

“Discerning the Body” in Cross-Cultural Relationships: A Critical Analysis of Missional Partnership in Southeastern Europe

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Summary

21st century mission, now recognized as being from “everywhere to anywhere,” has increasingly focused on the concepts of mission partnerships and interdependence. However, all too often, mission partnerships in Southeastern Europe seem entrenched in narratives of dysfunctional relationships. Is the power and impact of the global Church as it participates in God’s mission directly related to how we function together across the boundaries of ethnicity, tradition, and socio-economic status? If so, how can both national Christians and foreign missionaries step out of repeating negative relational patterns? In order to explore some of the foundational issues rooted in this question, this paper will first discuss a missiological reading of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. Secondly, this paper will critically analyze a Croatian case study, which highlights a past successful partnership between nationals and Western missionaries, focusing on three pertinent concepts that emerge: organic teams, economic paradigms, and the foundation for true power in mission. Finally, in light of both Paul’s directives and the issues raised in the case study, the paper will offer missiological implications for future cross-cultural relationships in Southeastern Europe.

Key words: *God’s mission, global Church, mission, missionary, cross-cultural relationships*

Introduction

In this era of globalized exchange, expanding technology, and constant migration, mission is now recognized as being from “everywhere to anywhere” and from “everyone to anyone.” Offering an apt depiction of this phenomenon, Bill Dyrness describes missions as the “mutual exchange among multiple centers of influence and learning and resources traveling all directions, not only from here to there”(Borthwick 2012, 39). In such an era, 21st century mission has increasingly focused on “mission partnerships”, “interdependence”, and for better or worse, the increasing trend of “short-term mission”. This changing paradigm is not a new concept in missiology; however, mission praxis often struggles to keep up with present realities and new insights regarding cross-cultural partnerships; instead it often seems entrenched in narratives of dysfunctional relationships.

If one were to ask national Christian workers in Southeastern Europe what they thought of Western missionaries, for example, one would likely hear some version of Davor Peterlin’s assessment in his article entitled “The Wrong Missionary”: All too often, Western missionaries are “a liability rather than an asset” (1995, 165). In fact, it is not uncommon to hear Christians in Southeastern Europe express the opinion that perhaps the best way for those in the West to participate in God’s mission is to financially support local Christians and stay in their country of origin. Paul Borthwick, in his book *Western Christians in Global Mission*, argues that at least for Westerners, this is detrimental as it “implicitly affirms an already pervasive materialism that believes that God wants our money more than he wants our lives” (2012, 154). On the other hand, missionaries have also become disheartened while working with nationals, eventually abandoning any co-operation for the sake of beginning their own independent projects. Often they return to their countries of origin disillusioned and disappointed. Such issues have resulted in negative “relational-memories”, leaving an unhealthy and detrimental residue in current partnerships.

To think of mission partnerships only in terms of economic resources, contractual agreements, or specific projects misses the implications of the church’s multifaceted body revealing and participating in God’s mission. Andrew Walls alludes to the idea of global Christianity manifesting the “new humanity” possible only through Christ and questions, in this critical moment in history, “... whether or not the church in all its diversity will demonstrate its unity by the interactive participation of all its culture-specific segments, the interactive participation that is to be expected in a functioning body” (2002, 81). Is the power and impact of the global church as it participates in God’s mission directly related to how we function together across the boundaries of ethnicity, tradition, and socio-economic status? If so, how can both national Christians and foreign mis-

sionaries step out of repeating negative relational patterns?

In order to explore some of the foundational issues rooted in this question, this paper will first discuss a missiological reading of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. In this passage, Paul critiques the privileged Corinthians' relationship with the poor and disadvantaged—resulting in a misuse of the Eucharist. According to Paul, not "discerning the body"—that is, acting indifferently to the poor (and vice versa)—is a sin which strips away the spiritual power behind the symbolic activities which were originally designed for the glory of God. Secondly, this paper will critically analyze a Croatian case study which highlights a past successful partnership between nationals and Western missionaries, focusing on three pertinent concepts that emerge: *organic teams, economic paradigms, and the foundation for true power in mission*. Finally, in light of both of Paul's directives and the issues raised in the case study, the paper will offer missiological implications for future cross-cultural relationships in Southeastern Europe.

Exegesis of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

μη διακρίνων τὸ σῶμα: On the Problem of Discerning the "Body"

The biblical text in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 which offers itself as a foundation for our case study is one not immediately seen as relevant for Christian mission. Traditionally the text is used in the context of the Eucharist, mainly within the confines of a local church with implications for the holy living of its members. Admittedly, the Eucharist in a local church is the text's primary *Sitz im Leben*. However, it will be argued here that rather than an instruction for a proper cultic approach to the Lord's Table, "discerning the body/church" in the sacrament is the theme of this text.

