gives me easy access to dozens or hundreds of people before whom I am able to live out obedience to Christ, and speak forth the gospel of Christ.

A few years back I spoke at a missions conference about our work as Christian professionals, using our vocation to establish legitimacy in the community, and using it to have natural and easy ministry relationships with dozens of people. After my talk a woman working with her husband as missionaries in a country similar to ours shared that her husband was bored, depressed and misunderstood in his community. Why? He did not have a legitimate vocation. He spent most of his time at his computer, and trying to drum up reasons to connect with people so he could share the gospel with them. She wanted me to share our approach with him, which I did. To my chagrin, he was not interested.

It is high time that we revisit the issue of what role the missionary is to

play in their work, to wit, what their vocation is. Few of the countries in need of the gospel today extend missionary visas, so an occupation is required to obtain a legal visa to reside in the country. This requires that a person be qualified and able to do that occupation well, and in such a way as to accomplish the mission objectives. In this essay I will attempt to define vocation from within a ministry perspective, and explain the missiological implications of that definition. Although it has implications for how to view vocation and secular employment in one's home country, I will not be addressing that issue. Furthermore, I want to make clear that while I affirm the essentiality of the role of pastor/teacher in the Body of Christ, and in missions, and I consider the pastor/teacher to be

a vocation as well, in this paper I will be focusing on the public vocation the cross-cultural missionary fills and not those who are assigned to full-time church-based ministry.

**We are called to assume a vocation in our host country that is an avenue through which to live out obedience to the gospel, and build the church of Jesus Christ.**

According to Merriam Webster,<sup>1</sup> vocation means: 1a : a summons or strong inclination to a particular state or course of action; *especially* : a divine call to the religious life b : an entry into the priesthood or a religious order. 2a : the work in which a person is employed : occupation b : the persons engaged in a particular occupation. The word comes from the Latin roots *vocatio* which means a summons, or *vocare* to call. It was first known in the 15th century and referred to a “spiritual calling.” So the modern notion of a vocation as a means to earn enough money to support one's livelihood is not its original meaning.

Our vocation as Christians is that work to which we believe God has called us, and is daily calling us, to use as a means to contribute to those around us, and as a means to profess one's commitment and moral convictions.<sup>2</sup> Our primary calling as Christians is to salvation and obedience to the gospel.<sup>3</sup> The core of our mission calling is to proclaim the gospel, make disciples, teach the Scriptures and form healthy churches. The role we play to accomplish that, namely our vocation, is negotiable. What is non-negotiable is that it is a legal, legitimate, value-conferring, gospel-ex-

alting position that you are qualified to perform, and which can be used for mission purposes.

**We are a good model to those we are trying to reach if we are not perceived by them to be idle, dependent or unemployed. In fact, most of the church workers in our host countries will themselves be bi-vocational ministers.**

In Scripture the word vocation is used in reference to Samson, where his father Manoah asks the angel of the Lord, "Now when your words come to pass, what shall be the boy's mode of life and his vocation?" (Judges 13:12, NASB) 4 The same root word is elsewhere translated "calling." 5 Scripture also helps us see that any vocation can be in service to God, and that the Holy Spirit is needed to do even the most secular-appearing work. For example, God filled Bezalel with the Spirit of God to do metal work (Ex. 31:1-6). In Acts 6:1-4 people were needed to wait on tables, and only people filled with the Holy Spirit were sought. Does that mean only such people can wait on tables? Of course not. But only such people can wait on tables in a way which is

a true God-given vocation, and useful for building up the body of Christ! Furthermore, these persons who accepted their calling to wait on tables thus allowed the apostles gifted in Bible teaching to be released from waiting tables to be free for just that purpose.

In Zech. 4:6 Zerubabul was building the temple. God reminded him, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts." Only the spirit of God could accomplish the will of God, even with regard to construction work.

By working within the local medical system in the country in which we serve, we find ourselves able to model best practices and integrity. It also allows for a natural Christian witness within those professional contexts (I Pet 2:12-17). A work in infectious disease control was started with the local department responsible for this. During this time we discovered that one of the young men in the department was a young believer. However, his previous training had taught him that his line of work (medicine) was unspiritual unless he used it to evan-

gelize patients and colleagues. He felt quite uncomfortable in his role, and when we met he was not satisfied either with his work performance or the nature of his spiritual life in that context. Through working together, he has learned to integrate witness into his work, and has become a model employee and a winsome witness for Christ there. He has come to see his medical work as a vocation, as a calling from God.

