

KERYGMATIC COMMUNITIES

EVANGELISM AND THE EARLY CHURCHES



A BILD ENCYCLICAL



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**KERYGMATIC
COMMUNITIES:
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I am writing this article from the veranda of a small resort on Kovalam Beach, in the Southern tip state of Kerala, India, overlooking the Indian Ocean. The article, though, did not begin here. Specifically, it began a year ago in a 7-week series I delivered at CityChurch of Ames–Des Moines, a network of 12 churches. The series was designed to address the nature of our 12 churches—a church of churches—as kerygmatic communities. It has been my long-held belief that we need to rethink the fragmentation of evangelism and missions in our modern Western structures and reintegrate them, along with the more recent notion of church planting, with local churches themselves and to stop seeing them as “departments” of ministry. This article continued to develop in Peru in August, when Javier Velasquez² insisted that I present the entire series in one message, at the 2011 ETBIL Summit. He took my PowerPoint slides from the entire 7-week series and carefully reduced them to 168 slides. Then after much persuasion, exhausted by back-to-back trips to India, NYC, Peru, and back to NYC again, I agreed to do the message. After reducing it to the most

¹ This is the fourth of a series of articles written under the branding of a modern-day encyclical (a double play on words: *encyclical* mean circulating amongst the churches, and *encyclopedia* is the cycle of knowledge that the churches, especially the leaders, need to cycle through), designed to circulate among networks of churches around the world. Most of these articles deal with critical issues of the early churches, intended to help today’s leaders develop complex networks of well-trained apostolic teams moving amongst well-connected, strong, multiplying churches, all carefully founded on “the way of Christ and his Apostles.” The first paper, “From Jesus to the Gospels,” dealt with the massive modern day confusion of discipleship and the Gospels and reset the whole issue of the use of the apostolic teaching in Acts and the letters of the Apostles as foundational to returning to the “way of Christ and his Apostles,” as we establish churches today. The second article, “The Churches of the First Century: From Simple Churches to Complex Networks,” brings into view the complex network of the early churches and how this network forms a map for our church-planting movements today. The third encyclical “Women and the Spontaneous Expansion of the Early Churches,” focused on the vital and commonly misunderstood role of women in the spontaneous expansion of the churches. The fifth encyclical will be on the issue of shepherding and counseling in the early churches and the sixth on the flow of money through the churches.

² Javier is Associate Dean with the Antioch School of Church Planting and Leadership Development, in charge of Hispanic programs.

essential 148 slides, I delivered the message, in one long sitting, and was again convinced this needed to be the next encyclical.

Building on an earlier encyclical, “The Churches of the First Century: From Simple Churches to Complex Networks,”³ in this paper we will take a fresh look at what really happened in the early churches. We will begin by addressing the issue of evangelism today, which I will suggest has been reduced to a very sloppy and fragmented theological concept. We will then turn our attention to a careful examination of evangelism in the early churches, moving from Jesus’ original kerygmatic community in Mark, to the Jerusalem community in early Acts, to the multiplication of these communities under Paul, to the Empire-wide network of these communities. Then we will focus on the kerygmatic nature of these communities as evangelism in their essence—properly understood and integrated. And finally, we will focus on the role of evangelists in the continued progress of the gospel through the multiplication of these communities.

The Fragmented Concept of Western Evangelism

I want to begin by posing a series of questions to those of you primarily in the United States, though these questions are relevant to everyone, since our systems of evangelism have been marketed to every corner of the globe.

- What is your idea of evangelism?
- What system did you learn?
- Why are we entering a post-Christian culture if 33% are evangelical and we have dozens of good “evangelism” systems?
- How can what happened in the Early Church (which continued for 300 years and turned the entire world upside down) happen now?

Today, we have divided up the idea of *the progress of the gospel* into compartments of ideas that really fragment and confuse the idea of the gospel’s proclamation and progress. Evangelism is one department, missions is another, and now church planting has become a new specialty, which is not clearly defined as to how it relates to both missions and evangelism. When we think of evangelism today, two primary categories come to mind: individual evangelism and household evangelism. However, both of these forms are disintegrated from churches because they are understood as something an individual or individual family does. Even church-wide programs or campaigns motivate an individual or individual family to carry out the activity of evangelism, rather than evangelism being a part of the DNA of community life itself. Individual evangelism outside

³ In footnote 2 of “The Churches of the First Century: From Simple Churches to Complex Networks,” I introduce a “school of scholarship” devoted to the study of the early churches in their Greco-Roman socio-historical context. I expanded on this set of authors and key works in “Women and the Spontaneous Expansion of the Early Church” in footnote 3.

the context of a kerygmatic community is not very effective. Household evangelism outside the context of a kerygmatic community is also very limited. In fact, the concept of *evangelism* is a very sloppy and fragmented theological concept. As we will grow to see in this study, evangelism is effective only in the context of churches whose identity is essentially kerygmatic.

To get at these issues we need to ask ourselves a new set of questions. How did the early communities “evangelize”? How was the gospel proclaimed? How and why was the proclamation so effective? Many of you grew up in different traditions. Some of you are from high church—Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, some Baptist, some Pentecostal. Think about your tradition. What would you say was understood as the main purpose of the churches within your tradition? Now contrast this with what you know from the New Testament about the purpose of the first century churches. What was their purpose? What was their identity? In this paper, I am going to attempt to demonstrate that their identity can best be described as *kerygmatic*. I’ve chosen to call these churches *kerygmatic communities*. I believe this to be a very important choice. The only way I know how to “rebrand” churches today, in the midst of all the confusing and dying Western traditions, is by using a biblical term, a term actually used by the Early Church. Using the term *kerygma*, I will attempt to rebrand the entire concept of *evangelism*. The concepts of *the kerygma* and *kerygmatic communities* are as misunderstood as *the didache*⁴ today. But why use the term *kerygmatic*? And why did the early churches refer to the essence of the gospel and its proclamation as “the kerygma”? So the task at hand: rebranding churches as “kerygmatic communities.” To begin this, let’s look in on the very first community—Jesus’ community!⁵

Jesus’ Kerygmatic Community

They all stood staring into space as Jesus exited the rather motley team of leaders. They were still a long way from putting the whole picture together. Most of the massive crowds who followed Jesus during the most intense part of his 3½ years of ministry had long ago deserted him. The twelve looking up at Jesus had not exactly demonstrated a strong followership. The main leader, Peter, had denied Christ. After his resurrection, several failed to recognize him, again a matter of little faith.