The apostle Paul does not argue for a proper administration of the Eucharist only to deserving members, but rather argues the other way around. Deserving members proclaim the Eucharist's true meaning—the oneness of Christ's body which is the church. "The body" to be discerned here by those participating in the Eucharist are not their own individual bodies—as if Paul meant that individually they should make a sinless appearance in the presence of the sacrament as this text is often traditionally interpreted. Rather, "the one body of Christ" to be discerned in the Eucharist is Christ's church of which he is the head (Eph 4:16). All participants at the Lord's Table must recognize this body. Generally, in 1 Corinthians, the body of Christ is used as a metaphor for the church. This is true of our text and its immediate context (1 Cor 12 in particular; proven by Collins from its rhetoric; Collins 1999, 439). Individual Christians, regardless of gender,

nationality or social status (1 Cor 12:13; cf. Gal 3:28) have a part in Christ's body as body members. As body members, they fulfill their diverse functions with the explicit purpose of enabling the body as a whole to live and thrive. Paul warns that a weak, ill and dying church is directly connected to the lack of this acknowledgment of the body of Christ (11:30).

Three points in Paul's exposition need closer theological attention to arrive at our thesis: What does Paul mean by "Christ's body" and how does he arrive at the claim that the church is rightfully understood as the body of Christ? This question also necessarily asks about the relationship Paul sees between the Eucharist and the church. Secondly, what does it mean to "discern" the body and how is it done in the church? Finally, what is meant by the "sick, weak and sleeping/dead"? All of these questions naturally presuppose detailed exegesis which cannot be displayed here for lack of space. Thus our discussion is based around the works of four authors which give a solid overview of the issues at hand and also across denominations: Wolfgang Schrage's Ecumenical Commentary on Corinthians and his detailed study on the body of Christ as the church; F. Collins' commentary on 1st Corinthians from a rhetorical critical perspective; Barrett's commentary which represents a traditional Protestant view, and Gordon Fee's Commentary on First Corinthians.

It has to be about Christ

The chosen passage can be divided into three major sections which are directly connected with questions leading this study: The first section, 11:17-22 can be titled: Paul's View of the Corinthian Problem Regarding the Eucharist; the second, 11:23-26 is a reminder of the Jesus tradition regarding the Eucharist which stands in utter contrast to the Corinthian practice. The third, 11:27-34 recounts negative implications for the church and its proclamation from a misconception of (and therefore leading to misconduct during) the Eucharist. The problem is so serious, Paul states, that it needs immediate attention that cannot wait (like some other issues) until he comes in person (11:34).

Paul begins by describing his frustration with a condition where the Lord's Supper had become an orgy of sorts. The rich were exhibiting their status by eating publicly and excessively and even getting drunk, while other church members, coming from lower social classes went hungry (11:21). The Lord's Supper had been part of a full fellowship meal where the celebration of the Eucharist was the climax (Schrage 1991, EKK I/I, Introduction; Fee 1989, 541). However, the rich Corinthians hijacked the occasion, so Paul criticizes them. Instead of remembering the Lord and how he gave himself up, they were enjoying the fellowship of the other "few" rich (1:26). The conditions described here by Paul are not surprising. While the church in Corinth consisted of all classes, the rich naturally ran the show. They had the time and energy to come early as they did not need

to work heavily, and they had food to bring along with them. The poor and the slaves had to finish their work first, had no time to fix dinners and came hungry and exhausted. Paul asks the obvious question which nobody in Corinth thought of asking: What was the purpose behind this exhibition of wealth they called the Lord's Supper? Was it to shame the poor? They professed to belong to Christ, but intentionally or unintentionally they dissociated from those whom God called and whom he placed alongside them simply because the poor could not keep up with their wealth (11:22). In Corinth, this was but one expression of disunity (1:12ff; 3:16ff; 5:6ff; 8:12; 10:14ff; 12:12ff; see also Collins 1999, 418-421), but this one distorted the core of Christianity: Christ's sacrifice. Consequently, in Paul's mind, this was fatal for the church.

To make the connection evident, Paul reminds the Corinthians of the tradition of Jesus. When Paul recollects the tradition of Jesus' last supper (our second section), he insists on Christology as the sole purpose for the performance of the sacrament. The text predominantly highlights Jesus' own words and the 1st person personal pronoun rules the unit. Jesus established the Eucharist so that *he* would be remembered in the bread that is his body and in the wine that is *his* blood. The church—being reminded of *his* death—assembles to celebrate the Eucharist because of *his* memory and until *his* coming. The emphasis is so strong that its point cannot be missed. The more Paul emphasizes the priority of Christ in the Eucharist, the more the Corinthian problem is exposed. In Corinth, the Lord's Supper was about the wealthy Corinthians, and the conclusion was devastating for people who were convinced, even thrilled, about their own piety: "You do not eat the Lord's supper, because all of you eat your own dinners" (11:22).

