

## Paul's Missionary Band as Metaphor


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### Additional Features And Historical Examples

PART THREE OF A SIX PART SERIES

In section one of this series I introduced some of the radical themes of Paul's selection, training and strategy that are appropriate for postmodern, multicultural ministry. In this second section I will describe additional features of Paul's initial missionary band, and then cite examples of other "sodalities" in the redemptive history of Christianity.

Paul's Missionary Band serves as an excellent biblical metaphor for 21st century ministry because the playing fields in America have changed from mono-cultural to cross-cultural and there are thousands of new tribes that are spiritually hungry. Unfortunately, these new barbarians are finding answers elsewhere because the church is often seen as an irrelevant farce, confused, dysfunctional, divided, bogged down in introspection and institutionalism.



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The PMB framework provides a solution that is rooted in the beginnings of Christianity, that builds on the ancient foundations of the church, but provides both message and metaphor for the future church. As we look at Paul's missionary band we see the first example of practical missiology and cross cultural team ministry in the New Testament, and the missionary means of implementing the Great Commission.

I believe we need to develop a whole new skill set for the next generation of church leaders, because in a rapidly changing world where cultural shifts are taking place seamlessly, there is enormous confusion and ignorance about both church and mission in this new setting. We are relying on training and programs designed for a modern setting. We don't realize that in this postmodern world we need to be cross-cultural rather than mono-cultural and more missional than institutional.

Paul and Barnabas model the corrective skill sets in Scripture. Their approach relied upon practical missiology and relational teamwork to reach the Gentiles. The skills and patterns of the original missionary band are observed in various waves of missionary bands through history.

I believe it is time to reinforce our ecclesiological foundations by introducing practical missiology and by learning from our biblical and historical origins to become a catalytic force once again. Only by understanding practical missiology, that is how we contextualize ministry, form effective cross-cultural teams and address issues as a team in a particular context, can we effectively reach 21st century postmoderns.

Consider these additional features of Paul's initial missionary band:

- ◆ Barnabas and Paul both had cross-cultural experience, and were able to form an indigenous ministry. They provide the first manual in practical missiology. They formed a particular team to reach persons in a particular context.

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- ◆ They complemented and completed each other as key persons within a team-sized entourage. They recognized what the other brought and valued the other person. They modeled giftedness, trust, healthy relationships, and Christian community.
- ◆ They were led by and in tune with the Holy Spirit. They believed in God's sufficiency no matter what the circumstances.
- ◆ Barnabas was willing to allow Paul to lead the team. He was a model of how leadership succession is supposed to work in the church.
- ◆ Barnabas went on to mentor others on teams, notably Mark. Paul, because of his own giftedness, did not perceive Mark the same way. Barnabas again saw what Paul could not see, and served as a strategic link and mentor. To reproduce, every team needs these strategic links and mentors.
- ◆ Paul covered a great deal of territory. He and his team did not stay so long in one place as to become institutionalized.

It is time to learn from our biblical and historical origins and become a catalytic force once again

- ◆ Paul learned from Barnabas to empower people early, and he continued this practice. They planted churches that became quickly autonomous and that continued to reproduce other Christian communities.
- ◆ They developed new leaders by taking them into real ministry settings, expecting people to rise to the challenge. Leaders were developed in the midst of challenging circumstances. Not all the young disciples survived -- but the best leaders emerged.
- ◆ They were able to secure authority from Jerusalem when it was necessary, by presenting their church planting approach in ways that were perceived as favorable and appropriate. They modeled how sodalities can be highly autonomous; yet work in effective partnership with modalities for a greater purpose.
- ◆ They developed an overall effective strategy, drawing upon Barnabas' history and credibility. When Barnabas' discerning gifts were creatively blended to Paul's catalytic gifts, it launched an explosive, cross-cultural movement.

*Summary of original team:* Paul's missionary band was formed as a cross-cultural team. The story is as much about Barnabas as Paul. Together, they interacted with the more institutional, established church, in a creative and healthy manner. Because their team was both mobile and frontline, it avoided the inevitable tendency to lapse into institutionalism.

