



PRACTICES OF A MISSIONAL PEOPLE

Alan begins his keynote by affirming God’s creative engagement in our world of destructive social patterns, brokenness and oppression. He evokes the God who responds to the cries of the people and invites us into practices which will enable us to participate in God’s reshaping presence, neighbourhood by neighbourhood. However Alan describes two critical concerns that block us from entering this invitation from a God who is disembedding and displacing us into a new, unmanageable space. First, he finds most of our responses to remain within an ecclesiocentric imagination that blinds us to asking different questions. Second, and as a subset of this, he finds our language of ‘spiritual practices’ and ‘discipleship’ inadequate for this task. He traces a history of these ideas which have become captive to the expert, the abstract and the disembodied. He notes instead Luke’s story of the seventy, sent by Jesus into their own fragmented world, with a learned and radical practice of openness, willing to encounter the other in ordinary homes, neighbourhoods and fields.

In the course of time the king of Egypt died and the children of Israel cried because of their bondage and their cry came before God and God heard their groaning and remembered... (Exodus 2: 23-24)

“The cry was a response to the existential pain of a withering crisis of everyday life in the city. The demand was really a command to look that crisis clearly in the eye and create an alternative urban life...our political task...is to imagine and reconstitute a totally different kind of city out of the disgusting mess of a globalizing, urbanizing capital run amok.[1]

God is always trying to give good things to us, but our hands are always too full to receive them.” St. Augustine City of God



The legacy of Lesslie Newbigin is a robust theological engagement with the critical questions of mission to Western culture(s). Throughout his writing that engagement was continuously informed by a laser-like focus on the agency of God in the world. These are critical elements shaping the agendas of this journal. The above quotes set God as the primary actor in the world and propose how our missional praxis is to be shaped.

The tragedy of the missional conversation in recent years is the way in which the agency of God has been eclipsed by a myriad of ecclesiocentric defaults that now determine our understanding and practice of Newbigin’s clear framing of the challenge before the churches of the West. This represents nothing less than a crisis of Christian identity. In terms of a gospel imagination and the inchoate cries characterizing so much of contemporary life in the West this crisis of identity requires a radically different starting point to grasp what is at stake for Christian formation. This Journal was launched in London, in the House of Lords. We wanted to signal that the *JOMP* would attend to questions about the interrelationships between the gospel and the multiple forms of modern, Western culture. Behind this focus stands Newbigin’s framing of the challenge for Christian identity in the West: ‘What would be involved in a missionary encounter between the gospel and this whole way of perceiving, thinking and living we call “modern western culture”?’[2]

As noted above Newbigin’s ‘missional’ trajectory has been misdirected in several ways. First, the language of *missional* has become almost completely identified with ecclesiology, illustrated by the fact that the word is practically always a modifier of church as in the phrase *missional church*. This was an unintentional but major turning from Newbigin’s framing into a default ecclesiocentric pragmatism. The missional conversation (particularly in North America) has been trivialized into questions of church health, church growth, church effectiveness and church styles. Second, compounding this ecclesiocentricity is a diminution in robust theological dialogue around missional questions especially in relationship to God’s agency and a gospel engagement with Western societies. A thin, unreflective

montage of tactics for making churches different has taken the place of such dialogue. Therefore, addressing questions of Christian practices from within current categories of church life in the West will only reproduce deformed repetitions of ideals inside the church's conversation with itself. Turning to language such as discipleship, for example, primarily from within the internal dialogues of the churches cannot address Newbigin's question or join the triune God in the cries of people in destructive contexts of globalizing and urban capitalism run amok. We need to start from a different place without denying the absolute necessity of believing communities shaped by the great confessions, formed in prayer and Eucharist and dwelling in the everyday realities of their neighborhoods. Such a proposal is not a rejection of the church. It must be underlined at the outset that this is **not** the intention. Rather, the argument that follows is based on a conviction that at this moment in time we cannot begin to grasp the practices of a missional people if we begin from within the language games and categories that currently shape the churches of the modern West. What is at stake is the calling of these churches back into a theologically engaged praxis of God's agency in our time and places.

