

Contextualizing Peacebuilding

Ambassadors of Peace and Reconciliation:

Towards a Praxis of Integral Mission in the Local Church

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Author Note

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Abstract

The mission of God requires both the demonstration and the proclamation of the Good News of the Kingdom. Mission requires a vehicle or vessel through whom demonstration and proclamation of God's mission can be seen and heard. Mission needs a people called, formed, and surrendered to the Lord of mission. In this paper we will explore Biblical mission as an unbroken whole of proclamation and demonstration of the Good News of Jesus and the Kingdom of God. Biblical mission is not only interested in saving souls but brings God's intended abundant life into the world as a foretaste of what is to come. This paper will argue God is uniquely concerned for and seeking to redeem all localities and peoples with their distinctive beauty and brokenness. God is at work to bring the shalom of his Good News Kingdom into redemptive and transforming reality. And, furthermore, the primary agent of God's integral mission everywhere is the *ekklesia* that takes its locality, context, space and place seriously. The

local *ekklesia* – whom God has called to Himself through faith in Jesus Christ and sent as Jesus is sent – takes responsibility for their locality through the ambassadorial ministry of reconciliation that has been gifted to it. The local church is set apart by God to be the local ambassadorial agents of God’s plan to reconcile all things to Himself in Christ. And, finally, this paper will present practical and challenging ways in which every local church, a community consisting of those reconciled to God who are now ambassadors of peace and reconciliation, must in their way of life as a community and in their planting of new churches embody the ministry of reconciliation giving to the church by God.

Keywords: peace, reconciliation, integral mission, local church, localization, incarnation

A Local Church Story: Peace or Mission?

I was called to provide transitional leadership to a once thriving congregation in western Canada that was struggling to find its way. Disunities around vision, theological conviction and generational gaps were showing up in presenting conflicts over music, building use, the dwindling of programmatic vitality and expressions of prayer. Church leadership was genuinely and painfully seeking a way through the maze, recognizing that the fellowship’s literal survival hung in the balance.

Part way through a congregational meeting during this challenging season, a gentleman courageously exposed the proverbial “elephant in the room,” pointing out the fellowship’s historic inability to work through conflict and act passive aggressively and divisively. The sobering silence that followed was broken when a godly sister said, “We are in a neighbourhood surrounded by broken families and great need. We need to run some programs to reach into the neighbourhood.” The holy tension between the two statements could not have been more

palpable. On the one hand there was the very real and present challenge to be a people of unity, love and forgiveness as followers of the Way. And, on the other hand, the very real and present Spirit-sourced desire to be salt and light in the neighbourhood as disciples commissioned to make disciples. Which of these is the mission of the church? Which emphasis should this local church choose?

The holy tension was itself the opportunity, and I called the fellowship's attention to it. "If the people of God do not have the courage or capacity to be reconciled with one another, what will we bring people into from our community who already experience brokenness and conflict? If we do not live the Good News how will the Good News we proclaim be experienced?" Again, a sobering silence filled the room.

Despite the abrupt challenge, these polite Canadians began a journey of wholeness that produced good and holy fruit of renewed unity and neighbourhood ministry in the months that followed.

Understanding Integral Mission

The mission of God requires both the demonstration and the proclamation of the Good News of the Kingdom. Mission requires a conduit through whom demonstration and proclamation of God's mission can be experienced. Mission needs a people formed by and surrendered to the Lord of mission. As Christopher Wright says, "Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission—God's mission" (Wright, 2006, p.62). The Micah Global Declaration on Integral Mission declares,

Integral mission or holistic transformation is the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission our proclamation has social consequences as we

call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. If we ignore the world we betray the word of God, which sends us out to serve the world. If we ignore the word of God we have nothing to bring to the world. Justice and justification by faith, worship and political action, the spiritual and the material, personal change and structural change belong together. As in the life of Jesus, being, doing and saying are at the heart of our integral task (Micah Network Declaration on Integral Mission, 2001, p.1-2).

Mission must be an integral whole and the local church is uniquely designed and called to be the embodiment and witness of this wholeness. The Church has been given the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18) and, therefore, wherever people and communities need peace and harmony with God, themselves or their neighbours, the Church should both address such situations and be prepared with an integrity of practice and proclamation. It is the conviction of this paper that the primary living out of integral mission through the local church is where, as I experienced as a transitional pastor, the hard realities of demonstration and proclamation come closest to the hard realities of being human in households, neighbourhoods and municipalities.

