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Mission Advance:
"Managerial Missiology" or Dependence on the Spirit?

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Seminar Description: Samuel Escobar refers to present tendencies which place strong emphases on adequate personnel, finance and modern management techniques in advancing mission. But this ignores less tangible but more fundamental concerns like prayer, unity and holiness in church, and the indispensable role of the Holy Spirit. How can our paradigms be reshaped? How can we recover the centrality of prayer and our dependence on the Spirit?

1.   **Introduction**

•   Many years ago, the late Michael Griffiths, referring to one presentation at the Lausanne consultation on world evangelization in Pattaya (1980), said the one participant commented: "What the difference between preaching the gospel and selling Coca-cola?"

•   Focus of seminar: Tendency in the modern world to focus on management methods, strategic planning and human resources in missions. These have their place but often they have been given such importance that the role of the Holy Spirit becomes minimized, if not altogether neglected.

•   In contrast, just consider two examples:
  ■ The centrality of the HS in Acts. The emphasis was on his leading and not on human planning.
    The Spirit is full of surprises: e.g., the Gentile breakthrough; Paul's Macedonian call.
  ■ The revival of the Chinese church in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) & John Sung's prophecy.

2.   **Managerial Missiology Defined and Two Critiques**

i.   *Samuel Escobar*
        ("Managerial Missiology," *Dictionary of Mission Theology: Evangelical Foundations*, eds. John Corrie, et. al., [Nottingham: Intervarsity Press, 2007], pp. 216-218; also "A Movement Divided: Three Approaches in World Evangelization Stand in Tension with One Another," *Transformation*, 8.4 [Oct 1991], pp.7-13.)

a.   Managerial missiology defined:

        "…a trend within evangelical missiology that emphasizes the management of mission practice. It developed in North America during the last third of the twentieth century. It came from a cluster of institutions connected to the Church Growth school and movements such as AD 2000 and Beyond. It is an effort to reduce Christian mission to a manageable enterprise.

Every characteristic of this missiological trend becomes understandable when perceived within the frame of that avowed quantifying intention. Concepts such as 'people-groups', 'unreached peoples', 'homogenous units', '10-40 window', 'adopt a people' and territorial spirits …, express both a strong sense of urgency and an effort to use every available instrument to make the task possible. ==One way of achieving manageability is precisely to reduce reality to an understandable picture, and then to project missionary action as a response to a "problem" that has been described in quantitative form. Missionary action is thus reduced to a linear task that is unfolded into logical steps to be followed in a process of management by objectives.== Movements that express this trend proliferated as the end of the twentieth century approached, proposing strategies that used the year 2000 as a date to complete evangelization" (Escobar 2007:216).

b.   Critique:
Escobar goes on to note that using statistic information to visualize the missionary task and to motivate the church is not new in the history of missions. Statistics were compiled to communicate the nature and extent of the missionary task required, and also to promote a sense of urgency. "Within managerial missiology, statistical analysis was used first, as a way of measuring the effect of missionary action, in an effort to reduce the lack of clarity that surrounded it and a certain fuzziness in the traditional way of defining and evaluating it" (Escobar 2007:216).

However, Escobar (2007:216-217) has suggested that this approach suffered from some serious weaknesses including:

(1) Mission narrowly defined in numerical terms: Mission is narrowly defined as the numerical growth of the church through conversion. But this is reductionistic for two reasons. First, often mission has to begin with social service and outreach of various kinds before calling people to follow Jesus. Second, some forms of evangelistic efforts can be quantified such as number of tracts and books distributed, rallies, radio broadcasting hours and the like. But it is not possible to quantify the ministries of discipling, spiritual formation and leadership training.

(2) A simplistic pragmatism cannot cope with deeper questions: If mission is reduced only to numerical growth, anything that does not directly enhance it is set aside or jettisoned.
   ■ This includes any form of costly involvement in social transformational services.
   ■ Moreover, this very pragmatic approach to mission "de-emphasizes theological questions, takes for granted the existence of adequate content, and subsequently majors in method" (Escobar 2007:217). Thus efforts required for contextualizing theology and church practices may be deemed as cost inefficient in terms of time and money, and therefore ignored.
   ■ Such a pragmatism cannot live with paradox or mystery and has no theological or pastoral resources to cope with the suffering and persecution in mission because it is geared to provide methodologies for a guaranteed success. "Only categories such as paradox, mystery, suffering and failure can help us to grasp something of the depth of the spiritual battle involved in mission" (p. 217).