God as active agent in our unraveling social contexts

The most crucial missional practice is a recovery, confession and praxis of God as the active agent in our world. Our focus must turn, again, to God's agency. The practices of a missional people in these Western societies must be shaped out of two, interconnected convictions: God's agency *in the world* and that our location is within destructive social practices (especially in terms of economics, individualism and the turning of all of life into objectified commodities) that desperately miss God. Given the God who hears the cries of people and comes to act among them, Newbigin's question cannot be reduced to adjectival prefaces of ecclesiocentric defaults. The crisis of Christian identity in Western societies cannot be addressed, primarily, in terms of ecclesiology. The focus must be elsewhere. Jurgen Moltmann expresses that locus when he wrote:

We are not theologians because we are particularly religious; we are theologians because in the face of this world we miss God. We are crying out for his righteousness and justice, and are not prepared to come to terms with mass death on earth...theology...also springs from God's love for life that we experienced in the presence of the life-giving Spirit...seek first the kingdom of God.[3]

These beginnings intimate we can only address the question of the practices of a missional people in the materiality of the local, ordinary and everyday. The reason for this is straightforward - the God who acts in this world, acts in this concrete materiality! There is no other location from which we can address the question of practices. The churches have lost this understanding. Their grasp of practices is informed only by their interiority. They look in a mirror believing their own reflection is the answer to the question of being a missional people (the argument can be made that this is how its supposed to be but that is not the point being made here). The triune God is known, discerned and present in the local and everyday. The God we confess in Jesus Christ is on the ground in neighborhoods that thirst for God in a world that desperately misses God. Most proposals for Christian practice assume the only place where God

can be present is in *our* churches. What if the Spirit has brought God's people, after a long period of believing we already had God (particularly those of the Euro-tribal 'reformations') to a place where our systems and narratives are no longer capable of discerning the agency of God? That would mean it is now most difficult to address the question of the practices of a missional people by starting with ecclesiocentric questions. The usual categories of Christian life, so entrenched in our language (discipleship, spirituality, formation), have become uncritical defaults preventing us from discerning the agency of God. What might it mean to address the question of practices for a missional people from a starting point other than established ecclesial language and defaults?

God is in God's world hearing people's cry

Such a proposal about God's agency is addressed from the perspective of two texts: Exodus 2:23-3:15 and Luke 10:1-12.

Exodus 2:23-3:15

These verses can be read as if Moses were their subject. But, repeatedly, the text references God as the primary actor in relationship to a fragile group of the earth's offscouring about to be eradicated.^[4] The text is about this God acting in the world in a specific way – toward a people. There's no accounting for the particularity of the choice. We know these human beings are without power and have no future but are precious to God. God is the subject. God remembers and God acts on behalf of this people. Here clues about where to begin discerning the practices of a missional people – with God as active agent, with the One who attends in specific ways.

This God's focus is slaves facing shoah by an empire that has finished with them. They're disposable! The One who hears their cry and comes down to them is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. The scribe doesn't eliminate redundancy. It must be clear whom this is and with whom this God is acting. God acts in the terrible concreteness of those who no longer know who they are. All they can do is cry out. They are, by virtue of God's choosing, the face of a world crying out because it desperately misses God. Not prepared to accept this mass death, God acts to reshape the world – but not where we would expect the world to be reshaped. God acts in, with and among this ordinary people. Moses (sic. church) is invited to participate in this, the primary, drama. His vocation is among these people on behalf of the God who acts in their material crisis.