Integral Mission: Biblical and Missiological Foundations

To begin, note the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. God loved the world so much that He sent His Son into the world (John 3:16). Jesus commissions his first followers with this same sentness he received: “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21). This love for the world and sending, however, is not abstract but very tangible and localized. The Gospels take great care to track the locality of the presence of the Messiah who is the fullest expression of God’s love for the world. He was born in a real place: Bethlehem. His

first miracle was verified in Cana as part of a rite of passage: a wedding. His adopted hometown was Capernaum. He stopped at a well in Samaria and raised Lazarus in Bethany. He was crucified on the notorious Golgotha and sent his disciples ahead of him into Galilee. The Gospels – and the Acts of the Apostles that follow – are painstakingly geographical, not abstractly “spiritual.”

The Incarnational sent-ness of Jesus Christ is localized and, of course, His ministry is integral; the proclamation and demonstration of the Good News of the Kingdom of God. In sending His disciples as He was sent this integral mission in locality will not cease but continue with even greater effect (John 14:12). To Peter’s declaration of Jesus, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16), Jesus announces that this confession is both Spirit-sourced and the foundation upon which His church will be built. But, even in this elevated proclamation there is a hint of locality, for Jesus specifically uses the word *ekklesia*, a term Lesslie Newbigin points out is “...the assembly of all citizens called to deal with the public affairs of the city” (Newbigin, 1978, p.18). Johannes Reimer and Christopher Wright emphasize that the use of this word – translated “church” in English – is a call to localized responsibility. “Jesus uses this term,” they write, “as a direct translation of the Hebrew *cahal Jahwe*, which was similarly used in the Old Testament to denote political gatherings for Israel (1 Chronicles 28:8; 29:1, 10; 2 Chronicles 29:28, 31; 30:22ff, and others). *Cahal* refers to Israel being called to be responsible for the common good of the nation and those who live among them” (Reimer and Wright, p.22) In short, Jesus’ use of *ekklesia* roots those who confess Him as Messiah *in* locality with responsibility *for* locality. The Lordship of Jesus does not lead to escape from the neighbourhood, but to an even greater embrace of it.

The Ascension commission of Acts 1:8 continues this geographical and localized theme. The coming of the Holy Spirit will not move the church into a detached Gnosticism (where the material is evil and overcome through special knowledge) or Docetism (where the spiritual can have no real interaction with the material). Jesus's Ascension commissioning of his disciples is a call to the locality of witness precisely because of the promised arrival of the Holy Spirit. Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and the ends of the earth would experience the proclamation and demonstration of the victory of the Messiah and His Lordship over the very local realities of sin, the grave, and the works of the Devil through those who are sent, just as the Father sent the Son as the fullest demonstration of His love for the world.

The Acts of the Apostles reveals that as the Gospel of Christ spread first among the Jews and then into the Gentile world what emerges is localized communities and fellowship of believers who take their place and space seriously. The first Christians rapidly needed to figure out what it meant to be *ekklesia* wherever the Spirit of God was actively drawing people into the Kingdom (Acts 13:48). The disciples had been prepared for locality and the uniqueness of peoples and their contexts through the teaching of Jesus. The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 placed an emphasis on "making disciples of all nations (*ethne*).” The parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31-46 reveals that the distinction between those on the right and those on the left is acts of shalom and righteousness to "the least of these.” Strikingly, the parable is introduced with the Son of Man sitting in judgment and before him "gathered all the nations (*ethne*)” (Matthew 25:32). This practical parable, which is often read as individual acts of the faithful, is in Jesus's mind the behaviour of nations, ethnicities and peoples that exposes their true character. The disciples, in their close followership of Jesus, were being instructed to think of localities, peoples and distinct nations beyond Israel. Jesus, in both the Great Commission and

in the judgement of the sheep and the goats is revealing the will of Heaven for all localities. This was the local Kingdom activity believers took with them into the Gentile world.

The New Testament letters are all the result of the very real challenge of bringing the hope and truth of the whole and integral Gospel of Jesus Christ into local proclamation and demonstration. The Church's receptivity of these letters as canonical and carrying the authority of the Holy Spirit was in some part due to the demonstrable localized rooting of the Gospel in Ephesus, Corinth, Rome or even in a household, like that of Philemon. What happened by the power of the Spirit there remained alive and can therefore be trustworthy for transformational Kingdom of God impact in our own contexts and localities as well.