⁴ The concepts of *kerygma* and *didache* are thoroughly introduced in the first encyclical “From Jesus to the Gospels.”

⁵ It is important to note here that there have been several movements in the last half of the century that have been moving the directions I am encouraging in this paper: the cell movement, the house church movement, and the saturation church-planting movement. All three of these are steps in the right direction, all tying the multiplication of churches into the core mission of the church. I established the essential weakness of the three movements in “The Churches of the First Century: From Simple Churches to Complex Networks.” The main problem is that these movements, again steps in the right direction, are not sustainable on at least two fronts: they lack the carefully thought out apostolic network structure of the early churches, and they lack the carefully designed household of households structure for establishing churches. In addition, the essential elements of both the kerygma and didache of the early churches are not carefully laid at the foundation of the churches.

And now, a few days after his resurrection, he disappears. Two men in white robes then appear and ask them what they are staring at. Jesus will return just as he left. They sort of appear to be saying, “What are you standing around for. Go get to work.” So the twelve left and journeyed one day back to Jerusalem (Acts 1:9–11). When they got back to Jerusalem, to the upper room where they were all staying, they were joined by several others: certain women and Jesus’ brothers. And they were fervently praying, waiting for the Spirit to come who would give them their next instructions. This was all that was left—a small group of about 70. Who were these people? How would you describe them? What was the essence of what they were to be doing?

To begin answering these questions I have chosen to turn to the Gospel of Mark, for the most basic of answers. Mark was written to the churches⁶ to help them, and us, understand just such questions. So let’s start at the beginning of Mark. Mark begins with a few very simple statements in his first chapter.

¹ The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God....⁴ John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins...¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God,¹⁵ and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”⁷

Two key words appear here—words that will form the heart of the gospel statement later to be formed by Peter and the disciples, words that will take on deep theological significance as well as will appear in the everyday conversation of the early churches. The words are found in the phrase “proclaiming the good news.” *Good news* appears in verses 1 and 14. *Proclaiming* appears in verses 4 and 14. They appear together in v. 14. *Good news* literally means “good words—good news, gospel,” and is the root from which we get the word *evangelist* (transliterated from Greek = euangeliov). The second word is *proclaiming*, which means “to announce, proclaim.” Literally, it is the root word for *kerygma* (transliterated from Greek = keryusso), the word that became so important to the early churches. Together they refer to the proclamation of the good news, the essence of Jesus’ preaching activity. So the two key words are *proclaiming* (*kerygma*) and *good news* (gospel). The Early Church called the proclaiming of the gospel *the kerygma*.

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Now let’s turn our attention to the end of the Gospel of Mark, chapter 16, where we see the same phrase appear.

⁶ It is important to note that the Gospels were written to the churches after most of the Epistles were written. They need to be interpreted with the knowledge of the Epistles.

⁷ The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture will be taken from the NRSV.

¹⁵ And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation....” ²⁰ And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it. ⁸

What began with John the Baptist and Jesus, continued with his followers. The exact same phrase appears two times: “proclaimed the good news.” That is what they went about doing after Jesus left and the Spirit appeared. We see this more clearly if we turn back to the book of Acts chapter 1.

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷ He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” ⁹

This section appears just before the scene we described earlier, when the disciples were left staring into the sky as Jesus exited. Jesus gave them the essence of their directives. These directives would be filled out over the next 30 years as Jesus unfolded the entire picture of his new community in the teachings he delivered to the Apostles, through the Spirit. So how should we describe the essence of Jesus’ community of followers? What was their main purpose? What is their reason for existence? They were to be witnesses: beginning in Jerusalem, extending to Judea and Samaria, and eventually to the uttermost parts of the earth. This was their essence. They were a *kerygmatic community*—“proclaimers of the gospel” communities—yes, but with a global mandate: Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth. This small community of 70 was soon to be part of a global enterprise.

Let’s dip a little deeper into Mark and look at this kerygma more closely. In three passages Jesus predicts his death and resurrection: Mark 8:31, 9:30–31, and 10:32–34. In each passage he predicts his suffering and death at the hands of the Jewish and Gentile leaders. With these passages, in the context of the Mark narrative, we see Jesus preached the “news of victory” of God:

- The time is fulfilled (for Israel’s restoration) and the kingdom of God is near.
- Repent and believe in this, and follow Jesus.
- Jesus is the promised Messiah, promised in the Old Testament, who would restore Israel and set up the kingdom.
- All who follow him will be spared the coming judgment on Israel and be part of the New Covenant he is setting up with his followers.

So this then is the storyline. Jesus became the Kerygma. He proclaimed it and became it. The community was built around him. They were to wait for

⁸ NRSV

⁹ NRSV

the Spirit. And just as John the Baptist, and just as Jesus, they were to “proclaim the good news,” which Peter would soon begin doing! So the very essence of their existence was defined as being witnesses.

I want to make one more observation from Mark about this community before we move on. There are two very insightful scenes tucked away in Mark that help us understand the centrality of this new kerygmatic community that Jesus is forming from that small band, praying and waiting in the upper room after his exit. The scenes are in Mark 3:31–35 and 10:28–31. Again, in order to clearly impress the essence of this new community on our minds, let’s look first at Mark 3, then Mark 10.

³¹ Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. ³² A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.” ³³ And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” ³⁴ And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵ Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”¹⁰

²⁸ Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” ²⁹ Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, ³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life.”¹¹

The members of his real family were those who joined him in the kingdom community. Those who chose to do so would have to leave their families and heritage. Their family would multiply in the kingdom. In the future, they would have eternal life. This community was to be more central than their families, than their ethnic heritage, than their national heritage. It was to become the heart of their lives—now and in the coming kingdom. Speaking of the significance of these words of Jesus, Collins writes:

“The narrative of Mark to this point hints at a new social world in the making that began with Jesus calling disciples. . . . The passage as a whole (vv. 20–35) may be read as reflecting or legitimating the social displacement and relativization of social norms that members of the audience have experienced as they moved from communities based on ties of kinship and traditional ethnic identities to voluntary associations of followers of Jesus. At the same time, these new voluntary associations were based on the social model of the ancient Mediterranean family.”¹²

¹⁰ NRSV

¹¹ NRSV

¹² *Mark*, by Adela Yarbro Collins, in the *Hermeneia Series*, p. 237

This community was stripped down to 70 by the death of Christ. They stood looking up as Christ left, only to experience explosive growth after the Spirit came. And over 3,000 believed as a result of Peter's "kerygmatic" sermon. We now turn our attention to this development.