The practices of a missional people are *discerned anew from the place where God acts*, not the presumptions of ecclesiocentric discipleship. The location for discerning the practices of a missional people is critical for understanding how we re-engage Newbigin's question. God is present and acting in the ordinary, in the everyday realities of people's lives in the neighborhoods where we find ourselves. These practices are *discovered and discerned* only by joining with this God who is already in our neighborhoods as the agent of transformation where

people cry out because we have acceded to the soul destroying and community dissolving claims of nation states and globalized economics.^[5] God is ahead of God's people - dwelling, acting in ordinary, concrete, everyday places. This is where we work out the practices of a missional people. Such practices are shaped by the profoundly human question of how we reweave of the fabric of social and communal life when the markers of human thriving are ripped asunder. Ours is to join this triune God, out ahead of us, in the everyday materiality of people's brokenness. These are real spaces where so many people are wondering how to keep families together, how communities will hold, how there can be even an economic future for their children that keeps belonging and community together.

Luke 10:1-12

This narrative links to the Exodus text. The sending of the seventy harks back to the constituting of Israel's elders. In Luke the sending is framed in terms of what it means to follow Jesus. Such following has to do with Israel's vocation in and for the world. The seventy are sent to embody and announce the reign of God in their neighborhoods. Like Moses, they are agents of God actions. The practices shaping this sending are critical to grasping what it means to be a missional people. The seventy are made dependent on the hospitality of the neighborhoods (as Israel was dependent on the hospitality of God in the desert). As the seventy dwell, work, eat, talk and heal with and among the people's of these towns the kingdom comes among them. As in the Exodus text, the locale of God's activity is clear - in towns, in homes, around tables, in the fields at work, in the meeting places of the everyday life of ordinary people. The practices of a missional people are not formed from within the defaults of preconceived churchy categories but out in the villages and among their people just as in that other, older tradition, they are formed out on the way, in the desert. To frame the practices of a missional people based upon abstract ideas about discipleship and formation, or sanctification and holiness, is to miss the point.

A missional people ask about formation and practices from the perspective of other questions: 'Who is this God?' 'Where is this God to be found?' 'What is this God doing?'. Practices emerge from the forms of *God's* mission in the world. In the two passages above, God is active - hearing, entering and, above all, participating in the torn, desiccated lives of ordinary people, dwelling in their local, material realities. There is no other way to comprehend the agency of the triune God. We can't take our clues about practices from established categories within the churches where, for so long in the West, we have assumed and perceived ourselves in a benefactor role within our contexts. The perichoretic God (walks and dances about the neighborhood) propels us back into the local as the place where we discover the practices of a missional people. This God does not promulgate ideals but enters, listens and dwells with ordinary, confused, disoriented people living their everyday lives in the thralls of empire and religions demanding their performance. Here is where clues about practices are located. Such practices are about entering (without domain, power, or a benefactor role), listening, participating, and communing with mutuality and receptivity.

Why We Don't Participate in the Life of this Triune God

The practices are manifestly simple, almost obvious. They are social and communal. They embed us in everyday life not a de-materialized inwardness. They turn us toward the other rather than the search for some prior, inward purity or perfection. They invite us to extend ourselves in vulnerability, relationality amidst the local, rather than being armed with a program. This understanding of practices is hardly the imagination of our churches. Why is this the case? Why is it that when terms such as *discipleship*, *spiritual formation*, *sanctification* and so forth, are used their referent is practically always to inner, private, individual experiences between self and God? How did we get to a place where practically all our language around the relationality of God has been turned into a set of private, inner, individual *spiritual* (therefore, dematerialized and of no 'earthly' good) experiences? Some explanation of this diminishment is required to appreciate the challenges we face.

The following offers little more than pointers; a more sustained analysis is needed.^[6] In the late Medieval period leading up to the great transformations of the European reformations, the 'enlightenments' and the emergence of nation states, something happened. It was a time of massive transition in the Western imagination. The Thomistic world had fractured. Its delicate interrelationship between the realm of sensibility and the knowledge of God, known in and through everyday experience, was being cast aside. In this Thomistic frame 'Faith' was less a 'leap' than the activity of reason in the experience of God. In the shift of imagination practically everything changed. The location of the reality of God is turned on its head. God would now be sought not in the 'world' (the realm of the ordinary and the sensible) but in the realm of the 'spirit' (hence the basis for conceiving such matters as discipleship in terms of 'spirituality' and inwardness). God in Jesus Christ was not to be known in the world.^[7] We entered an imaginative narrative (called 'modern') wherein we became predisposed neither to expect or see the reality of the triune God in the materiality and ordinariness of neighbour or everyday life. Rather, we 'experienced' God in interiority, subjectivity, above all, in the self (*'I serve a risen Saviour, he's in the world today...he lives, he lives, I know he lives, because he lives within my heart'*).