(3) Missions can be completed with enough resources: A third consequence of this line of thinking is the "idea that an accumulation of material resources is bound to produce certain effects, is reflected in the constant preoccupation with augmenting the missionary force quantitatively, without much debate about the quality of that missionary action" (Escobar 1991:12).

ii. *James F. Engels and William A. Dyrness*
(*Changing the Mind of Missions: Where Have We Gone Wrong?* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), pp. 55-81.])

Modernity's mindset: Engels and Dyrness in their book argue that modernity is the dominant worldview for most people (in the West) today. Modernity insists that only logic (and mathematics) and the scientific method are the only sources of truth, and everything must be subject to the test of logical and scientific reason. Thus the proper use of the scientific method and analysis can help us understand and overcome all the challenges we face in life. As Engels and Dyrness put it, "The cry of Western civilization and the very essence of modernity became, 'There is no problem too big that it cannot be solved with human wisdom and technology'" (:59). To put it in another way, one of the key outcomes of modernity was that it led to "An optimistic conviction that all problems are solvable through the combination of individual initiative, reasoning and technology" (:61).

Privatization of faith: Furthermore, other developments in the 19th century resulted increasingly to a privatization of faith and focus on individual conversions. This emphasis on individual conversion led to an evangelism devoid of discipleship and a dichotomy between evangelism and social transformation. As Os Guinness puts it, the Christian faith has become "privately engaging, social irrelevant" (cited in p. 65). The primary focus is now on the number of converts. "Ever since the late 1800s, dominant evangelical voices have called for an accelerated church planting to *evangelize the maximum number of unreached in the shortest possible time*" (p. 64).

A manageable enterprise: With the above mindset prevailing among evangelicals, world mission was reduced to a managerial enterprise. Commenting on North America missions, Engels and Dyrness argues that these have "become known for technical and organizational brilliance and highly centralized bureaucratic structures. Indeed one might say that one of the greatest strengths of North American missions, and … one of its greatest weaknesses, is its preoccupation with strategies and methods" (:67). Despite evangelicals' rejection of theological modernism, "they have been all too willing to embrace sociological modernism" (:68).

This preoccupation with methods and numbers often has not only obscured larger questions of the ultimate goals of mission, but the methods employed have undermined them as well (as seen in Escobar's earlier discussion). Further, "our method-driven missions in many cases have had the following unintended consequences: (1) an uncritical adoption of strategic planning, (2) a preoccupation with numerical success, and (3) an unhealthy relationship between numerical success and funding" (p. 68).

a. "Uncritical adoption of strategic planning": The Enlightenment optimism that all problems are solvable with the right knowledge and methods "gave rise to a hunger

for strategies that would produce results within a given time period. Such great evangelists as Finny and Moody, for example, openly embraced and discarded strategies on the basis of the numbers of resulting converts, a practice commonplace today" (p. 69).

Missions thereby become reduced to a manageable enterprise (cf. Escobar's "managerial missiology") with quantifiable outcomes. Thus success in evangelism is defined by number of "decisions", a measurable result which is achievable through use of secular strategic planning. "Tragically, this managerial reductionism short-circuits the theological cornerstone that the Holy Spirit alone is responsible for conviction, regeneration and sanctification (Jn 16:13-14; Rom 12:3; 1 Pet 1:2)" (:70).

b.   "A preoccupation with numerical success": Caught up with the idea that "bigness is a sign of success", quantifiable results became a virtual obsession. "Donald A. McGavran, the founder of what is now known as church growth theory, contends that numerical church growth is the 'chief and irreplaceable goal of world'" (p. 71). Whilst not denying that God desires the salvation of all humankind, Engels and Dyrness nevertheless state that "we cannot discern any scriptural basis for the contention that 'success' in Christian stewardship is reflected in numerical growth" (p. 71). The NT appears to focus on quality rather than quantity, and that numerical growth "is an outcome of a church that is pure and blameless, not a goal in and of itself" (p. 72).

The above is perhaps over-stated. But nonetheless, the point that the large numbers often reflect "conversions" happening without the cost of discipleship being counted. This compromises the integrity of the gospel. "It is time to tone down the Christian public relations machinery that turns at fever pitch reporting the numbers allegedly reached through crusade, the electronic and print media, and intensified personal evangelism initiatives" (p. 72).

c.   "An unhealthy relationship between numerical success and fundraising": "Strategic planning designed to bring about numerical growth can be expensive, and it is rare to encounter a ministry plan that does not call for funds to be raised" (p. 72). There are several downsides to this model. First, it makes missions an expensive exercise and this means the richer churches will always control the poorer ones. Furthermore, this is not what we see in ministry of Jesus and his apostles. They just used what was available on hand. Thirdly, missions become donor driven and donor controlled. But what happens when ministry needs do not match donor priorities? Does this mean that the former is cast aside?