Even our hermeneutics depends on this locality. Glenn Smith, in addressing the Canadian *Unity in Mission Symposium* declared (2020),

“If we take a benign (non-contextual) approach to understand the context of Scripture then we understand a de-contextualized understanding of the work of God in our time and place (and) we don't really believe God can stoop down and get involved in our communities in real ways.”

Reading and handling Scripture well toward application requires respect for the localized context out of which it emerged. And, furthermore, it is not simply enough to translate the text, Scripture must also be incarnated so that the people who live in particular places become *ekklesia* for the glory of God and the coming of the Kingdom on earth just as it is in heaven.

On Earth as in Heaven

But, how does the Kingdom come? The Acts of the Apostles points us toward the localized Christ-centered community. Detached spiritualism or even personalized spirituality is not the Gospel. Mission – from the coming of the Spirit in Acts onward – becomes an

incarnational and interpretive task. Missionaries then and now, as Lamin Sanneh points out, lay “the foundations of indigenous revitalization to which the Christian cause would be tied” (Sanneh, 1989, p.24). Furthermore, this sent missionary work of Jesus’s disciples, while often disruptive to the city (Acts 19:23-41) was primarily aimed at the heart and life of individuals while being rooted in the integrity of a community who embodied the proclamation of the Gospel with the demonstration of it – often at great cost.

When Peter addresses the scattered exiles he calls them a chosen people, royal priesthood and holy nation. They are “called out of darkness” to be the people of God (1 Peter 2:9-10). This could sound escapist, even elitist, but Scripture says, “Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles...Live such good lives *among* the pagans, that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may *see* your good deeds and glorify God on the say he visits us” (1 Peter 2:11-12 *italics added*). Peter’s word of heavenly position and identity immediately turns to incarnational interpretation of the Gospel in the local context. The church takes seriously being *among* so that the deeds of the Kingdom of light can be *seen*. This is the work of the priestly nation. This is the consistent New Testament description of the identity and task of *ekklesia* and underlines Newbigin’s conviction, “I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live it” (Newbigin, 1989, p.227).

So, how is the Christ-centered, Christ-formed, Christ-headed and Christ-sent *ekklesia* to live as the hermeneutic of the gospel in locality? How will the manifold wisdom of God (Ephesians 3:10) be expressed through these local – and often discouragingly small, conflicted and challenged – flocks?

The Apostle Peter identified the Christian communities under his oversight with the political language: “foreigners” and “exiles.” They were citizens of another place, another

Kingdom, immigrants in the place they lived. They had been called out into the *ekklesia* to take responsibility for the city. They are outsiders at home. They are now the people of God, given heavenly responsibility for another place. They are not missionary churches who do mission among other activities; but are the mission – the true meaning of being “missional” (Reimer and Wright, p.48).

Paul of Tarsus also address the Christian community’s task and position in rather politicized terms. In 2 Corinthians 5 he describes himself and his missionary team as “ambassadors” – and places the mantle on the Corinthians as well. It is as though God, says Paul, “were making his appeal through us” (2 Corinthians 5:20). Again, we should note that proclamation and demonstration are an integral whole. Paul will routinely state that the trustworthiness of the Gospel is demonstrated in the reality of his own changed life. It is the witness of the Gospel incarnated and translated in his – and his team’s – person that makes the Gospel understandable and how the Message will spread with integrity (Acts 20:25-35; 1 Timothy 1:12-17).

The ambassadorial task given to the *ekklesia* that sees the world and its local peoples differently because of Christ and His new creation is, in Paul’s words, reconciliation.

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation“ (2 Corinthians 5:18).

It is crucial at this point to not skip over Paul’s words because of familiarity. The Apostle has made it clear that it is not just individuals that God was reconciling to himself in Christ, but the *world*. “The whole creation,” notes David Bosch, “is in the process of becoming *ekklesia*, the

church, the body of Christ” (Bosch, 1991, p.209). The ministry of reconciliation is therefore, an integral, dynamic and whole task for the disciple-making community following the Spirit to bring into the here and now what will someday culminate in the promised city of God (Revelation 21). This is the shalom vision of God for His creation.