The Jerusalem Community as Essentially Kerygmatic

So far in this message, we have brought into question the whole modern-day idea of *evangelism*. We have defined "kerygma." And we have examined Jesus' kerygmatic community. Jesus was forming a new community. It wasn't like anything before it. It would be his key to the continued proclamation of the good news that he began preaching, taking it to the ends of the earth. What was to be so distinct about this new community? In what way was it to be totally unique? Remember where we left this community—staring up at the clouds (Acts 1:9–11). Then the Spirit arrives! Let's pick up the story in Acts 2:1–4.

¹ When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.¹³

The Spirit was poured out on everyone present. Peter quickly identified this as the coming of the Spirit Jesus had promised. He then began proclaiming the good news (a kerygmatic message).

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say."¹⁴

The essence of Peter's proclamation of the good news is as follows (Peter's kerygma):

- Jesus, attested to by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs.
- Handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God ("*according to the Scriptures*"), you killed but God raised him up.
- This Jesus, God raised up, we witnessed, he is now at the right hand of the Father, and the Spirit has been poured out. Know for certain!
- Repent, and be baptized to receive forgiveness of sins.

¹³ NRSV

¹⁴ NRSV

How does this compare with the proclamation of the good news by Jesus? It is a continuation of the good news Jesus preached as we saw in the gospel of Mark:

- John announced Jesus as the promised Messiah. Everyone who believed this and repented would have their sins forgiven.
- Jesus preached the “news of victory” of God: The time was fulfilled (for Israel’s restoration), and the kingdom of God was near.
- Jesus was attested to by God through deeds of power and signs and wonders.
- All who follow him would be spared the coming judgment on Israel and be part of the New Covenant He was setting up with his followers.

The message is essentially the same, as we would expect. Acts is what Jesus continued to do and teach (Acts 1:1). Jesus said he would teach them all things once the Spirit came. The teaching was now beginning. You might say Jesus developed his proclamation of the good news more fully through Peter. In what follows in Acts, we have five sermons by Peter:

Acts 2:14–42 Peter

Acts 3:11–26 Peter

Acts 4:5–13 Peter

Acts 5:27–32 Peter and the Apostles

These sermons were in essence the formation of what might be called a “kerygmic statement.” This kerygmic statement was probably best seen in his last sermon, Acts 13:44–48. This is what the church understood as the Kerygma—the gospel proclamation. This is what Paul referred to, in 1 Corinthians 15, as having received—authoritatively handed down from the Apostles.

¹ Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, ² through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you¹⁵

Notice again the formulaic nature of the words used: the “good news that I proclaimed to you.” The proclamation of the good news was to continue through Jesus’ new community, as it was formed. It would be a community that would grow worldwide and be the agent of this continued proclamation. The fundamental question to which we must now return, which is germane to the entire argument of this paper, is *how* did they proclaim the good news, the gospel story, the story of Jesus? Again, we get a clear picture right in the beginning of Acts (2:41–47), immediately following the stunning entrance of the Spirit.

⁴¹ So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. ⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ Awe came upon everyone, because

¹⁵ NRSV

many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

We see four key elements identified regarding the nature of this new community. They were devoted to:

1. The Apostles' teaching (kerygma)
2. Fellowship (sharing all things in common)
3. Breaking of bread (sharing meals house to house)
4. Prayer (going to the temple to pray daily)

So here is the scene: They were together daily—they shared all things in common, ate together from house to house, went to the temple together, etc. And, these radical new community activities were marked by something never seen before, which was key to their proclamation—key to God adding to their number daily. Those participating in these activities were marked by “glad and generous hearts.” The word *glad* refers to those who were really grateful at a celebrative level. *Generous* refers to humble, simple approach to these new community activities. Why was this so attractive? Or we might ask, what was so attractive? It is hard to get at. This key phrase, “with glad and generous hearts,” evidently added up to something very attractive. These people opened their homes. They freely shared their time and their possessions. Their faith changed their outlook, spirit, and life priorities.

So let's revisit our question. What form did the initial proclamation take that led to 3,000 believing? What form did the continual proclamation take that led to new numbers being added daily? In what sense were they becoming a kerygmatic community? In essence, at its birth, the Jerusalem church was a kerygmatic community.

- The core community Jesus commissioned was to continue “the proclamation” to the world.
- 3,000 were added by “the proclamation” through Peter's sermon.
- The 3,000 became a kerygmatic community resulting in numbers being added daily.
- They devoted themselves to “the Apostles' teaching,” which was, in essence, the kerygma message at that time.

What does this say to us about the nature of our churches? about our attitudes? What is attractive? What should “glad and generous” look like today? Many parts of the world argue for music and worship. I'm not so sure. It appears our generous spirit—with our homes, food, possessions, time—and a true, sincere faith that is solid, producing an ability to celebrate life in Christ are more at the heart of the issue. We must be careful not to

focus on the form and miss the “kerygmatic spirit,” which was so clearly seen in the exploding community of Acts 2. Now let’s look at the expansion of this new kerygmatic community mandate to “proclaim the good news” to the ends of the earth.

The Multiplication of the Communities under Paul

When we think of the Great Commission today and making disciples, we think of the modern day Western movement, and method, called discipleship. This is a movement that is probably best exemplified in *The Master Plan of Evangelism*,¹⁶ a book written in 1963—almost 50 years ago—at the beginning of the major ascendancy of the USA based Western discipleship organizations. The book, and the model that followed, basically set forth the assumption that what Jesus did, through his strategy in his 3½ years on earth, set forth a pattern for all of us to follow. We are all to go into the world and make disciples, individually, and train them to make disciples, individually, and then through multiplication of individuals we will reach the world. Listen to excerpts from the introduction and conclusion of *The Master Plan of Evangelism*.