Martin Luther was the key theologian to reclaim the sense of vocation and the calling of all believers to use their vocation for the "spiritual welfare of the community." He wrote:

There is really no difference between laymen and priests, princes and bishops, "spirituals" and "temporals," as they call them, except that of office and work... A cobbler, a smith, a farmer, each has the office of his trade, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops, and everyone by means of his own work or office must benefit and serve every other, that in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community, even as all the members of the body serve one another. 6

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In our commitment to wholistic community development, we take seriously the challenge to participate fully in the society that we hope to serve, not as arms-length experts. Jeremiah 29 is a picture of the people of Israel living in bondage in Babylon. Paraphrasing, God's word to them was, "You are going to be here a while, settle down, build houses, plant gardens, raise your families and seek for the welfare of the city where you have been sent. In fact, pray for the city and her people, for as they are blessed, so are you." (Jer. 29: 4-14, 28)

In the New Testament Paul has words for believers in Thessalonica who had become what he calls the "disruptive-idle" (I Thess. 4:9-12, II Thess. 3:7-10).<sup>7</sup> This warning to work, so as not to be a burden is repeated in Titus 3:14. Paul goes on to say specifically, "For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you." (I Thess. 3:7a) They had been taught how to live in the church and the world, but they weren't doing it. Even though Paul had a right to their support, he didn't use it, instead he became their model by exercising his other right, which was to work with his own hands (I Thess. 4:11-12, II Thess. 3:8-9).

**As we move into a cross-cultural setting to carry out our vocation we will be living in complex cross-cultural settings, but we can trust that God is the one who sends us into that world, and He will accomplish His good purposes through us.**

In Scripture we are warned to not love the world or the things of the world (I John 2:15-17). In this sense, "the world," serves as short-hand for the sin and its influence which has taken over the world in such a way that it is to be avoided. We are to beware not to become "of the world," or comfortable with its lustful, sinful or prideful ways.

But assuming a professional vocation in society will thrust one into the world. Furthermore, Scripture calls us to be "in the world," as witness and

contributor. In John 17:15-23 Jesus spoke at length about "the world." Although He reminded us that the world hates us, he also reiterated His prayer for us, "not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one." And He went on, "Sanctify them by the truth." Therefore we are to be in the world and can rest assured of God's protection in that world. But we also need God's daily and continual sanctification in order to be able to stand strong in the world and not be consumed by it. Additionally, Christ admonished us, "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world." So the Father's sending of the Son into the world is the model for our being sent into the world.

Many Christians have been trained to identify the line in the sand that

17).<sup>8</sup> Our ability to minister the gospel is related to these officials, so we should pray for them and strive for their salvation (I Tim 2:1-4). The way we relate to local governing authorities is a reflection of our love for the Lord.

Abraham Kuyper advocated a concept he called "sphere sovereignty,"<sup>9</sup> where each sphere in society has its own sovereignty, and there is an independent set of rules in each sphere. Understood properly, Jesus Christ is sovereign Lord over all the spheres,<sup>10</sup> and calls us to transform the sphere we are called to from within. So when we operate in that sphere as Christians, for example in schools, hospitals, or public places, we need to find ways to explain and defend the principles of the kingdom using the rules and even the jargon of that sphere.<sup>11</sup> This

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## MANY CHRISTIANS HAVE BEEN TRAINED

**to identify the line in the sand** that separates Christians from "the world."

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separates Christians from "the world." While this warning is important, as mentioned above, it can also be used as an excuse to condemn the world, and neglect witnessing to that world in need of Christ. In fact, the Apostle Paul pointed out to the Corinthian believers that they had it upside down. They had been overly tolerant of sinful behavior within the church, and overly condemning of sin outside the church (I Cor. 5:9-13). He warned to not even associate with hypocritical sinners inside the church, and then he warned against judging unbelievers and the world. Our witnessing to them does not include condemnation of them.

The world also includes governing authorities and how we relate to them. So we should honor the governing authorities in our host country (Romans 13), we should be above reproach in our vocation so that our behavior will silence fools and naysayers (I Pet 2:13-

is how we can be both excellent members of that sphere (known for our excellence), and also be fruitful evangelists in that sphere, where we are operating by shared rules, but winning the day by the persuasiveness of our arguments and our integrity. In fact, this is the point of Augustine, who acknowledges that we are residents of both cities, the city of God and the city of Man, and we live on earth as pilgrims and aliens in both.<sup>12</sup>