iii.   *Key features of managerial missiology – A Summary*

a.   Mission is narrowly defined in a numerical sense, and success is measured by number of converts (or size of a church).

b.   Missions reduced to a managerial enterprise: "a linear task that is unfolded into logical steps to be followed in a process of management by objectives" (Escobar 2007, p. 216). Crudely stated, an assembly line mindset. This leads to an uncritical

adoption of the strategic planning and management methodology based on the mindset of modernity.
(Another way of putting it is that mission is reduced to a method.)

c.   A simplistic pragmatism, with a strong emphasis on successful methods, takes over which focuses predominantly on numbers but fails to address larger questions such as quality of discipleship, holy living and proper understanding of the faith on the one hand, and the more complex questions such as suffering, opposition, persecution and setbacks, encountered in the spiritual battle of mission and advancing the work of the Kingdom.

d.   High dependence on human resources and funding.

e.   Above (d) leads to an unhealthy relationship between numerical success and fundraising, between money and missions.

3.   **Four Examples**

i.   *Preoccupation with numbers? AD 2000 & Beyond*

a.   Details and concerns of the AD 2000 Movement can be found in *Countdown to AD 2000: The Official Compendium of the Global Consultation on World Evangelization by AD 2000 and Beyond Singapore, January 5-8, 1989*, ed. Thomas Wang (AD 2000 Movement & Pasadena, CA: William Carey, 1989) and *AD 2000 and Beyond: A Handbook,* ed. Luis Bush [AD 2000 & Beyond, 1992]).

The catch phrase of the movement is "A church for very people and the Gospel for every person by AD2000" (*AD 2000 and Beyond*, 1992, title page).
Together with the above is a quote from D. L. Moody, "It can be done – it ought to be done – it must be done."
(Cf. also SVM for Foreign Missions catchword in 1880s and 1890s: "The Evangelization of the World in this Generation.")

The primary focus of the movement is: "We believe that it is possible to bring the Gospel to all people by the year 2000. This can be accomplished with sufficient dedication, unity, and mobilisation of available resources, powered and directed by God." More specifically, it calls for
■ A focus on those who have never heard the Gospel
■ All to be able to hear the Gospel in "a language they can understand".
■ The establishment of a mission-minded church planting movement among every unreached people group
■ A church in every human community

In response, something like 2000 plans (both regional and global) were identified for finishing the task by AD 2000. Looking back with hindsight today on all that has been written about the goals of the movement and its plans, it is clear that, despite the nobility of the aim, the whole project reflected clearly the human frailty of its leaders.

One statement among many betrays its captivity to modernity. In the statement "Two Thousand Plans Towards AD 2000: A Kaleidoscopic Global Plan ..." (*Countdown to AD 2000*, 1989, pp. 209-236, here Para 9, p. 212), the report reads: "We need to insist that the task is unfinished but finishable. *It is finite task that can be split up into discrete finite elements, each of which could rapidly be brought to closure and completion.* (italics mine) All that is needed (in addition to spiritual commitment) are goals, planning, concrete deadlines, and the determination to actually see them accomplished."

b.   Reading through the documents, one finds that much of what is said about managerial missiology earlier would apply to the way that the whole movement is framed. There is no discussion on in-depth teaching, discipling and character formation of converts, or on whether these plans will actually work. The financial outlay would have been enormous, even by Western missions standards, if all the 2000 or so plans were actually implemented. Little or nothing is said of serious contextualization which is needed to help the listener to truly grasp the Gospel and the convert to fully understand what maturity in Christ entails.

What is found is a clear example of how missions are reduced to the methods of our scientific-technological age. This is clear in the statement quoted above: "*It is a finite task that can be split up into discrete finite elements, each of which could rapidly be brought to closure and completion.*" Missions is therefore modelled on the assembly line of modern manufacturing. Split the whole process into finite components, bring each component by itself to completion, and with that missions are done.

(Note for personal reference: A good and easily available example of Ralph Winter's approach which Escobar has critiqued is: Ralph D. Winter and Bruce A. Koch, "Finishing the Task: The Unreached Peoples Challenge," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, 4th ed., eds. Ralph D. Winter & Steven C. Hawthorne [Pasadena, CA William Carey, 2009], pp. 531-546.)

ii.   *Modern technology & strategic-level spiritual warfare (SLSW)*

Whereas for some centuries the Western churches have largely ignored the demonic, sometime around the 1980s, spiritual warfare increasingly became an important theme within Western Pentecostal-charismatic circles. One name that was particularly influential was that of Peter Wagner through books such as *Warfare Prayer: Strategies for Combating the Rulers of Darkness* (Tunbridge Wells, Kent: Monarch, 1992) and others.