Thus, a list of admonitions follows for the Corinthian church for what would be the right approach since this practice threatens the mere existence of the church, and had already affected large parts. This third section of our text is the longest. It conveys a serious message to a church that had failed the test of recognizing the body of Christ. They should be warned that by taking what is about the Lord and making it about themselves, they are found undeserving of Christ's body and therefore judged. The judgment is seen in Corinth: many among them, Paul claims, are weak, sick and asleep (dead) (11:30).

The Church as Christ's Body

We will start the discussion of Paul's exposition in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 backwards—that is, from the outcomes for the church which Paul links directly to their unworthy participation in the Eucharist to the need to address them immediately. There are no uniform opinions about what Paul means by the "weak, sick and sleeping/dead." Are these physical conditions (Barrett 1968, 275; Fee 1989, 565)? Or does Paul refer to a set of unfortunate spiritual conditions? Most

commentators leave the decision open for lack of concrete information in the text. However, we find the theological reason why these should be used metaphorically in Paul's σὰρξ (*sarx*, flesh) - theology as he sketches it in Romans 8, perhaps possibly already in Romans 7:5ff, but certainly in Galatians 5:16ff.

Paul claims that people who live by the "flesh" are (spiritually) "dead". This death is evident in their fleshly desires that "seize opportunity" over them instead of letting the spirit of God destroy their mortal *sarx* and at the same time resurrect their otherwise "mortal" bodies (*soma*; Rom 8:11). Because, as Dunn said, "when sin plays death as its last chance God's spirit will trump it," (Romans I: 1988, 445). Dunn's remark is entirely futuristic, but I believe (alongside Calvin) that Paul means not just as a future resurrection, but the ability to gain life even in this deadly and death-bringing *sarx*. Read from this perspective, the whole of 1 Corinthians is a display of a church with many "sick" and "dying" people. Their weakness is evident in the display of their deadly works: they put themselves first, they divide, they go after their bodily passions, they boast, and they disturb the worship. Christ's resurrected life is not seen in them.

Therefore Paul calls the Corinthians to test and judge themselves before it is too late and God judges the world at the end of history. Paul's theology always allows for improvement and growth, even resurrection of the "dead". This is accomplished in the self-test of the Corinthians in view of the Lord's Table. Jesus' self-giving life remembered in the Eucharist is God's gracious chance for improvement and life as it constantly places the Christian before the mirror of Jesus' perfect godly conduct. Thus the question of everyone should always be: Am I serving the purposes of Christ, or is my life an inappropriate self-presentation that shames and degrades others who are part of the same body of Christ?

Paul's σὰρξ- theology illustrates the problem from a negative perspective, how *not* to live your life as a Christian; on the other hand, his σῶμα (*soma*) - theology displays positively what is expected of Christians. As God's adopted children and sealed by his Spirit, they come together in the church which is Christ's body. How exactly Paul came to the conclusion that the church should be Christ's body is not entirely clear to commentators. However, many aspects of the Eucharist suggest a connection. Barrett, for instance, points to 'the body of the Passover lamb' mentioned in Pesachim x. 4 in connection with Jesus' words at the Eucharist (Barrett 1968, 266) with reference to the bread: "This is my body." From there one can draw the conclusion that "he had given himself on behalf of his people, who shared in the benefits of his passion as they shared in eating a loaf in a meal held in his memory" (Barrett 1968, 267). Barrett notices that when describing the Eucharist, Paul stops at the body and "refrains from identifying the wine with the blood of Jesus" (Barrett 1968, 271); but while Barrett explains this Christologically, I believe that Paul's emphasis on the *soma* does give an ecclesiological bent

to the discussion, as Moffat remarked: "The reason he speaks only of the Body in verse 29 is that he is now introducing another rich aspect of the Body, to bring out the corporate communion about which some of the Corinthians have been so fatally careless" (Moffat 1949, 171). We can still conclude with Barrett that the Eucharist was not a "buddy meal" between equals, but a representation of participation in the glorified life of Jesus which is demonstrated in the church. Schrage comes to a similar conclusion by researching Paul's picture of baptism as participation in Christ's death in Romans 6 (Schrage, Abbild 1980, 207-208). There is something mysterious in the fact that through faith in Christ, the suffering servant, God brings people together in a church because as they come together, they become one effective resurrected body of Christ in the world, called to proclaim Christ by their very being a church.

Eat at Home!