Not all agree with this approach, citing the disaster Nazi Germany was to the credibility of the church. Nazi understanding of the "two spheres" taught that we are one person on a personal level (free to believe what you want), but as a member of the state, we must have a different system of ethics, values and morality. In response to this, the Barmen Declaration of the Confessing Church proclaimed: "We reject the false doctrine that there could

be areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ but to other lords, areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him.”<sup>13</sup>

I am very sensitive to this concern, and I frequently see attempts by the government of my host country to ask the same bifurcated existence of Christians in their own country. But we must reject this political expectation that our faith be personal, and that in public we subject our faith to social or political correctness. What I am arguing for is not living a divided life with two sovereign lords, but living one life, wholly consecrated to the Lord Jesus Christ, but respecting the rules of the sphere to which God has called you, in such a way that your light can best shine, and the gospel most legitimately be proclaimed from within that sphere.

**Cross-cultural evangelism requires Spirit-led application of biblical wisdom whereby we are legitimate participants in the community we intend**

Indeed, all we hold dear should be seen as “but rubbish for the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord,” (Phil. 3:8), but at the same time we are to “be all things for all men, that we might by all means save some” (I Cor. 9:22-23). So we lay down our vocation *for the sake of the gospel*, but we also take it up again *for the sake of the gospel* (v. 23). So the challenge is not whether to perform our professional role or not, but to obey our Lord Jesus Christ, willing to lay it down or to take it up, for the gospel.

Some Christians only seem familiar with certain programmatic ways of “doing ministry,” and have little thought about what the Lordship of Christ over their work really means. They struggle to bring the Truth into their work, except to “snatch” souls from among their colleagues. The Apostle Paul used a beautiful picture when he wrote that the way we do our work “adorns” the doctrine of God (Titus 2:9-10), increasing or decreas-

only through the wonders of medical treatment that the message of the Church’s teachings could reach the people, and on the other hand it was only through the respectability of religious affiliation that the medical missionaries could bring credit to the medical profession.<sup>15</sup>

In Asia, Christianity is a minority faith, and its relationship to society is colored by this fact. As Tan has written, “Church in Asia is truly a little flock, an infinitesimal minority in an ocean of people who profess other religious faiths or belong to other religious traditions.”<sup>16</sup> He goes on, “The proclamation of Jesus Christ in Asia means, first of all, the witness of Christians and of Christian communities to the values of the kingdom of God, *a proclamation through Christ-like deeds.*”<sup>17</sup> Therefore witness in Asia must involve an open and participatory role in the community through practical acts of faith and witness.<sup>18</sup>

How are we to function in the world, for it often feels painful straddling the gap that separates us from them? How does our vocation presence, i.e. work, in public have a kingdom influence? There are three significant ways in which the church shares its values in the public sphere: (1) in a *visionary way* by communicating and embodying larger pictures of human value, human nature and human destiny; (2) in a *normative way* by establishing a whole range of social, legal and political norms which reflect the values of the kingdom of God;<sup>19</sup> and (3) in an *evangelistic way* by proclaiming the saving gospel of Jesus Christ to those in one’s sphere of influence. To have this kind of influence takes years. Long-term missionaries are still needed. Furthermore, all people in all cultures “work” and this work provides a recognizable and common point at which to engage with these cultures.

We are a team, and a ministry team needs all the gifts of the Body to accomplish the mission of Jesus Christ.

There are many ways our vocation impacts on individuals and society. Those we serve are impacted for Christ. Mr. Nai first appeared in the

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## **CROSS-CULTURAL EVANGELISM** requires Spirit-led application

of biblical wisdom whereby we are legitimate participants in the community we intend to reach, and yet are living holy fragrant lives, in such a way that we effectively witness to it.

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**to reach, and yet are living holy and fragrant lives (II Cor. 2:15), in such a way that we effectively witness to it.**

Although the world of missions has changed radically, it is my experience that the majority of people who are sent out by mission organizations consider their vocation as ‘but rubbish for the gospel,’ and are neither trained nor are personally prepared to use that vocation in a way as to witness for Christ in that sphere. Rather, they are expecting to function as if within a wholly Christian setting, seeking to reach the world for Christ by arranging church-type programs for them. Or at a minimum, they carry out their professional role reluctantly, seeing it as a mere platform from which to share the gospel.

ing the attractiveness of the gospel we profess before unbelievers. But in order for this to happen, those around us must know we are Christians, so we do not consider secret Christian faith appropriate in most global contexts today (I Pet 2:12-17).<sup>14</sup>

Doing this is not easy, but it never has been. The earliest medical missionaries to China in the 1830s, led by Peter Parker, struggled with how to apply their vocation in medicine in a way that supported the work of the mission, but they were still sorely misunderstood. Here is how their dilemma was described:

The medical missionaries, while caught in the middle, were indispensable to both. It was

clinic with an ill daughter. During the long course of his daughter's treatment, he was invited to participate in an economic development training session. During these interactions he was able to hear and see the gospel demonstrated to him in many ways, impacting several facets of his life. He accepted the gospel and has become a faithful servant of Christ. He has also improved his livelihood as a farmer-entrepreneur and is a witness in his community. This started with a simple clinical encounter, which shows that this approach to ministry values the whole person—he is not just a box to be ticked or a soul to be won. Mission work done this way is a powerful means to demonstrate and thus carry full shalom to people in need of the gospel.