This turn to subjectivity and inwardness is reflected in an ecclesiocentric reflexivity - the assumption that in the subjective experiences of those in the churches, in the language games and cultural habits developed to express their experiences of God, are located all the necessary practices for being God's missionary people. There is a loss of capacity to imagine that the disruptive Spirit might, in fact, be challenging the churches to confess that such reflexivity is a barrier to engaging the triune God's actions in the world. Might it be the case that our conceptualities of *discipleship* and *spiritual* formation are so compromised by this turn that we must follow the Spirit out into the ordinary and everyday to discover the practices of a missionary people? What if this is the conversion the churches must experience to become a missionary people?

Following what we now call the 'Reformation'[8], Europe was beset by wars ostensibly caused by religious differences but with many other causes. These massively destructive conflicts decimated Europe as emerging states struggled to determine the political map of Europe. The conclusion of the Thirty Years War (Peace of Westphalia, 1648) redefined religious life within emerging nation states. Throughout this terrible time there was a search for an explanatory narrative for these destructive wars and the mass deaths caused by 'nature's' plagues. It was no longer sufficient to postulate the will of God and God's order of things. In a post-Nominalist climate *God* was no longer a sufficient explanatory frame. New explanations were needed and these came in the early stages of the 'Enlightenment'. In this narrative the cause of destruction was largely the superstitious, religious ignorance of uneducated peasants driven by unchecked passions and emotions. This explanation emerged from another underlying narrative. The Enlightenment story pronounced that human beings were finally climbing out of their bondage to superstition, to stand on a bold new plain where their skills of reason would gain control over the world.[9] Inside this story lay the new mistrust of the common, ordinary and everyday, the locale of ignorant, primeval, uncontrollable emotions and religious superstitions. If 'man' was to enter the new world of enlightenment a critical step was to mistrust the local. Descartes' two kinds of life: *res extensa* and *res cogitans* expresses this new suspicion. The prior is the world external to the thinking subject, the world of material being, including one's own body; the latter is the real, human self characterized by its capacity to think abstractly and rationally, independent of the material. Here is a new way of framing what it means to be human. The ordinary, the local, the materiality of life are not to be trusted as a means for knowing what is true and real. What we have is the abandonment of the local, ordinary and everyday as the place where we can know the real. Entering Western imagination is a view of the world fundamentally antagonistic to the triune God.

This new explanation required a new story of how 'man', freed from these bondages, can know the true and the real. It's a complex story. A primary response came from Kant who proposed that in the categories of the mind (for Kant and Descartes guaranteed by God) one knows reality. Reason was primarily a matter of the mind and knowing how it worked in providing categories that named reality. Here was a new starting point for knowledge, understanding the world and ourselves. Once this narrative became the norm (there were those who called it into question) it was a short step to the emergence of its corollary, namely, only well trained, educated, professional people could lead us from the childhood of superstition onto the bright heights of mature human reason. With this new narrative came a deep suspicion of our own bodies, of our ordinary embodied lives being the primary locale for knowing God and one another. We have travelled a long way from a sense that the local, ordinary and everyday is the place where we experience and comprehend the triune God's actions. The God of Exodus and Luke, the God who came to dwell among us in Jesus, becomes the deistic, absent, abstract God of the enlightened modern; this god was on the way to becoming the gnostic god of inner experience and inner enlightenment (*spirituality*).