The Corinthians' approach to the church differed from that of Paul showing that the resurrection of their "mortal bodies" had not yet advanced far. They could hardly recognize their wrong. They expected praise from God for their charismatic presence. It never occurred to them that their social differences held any significance in their exalted worship of God. But Paul claims the contrary, and also calls for immediate action. His suggestion, however, hurts our socially sensitive expectations. Surely, the solution is in an even distribution of wealth! Paul, however, never calls the rich church members to feed the poor and share all their possessions. He is no revolutionary activist or idealist who believes that the differences in the world can be dissolved by a little social effort. His solution is slower, but more effective. We may notice with Schrage that from the perspective in Romans (and in Paul's mind), the church on earth is never fully Christ's representative in a docetic way: "So gewiß die Kriche den gekreuzigten Herrn irdisch repräsentiert und Christus und sein Leib nicht auseinanderzureißen sind, so wenig fallen beide einfach zusammen" (Schrage, Abbild 1980, 218). The church is simply not there yet. The Corinthians must learn to discern the body by accepting and working alongside those who are different by showing proper respect for the work of God in them without imposing their own standards. The more this happens, the more progress will be seen socially. Therefore, "If someone is hungry—let him eat at home," is good advice. The church gathering is not a place for the exhibition of individuals and their wealth, but a place where Christians experience equality in Christ and test their motives and practices against him. Social justice naturally emerges where unity is lived out—even if only at first temporarily and in a church service setting. An inner experience of change in the areas of beliefs and convictions usually does bring change. Outside coercion rarely does.

In conclusion, we may say that Paul identifies the church as Christ's body living in the world with the mission to proclaim him. This mission is jeopardized by private agendas, especially of the rich and powerful as they exhibit their dissociation from the poor which God has placed alongside them. A church like this is "weak, sick and dying." Paul's advice for improvement is not in radical social justice activism, but rather in spiritual transformation that can recognize the work of God in each brother and sister.

Case Study Analysis¹

Summary

During and immediately following the wars in the 1990's, the region of the former Yugoslavia experienced two trends: an influx of conversions to the Protestant and Evangelical churches, and an influx of foreign missionaries and organizations. Church planting and humanitarian aid were primary mission strategies; however, often expat Christians and organizations held an optimistic expectation that newly planted churches would grow in a manner similar to the stories emerging out of Latin America and Africa. During this time, the Croatian Baptist Union (BU) purposed to cultivate an evangelical presence in all 20 counties of Croatia. In 1998, Tony and Donna, American missionaries with Pioneers, had just completed two years of language training in Zagreb, Croatia. Pioneers approached the Baptist Union and asked where the BU saw a need—an event which was, according to the BU's head, Željko, atypical of missionary organizations at the time. In conjunction with both their own research and in deference to the BU, Tony and Donna decided to move to Slavonski Brod—the largest city without an Evangelical church—to begin the work for a church plant.

In the summer of 1998, Darko and Gorana, who were studying at a Croatian Evangelical seminary, were suggested by the BU to serve as interns in Slavonski Brod during the summer, and every other weekend throughout the year. After they graduated from the seminary, Tony and Donna invited them to move to Slavonski Brod and be full partners in the church planting process. The two families worked closely together until Tony and Donna decided to leave Croatia permanently after their furlough in 2006. During the time of their missionary service, Tony and Donna received their support through Pioneers. Initially, the BU

1 Only first names will be used in the case study.

paid Darko and Gorana's health insurance and pension, and after they began to serve full time, Tony decided on a salary of which to pay Darko and Gorana. After Tony and Donna left Croatia, financial support continued for the church—in fact, Tony became a pastor of a church in the USA and was instrumental in raising money to purchase a church building in Slavonski Brod. Today, the church continues with about 20-30 regular attendees (a medium-sized church in Croatia). Gorana and Darko continue to have their insurance and pension paid by the BU and their salary paid by churches in the West through Pioneers, although they are not considered Pioneer missionaries. There are still Pioneer missionaries in Slavonski Brod, one of whom is actively assisting Darko and Gorana, and they maintain their relationship with their supporting churches in the USA by accepting short-term mission teams and writing prayer and news updates.

Both the nationals and the foreign missionaries considered the partnership to be highly successful and the church plant itself to be moderately successful, according to their individual definitions of success. An exploration of this case study in light of the preceding biblical exegesis will bring several issues to the forefront for a more in-depth missiological discussion. First, the factors contributing to the success of the interpersonal relationship will be considered, paying particular attention to the idea of "organic teams". Second, the economic issues will be discussed, in light of the income discrepancy between the nationals and the expats and the ongoing question of "economic dependency". Third, the analysis will look at the function of power to this particular case and explore how it is related to mission and the church.

The Strength of Organic Teams

Participating in cross-cultural teams is always challenging because of different and possibly clashing cultural values expressed through language and behavior. Diverse cultural values lead to a different understanding of ministry praxis, success, leadership, power, financial responsibility and accountability, to name just a few pertinent areas. Of course, relational failure often happens when individuals do not accept their own ethnocentrism, or their tendency to judge and interpret the other through their own cultural framework. This is only exacerbated when one or both cultures have had past negative experiences with the other. Mary Lederleitner, in her book *Cross Cultural Partnerships*, notes that these compounding factors contribute to missionaries and nationals interpreting each other's actions in a way that validates their preexisting beliefs about the other—otherwise known as the "negative attribution theory" (2010, 71). On the one hand, Lederleitner notes that when the "out-group" acts in a way that challenges the prejudice, it might well be interpreted to the "in-group" as only an "exception" to the rule rather than allowing

it to challenge the prejudice itself and therefore becoming open to new relational possibilities (2010, 74,75). On the other hand, Sherwood Lingenfelter highlights the possibility for a foreign missionary to “distort God’s creative diversity” when he or she is bound to think about the praxis of God’s mission only through the particular structure(s) with which he or she is familiar (2008, 58,64).