Those we work alongside in our professional context are also influenced for Christ. Ms. Qin came to Christ while working with us as a student intern:

During my third year of university I came to know them, joining their student internship program. During my internship I gained a lot of skills and added to my knowledge, but the most important thing was I was able to come to know God. Even though they have high levels of education, and skill – both the expatriates and the local staff – but they showed me humility and acceptance, and never looked down on me as a young person. They valued by opinions and invested a lot of training in me. This experience was very different from my experience as a medical intern in the local hospital. Their values and the love they showed to people were deeply attractive to me.

Does pursuing our professional work, or vocation, serve as a legitimate avenue through which to do the work of missions, and even open new opportunities, or is it an obstacle? Some would argue that we proclaim the gospel and teach the word and not worry about how we relate to the local people or what our role is. I would argue that pursuing vocation as taught here both opens up new opportunities for the gospel and creates ideal cross-cultural ministry. This approach assumes the Word of God is faithfully taught as we go along, and many of those most gift-

ed in this area will be the same persons who are filling a professional role in the community. We do well to model the Apostle Paul who saw himself as “a servant of Christ, and a steward of the mysteries of the gospel” (I Cor. 4:1-2), but often did this by assuming a vocational role in the community.

There remains a need for full-time “apostolic missionaries” whose full-time role is preaching and teaching. But in the post-Christian western world, and in countries that do not issue religious worker visas, and do not understand our religious behaviors or culture, we need to consider the value of Paul's rejoinder to “remain in that manner in which you were called” (1 Corinthians 7:17-24). We should seek to use our vocation and our skills as a way to glorify God in the world and to extend His kingdom to the ends of the earth.

## Conclusion

From my experience serving God in a creative access setting beginning in 1985, awareness among missionaries of the need to come with professional skills that are a legitimate means to live in the society and minister through one's vocation has grown. But few of the people coming in have professional skills that they intend to use, and fewer still are prepared to actually use them well. So it is obvious that our missions training is coming up short in this regard. Much of what we have accomplished in helping a new generation of missionaries learn how to get to creative access countries has been lost on the fact that they have not been trained to actually do it once they get there.

Increasingly, we are able to live as Christians in countries in need of the gospel because of the vocational skills we bring. For those who are prepared to do so, this vocation can be an avenue through which to live out obedience to the gospel, and build the church of Jesus Christ. Although these diverse professional settings present their own challenges, God is with us,

and ready to use our sacrifice and our humility to glorify His Son and exalt the gospel. Ideally, we serve as a team of people committed to a common purpose, so all the gifts are at work and bearing fruit. Finally, since most of the church workers in our host countries will themselves be bi-vocational ministers, our public vocation can be a good model for them. May God continue to unleash His people and build His church around the world through the unique and essential role of cross-cultural workers serving effectively in concert with their vocation.

## Endnotes

1. [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vocation](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vocation), accessed on April 20, 2011.
2. Stevens, R. P. (1999). *The Other Six Days*. Vancouver: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. Veith, G. E., Jr. (2002). *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books.
3. I am not here advocating for a notion of call that implies a once-for-all divine appointment to a certain role. My notion of call is a Spirit-led inclination to a certain role that is affirmed by others in the Body and results in fruit being bore. It is not something we are driven into begrudgingly, but something which we are inclined toward. We are given freedom to use our God-given wisdom to make this choice, and then to humbly carry it out. While we are all called to “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Timothy 4:5) and to teach disciples to obey all that Jesus Christ has commanded (Matt. 28:20), there is a specific spiritual gifting for the evangelist, the pastor and the teacher, and a special role for those persons so gifted and trained. So while all Christians are called to teach and preach Christ, some specialize in it and are devoted to it. See Guinness, Os. (1998). *The Call*. Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers.
4. All Scripture references are from the NASB.
5. In the Septuagint and Greek NT vocare and all its summoning/calling derivatives appear frequently.
6. Luther, M. (1960). *An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility, in Three Treatises*. Philadelphia: Fortress, p. 14-17.
7. Fee, G. D. (2009). *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, p. 329.
8. One reviewer pointed out the complexity of how we relate to governing authorities, citing Acts 4:19 as a Scriptural example of how God's authority trumps human authority.

