

Re-ignitional Missiology in an Era of Decline

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Abstract

This article calls for a missiology that reignites, or “Re-ignitional Missiology.” The paper begins by explaining an analogy of the stages of a fire: Ignition, Growth, Fully Developed, and Decline. It then addresses “the Missiology of Decline,” which is a phenomenon plaguing much of missiology today and is manifested in an overly-broad view of missions, and missiologically-induced syncretism. The article then pivots to consider the importance of revivalism and spiritual re-awakenings in church history. The conclusion outlines steps toward Re-ignitional Missiology. These steps include keeping a narrow missional focus on “apostolic function,” as proposed by Alan Johnson; that is, preaching the gospel where it has not been preached, and planting churches where they do not exist. Additional steps include resisting missiological decline in all its forms, and reapplying movements of the Spirit, by fire and by wind, in a revived and renewed missiology of the *Pneuma*.

Introduction

Cycles permeate life. Human existence would be unimaginable without the biorhythms demarcated by days, weeks, months, and years. The first thought a person may have when waking up in the morning and reorienting is to grasp which day it is. Life cycles include ebbs and flows. In their first year or so, people learn how to walk and eat independently. In later years, they frequently lose those abilities.

Cycles also detail the life of organizations, churches, denominations, and even civilizations. The energy pattern of such human organizations often mirrors the lifecycle of a typical fire. This essay will utilize various applications of the fire analogy, since the Bible likens

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the moving of the Holy Spirit to fire. John the Baptist prophesied that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matt. 3:11). When the Spirit descended on the Day of Pentecost, He manifested as tongues of fire (Acts 2:3-4). Pentecostal missiology centers on the fire of God falling upon previously unreached people groups (UPGs).

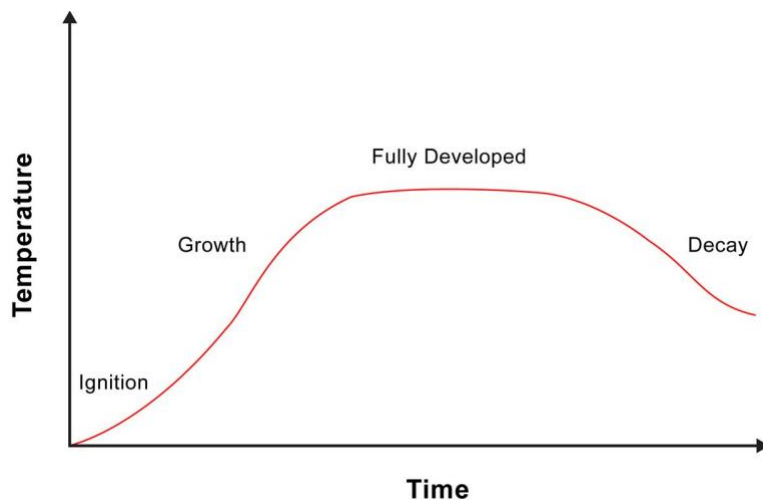
This article calls for a missiology that reignites, or “Re-ignitional Missiology.” The paper begins by explaining the analogy of the stages of a fire. It then addresses “the Missiology of Decline,” which is a phenomenon plaguing much of missiology today. The article pivots to considers the importance of revivalism and spiritual re-awakenings in church history. The concluding section outlines steps comprising a Re-ignitional Missiology.

Fires and the Fire of God

Firefighters study fires to prevent and extinguish them. Firefighting science has produced the following graph which illustrates the stages of a typical fire, in terms of temperature across time:¹

1. Ignition
2. Growth
3. Fully Developed
4. Decay

Image 1.



Applying the fire graph roughly to spiritual life, a quick international survey indicates that national churches may be found at various points of this cycle. Through the agency of missions, some nations are witnessing an initial Ignition of the gospel. As a former Muslim involved with ministry to Muslims, I happily observe this hopeful state in countries such as Iran, my ancestral homeland. There, the annual rate of growth of the church is reported to be 19.6%, the fastest growing evangelical movement in the world by percentage.²

Indonesia provides an example of both Ignition and Growth, which can also be considered a “harvest,” with many Muslims getting saved.³ I am presently serving in Albania, where an oppressive atheistic regime nearly extinguished all religious life, including the ancient churches indigenous to the country. Since that regime fell 30 years ago, the evangelical church has sprung to life with a growth rate reported about 5% per annum. This national church, now ignited, is in the Growth stage.