*Examples of later sodality teams:* The practical characteristics of Paul's missionary team have been present in all the great historical movements of Christian revival and growth from Paul to McGavran. Additional strategic clues for reaching postmodern barbarians can be discovered in the unfolding interplay of sodalities and modalities following the first century.

- A. Celtic Christianity. Perhaps the most impressive example is seen in Celtic Christianity from the fifth to the eighth centuries. Here we can observe repeatedly the same kind of misunderstandings that Paul and Barnabas faced at the Council of Jerusalem, based upon the difference in perspectives between sodalities and modalities. Latourette, for example, cites the irritation by the local bishops in Ireland and all throughout the Alpine valley when encountering one of Patrick's

We see characteristics of Paul's missionary team in the great historical movements of Christian revival and growth

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missionary bands, referred to as the Irish peregrini. Their faith and lifestyle simply did not fit into the bishop' s diocesan pattern.

Patrick' s centers of learning were unique in that their monks migrated to distant countries. They formed missionary groups both to reach pagan populations and to elevate the morals of the nominal Christian populations near whom they settled. The apostolic teams sent out by Patrick, beginning in the fifth century, closely resembled Paul' s missionary band in the manner in which they engaged barbarians in both conversation and in ministry.

The Celtic achievements as a movement were astonishing. As Hunter' s study substantiates, Patrick' s bands multiplied mission-sending monastic communities, which continued to send teams into settlements to multiply churches so that within two or three generations all of Ireland had become substantially Christian.

Celtic monastic communities became the strategic "mission stations" from which apostolic bands reached the "barbarians" of Scotland, and much of England, and much of Western Europe.

Ultimately, what caused their disappearance in the two centuries following the Synod of Witby in 664 was the control of the Roman way over the Celtic way. The Romans were more conservative. They insisted upon cultural uniformity rather than allow for shifts in methodology. Celtic Christianity adapted to the people' s culture. The Romans wanted Roman cultural forms imposed upon all churches and people.

- B. Waldo through Wesley. A few examples of missionary teams can be observed after the 9th century, such as the Frenchman Peter Waldo. The Poor Men of Lyon, initiated by Waldo multiplied discipleship communities rapidly through Spain, Italy, Germany and Bohemia at the end of the 12th century. John Wesley further developed the Pauline pattern of reproducing Christian communities during the mid-18th century Evangelical Revival in England and the United States.
- C. Carey. It was not until 1793, when William Carey and a colleague sailed for India to initiate the first undertaking of the Baptist Missionary Society, that rapid cross cultural missionary activity returned to the level of the Celtic teams of the fifth and six centuries, or to Paul' s first century missionary band. Carey, after the greatest of effort and patience in persuading the non-conformist Baptist that a new structure was necessary for mission, settled in Serampore, a Danish possession near Calcutta. His "Serampore Trio" translated and printed the Bible into several languages and founded a school for the training of Indian Christians.

As Winter points out, Carey was not the only pioneer who encountered resistance in launching a structure for mission.

Indeed all down through history, structures for mission have, by and large been greeted with great reluctance by church governments, and have generally required the additional impulse of Pietism, Wesleyanism or revivalism. Somehow the older and more settled a denomination, the more likely the church government itself is going to be fully occupied merely with the task of staying on top of things.

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D. McGavran. If William Carey can be credited with rediscovering the advantages of Paul' s missionary band, Donald McGavran must be recognized for taking the strategic insights to the next logical level. As early as the 1950' s, McGavran' s investigation of indigenous strategies and people movements clearly confirmed the upside of sodalities. In the tradition of Paul and Barnabas, McGavran also made things happen, and at the same time created tensions. He rocked the boat in India as field secretary; questioning whether schools and hospitals had taken up so much energy and money that evangelism had been forgotten. And he later rocked the boat in numerous speeches and articles challenging both the priorities and the structures of the conciliar movement.

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