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# The Facilitator Era: Beyond Pioneer Church Multiplication

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Reviewed by Ed Smither

## Author

**A***The Facilitator Era* is the latest work from well-known missiologist Tom Steffen. Presently, Steffen is professor of intercultural studies at Biola University and directs the Doctor of Missiology program at Biola's Cook School of Intercultural Studies. Prior to assuming his present role, Steffen served with New Tribes Mission as a church planter among the Ifugao people of the Philippines for fifteen years, after which he consulted the mission in church planting for another five years. His previous books include *Passing the Baton: Church Planting that Empowers* (1997), *Great Commission Companies: The Emerging Role of Business in Missions* (with Steve Rundle, 2003), *Reconnecting God's Story to Ministry: Crosscultural Storytelling at Home and Abroad* (2005), *Business as Mission* (with Mike Barnett, 2006), and *Encountering Missionary Life and Work* (with Lois McKinney Douglas, 2008). Steffen has also contributed numerous other articles to missiology journals, particularly in the area of church planting and orality.

## Overview of the Book

True to his own convictions, Steffen masterfully frames the arguments in this book around an engaging story. In nine weekly encounters, intercultural studies professor Dr. C.P. Nobley meets with his former students, Bill and Bev Beaver, who are on furlough after two years of service in the Philippines. Questioning their role as international transcultural workers, they approach Dr. Nobley who helps them (and the audience) reflect critically on a new paradigm and period of missions—the fa-

Facilitator era. Referring back to Ralph Winter's three eras of mission history—the coastlands (led by William Carey), the inlands (led by Hudson Taylor), and unreached peoples (led by Cameron Townsend and Donald McGavran)—Steffen, via this story, proposes that the most useful role for missionaries today is to help facilitate the pioneer church planting ministries of national believers.

In part 1, the first seven weeks of the encounter, Steffen:

- surveys the church planting literature (pp. 7-23)
- discusses the history of missions, Winters' three eras, and mission models (pp. 24-41)
- works to define key mission terms, including church planting, church growth, healthy churches, and church multiplication (pp. 42-59)
- seeks to define the profile of a facilitator (pp. 60-73)
- discusses the phenomena of the megachurch and short-term missions from North America (pp. 74-99)
- probes into the issues of missions and money, and tentmaking and Business as Mission paradigms (pp. 100-120)
- shows the essential role of storying the Gospel for oral learners (pp. 121-51).

It is not surprising that Steffen would devote such space to church multiplication, Business as Mission, and orality as the author has already shown in other works that these are his passions in missiological study.

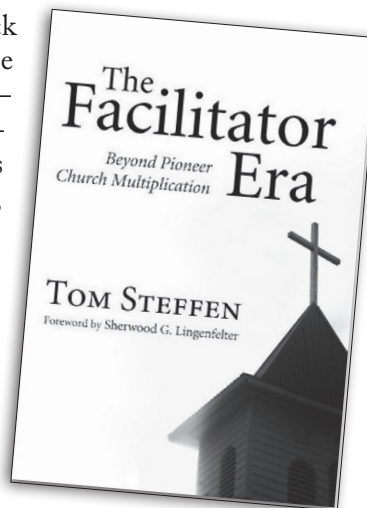
In part 2 (pp. 155-327), Steffen endeavors to support his thesis by examining sixteen case studies that show the facilitator model at work. As the Beavers nicely report to Dr. Nobley in their

eight meeting (pp. 331-39), the case studies dealt with issues such as partnership in the Amazon (case study 1) and in Latin America in general (2); training in Brazil (3) and

China (5); church planting in Japan (4), Southeast Asia (6), Papua New Guinea (9), Poland (10) and Russia (11); and evangelism in Sudan (7). Other case studies addressed community transformation in Uganda (8), developing a Bible and church planting training institute in the Philippines and Russia (12), Busi-

ness as Mission in Russia (13), short-term missions in Peru (14), English youth camps in Ukraine (15), and Bible translation in Southeast Asia (16). While the eighth meeting reflects upon and summarizes what was learned from the case studies (pp. 331-50), in the ninth and final meeting, Steffen has Dr. Nobley make the case for the validity of missionaries continuing to serve as pioneer church planters (pp. 351-72). In week 10, through the Beavers alone, the author offers a final synthesis of the book's arguments.