Several consequences of this transformation are important for our argument. First, embodied,

everyday life was not the locale of God's activity. Second, knowledge, reason, truth became the domain of experts and professionals. Knowing became the domain of those who extracted themselves from the local, embodied and everyday. Obversely, we came to mistrust our own common experiences; the embodied reason present among ordinary people in their local and everyday lives. We privileged the expert, professor, doctor, guru - all those whose focus is on abstract ideas or romantic ideals (back to the 'biblical frame of the church', rediscovering 'Paul's strategies for church planting', get a new 'apostolic' vision for leading the church and so forth) that can be applied normatively across all places and all times. Third, the abstract ideal came to be viewed as the source of solutions to all human problems. At every turn the existential challenges facing us as human beings are transposed into some abstraction (the market, the expert, the new research study, discipleship, spirituality, a formula for becoming missional, etc.) that can then be turned into a technique for regaining control in a disorienting world. In so doing there is a continuing turning away from the particularity of the local, the place of embodied experience, the messiness of the ordinary. In this way our lives are thinned out; we are conditioned to believe that God is only known in such abstractions as *discipleship* and *spirituality* or within those who live on some other plane than the ordinary and everyday (what we have created in the role of clergy or the cult of the saint). We will not trust our own capacities to discern and discover as an ordinary people - we need the expert, the guru, the mandarin, or the 'pastor'. We came to believe in such abstractions as 'truth', 'justice', 'hope', 'love' etc., as reified ideals that, in turn, inform and determine how we are to live and strive for the good life. These are turned into 'principles' of life applied to all people, in all places, for all time. We are in a different universe from the Exodus and Lucan texts. The biblical narratives and the triune God are re-interpreted into generalized principles for life. Leaders (professionals, masters, gurus - the new gnostics) then create strategies for them to live into these generalized practices. Practices have become generalized, abstract principles I am urged to apply to my life in order to make the church 'work' but they have little material connection to the actual everyday life I live. The resistance to all of this (sic. the failure of almost every 'discipleship' program) is a sign of the hopeful resistance of ordinary people.

An example of this is the word *discipleship*. Wherever one goes just now there is a common recognition that the churches are in trouble. There is a malaise. They are running stuck. At the same time, one hears leaders of all kinds identify a basic underlying reason for this malaise - loss of discipleship. The professional has determined the abstraction at stake and now proposes programmatic solutions. Emerging across North America and Europe is a new mantra - the critical need for discipleship. But this language of discipleship is largely an abstraction, an ideal principle, a category of the mind, a de-materialized concept driven by a view that if one can name the concept one can define the solution. In these conversations about discipleship there is practically no reference to either the actual agency of God in the present or the actual lives of ordinary men and women in their everyday local contexts. There is plenty of energy from the experts and gurus to bring ideals of discipleship into packaged programs on how to become disciples. Such abstractions reference the Bible for principles from Jesus, or Paul, or the Old Testament. In any other context, one would call this **ideology**, the belief that an elite, an expert,

an educated leader in the know, a guru who has been to the mountain or climbed out of Plato's cave, has the keys and the principles to lead the ignorant (read - local, everyday life of ordinary people) out of their bondage and solve the problem of Christian witness in late modern societies. In our time this deformed narrative still has huge influence and power in the churches. We continue to address the issues of forming a missional people from the perspective of an ideology that is a continuing incredulity toward the embodied, the local and the everyday.

A missionary people formed by the practices of the missionary God move in a different direction. The practices of a missionary people are discerned to the extent we enter the local as participants, as listeners who dwell with and among the people of our neighborhoods. We discern how to live into such practices by beginning with where people find themselves in our communities. This is about the very first question God asks in Scripture: *Adam, where are you?* This wasn't a trick question to find Adam out but one that genuinely wanted to enter into relationship with Adam from where Adam was. This is the place from which God calls us in discerning the practices of a missional people. It is also the question we must learn to ask in order to know such practices.

Where Are these People?