These issues highlight the possibilities in the formation of “organic teams”. Organically formed teams can be defined as teams that form out of natural relationships and mutual, evolving vision. The team’s development can be seen as a slow-growing spiral as trust, vision, and friendship mutually interact and deepen over the course of sustained time. For this to happen, two things must be addressed: an awareness of clashing cultural values combined with a humble acceptance of one’s tendency towards ethnocentrism, and a willingness to divert the past relational narrative out of its well-formed course and into a new pathway.

One of the many clashing cultural values is individualism vs. collectivism. Lederleitner highlights David Maranz’s research on individualistic worldviews to illustrate both the assets and liabilities when they collide with more collectivist cultures. Maranz claims that the most important economic consideration in individualistic cultures is the acquisition of wealth, and this allows an infrastructure of self-reliance that many cultures do not experience: “money and wealth, not relationships form foundation for personal security” (2010, 37,38).

One can see many results and implications of this in the context of South-eastern Europe. Americans’ rugged individualism, for example, so valued and appreciated in its own context, can be a liability in countries such as Croatia, Bosnia, and Serbia where problems and solutions, help and assistance, and even—for better or worse—social, educational, and political mobility are often worked out through relational lines. While Americans value “figuring things out” on their own and have the sense that they do not want to impose too much on local believers, locals can feel hurt and confused as to why their alleged “partners” are not including them or asking for help.

This clash can produce the blatant problem of missionaries arriving with their pre-set visions and plans and using national workers to accomplish their strategies. It can also produce the less obvious, but perhaps the more damaging effects of a dysfunctional relational cycle—local assumptions regarding missionaries’ agendas (based on prior relational-memories) are reinforced by missionary individualism and ignorance concerning the primacy of long-term relationships in the context. Therefore, national workers feel railroaded and learn to “play the game” so that they can still accomplish their own vision while Western missionaries have the unpleasant sense that they are only valued for their resources.

In this particular case, Pioneers challenged the road map of expected national-missionary interaction by asking the Baptist Union to guide them to their perceived

needs. This unexpectedly carved another pathway angled away from the normal script of missionary-national relations. In addition, it was with the Baptist Union's recommendation and blessing that Darko and Gorana came onto the team—but there was also an immediate respect and "chemistry" between both families.

Perhaps the most distinct factor that contributed to the formation of this organic team, however, was Tony's difficult first year working by himself in Slavon-ski Brod, a period he called, "The darkest period in my Christian life." (Interview, 2014). He described a few months of depression and loneliness when all he could think about was moving back to America. Usually Pioneers does not send a family or individual without other teammates; however, an exception had been made in Tony and Donna's case. These circumstances, however difficult and unpleasant, put Tony in a position of weakness and dependency on Darko's friendship and help. In fact, one could say that this dependency perhaps circumnavigated individualistic approaches to engaging and learning about the Croatian culture. For example, when Tony and Darko needed to confront a member of the church, Tony's plan to present the issue immediately after arriving at the member's home was gently corrected by Darko, insisting that it would be better to first engage in a time of small talk. Tony waited for Darko's signal while they were visiting before he moved on to confront the issue.

In addition, theological difference was seconded to relationship—a point emphasized by Željko who noted that theology cannot be separated from character. Both sides were willing to learn from and defer to the other. Even though they differed on a few points—such as women's role in leadership and the requirements for taking the Lord's Supper, Tony wanted Darko to set the theological tone, so he did not impose his own theological proclivities. On the other hand, when Darko visited America, he better understood the cultural differences and learned to appreciate the Americans' sacrifices and struggles, "not to take lightly their coming and being here as missionaries ... the things they had to give up" (Interview, 2013).

Željko, Darko, and Tony attributed the success of this organic team to character, reason, willingness to learn, willingness to step into the cultural shoes of the other, training, calling and focus on God's mission. Through this analysis, it seems several other factors played a role: the initial "tone-setting" encounter between Pioneers and the BU, the circumstances creating Tony's initial solitude which perhaps allowed a deeper relational dependency, and a mutual willingness to learn from the other and see through the other's paradigm.

Economic Equality, Paternalism, or Dependency—Is There Another Way?