How does it relate to other works? As Steffen's book covers a number of themes, there are several recent books to which it relates, including Steffen's own *Passing the Baton*, *Great Commission Companies*, *Business as Mission*, and *Reconnecting God's Story to Ministry*. In one sense, the overview chapters of part 1 could be considered a "best of Steffen" compilation. In addition, Steffen's chapter on short-term mission certainly relates to Robert Priest's (ed.) *Effective Engagement in Short-Term Missions* (2008). Finally, as a book on twenty-first century mission trends, Steffen's work also finds affinity with Andrew Walls and Cathy Ross' *Mission in the 21st Century* (2008) and Stan Guthrie's *Missions in the Third Millennium* (2000).



## Strengths

Among the book's many strengths, I was first impressed with Steffen's style. Through setting up the non-case study chapters as dialogues between Dr. Nobley and the Beavers, the approach was engaging and invited the reader to keep reading. Personally, I was so into the book that I passed up three movies on a flight from the U.S. to Eastern Europe! I loved the necessary presence of coffee in each encounter and the hospitality displayed through Dr. Nobley's homemade cookies. Bev's continually twisted ponytail was a prop that depicts the curiosity of many students. Dr. Nobley's whiteboard lists not only helped to frame and summarize discussions, they will also serve as useful tools for other mission educators. Through the dialogues, Steffen also managed to embed a significant bibliography and list of content rich and relevant web sites.

Mission professors will connect easily with this narrative because we have all had these discussions to some extent. Through his story, Steffen succeeds in offering a learner-centered model for ongoing missiological education that treats some of the major issues in current missiology while making the case for the facilitator paradigm. Indeed, if Dr. Nobley were having these discussions in the Beaver's field context, we might regard him as a facilitating missions educator.

Second, the facilitator model is certainly a worthy paradigm for global missions today. Steffen helpfully takes into consideration the history of missions and how the paradigms of the first three eras bleed into this fourth period. North Americans and Westerners are invited to learn from our mistakes and take a "back-burner" posture and adopt the role of a ministry coach. In contrast to earlier paradigms in which missionaries spent forty years laboring in another context, this model celebrates short-cycle church planting (and therefore shorter missionary careers) and church multiplication. Indeed, the facilitator model counters dependency and empowers national Christians.

Third, the sixteen case study chapters alone were worth the price of the book. While showing the real difficulties and messiness of global missions, they certainly gave credence to Steffen's thesis and revealed how the facilitator model is wrestled with and worked out on the field in the context of ministries such as evangelism, church planting, training, partnership, BAM, youth ministry, and Bible translation. While the individual case study chapters provided helpful reflection, the concluding debrief chapters with Dr. Nobley and the Beavers firmly supported the maxim that missiology needs mission and mission needs missiology.

## Critiques

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**WHILE THE INDIVIDUAL case study chapters provided helpful reflection,** the concluding debrief chapter with Dr. Nobley and the Beavers firmly supported the maxim that missiology needs mission and mission needs missiology.

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As I offer some critiques of Steffen's work, let me begin by quoting Dr. Nobley: "Anything I say that may sound like criticism is not meant to condemn, but rather to challenge, to bring clarity, and to be constructive" (p. 85). In this spirit, let me first remark that it seems like Steffen struggles to define adequately the facilitator paradigm, especially with regard to the facilitator's commitment to learning culture and language. To be sure, in the week 4 dialogue ("what's in a profile"), he asserts that facilitators can be permanent or semi-permanent workers or those that parachute in (p. 63). In distinguishing between pioneer church planters and facilitators, he also suggests that facilitators may not need to acquire linguistic and cultural proficiency in order to minister effectively (pp. 61-66). In case study 5, Monnie Brewer fits this profile as he trains Chinese church planters via translation during a short-term trip (pp. 196-206). On the other hand, Don Finley (case study 3), a long-term

worker in Brazil with fluency in Portuguese, labors to train Brazilians for Muslim ministry (pp. 173-85). In case study 10, the short-cycle church planting team in Poland lamented over not having all of their team engage in rigorous cultural and language learning (p. 248), while case 12 seems to celebrate the importance of being a cultural insider (pp. 282-83). Finally, in case study 13, Dianne Thomas warns, "I would like to sound the warning bell and strongly suggest that missionaries and the agencies they represent do more study and investigation of the host culture in all of our cross-cultural ministry ventures" (p. 295). In the very least, the facilitator profile is quite varied.