This ministry must, by necessity and understandability for those who are unreconciled, be locally expressed through reconciled individuals and the *ekklesia* of the reconciled. The individual is the *ekklesia* – consider what people conclude about the “church” if one member sins – and the *ekklesia* community does not eradicate the individual – for that one sinning member has a shot at restoration (Galatians 6:1). This is all witness to the outside critics of the Christian community of the scandal of reconciliation. So, in mandate and practice, by proclamation and demonstration, the local church is ambassadorial and priestly. Ambassadors of what God has accomplished in Christ – proclaiming and demonstrating the reconciled life – and priestly in that it mediates the new heavenly reality in the habits and life in obedience to Jesus as Lord. The local church

“is called to be God’s ambassador of reconciliation acting in the name and authority of Christ, proclaiming to the world complete restoration of its relationship with the Creator through salvation in Christ (2 Cor 5:18-20). It lives among the peoples as an alternative, a fellowship of brothers and sisters, the family of God in which righteousness and justice and shalom is present and pursued (2 Corinthians 5:21)” (Reimer, 2077, p.54).

The Local Church as Show and Tell

Filipino social anthropologist Melba Padilla Maggay paints a vivid portrait of the local church as the “show-and-tell” ambassadorial presence of God’s reconciling mission:

Integral mission involves saying, doing and being people in the Kingdom. It should be understood as having to do not only with evangelism and social action, but with all that it means to bear witness to the reign of Jesus in all of life. It means sexual purity, keeping our marriages and families intact, and in general widening the political space for ethical choices that are consistent with the Christian tradition. But it also means defending human rights of all peoples, respecting their cultural practices and religious convictions with the limits and civilities of pluralistic society.

It means forgiveness for people tortured by guilt, and reconciliation for societies wracked by conflict. It bids us to feed the poor and make sure that power structures are just. It means waging spiritual warfare in the heavenly realms, but also destroying strongholds in the mind. We make every thought captive to obey Christ, engaging the intellectual life and the systems and patters of our culture (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

We are pilgrims looking forward to an altogether new world, yet also inheritors of the earth, re-creating and conforming it to the image of the Son. We affirm all that is true and lovely and just around us, supporting governance, creating art, inventing technologies that honour the Creator. But we also hold accountable those who have power over us, resisting the Beast and critiquing myths and stories constructed for us by media or the “prince of the power of the air” in our time (Maggay, 2007, p.10).

So, to summarize thus far:

Biblical mission is an integral, unbroken whole of proclamation and demonstration of the Good News of Jesus and the Kingdom of God. Biblical mission is not only interested in “saving souls,” but brings life in God’s intended abundance into the world as a foretaste of what is to come.

God is uniquely concerned for and seeking to redeem all localities and peoples with their distinctive beauty and brokenness. God is at work to bring the shalom of his Good News Kingdom into redemptive and transforming reality.

The primary agent of God's integral mission everywhere is the local *ekklesia* that takes its locality, context, space and place seriously.

The local *ekklesia* – whom God has called to Himself through faith in Jesus Christ and sent as Jesus is sent – takes responsibility for their particular locality through the ambassadorial ministry of reconciliation that has been gifted to her.

The local church as the fellowship of Jesus's disciples is set apart by God to be the local ambassadorial agents of God's plan to reconcile all things to Himself in Christ. The church in locality as *ekklesia* in the power of the Spirit is the body of Christ sent by God to be the priestly presence of God with a primary ministry of reconciliation.

Integral Mission in the Local Church

This praxis of integral mission will take the form of a deeply engaged, localized vision of being *ekklesia*. The local church must ask the question: "What does Good News look like here?" It is tempting for the church to set a vision based upon its own organizational well-being, dreams, or even in competition with other local churches. The church that is foreigner and exile, that is ambassador of God's reconciling activity in the world, will envision where integral Good News is needed in their location through the unique qualities of the disciples who compromise their fellowship.

Where is the Holy Spirit already at work? Where is there brokenness that the wider society says is impossible to address? What open doors and societal access and influence do

members of the local *ekklesia* have with their various gifts, vocations, relationships, and opportunities?

The prophet Jeremiah reminded the exiles that they had been sent by the LORD into their Babylonian captivity (Jeremiah 29:1-14). There, as a captive and foreign community, they were to live very localized lives – plant gardens, marry off their children, and embrace locality to “...seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf” (Jeremiah 29:7). God’s mission is always cosmic in nature, but local in revelation and expression – as simple as swaddling cloths in a manger (Luke 2:12) and every person under their vine and fig tree (Micah 4:4). To live as the cosmically called-out *ekklesia* requires a localized and more humble vision. David Fitch writes, “This is the way God has chosen to change the world. God will not force himself on the world. Instead he looks patiently for an entry point to become present” (Fitch, 2016, p.204). By seeking a localized vision, the *ekklesia* joins God in seeking the next entry point.