“The Master Plan of Evangelism presents a thorough examination of the Gospel accounts, revealing the objective of Christ’s ministry, and his strategy for carrying it out. Robert E. Coleman focuses on the underlying principles that consistently determined what Jesus’ actions would be in any given situation.”¹⁷

“Everyone of us should be seeking some way to incorporate the wisdom of Jesus’ strategy into our own preferred method of evangelism.”¹⁸

But is that what Jesus was doing? Was that really his strategy? What was his “master strategy” for evangelism or, more properly phrased, for seeing his “proclamation of the good news” spread to all the world? I am going to suggest this is not the case at all. Jesus was shaking up the Jewish establishment, announcing a whole new plan, forming the essence of his new community—the church—around a small group of people, and getting himself killed as the sacrifice needed to birth this new community. He told his disciples to wait for their instructions after he left, which he would deliver through the Spirit. On the basis of the instructions, they were to be witnesses to the ends of the earth. Jesus had a “master strategy,” but his strategy is not found in the Gospels. It is found in Acts and the Epistles,

¹⁶ *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, by Robert Coleman (Revell, 1964) This work became the seminal work for many organizations in the mid sixties in the USA. Eventually it was eclipsed by in house material as organizations like the Navigators, Campus Crusade and InterVarsity Fellowship developed their own key books and elaborate discipleship training system. But they all basically followed the model.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Kindle books, locations 13–17.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Kindle books, locations 869–73.

which were written to the churches by his Apostles and their key leaders. Let's observe this "master strategy as it unfolds."¹⁹

Let's return once again to the scene in Acts 1 where the disciples were staring up into the sky. They had just been given their marching orders—an outline of the strategy to proclaim the good news to the ends of the earth. It would all begin in Jerusalem. Then they were to be witnesses in Judea and Samaria. And finally they were to be witnesses to the entire world. Acts is structured around this strategy of expansion. The key to the structure of the meta-narrative of the book of Acts is given to us by Luke himself.

1. Introduction
2. Three sections
 - a. The establishment of the church in *Jerusalem* (1:1–6:7)
 - b. The establishment of the church in *Judea and Samaria* (6:8–9:31)
 - c. The establishment of the church to the *extremity of the earth* (9:32–28:31)
 - The establishment of the church in *Antioch* (9:32–12:24)
 - The establishment of the church in *Asia Minor* (12:25–16:5)
 - The establishment of the church in the *Aegean* area (16:6–19:20)
 - The establishment of the church in *Rome* (Rome was the extremity of the earth. When you hit the core, you controlled the extremity.) (19:21–28:31)

The key to understanding the progress of the gospel is seen in the expansion strategy—Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and the uttermost parts—accentuated by six literary markers, carefully constructed by Luke. They show the progress of the gospel in the context of the expansion and multiplication of churches—kerygmatic communities demonstrating the "proclamation of the good news" through the nature of their community life. These markers are in essence six progress reports.

- progress report: 6:7
- progress report: 9:31
- progress report: 12:24
- progress report: 16:5
- progress report: 19:20
- progress report: 28:30–31

¹⁹ I deal with the discipleship confusion more thoroughly in *From Jesus to the Gospels*, the first of these encyclicals. In addition, a 5-booklet series entitled *Mastering the Scriptures: The Gospels* is scheduled to be released in November of 2012.

Here is the essence of each progress report.

6:7

The word kept spreading and the number kept increasing. Acts 2:42–47 tells us what this was rooted in: the new believers practicing radical community life. So the progress was rooted in community living!

9:31

The church was being built up and continued to increase. *Increase* appears in both reports; here it is an increasing in the church.

12:24

The word of the Lord continued to grow and be multiplied.

16:5

The churches were being strengthened and increasing in number daily. Now that the gospel was expanding to the Gentiles, the increasing was no longer to the body of Jewish believers but identified numbers being added to the Gentile churches.

19:20

The word of the Lord was spreading.

28:30–31

Paul was proclaiming the kingdom.

Let's put it together up to this point.

1. "The word of the Lord continuing to multiply" means that the Kerygma—the proclamation of the story of Jesus—continued to increase.
2. At first, this became synonymous with believers increasing in the Jerusalem church and the surrounding Jewish areas of Judea and Samaria.
3. As the word of Jesus took root among the Gentiles, it was referred to as adding believers to the churches.

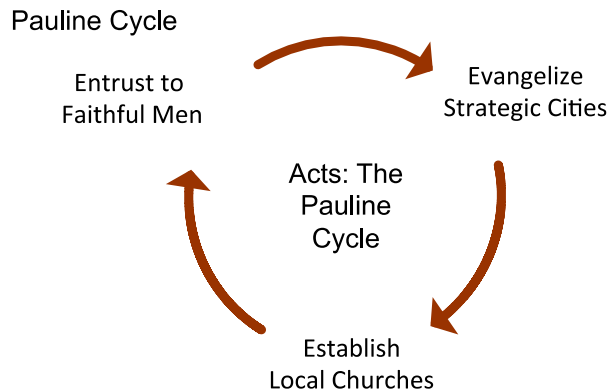
Now the picture begins to take shape. How were they added?

1. In the Jerusalem church they were added in two ways: Peter's five sermons and the intense, genuine community life of the believers.
2. In Judea and Samaria, Phillip and Peter preached in the region where the believers were scattered because of persecution, and believers were added to the Jerusalem church as a remnant of believers.
3. Paul and his team visited key cities, proclaiming the gospel and forming new communities, called churches, around those new believers.

The following chart illustrates what actually happened in the progress of the gospel. And a case can be made that, from a catechetical point of view,

Luke recorded it in such a way so as to show a pattern for future expansion of these kerygmic communities.

The Progress of the Gospel



What can we conclude so far? *Evangelism*—proclaiming the good news, the gospel, and its steady multiplication—involved two things: first, Apostolic leaders proclaimed the Word and formed the believers into new communities. And second, these new believers lived in community in an intense and fully committed way, and the Lord added to their numbers. The “master plan” is the multiplication of churches—kerygmic communities. It is increasingly clear that the multiplication of churches was the broad-based method of evangelism of the early churches. All evangelism—the proclamation and progress of the gospel—was rooted in this strategy, and the Kerygma itself was guarded by these churches. So what are the implications of this so far? What is the method of evangelism—of telling and spreading the good news? What does it seem you and I are responsible for as believers?

The Empire-Wide Network of the Communities

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Now we get to the most seminal question of this article: What is the difference between *evangelism* and *missions*, at least as most evangelicals see it and most churches practice it? Roland Allen addressed this issue over 100 years ago. He was one of the very few in his generation to see clearly the contrast between Western forms of missions and the simple “way of Christ and his Apostles,” which we see in the New Testament.