While Steffen's goal may not be to definitively nail down a working definition for a facilitator, he has nevertheless presented this as a new paradigm for a new era in missions. After reading Dr. Nobley's descriptions in the week 4 discussions and following the case studies throughout the book, I perceive that the facilitator notion is actually more of a spirit, attitude, or perspective on mission work than a complete paradigm. This posture—that of a coach or consultant—could be held by a short-term mission leader or a pioneer church planter who labors to pass the baton to national leaders.

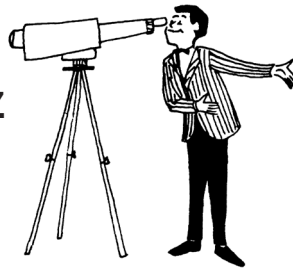
Second, I struggle to follow Steffen's logic that Rick Warren is the best model for the facilitator era (pp. 30-36). Warren's accomplishments as planting pastor of Saddleback Church and initiator of the PEACE plan are carefully noted (and certainly appreciate by) this reader; however, it is not fully clear why this North American megachurch pastor models best this new trend in

global missions. Why not Luis Bush—initiator of COMIBAM, AD 2000, and TransformWorld? Why not John Piper—another megachurch pastor, missionary theologian, sender, and advocate? Why not an unknown leader from the majority world where spontaneous mission movements are developing? Why should there be any face on this era of missions at all? I would concur with one majority world mission leader who, in a recent consultation on diaspora missions, declared that “there is no one leader in this global movement.”

Third, and related, Steffen’s book still appears largely focused on the North American church, which again, is a disappointment in the present era where majority world and diaspora missions movements are developing and even serving as models for the global church. Steffen’s case studies, while very insightful, fail to account for the facilitating activities of non-Western intercultural workers. Perhaps Steffen is suggesting that the facilitator paradigm should be largely pursued by North Americans. However, as I reflect on this, I am immediately reminded of two Latin American workers—one serving as a mobilizer and the other a missionary in the Middle East—who strongly demonstrate facilitator tendencies. It would have been good to hear more of these voices. In light of this third concern, I failed to see the relevance of the week 5 dialogue (pp. 74-99) and the attention given to the megachurch and short-term missions phenomena from North America. Are these foundational for the facilitator era?

In summary, though my appreciation for Professor Steffen and this work are clear, I did not find the work to be as groundbreaking as I had hoped. Indeed, he argues that the facilitator era builds naturally off of the previous eras. However, his discussions on church multiplication, the megachurch, BAM, and orality among others were largely summaries of existing (albeit excellent) work. As noted, while the case studies were helpful, they could have incorporated a broader element of the glob-

## As seen through the LENZ



This is the era when Business As Mission (BAM) is playing a major role in getting out the Gospel to restricted areas of the world. But what about a theology of vocation in relation to BAM? What are the motivating factors that should accompany this or any Christian ministry? I have asked Mans Ramstad to write an article that

al church. While one may argue that he has worked within the scope of his expertise, students, and contacts, the author has still made a rather bold claim that the facilitator model is indicative of a new era in missions.

### Conclusion

My “constructive, challenging, clarifying” critiques aside, my hope is that this work will be a catalyst for further reflection for the global church, especially as we continue to discuss pioneer church planting movements among the least reached. This book should definitely be read by professors of mission and practitioners from North America who, like the Beavers, are continually re-evaluating the role of the international missionary. Perhaps the book could be assigned in an advanced church planting seminar in a seminary missiology program; however, the book’s cost (\$46) is somewhat prohibitive.

*Ed Smither currently serves as Associate Professor of Intercultural Studies and Church History at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary and Liberty University. Ed holds doctorates in historical theology (University of Wales) and missiology (University of Pretoria) and his books include Augustine as Mentor: A Model for Preparing Spiritual Leaders and Early Christianity in North Africa (translation of François Decret). Ed spent fourteen years in intercultural ministry, ten of which were in France and North Africa. ■*

would give us foundational insights that should preface our calling into the Lord’s work. As you will note from his approach, Mans has had to think seriously about his calling into a non-church planter vocation, and he has done this very effectively to help God’s servants think through their preparation for ministry. These practical principles set forth should be included in every seminary course dealing with God’s calling.

We are also privileged to have Ed Smithers from Liberty University give a good review of Tom Stiffens new book *The Facilitator Era*, dealing with several key issues on the missions scene. Thanks Ed for taking the time to give us an overview of Tom’s work.

### Continued from page 5

9. Heslam, P. S. (1998). *Creating A Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper’s Lectures on Calvinism*. Michigan: The Paternoster Press.