Global economic inequalities show no signs of diminishing, and although mission is now understood to be from everywhere to anyone, this is not often the

case with finances. Hwa Yung claimed that the American church is still the largest source of mission funding, citing the example of the 80% contribution to total which funded the 3rd Lausanne Congress in Cape Town (2011, 44). Borthwick notes that although Christians of the Global South make up 70% of all Christians, they share in only around 17% of the finances (2012, 154). The debates highlighting the assets and problems concerning Western funding are often polarizing. Lederleitner lays out two opposite sides: John Rowell, arguing from an Eastern European context, contends that Westerners have often used their definitions of “creating unhealthy dependency” for their own self-serving reasons (Rowell 2006, 3). On the other hand, Glenn Schwartz argues from an African context that economic partnership contributes to unhealthy dependencies causing more harm and trapping people into a sense of powerlessness (Lederleitner 2010, 87-89). Lederleitner answers, “yes” to both arguments, insisting that it is not an “either-or” discussion, but rather it depends on specific contextual factors. In her perspective, the “fear of dependency” can actually be a smokescreen hiding one’s reluctance – coming from a fast-paced, individualistic culture that is largely media driven – to make a long-term relational commitment (2010, 88-92).

A serious problem arises when set patterns dictate that money and resources are seen as the primary reason for both forming and dissolving partnerships. Željko referenced this ongoing problem when he noted, “Money is the modern god and everything depends on the money...who has money has the power. Sometimes our mission just depends on the money” (Interview, 2014). If resources are seen as the highest and most important value in cross-cultural relationships, both implicit and explicit paternalism comes into play—it dehumanizes both the missionary, his or her value seen only in terms of resources, and the national, who begins to operate in deference to the missionary. Paternalism fosters a “culture of silence” which Lederleitner argues inoculates us to our own blind spots and weaknesses (2010, 128,129). The relational narratives continue without either culture able to articulate true feelings and experiences.

Lederleitner’s emphasis on context and dialogue are critical in this regard. Dialogue that names unhealthy dependencies must include both missionaries and nationals—after all, if both missionaries and local congregations are dependent on Western financial support, who gets to decide what is unhealthy? If the conversation happens only in isolated cultural enclaves, it is those with the resources who decide what is “unhealthy”, and make decisions based on this definition. This can lead to what both Bonk and Rowell discuss as the missionary “double standard” whereby foreigners are able to rationalize certain financial decisions, but are suspicious if locals try to gain the same goods or conveniences for themselves (Bonk 2011, 62; Rowell 2006, 20). On the other hand, locals can be deeply suspicious of the missionary living standard, postulating that perhaps they have

come to Southeastern Europe simply to have a better standard of living and an easier life, and that there are no real sacrifices involved.²

In this particular case study, one can see both positive and negative issues regarding finances – however, it seems that overall, money did not seem to be a negative factor in the relational perceptions and dynamics. At the beginning, the Baptist Union was specifically looking to partner with a Western organization because they felt they were unable to finance a church-planting endeavor on their own. Pioneers was willing to be flexible regarding its policies – they agreed to extend the usual three-year period where Pioneers typically waited for a church to become “self-supporting”, after the Baptist Union approached them to explain the economic difficulties in the context.

Tony decided on Darko’s salary based on what another Pioneers team in Bosnia was paying their national team members, and both parties said it was a livable Croatian wage, although Darko and Gorana tried to supplement their salary through two different methods. When Gorana began another job at one point, for example, Pioneers worried that Darko would be distracted from his pastoral duties because of his need to take care of the children while Gorana was working, but they changed their stance after the Baptist Union stepped in to explain the cultural economic issues, and a compromise was negotiated. Despite differences in living standards and incomes between Tony and Darko, both said it was not an issue between them, although Tony mentions one incident where the reality hit him that Darko had to be more careful with his finances than did he. Because of the dynamics in the region, it is somewhat surprising that the difference in income did not lead to feelings of either, on the one hand, the use of greater resources to control, influence, or subdue, or on the other hand, feelings of jealousy, covetousness, and a non-authentic relationship. One can point to several factors contributing to this – the willingness of Pioneers to listen to local leadership and their flexibility on their financial policies, the strength of the relationship and trust between the two families, and the commitment of both to the mission and vision.

In this case, can the church be considered to be operating in an unhealthy dependency since both Darko and the church will be financially dependent on Western funding for the foreseeable future? Darko believes the “healthiest way” is for a church to support itself, but acknowledges they are nowhere near that goal. Tony’s perspective is that it is all “God’s money” and should not be viewed as Western money or non-Western money. Perhaps both Darko and Tony’s perspectives maintain a healthy balance. Just as it has become somewhat passé to refer to “contextual theologies” rather than noting that “theology is contextual”—a

2 This generalized statement is based on numerous interviews conducted during 2011-2014 where this or similar sentiments were expressed.

change that dethrones Western theology from being the absolutist judge whereby all other theologies are judged – one might frame the question of economics in the same light. If God’s mission flows from everyone going everywhere, God’s money is also multi-directional. Regardless of one’s economic status, it is important to foster the active belief that everyone has something to give.