Given the premise that the triune God is already present, dwelling, participating, loving, suffering, imagining in the materiality of the everyday life of ordinary people, the questions we must ask are: 'Who are these people?' 'Who are the people in our neighborhoods in relationship to this triune God?' 'What are the forms of embodied life we, as God's people, need to indwell in order to discern the practices that must form us as a missional people?' Such questions represent a starting point for addressing the question of practices. This is not to discount the triune God's presence in the 'church' where we worship, have our lives shaped around the Eucharist, and the confessions and traditions which have formed us over centuries. But in the midst of the transformations of Western societies where a globalizing, urbanizing capitalism runs amok, the containers of those traditions of being God's people are now barriers to discerning the actions of God in the materiality of the everyday. I write this article while reading case studies by regional and national denominational leaders describing the situations in their systems and congregations. Overwhelmingly, these congregations function with no reference to what is happening in the everyday life of their contexts. Descriptions of denominational challenges bear no relationship to people's everyday life. Churches and the systems that serve them have become disembodied, dematerialized enclaves disassociated from their contexts. Congregations are functionally incapable of discerning what God is doing from within themselves. From the perspective of congregational and denominational life there is little ability to discern the practices of a missional people. To discover these practices we must dwell where the triune God is already dwelling - in the materiality of the everyday and the ordinariness of the locale.^[10]

A initiating practice will involve, for example, a readiness to reconnect with neighbour; to sit at

their table, to be welcomed without predetermined agendas about making people into something predefined by internal or denominationally programmatized 'discipleship' proposals. A second practice would involve listening to what is actually happening among the people of the communities where we live. The Exodus account is about the One who hears the cries of the people. This is the core point of engagement. Before the bush that burns and is not consumed, Moses' struggle is to turn aside in order to listen, to attend to this One who will speak out of the ordinariness of a bush. When the Seventy enter the towns and villages, they are to dwell, sit at the table and work in the fields, with their hosts. This is about attending to the questions: 'Who are these people?' and 'Where are they?' without which there is no discernment, no hearing the Spirit and no missional engagement.

We get a sense of what this means by asking these questions of those living in the towns and villages into which Jesus sent the seventy. These were people who inhabited a desiccated world where their hopes had been wrung dry by geopolitical and economic forces. An all-pervasive empire emptied them of hope: that long-held, almost absurd promise of God restoring a glorious past. The people of these towns and villages saw no reason to expect this would come to fruition in their lifetime, or in their children's lifetime. They were a lost, disoriented people, bereft of language to make sense of what was happening to them. All the marker stones had been removed. The assumed stories of how life was supposed to work had been eviscerated. They lived in the loss of story. The majority were Jewish but it was a mixed, confusing context where foreigners were moving in and taking over. The 'eat what is set before you' speaks of Gentile presence. Rome's garrisons and mega projects had brought the foreigners, like oil men in Iraq or Chinese experts in Africa; incursions of 'Gentiles' into Galilee.

Disorientation in the towns and villages had to do with this disconcerting loss of narrative and the presence of multiple stories competing for their loyalty. Rome made the primary demand. Long after the Babylonian exile, the return to Jerusalem and Temple re-building, Rome's presence proclaimed God's promises as failed hope. Everywhere these people were confronted with PAX Romana. It was easier to believe PAX was the true story than some lost SHALOM. In the meantime, religious movements had competing identity narratives: Pharisees had categories for true believers, Sadducees represented power elites and Zealots were certain they had seen the future.

On each account - from failed narratives of promise to Empire defining reality, from the externalized practices of religious elites to the absorption of Gentiles in an economic hierarchy of winners and losers - the people of these towns and villages had little story or hope. God was mostly absent from their everyday life. One cannot avoid the awareness that Luke is writing this narrative already knowing that Rome has destroyed Jerusalem and laid waste the Temple. There are now small, young 'churches' across the Empire, mostly Gentile, mostly at the margins, mostly dependent on the hospitality of the people in their areas. This whole text is a massive, radically disorientating reshaping of Christian practices for those living in the tentative margins of Rome seeking to comprehend how to be followers of Jesus.