A number of things raised by Wagner are right and biblical, providing a useful corrective to earlier Western skepticism, including among many who claims to take the Bible seriously. However, in some areas he appears to have succumbed largely to the emphasis on technology in the modern world. This is particularly true of his teachings on SLSW and territorial spirits.

Wagner's approach in brief includes his assertion that the territorial spirits are purported to be a class of powerful demons that rule over jurisdictions of various types and sizes. Some of what he writes are based on what he observes of people like Carlos Annacondia of Argentina. Warfare prayer involves naming and rebuking the

spirits, in order to reach the world for Christ. So the first step is to identify and name the ruling spirit and its territory; and the second step is to rebuke the demonic power using his name to exercise power over it. This enables major spiritual breakthroughs in evangelism and also in the sociopolitical sphere. This is what is generally called "Strategic-level Spiritual Warfare" (SLSW). (Cf. summary in Chuck Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation: A Biblical, Historical and Missiological Critique of Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare* [Sevenoaks, Kent: OMF International, 1998], pp. 15-28.)

Chuck Lowe in his book, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation*, has provided one of the most useful critiques of SLSW. He argues that Wagner (and other similar writers) manifest two serious defects. The first is that much of these teachings suffer from a tendentious use of scriptures. Lowe faults the approach of Peter Wagner and others in its use of scripture on the grounds that it is "a pre-existing practice in search of justification. It finds what it is looking for, or creates what it needs" (p.145). In a series of detailed chapters, Lowe demonstrates that this tendentiousness applied not only to the reading of scripture by Wagner and others, but also to their use of history and empirical data.

Secondly, Lowe suggests that SLSW reflects evangelicalism's domestication by the forces of modernity. It tends to give too much emphasis to technique with "its application of mechanistic methods to all of life." (p.147). He goes on to state that "the rise of technique is a form of secularization. Theoretical rationalization denies the existence of God through naturalistic science or rationalistic philosophy. Functional rationalization manages his power through the application of technique. Either way, the end result is the same: God becomes redundant" (p. 148). Lowe argues that in seeking to increase efficiency through the application of the management techniques of the factory floor into church life and pastoral action, evangelicalism has been unwittingly undermined by modernity's mechanistic mindset. The same applies to SLSW. "If God can be managed, so can Satan: SLSW is born." (p. 148). Thus the most serious critique against this approach may actually be Wagner's own claim that SLSW is a form of *"spiritual technology for completing the Great Commission in our generation."* (my italics; p. 149; cf. also pp. 147-152). Such an emphasis on technique and technology reflects a mechanistic worldview that is clearly at odds with that of biblical Christianity.

iii.   *Putting our trust in the abundance of human resources – Missions in China and India compared.*

      Note: The consequences of the abundance of material resources in traditional denominations in India and other South Asia countries.

iv.   *The Cell-church movement*

      We need to distinguish between the use of small groups or cells for pastoral support, accountability and discipleship from the idea of using the "cell-church" as a primary method or tool for growth.
      The former is important and valid (cf. Methodist classes and bands).
      But when taught primarily as a tool for growth, it is a good example managerial missiology.

4.   *Getting out of the Managerial Missiology Mindset*

We need to break out of the modernity mindset which underlies managerial missiology. Some steps needed. (See also Engels & Dyrness [2000, p. 78-81].)

i.   Obedience to the entirety of Christ's Great Commission. Evangelism/conversion is only the first step. This must be followed by discipleship and maturity.

ii.   Commit ourselves to plant and build churches that model and proclaim the Good News through their word and deed (based on a lifestyle of holiness). In this way, evangelism will be understood and practiced as the outcome of a lifestyle of love and respect for our neighbours, especially those in deepest spiritual, social or material need.

iii. Seek to live as "salt" and "light" in all segments of society, and allow for no dichotomy between evangelism and social transformation.

iv.   Make prayer and dependence of the Spirit's leading primary in all that we do, as exemplified in the Acts. It is not that dependence on strategic planning, modern management and human resources are wrong. They have their place in the advance of the Kingdom. But these are always secondary.

5.   **Discussion Questions**

i.   Do you agree with points against the "managerial missiology", rooted in the mindset of modernity, as discussed by Escobar, Engels and Dyrness, and the seminar speaker?

ii.   In the context of the discussions on the relative merits of institutions and movements, Tim Keller reminds us that movements are characterisd by vision, sacrifice, flexibility with unity, and spontaneity ("How movements and institutions contrast," https://pruitttraining.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/how-movements-and-institutions-contrast-by-tim-keller.pdf) Is your church or mission organization more like an institution or a movement?

iii. Give examples that you are familiar with or know of that demonstrate this approach to mission. What can you do about changing the approach they are taking?

iv.   What is your key takeaway from this seminar?