“For missionary work we have two organizations; one which is **ancient and one which is modern**; one simple, the other very

cumbrous; the simple necessary organization of the Church, the cumbrous modern organization is the organization of mission societies.... The new modern missionary organization is an addition. With us the Church had largely ceased to be self-expanding; its members, had, for the most part, forgotten its missionary character; its organization had degenerated and become stiff and rigid.... It took the form of an elaborate organization; it created a new organization within the Church.”²⁰

You see, we have professionalized and departmentalized the concept of *missions*. It has become disintegrated from the churches, changing their very DNA. We have fragmented a biblical concept to such a degree that churches are actually marginalized from participating in the progress of the gospel in the vibrant way we see in the New Testament. *Missions* is now outside churches, requiring only a token of their involvement, sacrifice, and money. And missions is separated from evangelism, which is a different thing yet. In the chart below I attempt to show how when viewed from the vantage point of the progress of the gospel in the early churches, the terms, though they were not used the way we use them today, are interchangeable.

The Progress of the Gospel

The Multiplication of Churches as ~~Evangelism~~ Missions

It is increasingly clear that the multiplication of churches was the broad-based method of evangelism of the early churches.

The Multiplication of Churches as Evangelism

It is increasingly clear that the multiplication of churches was the broad-based method of ~~evangelism~~ missions of the early churches.

Let’s look at the progress of the gospel in the early churches. They saw no difference between evangelism and missions. They did not even have those concepts in their minds. They saw everything as one. They were part of a movement, and the churches were a vital part of that entire movement. They participated in everything that happened. Let’s begin with the church at Philippi. Paul wrote a letter to them. In chapter one he praised them for “participating in the progress of the gospel” with him “from the first day until now” (1:3–5). He then challenged them not to let anything break up their one-minded participation with him in the progress of the gospel (1:27ff). He praised them for sending Ephroditus to minister to him (2:25ff) and for the financial gift they sent for him and his needs as he was on the front lines of that progress (4:15–18). A special concern of his was the conflict of Euodia and Synteche, two women who were co-workers with him in the progress of the gospel, implying that their conflict might hurt the

²⁰ *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church*, Roland Allen

focus of the Philippian churches (4:2–3). The church at Philippi was a partner with Paul in the progress of the gospel. They saw themselves as partners and saw no difference between the local progress of the gospel and the global progress—it was all one enterprise! Many of the Philippians were involved with Paul directly as co-workers, and people were clearly sent back and forth. In addition, they participated financially on many occasions.

Let’s look at another passage that includes two different examples of co-workers who both had churches in their homes (kerygmatic communities), and both were involved in the progress of the gospel in the network and in the movement. They are reported in Romans 16:1–5.

¹“I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, ² so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well. ³ Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, ⁴ and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. ⁵ Greet also the church in their house.”²¹

We have two examples here—Phoebe and Prisca and Aquila. Both examples show the complete integration of evangelism and missions. Both sets of leaders served in churches, and probably both had churches in their homes. Plus both served in the progress of the gospel beyond just the churches in their houses. And implied here, is the gratefulness of all the churches to these leaders, which also suggests that all the churches were participating in the network, dedicated to the progress of the gospel. Furthermore, they were all involved in Paul’s network—his work—the progress of the gospel across the entire Empire. It is all under the banner of the proclamation of the gospel—the main idea of evangelism (“good news”). Yet it is set in the context of global mission.

Paul expected them to participate with him at every level. You can see this clearly in Paul’s correspondence with the Romans in 15:17–19 and 22–24. Paul desired to come to them but had been hindered. He “proclaimed the good news” (same phrase again) all the way from Jerusalem across the Roman Empire to Illyricum. Paul’s correspondence with the Corinthians is also very informative at this point (2 Corinthians 10:8–18). He speaks of an authority that had been given to him over the churches within his “sphere of action” (v. 15). He also speaks of God assigning a “field” to him (v. 13). And he desires his sphere of action to be “enlarged” by the Corinthian’s participation with him. There are three key concepts to Paul’s argument:

- “sphere of action”—the same word as *field* in verse 13. Refers to the area under one’s governorship; the word for canon or rule.
- “greatly enlarged”—mega

²¹ NRSV

- “in lands beyond you”—progress of the gospel is in view here; again we see the phrase “proclaim the good news” v. 16

Paul’s argument is this: They were part of an enterprise that was in the context of a “field” God assigned to his team. As he would be “enlarged through them,” his field would expand. Their success was intertwined, so their local growth related to the progress of the gospel globally. Paul had the authority to keep them in line and on task.²²

It is critical to see that there was an empire-wide network of these communities that had design, structure, and planning to it. This is all part of the strategy that unfolded in Acts. Remember Acts is Jesus’ plan—it is what Jesus continued to do and teach through his Apostles and their teams. The implications are huge. Only evangelism set in the context of global mission and network building will be carrying out true evangelism. And only evangelism set in this context is sustainable. We need the connection . . . and the vision!

A bit of our own story might be helpful here. We have been on a journey of discovering these truths for over 3 decades. In the late 1980s and early 90s when BILD began to unfold larger scale, this produced stress in our church. It created an internal debate that eventually cost us 25 plus families. “Let the church be the church.” “Send Jeff out as a missionary—that’s what he wants to do.” Separate the two spheres.” A huge battle ensued. Letters were circulated behind the scenes. A lot of personal attacks were involved. But the elders, well schooled in the concepts, prevailed and opened the door to huge opportunity and very important modeling. By staying with the paradigm over the next 15 years, God has really blessed. As an apostolic team in a reasonably small but strategically located church in a university town, we are shaping strategic church-planting movements worldwide; we have our own CityChurch network in Ames–Des Moines (a church of 12 churches); and we have an Antioch Initiative 30-city urban strategy for North America.²³ These are powerful concepts in any generation. The implications are huge. Only evangelism set in the context of global mission and network building will be carrying out true evangelism. Churches’ loss of connection and vision is one of the main reasons we are now in a post-Christian culture in the USA.