Engage Dysfunction

The praxis of integral mission in the local *ekklesia* engages local and relational dysfunction. The introductory story of being a transitional pastor of a church beset by internal mistrust and conflict avoidance while equally desiring to be salt and light and evangelist in the neighbourhood exposes this reality and hope. Every local fellowship is gifted not only with the ministry of reconciliation, but with the opportunity to practice it together.

The first group of disciples bickered and quarreled. They needed the correction of a child’s presence (Luke 9:46-48) and the foot washing example of servant leadership (John 13). The Apostle Paul’s letters overflow with calls to practice the ministry of reconciliation because of the very localized dysfunctions of being the church. The work of peacemaking, forgiveness,

and restoration is presented as the church's mission; for how the Christian community engaged relational dysfunction was witness of Jesus as Lord to the surrounding context. The body of Christ grew as a collection of Jew and Gentile people of the Way through the sweat and tears practice of the truth that Jesus broke down the dividing wall of hostility by his death for both (Ephesians 2:14-16). Throughout the New Testament there are calls to be forgiving (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13), to restore those who have sinned (Galatians 6:1-2) and to show no partiality between rich and poor (James 2:1-4). Paul even pleads for two women in Philippi to get along and work through their divisiveness (Philippians 4:2-3) and the very personal and localized reconciliation of a master and slave is the entire point of the letter to Philemon. These, and the many other examples that could be referenced, demonstrate the ministry of reconciliation being practiced among the *ekklesia* itself from the beginning. Integral mission's unified wholeness of proclamation and demonstration requires the dysfunctional local church practicing and celebrating the ministry of reconciliation as part of the ambassadorial mission task.

Engage the Gifts

The praxis of integral mission requires all the gifts of all the people of God and *ekklesia*-planting. Chris Wright summarizes the missional focal points God directs the *ekklesia* toward as “*Building the church* (through evangelism and teaching), bringing people to repentance, faith and obedience as disciples of Jesus Christ. *Serving society* (through compassion and justice), in response to Jesus sending us ‘into the world’...(and) *Caring for creation* (through godly use of the resources of creation along with ecological concern and action, fulfilling the very first ‘great commission’ given to humanity in Genesis 1 and 2” (Wright, 2015, p.11).

What if churches were planted with these focal points in view? This would awaken a more robust priesthood of believers and honour and harness the diversity of spiritual and natural gifts distributed to the saints by God. And it could immediately make church planting an activity of a reconciled and reconciling people who with their gathered and scattered life in locality give witness to Jesus as Lord and his reconciling activity.

As Wright further calls, “It is not a case of everybody doing everything, but everybody being intentional about *something*, according to the gifting and leading of God...It takes the whole church to engage in God’s whole mission” (Wright, 2015, p.34). Moving from church-planting (which has come to mean primarily worship-service-planting often built around a charismatic personality) to *ekklesia*-planting (with an aim of launching the whole people of God into responsibility for the reconciling work of God in a specific locality) could transform who is sent and how labourers are sent into the harvest.

This emphasis would lead to new local churches whose DNA from the beginning is integral mission with an embrace of community development. As Johannes Reimer writes in “Community Transformation, Peace and Church Growth”

“Her missionary praxis will...always involve active community participation. This makes Community Development a vital concept of church’s mission and church life. In fact, Christian Community Development might be considered as the model for active mission of the church in the world.” (unpublished, p.33),

In addition, Reimer notes in the same article, “Social conflicts and a search for solution are an integral part of God’s salvific plan with humanity. The Church can’t avoid accepting her calling to become an agent of mediation” (Reimer, unpublished, p.33). The mediation of local conflicts is part of the church’s ambassadorial work. With new churches birthed with such a perspective

and praxis, the aim - more in step with the shalom purposes of God in the world -would be the transformation of the local social space and context where the Kingdom comes on earth just as it is in heaven.