What is to be noted in this context is how Luke frames the actions of Jesus in the sending of the seventy. The frame for the sending is a series of stories about discipleship. A variety of people ask Jesus about what it means to follow him. The sending of the seventy is a direct response. In this sending Jesus is pointing to the location where the people of God discern and engage in practices of discipleship. The location is the embodied, ordinary, everyday life. It is there that practices of a missional life are discovered, tested and, perhaps, shape what it means to be God's missional people. The missional practices were formed in the towns (neighbourhoods), around tables, shoulder to shoulder in everyday work. The place where practices are discerned is not, primarily, in 'churches' or their default language games formed in a modernity of abstractions, interiority and dependence on experts (especially the 'expertise' of the ordained). Those sent are shaped by simple practices (be the 'other', the 'stranger' who is not in control of the agenda; be dependent on the hospitality of the neighbourhood). These are practices of everyday life oriented toward the other, dwelling among, sitting at the table and working in their fields. This seventy had learned from Jesus how to pray (Abba Father, in heaven...). They went with practices learned from Jesus. One they must surely have learned from Jesus was being with and among ordinary people in their places of living. So many of Jesus' stories about the reality of God were stories of everyday life (a widow imploring, a woman cleaning a floor, a man building a barn, a shepherd worrying over the sheep and so forth). These are the contexts in which Jesus taught and healed (synagogue and Temple were not welcoming spaces for Jesus). He was connected to the material, everyday life of the local. His stories of the kingdom and God's presence grew out of this way of living. The practices learned from Jesus were those shaped by being among ordinary people, in their homes, neighborhoods and fields.

[1]David Harvey commenting on Henri Lefebvre's *The Right to the City* in *Rebel Cities* (London: Verso, 2012) x-xvi.

[2]Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks* (London: SPCK, 1986) 1.

[3]Jurgen Moltmann, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Ellen T. Charry, *A Passion for God's Reign* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 2.

[4]Such actions have gone on throughout history. It is the case that Western (white) colonizations assumed a domain in which the 'native' populations were vestiges to be disposed by the enlightened future.

[5]See, for example, Edoardo Nesi, *The Story of My People* (NY: Other Press, 2012).

[6]A number of helpful books that provide some of this background are Stephen Toulman's *Cosmopolis* and *Return to Reason* and Oliver Davies, Paul D. Janz & Clemens Sedmak, *Transformation Theology: Church in the World* (NY: T & T Clark, 2007).

[7]Some of the sources of this shift grew out of a sundering of the relationship between God and creation as nominalism pushed back at what was perceived as a Thomistic cosmology that linked God's nature within the great chain of being (see Jean Bethke Elshtain's Gifford Lectures: *Sovereignty: God, State, and Self* (NY: Basic Books, 2008).

[8]There was never a single 'reformation' but a variety of events and movements across Europe and the UK that amounted to these tectonic shifts in European religious life. Increasingly, there is emerging a recognition that these Euro-tribal events of the 16th and early 17th centuries now need to be relativized in terms of global Christian movements.

[9]Such diverse people as Roger Bacon (*The New Organon*), Immanuel Kant (*What is Enlightenment?*) and Alexander Pope (*An Essay on Man*) formed key elements of this new story about human identity.

[10]This is not an argument that parallels Hoekendyke's *Church for the World* written in the later part of the 60's. In that period, the *missio dei* was still a new kind of 'Copernican Revolution' in Europe and part of the debates in the WCC. All kinds of 'secular' theologies had emerged, not the least were some that sought to discount the role of congregation and the place of church. This is not the argument of this article. Rather, it is an appeal for the church to embrace forms of discipleship and missional practices that have been largely lost to its life for the reasons given here, in terms of abstraction from the local and the ideologies of expert, guru, clergy and all those who put themselves in the place of knowing already the ways of God in people's everyday life.



Alan Roxburgh

TMN founder, consultant, pastor, teacher and writer with more than 30 years experience in church leadership, consulting and seminary education.

[Twitter](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Full Bio](#)

Alan on [Amazon](#)