In conclusion, the question of economics must be placed within the larger framework of God’s mission – so that the resources are seen to belong to the global church. If this is the case, a separation needs to be made between money and resources and God’s people. Resources cannot define human value – this does violence to one’s identity and function in the body of Christ. In the same vein, power also cannot be determined by whoever has the most money and resources. This also does violence to the community of God and places an automatic barrier between the missionary and the national believer.

The Need for True Power in Mission

In Andy Crouch’s recent book *Playing God: Redeeming the Use of Power*, he argues that power is a gift and is meant for human flourishing (2013, 13). The mutual exercise of true power is a positive sum transaction – shared power multiplies capacity, not diminishes it (2013, 19,41). His claim for this is biblically based: he argues that it emerges from the Trinitarian God’s act of creation in the Genesis story and the introduction of God’s image bearers who were also meant for this creative power – which is actually the “deepest” form of power (2013, 35,54).

According to Crouch, the misunderstanding and misuse of power directly relates to both injustice and idolatry (2013, 54). When both parties accept an idolatrous definition of power, there is a tendency for the one with the money to “play God” in the lives of their brothers and sisters, and the poorer party to “play the game” in order to access a part of the power. In fact, the very idea of partnership can be an idol if it is modeled after a kind of capitalistic transaction instead of a participation in the mystical body of Christ. Željko discards the whole idea of equal partnership as a myth: “There is no way a partnership can be equal. It is not just the power... it is the different approach, different culture, different starting point. It depends on how we measure equality. Is it equality in money or exchanging ideas, or how we will quantify the investment? If we qualify with the money, it will never be equal because the sending side always invests more money than the receiving side. If we talk about time ... who will measure the time?” (Interview, 2014).

The tendency to accept an idolatrous notion of power evidences itself in the reverence for status in terms of missionary service. Why is it that often, when someone becomes widely known in their ministry or mission, they become “untouchable” and insulated from any critique or truth-telling from their brothers

and sisters in other cultures? In some ways, this is connected to the "culture of silence" related to paternalism in the previous section. If resources are considered to be the highest value in mission, and whoever has the most resources has the most power, this sets the parameters of the relationship.

To approach some of these issues head on, Couch suggests that a "power-mapping" take place which is highly applicable for the Southeastern European context (2013, 124,125). How do both the sender and receiver understand power in their culture and in their theology? What are the possibilities of falling into idolatrous power within their personalities and respective cultures? This mutual mapping assumes that we believe our identities are secure and equally affirmed around the body of Christ, but would also be a tremendous act of trust – we cannot always see our own power nor our perceived effect on others (Couch 2013, 125). In this sense, an organic team is "building power around relationships" instead of using relationships to exert power (Linthicum 2003, 131).

As the 1 Corinthians text points out, it is all about Christ who demonstrated the act of true power by his self-giving and "self-releasing" of status, therefore revealing his glory. Couch notes, "Love transfigures power ... and power transfigured by love is the power that made and saves the world" (2013, 45). If true power, then, emerges out of relationship as we mutually self-give to others, and power expands when it is used to create and serve, this offers a profound hope that can actively orient the global church in mission.

Implications

The symbolic starting point of the church's participation in God's mission is its position around the Eucharist: remembrance, worship, and a prophetic picture of all cultures feasting together in the eschatological banquet under the kingship of Jesus. It is here that the body of Christ must be discerned before any other action is taken – for it is only here that our equality in Christ is experienced as a reality and our motives are tested. "Discerning the body" means that each must struggle to understand one's own ethnocentrism, the other's cultural values, and the historical baggage and relational memories that both are carrying. Both parties must break the "culture of silence" and openly acknowledge both present and past ways of behaving that contribute to negative relational memories. Sending agencies are not religious multinational corporations for the purpose of strengthening their national interests. They are not to assume themselves as the teachers and leaders while the theologically educated nationals merely act as their translators, nor to use their resources as an idolatrous exercise of power and control. But the receiving countries too are called to discern the body. Mission agencies are not ATM

machines and standard improvement businesses. Their projects should not be accepted only because it will bring money – even as nationals do their own thing when the sponsors are not looking. A missionary may come over having no idea that he or she is stepping into a narrative that already exists and may make the same mistakes that only reinforce the local attitudes – but it is his/her responsibility to investigate what has happened in the past and discern what is happening in the present. A national may behave a certain way toward a foreigner under the assumption, “this is just how they are.” But it is his/her responsibility to discern the particular struggles, sacrifices and mistakes that the foreigner will encounter. Without such willingness to take responsibility and authentically engage, both will fail to discern the other and thus fail to enter into the organic relationship that is the body of Christ.