At this time, as church leaders, you may be asking, “What about local expansion, local proclamation? You may be thinking, “This is heavy on global proclamation.” Let’s turn our attention to the local “kerygmatic communities” we have seen in the early churches. In these last two sections we will focus on the implications for local *evangelism*, or should I say local *missions*. You decide. First, we will focus on the churches themselves as

²² This whole concept of a “complex network of the early churches” was developed in “The Churches of the First Century: From Simple Church to Complex Networks.” This concept was clearly at the heart of the unfolding of Jesus’ plan for the continued worldwide proclamation of the gospel through his “kerygmatic communities.”

²³ See BILD International for copies of our “North American Initiatives” and our 30-city urban strategy “One Degree at a Time.”

agents of proclamation, rather than viewing evangelism as an individual enterprise. And finally, we will address the ongoing role of evangelists, locally, including in local clusters.

The Communities as Evangelism

Were Paul's churches to continue as kerygmatic communities? Was that the heart of their existence? As we approached this point in our series at the CityChurch of Ames–Des Moines, one of the new elder designees of one of the churches stated to me, after the fifth study:

“Jeff, here is what I said about your teaching this morning, which I discussed with you: ‘The communities are telling the story of Jesus by the nature of their existence.’

“In addition, my thought as I considered this statement was this: Before we broke up into smaller churches, it would have been virtually impossible for us to ‘tell the story of Jesus’ as a community. The more intimate nature of the smaller groups and the greater one-anothering that is required is largely how the story is told by a community.”²⁴

What a great line! “The communities are telling the story of Jesus by the very nature of their existence.” I believe this is accurate. From every angle, when you examine the nature of these small communities of early churches, by their very design, they are intended to be kerygmatic and key to the continued proclamation of the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth, all through the centuries. Let's look at some of these kerygmatic elements.

First, they were kerygmatic in their meeting design. The very nature of their gathering indicated this. This gathering is described in Acts 20:7.

⁷ On the first day of the week, when we *met to break bread*, Paul was holding a discussion with them; since he intended to leave the next day, he continued speaking until midnight.²⁵

This type of gathering was commonplace for the first 300 years of the early churches. Listen to some of the research. The first is from Bradley Blue, from volume 2 of *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*, an invaluable 5-volume set.

“The gathering of Christian believers in private homes (or homes renovated for the purpose of Christian gatherings) continued to be the norm until the early decades of the fourth century when under

²⁴ Bob Shuka is one of our local church elders, on track to become one of our future city elders.

²⁵ NRSV

the tutelage of Constantine, the Christians began erecting the first basilicas. For almost 300 years the believers met in homes....”²⁶

The second is from James Dunn, found in volume two of ground breaking trilogy *The Making of Christianity*,

“And no doubt the small house churches grew by inviting friends, visiting kinsfolk, fellow synagogue attenders, neighbors and colleagues to come to one of their regular meetings or shared meals.”²⁷

What do I mean that they were kerygmatic in their meeting design? The nature of their gathering was in the evening around a meal in a home or storefront home/trade setting. As was seen in Acts 20:7, these meetings were described as gathering together to break bread, to observe the Lord’s Supper, as a meal of remembrance. Notice what is said about this gathering around the Lord’s Supper in Paul’s correspondence with the Corinthians in 11:17–20.

¹⁷ Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when *you come together* it is not for the better but for the worse. ¹⁸ For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it.... ²⁰ When you come together, it is not really to eat the *Lord’s supper*.²⁸

And again in 11:26

²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you *proclaim the Lord’s death* until he comes.²⁹

Notice the phrase “proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” The core of their existence as communities was the small weekly gathering in homes all across the empire. The core identity of the meeting was the Lord’s Supper. For 300 years the term *the Lord’s Supper* was synonymous with the gathering in homes on the evening of the first day of the week. The bread and the cup framed in the meal. And the purpose was to proclaim the Lord’s death—kerygmatic in nature. We are making a “living kerygmatic statement” every time we come together!

They were kerygmatic by the change in their lives. You can see this in Paul’s Thessalonian correspondence. In 1 Thess. 1:2–10 Paul first comments of the full conviction in which they embraced the “gospel

²⁶ “Acts and the House Church,” by Bradley Blue in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting—Volume 2: Greco-Roman Setting*, p. 124.

²⁷ Dunn, *Beginning From Jerusalem*, p. 641

²⁸ NRSV

²⁹ NRSV

message”—the kerygma (v. 5). He states that the Word sounded forth from them not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place. The gospel was progressing through the change in their lives from the way they embraced the gospel message. Paul was thinking of specific regions affected by how their lives were impacted by the kerygmatic message.

They were kerygmatic by the quality (and design) of their community life. This can clearly be seen in Titus, where Paul gives the “household design” for the churches. This design is Christ’s design.³⁰ The churches were to function as households of households, with extended family- type community relationships that were designed to adorn the gospel with their life in community.

³ Likewise, tell the older women to be... so that the word of God may not be discredited.

⁶ Likewise, urge the younger men to be... then any opponent will be put to shame, having nothing evil to say of us.

⁹ Tell slaves to be... so that in everything they may be an *ornament* to the doctrine of God our Savior.³¹

Their community life was clearly kerygmatic by design since Paul gave Titus specific instructions in how they were to order their community life in order to adorn the gospel so the Word would continue to progress.

They were kerygmatic as they told their stories. This time Paul’s correspondence with the Colossians gives us a snapshot. After praising the fruitfulness of their faith, he addressed an important kerygmatic element of their community life. They were to live a certain way toward outsiders and be ready to tell the story of their faith. In Colossians 4:5–6 Paul states:

⁵ Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. ⁶ Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you *ought to answer everyone*.³²

The context is to tell the story of their faith to those who ask them about their change to this new life. Thus a major reason for the way these new communities were to conduct themselves toward those outside the community was kerygmatic in nature—sincere yes, but kerygmatic.

They were kerygmatic in their participation in regional multiplication of churches. Again Colossians is helpful for us. They were kerygmatic in the sense that they belonged to a cluster of churches that were part of a regional network contributing to the progress of the gospel. In Colossians 4:12–16 we have a very interesting correspondence with the

³⁰ The organizing center of the Pastorals is 1 Timothy 3:14–15, which speaks of Christ’s household design for the churches. This can be cross referenced with Ephesians 3:8–10, which speaks to the church as the master plan of Christ for demonstrating the wisdom of God to all.