Engage the Missional Cycle

The praxis of integral mission, therefore, employs the missional cycle leading to community transformation. A praxis cycle of missionary theology helps the local *ekklesia* remain disciplined in working with and being with their local context (Wells, 2018, p.10-12). This missional cycle follows this path as outlined by Johannes Reimer:

- *Involvement*. Being with the world to love, know, and listen to the people we are among.
- *Context Analysis*. Learning culture, language and life to discover where there is brokenness and need.
- *Theological Reflection*. Applying biblical revelation and the history and learning of the global Church to what we discover.
- *Spirituality*. Prayerful intercession and listening to the Holy Spirit for how to respond in Jesus's way.
- *Planning for Action*. Acting in community as ministers of reconciliation with the people we are among. This action employs all the gifts of the Body of Christ and the various spheres of social life and influence that God has sovereignly placed His people in for His missional purposes.
- *Celebration*. Joyful and grateful expression of having participated in God's work of shalom (Reimer, 2017, p.97).

This was precisely the cycle employed with the church mentioned above in the months after that initial awkward, yet honest, meeting. Applying the cycle moved the fellowship to

honestly be involved in each other's lives as well as the life of the community and repositioned how leaders began to think about the nature of the church and what the wider community was really looking for. In the end, walking this cycle out led to reconciliation within the church and an awakened sense of ambassadorial ministry in the neighbourhood. Beyond that example, however, this cycle makes possible a way in which the reconciling *ekklesia* can enter into proclamation and declaration in the beautiful and broken realities of their localities moving “towards the goal of God's mission in the world – to disciple the social reality of people” (Reimer, 2017, p.89).

Embrace Patient Perseverance

The praxis of integral mission will require patience and perseverance. Living currently in an age of rapid change, local churches can be swept up in the whirlwind attempting to remain relevant and “successful.” The threat, however, is the loss of spiritual fervor, disciple-making and integral mission, like the churches addressed by Jesus in Revelation 2-3, along with the disintegration of the body of Christ and the ministry of reconciliation gifted to her. This is one of the great challenges to mission in the present landscape of western Christianity, and those churches that have been shaped or influenced by the overflow of western civilization.

It is reasonable and wise to consider, therefore, what we can learn from the patience and perseverance of the *ekklesia* of the past. In the third century AD Cyprian the bishop of Carthage began to reflect on what was making the Christian message attractive to the many who were beginning to consider the Gospel. He noted, “We do not preach great things; we live them” (Kreider, 2016, p.169). Observing this Alan Kreider notes,

“A church that grew because of the intriguing wholeness of its life—Cyprian sensed that God was at work in this, unspectacularly, patiently. The church would continue to grow

if the people lived in the ways that interested and attracted outsiders” (Kreider, 2016, p.169).

There is much reflection needed here. Cyprian’s description of the wholeness of reconciled living and Gospel-conviction that produced an attractive third century church and the patient and persevering work necessary for its flourishing remains relevant in the contemporary rapidly changing, and thereby life-destabilizing context. The challenge is quite real, but a renewed sense of the patient endurance of the saints and those who shepherd them (Revelation 14:2) seems necessary for integral mission to root and flourish through today’s *ekklesia*.

Expect Reconciled Leaders

The praxis of integral mission requires reconciled leaders. The New Testament does not hide the challenge leaders face in working together on mission. Paul confronted Peter for his hypocrisy (Galatians 2:11-13) and eventually parted ways with Barnabas because of a dispute over team composition (Acts 15:39-41). The former seems justified for the sake of the integrity of the Gospel, the latter seems more like what many Christian leaders have experienced in seeking to serve shoulder to shoulder with others who are equally gifted and called.

This same Paul, as a prisoner in Rome, describes what he contends for and invites the reconciling *ekklesia* to contend for as well: “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace“ (Ephesians 4:1-3). Directly following this admonition the Apostle flows into a description of the distributed gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd and teacher which are for the equipping and maturing of the saints – and Paul himself carries a title denoting one of these (Ephesians 4:8-16). The health, maturity and ambassadorial ministry of the *ekklesia*

depends, it seems, on those charged with building up the church being reconciled and fighting for the unity of the Spirit and the glue of peace. Unity is a positional reality for those filled by the Holy Spirit. Peace is glorious when we discover that in Christ every dividing wall has been overcome in Christ's broken body. It is keeping unity and peace that requires deliberate action, that demands a commitment to humility, patience and the ministry of reconciliation.

Unfortunately, the reconciling mission of the *ekklesia* is often hindered both within the fellowship and in the eyes of outsiders, not by her strategies or the rejection of the Jesus she proclaims, but in some degree by the demonstration of unreconciled relationships between those gifted and called to serve. In this regard, perhaps, we who carry such high responsibility should see again the model Jesus set for his own team as he wrapped a towel around his waist and washed their dirty feet: "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet" (John 13:14).

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