One of the challenges in this regard is the disconnection between language and the concepts behind the language. Borthwick notes the many meanings the word “partnership” can entail: ranging from one side sending money and the other pictures and updates, to a long-term relationship where short-term teams visit (2012, 149). One of the key issues, Lederleitner argues, is that individualistic cultures “tend to confuse their nomenclature, for example forming “partnerships” with “sister churches” (2010, 40). Family and partnerships are really two different concepts with different long-term implications – and even as the trends show no signs of changing the short-term emphasis of missions, national Christians struggle to invest emotionally when a “partner” might be gone after two weeks or two years. In essence, we must permanently substitute the partnership word and all its connotations with an image of the body as a living organism constantly changing, accommodating itself, dependent on all its parts. As Paul Borthwick argues, interdependence and reciprocity are key issues for authentic relationships—all must come to see what he or she brings to the relationship, to build friendships rather than merely utilitarian “interests” (2012, 130-135). In other words, the image of the body as a living organism implies that to sever relationship is to lose a vital part critical to the body’s function.

Another missional implication is that the missionaries must not display their wealth and social status which would be inappropriate in the receiving culture. Indeed, the missionaries must confront their own assumptions regarding the link between status, power, and resources – but this may only be possible by listening to their brothers and sisters in the receiving country as to how he or she is being perceived. While it is extremely difficult to downsize standards of living and comfort in order to live and serve somewhere else, such displays are a hindrance to mission and to developing authentic relationships. Sometimes, in such contexts, conversions happen – not to Christ, but to the missionary’s living standards. Once the missionary leaves, such converts disappear, and after a while no

results can be recovered.

However, the text also offers another implication – that of Paul’s solution to the problem in Corinth. There is no instruction in this text that those who are better off must share with those who are poor (such instructions can be found of course in Jesus’ sermon on the mount in Mt 5-7, but let us not consider this for the moment). Rich Corinthians are instructed to eat at home instead, and only to come for the ritual bread and cup where all are equal. Mission agencies in contexts of unequal wealth are not required to share equally. They can “eat at home” – but when they leave their country of origin, they are called to recognize the body without exhibition of wealth and patronization. If someone cannot live within the standards of the receiving country, are they actually able to serve in a manner honoring to Christ’s self-giving incarnational model?

Perhaps we have not fully grasped Christ’s definition of power and the possibilities for mission. If true power is self-giving, and the self-giving begets more power and creative possibilities, and this is all tied up, in some mystical way, to being part of Christ’s body, then the focus of mission is not just on something we produce. Yes, the gospel must be preached, the reality of the kingdom must be lived, human flourishing must be sought, – but this is also tied up in our mutual interdependence where God is glorified in the very action of our cultures rubbing up against each other, and out of this, a greater creativity and power of the kingdom is revealed. If the mission of God flows out of his Trinitarian relational being, how then can we separate our participation in God’s mission from our relationships that begin around the Eucharist? How can our mosaic of cultures, submitted both to Christ and each other, reflect the truth about God and his glory? In the words of Andrew Walls, the global church is “more culturally diverse than it’s ever been before, nearer potentially to that full stature of Christ that belongs to the summing up of all of humanity” (2002, 6). If mission in a certain context, like the Corinthian church, is sick, dying, or fruitless, perhaps we best begin by taking seriously our mandate to “discern the body” in what Paul envisions is a manner worthy of Christ.

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“Poznavanje Tijela” u transkulturalnim odnosima: Kritička analiza misionarskog partnerstva u Jugoistočnoj Europi

Sažetak

Misionarski rad u 21. stoljeću prepoznat je kao rad “od svuda prema bilo kuda” i sve je više usmjeren na koncepte misionarskih partnerstava i međuovisnosti. Međutim, isuviše često misionarska partnerstva u Jugoistočnoj Europi ostaju ukopana u pričama o disfunkcionalnim odnosima. Jesu li snaga i utjecaj globalne Crkve koja sudjeluje u izvršenju Božjeg nauma u neposrednoj vezi sa našom sposobnošću da funkcioniramo zajedno preko granica naše etničke pripadnosti, tradicije i društveno-ekonomskog statusa? Ako je tome tako, kako onda domaći i strani kršćani mogu nadići ponavljajuće negativne obrasce svojih odnosa? Kako bi istražio neke od temeljnih pretpostavki koje proizlaze iz prethodnog pitanja, ovaj članak će prvo razmotriti misiološko štivo Prve poslanice Korinćanima 11,17-34. Drugo, ovaj članak će ponuditi kritičku analizu odabranog hrvatskog slučaja koji svjedoči o primjeru jednog uspješnog prošlog partnerstva između domaćih i zapadnih misionara, usmjeravajući se na tri relevantna koncepta koji iz njega proizlaze: organski timovi, ekonomske paradigme, te temelji istinske snage misionarstva. Na poslijetku, uzimajući u obzir Pavlove upute i ključna pitanja koja proizlaze iz odabrane studije slučaja, članak će predložiti misiološke implikacije za buduće trans-kulturalne odnose u Jugoistočnoj Europi.