³¹ All from NRSV

³² NRSV

Colossians. He sees them clearly as part of a regional network. He wants to make sure the church at Laodicea reads their letter and they read the Laodicean's letter from Paul. And those at Hierapolis, a third city close in the cluster, are to read both, it is assumed. They clearly had a sense of being a cluster of churches participating with Paul in the progress of the gospel in their region.

And finally, they were kerygmatic in their participation in the global progress of the gospel. Paul let's us in on the complete picture of his involvement with the Colossians in 4:3-4 and 18. He encourages them to pray for him and remember his chains—his imprisonment, which brings with it special needs they can help meet. The church at Colossae, as well as all of the churches in Paul's network, saw themselves as kerygmatic in the final and broadest sense—as participating with Paul globally in the progress of the gospel.

All of this has huge implications for our churches today and implications for our understanding of *evangelism* and *missions*. Our meetings in our homes need to proclaim the Kerygma story. The change in our lives needs to reflect the power of the gospel story. The quality of our community life needs to adorn the gospel. We must all be prepared to tell the story through our stories in a convincing manner. Our churches must fully participate in the regional multiplication of churches. Our churches must participate in the global progress of the gospel through complex apostolic networks. Anything short of this is a fragmentation of the “master plan” of Christ. Bob was right when he summarized these ideas into one statement: “The communities are telling the story of Jesus by the nature of their very existence.”

This all takes me back to the basic thesis of my earlier paper “The Churches of the First Century: From Simple Churches to Complex Networks.” The thesis was this: There is a connection (“Link”) between the spontaneous expansion of the Early Church and the simple gathering together of communities of believers on the first day of every week in homes and tenements around an evening meal, celebrating their new life in Christ. Why was this all so attractive? Or we might ask, what was so attractive? These people opened their homes. They freely shared their time and their possessions. Their faith changed their outlook, spirit, and life priorities. Remember Dunn's quote:

“And no doubt the small house churches grew by inviting friends, visiting kinsfolk, fellow synagogue attenders, neighbors and colleagues to come to one of their regular meetings or shared meals.”³³

What should people be able to observe in our homes, if we are living out authentic Christianity? What do these small kerygmatic communities require in order to be attractive and for the Lord to add to

³³ Dunn, *ibid.*

them? Can this be experienced in a traditional church building or in a Western church service? In our homes people can...observe our “living kerygmatic statement” as we gather to break bread, observe the ongoing transforming power of the gospel in our lives, experience the beauty of the gospel in our families and community life, hear us tell *the story* through our stories, in a convincing manner, get answers to their questions, and be introduced to people from our church of churches—locally, regionally, and globally.

The Evangelists

Now finally, to complete the entire picture, we turn to the work of the evangelist. This is a very confusing modern day animal. He is not a missionary, according to most circles. He is not a pastor. This means he is not a professional. Most of our exposure to any expression at all of an evangelist is a preacher who speaks to large crowds and shares the gospel. A new modern day expression is a televangelist, a preaching evangelist who goes on television to share the gospel with large crowds. At any rate, our Western notion and model of an evangelist is one who is disassociated from churches, often wandering on his own, but maybe sending his converts to churches in the area he is currently evangelizing. Let me suggest that this picture is a long way from the one described and modeled in the early churches.

Let’s just quickly lay some biblical foundations from Acts and the Epistles, to try to see how evangelists fit into Jesus’ strategy. First, we must note, evangelists exist. There were leaders with the gift of evangelist. We can see this clearly in Ephesians 4. It is one of the five-fold gifts.

¹¹ The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers....

The context of this section is building up the church into one mature man (Ephesians 4:11–16), built on the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, Christ being the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:19–22). This church is the plan of Christ for this new age (Ephesians 3:8–10). These gifted leaders are building the framework of this church, in the context of which they will equip the saints to carry out their ministries within that framework so that the entire church will become a mature picture of Christ to the watching world. These leaders are also to equip believers for the work of ministry. I believe this was more in the context of helping the churches function as kerygmatic communities than helping individual believers learn to share their faith. The word *evangelist* is “euangelistas,” which is in the family of “the good news”; so an evangelist is a preacher of the good news. The focus of his ministry was more around believers and the kerygma than believers and the Didache. That is more the realm of a teacher.

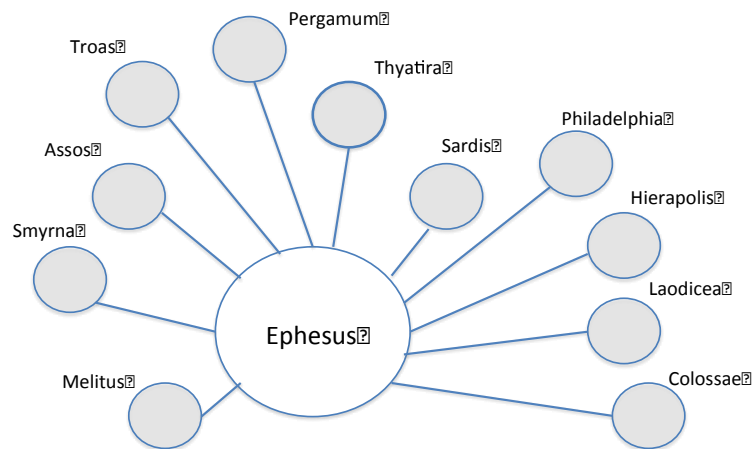
Was Paul an evangelist? Yes, it appears he had at least three of the five-fold gifts of Ephesians 4:11. Listen to how he describes himself in 2 Timothy 1.

¹¹ For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, ¹² and for this reason I suffer as I do.³⁴

The key gift here is “a herald.” That appears to be another word for evangelist. It come from the Greek word *keryx*, with is in the kerygma family. In other words, Paul was a preacher (proclaimer) of the gospel (kerygma). We see Paul in action as a herald/evangelist in Acts 19 at the hall of Tyrannus.