10. As Kuyper said, “There is not one square inch of the universe over which Christ does not proclaim, ‘Mine’.”

11. What Niebuhr called “middle level axioms.” See Niebuhr, Reinhold, (1932). *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons.

12. Augustine, A. (1878). *The City of God*. Edinburgh: T and T Clark.

13. Hockenos, M. D. (2004). *A church divided: German Protestants confront the Nazi past*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, p.23.

14. Strauss, S. (2005). “Kingdom Living: The Gospel on Our Lips and in Our Lives.” *EMQ*, 41(1):58-63.

15. Young, T. K.-h. (1973). “A conflict of professions: The medical missionary in China, 1835-1890.” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 47(3): 272.

16. Tan, J. Y.-K. (2005). “A New Way of Being Church in Asia.” *Missiology*, 33(1):75.

17. Ibid, p. 82.

18. Ling, S. (1986). “The Gospel and Chinese society.” *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 10(2), 147-152. Ng, K.-w. (1996). From *Christ to Social Practice: Christological Foundations for Social Practice in the Theologies of Albrecht Ritschl, Karl Barth and Jurgen Moltmann*. Hong Kong: Alliance Bible Seminary.

19. Simons, R. G. (1995). *Competing Gospels: Public Theology and Economic Theory*. Alexandria: E J Dwyer.

*Mans Ramstad [pseudonym] has worked as a Christian professional in a creative access country for nearly 20 years. ■*



## Greetings to EMS membership,

May I inform you of several important matters related to EMS?

**First, concerning the proposed amendment to the EMS constitution,** in anticipation of elections at the Annual General Meeting.

The Executive Committee of EMS would like to bring your attention to the impending problem we will face in the September EMS election. Due to various factors, we need to revise "Article VII, Section 1 – Time of Elections" by clarifying the phrase "no more than half" with reference to the combined totals of Regional VPs + National VPs. We have a significant turn-over due to a combination of various factors, e.g. officers not being able to serve the full term.

The full EMS body must vote on this change and pass this amendment BEFORE the elections at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) in September, so there will be no question of violating the constitution. We are hereby publishing this proposed change (in all caps below) at least 30 days prior to the AGM, through the EMS website, the Occasional Bulletin, and by personal e-mail to each member.

### Proposed Constitutional change

Article VII – Elections

Article VII, Section 1 – Time of Elections

Officers of the Society shall serve a term of three years. They shall be chosen in a general election at the national meeting, which marks the beginning and ending of such terms. To provide continuity, the President and the Executive Vice Presidents shall be elected in different years.

Likewise, not more than half of the COMBINED NUMBER OF THE National Vice Presidents AND/OR Regional Vice Presidents shall be elected in the same year.

**Second, the following is a report from the EMS Nominating Committee:**

According to the EMS Constitution:

"A Nominating Committee of three EMS regular members shall be appointed by the Executive Committee in the year prior to each national meeting. Nominations from the Nominating Committee shall be presented to the membership at least one month prior to the national meeting in the year in which the elections will take place. Nominations shall also be taken from the floor at the time of the elections. The assent of potential nominees for an office must be obtained before their names are placed in nomination and presented to the Society membership."

On behalf of the Nominating Committee, the following individuals have agreed to allow their names to be submitted as nominees for the following positions:

Enoch Wan, President

Mike Barnett, Vice President for Publications.

John Wang, Vice President for Northeast Region

Bob Priest, Vice President for North Central Region

Mark Naylor, Vice President for Canada

Dale Wolyniak, Vice President for Rocky Mountain Region

While a potential candidate is considering being nominated as the Vice President for the South Central Region, at the time of this writing, the name has not been confirmed.

Respectfully submitted,

2011 Nomination Committee: J. D. Payne, Elizabeth Lightbody, Geoff Hartt Mike Pocock, Tim Stabell

Finally, registration for the Sept. 29 - Oct. 1, 2011 Annual EMS meeting in Scottsdale, AZ is still open. We are meeting as part of the North American Mission Leaders Conference, Reset: Mission in the Context of Deep Change. Register here. EMS will focus on an important sub-theme of deep change, Urbanization: Mission in the Context of the City with workshops throughout the conference. Remember, you will save an additional \$75 on your registration fee by staying at the Doubletree Paradise Valley Resort. You will need to reserve your room separately from your conference registration. Be sure you use the hotel link from the conference web site, where the discounted rate of \$99 per night (single or double occupancy) will automatically be applied.

See you all there and then.

Enoch Wan, President, EMS (on behalf of the EMS Executive Committee)