⁸ He entered the synagogue and for three months spoke out boldly, and argued persuasively about the kingdom of God. ⁹ When some stubbornly refused to believe and spoke evil of the Way before the congregation, he left them, taking the disciples with him, and argued daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. ¹⁰ This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord.³⁵

Paul used the hall of Tyrannus to dialogue over the word daily, probably from about 11 in the morning till 2 or 3 in the afternoon every day. These dialogues were probably “kerygmic” in nature, because it states the whole surrounding area heard the word of the Lord. Many churches were birthed around Ephesus, which was clearly a hub for Paul. Here is a chart, by Arthur Patzia, of the churches that were planted, probably mostly as a result of Paul’s time in Ephesus.³⁶



³⁴ NRSV

³⁵ NRSV

³⁶ This chart is taken from *The Emergence of the Church: Context, Growth, Leadership and Worship*, by Arthur G. Patzia

Paul also challenged Timothy to do the work of an evangelist. Listen to Paul's final challenge to Timothy (2 Timothy 4):

¹ In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: ² proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. ³ For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. ⁵ As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.³⁷

Several things are important to note in this passage. First, he challenges Timothy to proclaim the message. Here the term seems to pick up the entire message—the kerygma and the didache. Clearly sound doctrine—the Didache—is in view. Many people will bring in false teaching to upset whole churches and hurt the progress of the gospel (Titus 1:9–11). Yet he comes back to the challenge for Timothy to do the work of an evangelist. Again, this is in the context of expanding and orienting the churches. Timothy was to help proclaim it in public forums of some type and, most probably, to help orient and equip the churches to become kerygmatic communities.

What about individual believers and the churches themselves? In a secondary sense, every believer is an evangelist. Paul, in Colossians 4:3–6, and Peter, in 1 Peter 3:15, state that believers in the churches all need to be able to make a defense for their faith and be able to give an attractive response when asked about their faith. But clearly this is all in the context of everyday life lived within a network of kerygmatic communities, which are clearly committed to the progress of the gospel.

So who were the evangelists? Evangelists were part of the gift cluster of Ephesians 4:11, designed to build on the foundation of the apostles and prophets and to equip the saints for the work of ministry. Those gifted leaders of the Ephesians' gift cluster, like Timothy, were to do the work of an evangelist. That is probably what Paul was modeling in Ephesus for 2 years at the Hall of Tyrannus. They are critical to the local and regional progress of the gospel through a multiplication of churches by their public proclamation and by orienting and equipping churches to become mature kerygmatic communities.

23

So What Does All This Look Like?

I am not going to try to spell out all the details here. There is enough in the sections for you to make it all fit. I do not know what journey

³⁷ NRSV

this will take you on. Some of you are leading massive church-planting movements in the Global South. You should probably just follow the pattern of the early churches as sort of a road map. The complex mapping chart in the *Churches of the First Century: From Simple Churches to Complex Networks* should suffice as a guide. For those leading mega churches, get serious about making your small groups true kerygmatic communities with all the elements built into these early churches. For those in the boroughs of mega cities, look around. Maybe it is wise to form a network of struggling small and storefront churches. Or maybe you could network a set of house churches in the brownstones of every block, using your church as a resource center. For those leading wealthy suburban churches, take seriously that each neighborhood needs a kerygmatic community. Look for walkable urban settings to establish true kerygmatic communities under your umbrella. They are everywhere.

As I said earlier, several movements have pioneered the way before us—the cell movements, house church movements, and saturation church-planting globally. If you are in one of these movements, I can address all three at the same time. You have taken enormous steps in the right direction, but your models are fatally flawed and will ultimately fail. Since the cell is not the social structure of the church—that is not Christ’s plan. House churches by themselves, without strong leadership and true networks with authority, will dissipate. And saturation church-planting movements that focus just on evangelism, forgetting serious establishing of churches and training leaders, those models are unsustainable. To all three I say this: focus on the whole picture; build a complete system based on the “way of Christ and his Apostles”—the whole system, not just part of it.³⁸ Roland Allen warns that those who just adopt fragments of Paul’s methods (that is, Jesus’ strategy) have not really implemented it at all.

“... people have adopted fragments of St. Paul’s method and have tried to incorporate them into alien systems, and the failure which resulted has been used as an argument against the Apostle’s method.... When these false and partial attempts at imitating the Apostle’s method have failed, men have declared that the apostolic method was at fault and was quite unsuited to the condition and circumstances of present-day missions. The truth is that they have neither understood nor practiced the Apostle’s method at all.

And a brief word to the young emerging postmodern churches of the West, who grasp many of these things but find themselves wandering in the wilderness of the Gospels, taking the followership of Christ seriously, but missing his whole plan in Acts and the Epistles often because of your hostility toward the Western evangelical church. If you do not correct your course and pay attention to Christ’s plan for the churches, which he revealed to the Apostles, then you too will be a trend that soon passes.

³⁸ *Missionary Methods: Saint Paul’s Or Ours?*, by Roland Allen

For us, it has led to an incredible journey. We decided to take some very radical steps. Three years ago we began a process that led us to a major decision to take our church of 400 in a small university town (actually the Ames–Des Moines metroplex and corridor between the two is just under 1 million) and deconstruct it into a church of churches—12 to be specific. It was not easy. We spent a year framing it in paradigmatically, another year preparing for it, and another year launching it. We are seeing significant results already. Spontaneous expansion is already happening. We have it all documented³⁹—part of the paradigm process for us. That is our journey. We are not recommending it for others in situations similar to ours by any means. But that is our plan. What is yours?

All I know is this, paraphrasing Roland Allen, “what I have presented to you so far,” in these four encyclicals,⁴⁰ is “the way of Christ and his Apostles.” If you follow them way carefully, I believe you will see amazing results—sustainable results, transformational results, and spontaneously expanding results.

³⁹ The documentation involves the encyclicals, a year of teaching on relevant issues in preparation, a covenant shared by the 12 churches, a new leadership structure, 1½ years of meeting every Monday night with 54 men and 18 leading women serving as leadership teams in the churches and working it out on the ground, and the formation of an apostolic team of 12. We anticipate our churches doubling to 24 in the first 2–2 ½ years based on current results we are seeing. And we were not the typical evangelical church to start with, having shed most evangelical paradigms of mission, theological education, discipleship and counseling prior to making this radical change. Even then it has not been easy. All of the leadership meetings have been recorded, as well, for future use.

⁴⁰ I presented the 4 Encyclicals at BILD International Conferences: (1) “Jesus to the Gospels,” Nov. 8, 2007; (2) “The Churches of the First Century: From Simple Churches to Complex Networks,” November 5, 2009; (3) “Women and the Spontaneous Expansion of the Early Churches,” November 4, 2010; and this one (4) “Kerygmatic Communities: Evangelism and the Early Churches,” November 2, 2011. These Encyclicals are available from BILD International: www.bild.org.