Other nations are blessed with a raging fire of God that can be considered Fully Developed. These nations experience burgeoning church growth and the institutional development that may include schools, seminaries, large numbers of people going into ministry, and established missions agencies. I have traveled to El Salvador numerous times to provide missionary training. Local Salvadoran believers have told me the evangelical church is strong, numbering approximately half the population of the nation.⁴ El Salvador has developed a robust missions sending program. However, as a contextual marker, one Salvadoran leader told me they are not witnessing the same number of miracles as was common in previous years during the Ignition and Growth stages.

Other nations are witnessing the fire of God in the Decay stage. This article will rename this spiritual stage *Decline*. The characteristics of Decline permeate many components of Christianity in the West, as will be explored below.

The fire analogy, though helpful, cannot fully reflect the complexity of human affairs. For example, in any given nation, one likely observes some church movements igniting—being birthed—while others have already reached a stage of being Fully Developed. Still others in the same nation are clearly in a state of Decline. In some contexts, an outward show of vibrancy remains, through well-oiled public relations machinery, yet internal spiritual vitality, marked by the fire of God, has waned. The spirituality of individual believers themselves may accordingly reflect ebbs and flows—backslidings and periods of spiritual growth and refreshment. Finally,

the shape of the curve, when applied spiritually, will vary greatly. Spiritual temperatures and timeframes may not follow a standardized pattern such as in the simplified firefighters' model, or even any bell-shaped curve.

While human institutions tend to decay over time, the life inherent in God is not subject to inevitable decline. Decline represents human failing, not a stage that is divinely predestined. Spiritual decline occurs by moving away from God, the divine life source. Early messianic believers faced persecution as described in Hebrews 10:32-34, which resulted in many believers backsliding *away* from God. Some "drifted away" from what they had heard (2:1).⁵ Others "fell away" from the living God due to evil, unbelieving hearts (3:12). Yet others "threw away" their confidence in Christ (10:35). The spiritual direction in these cases was always away from God. However, the author of Hebrews describes Jesus as the One in whom is vested the "power of an indestructible life" (7:16). Though the Lord Jesus was crucified, the nature of the life within Him resulted in a powerful resurrection. The saving work of Jesus on the cross and His resurrection are the gospel message that provide the critical spiritual spark. No other source of revival or spiritual life exists.

Jesus' disciples, trained by the Master, and sent out in the power of the Spirit, catalyzed worldwide revival. Their Ignition ministries frequently took place in high-persecution contexts, not unlike many UPG contexts today. Historian Rodney Stark estimates that the early church had a 40% annual growth rate over its first three centuries.⁶ By comparison, the Early Church experienced an annual growth rate *over three centuries* which doubles that enjoyed by any single country today. Those early apostles were igniters.

Some Characteristics of Fully Developed Spiritual Fires

Space will not allow for a full treatment of the myriad positive impacts of the gospel upon society. Alvin Schmidt's seminal *How Christianity Changed the World*⁷ describes the leavening impact of the gospel on the carnal Greco-Roman societies which it penetrated. No area of life was left untouched. Ethics, morality, art, education, law, and interpersonal relationships were transformed.

Nations in which the gospel makes significant inroads may also experience what Donald McGavran described as "redemption and lift."⁸ *Redemption* refers to gospel reception, while *lift* describes the attending work ethic, creativity, and freedom from wasting time and treasure on

vices—all of which may result in economic dynamism and societal prosperity. Though *lift* can be considered a positive side-effect that often accompanies widespread salvation, it is not a primary goal of preaching the gospel. South Korea and Brazil over the past half century portray many characteristics of “Redemption and Lift.”

Furthermore, nations in which gospel fires are fully developed will likely witness a commensurate increase in the development of Christian education, Bible colleges, and seminaries. A robust indigenous theological output typically accompanies these trends. Duane A. Miller has noted that ex-Muslim Christians are now finding their theological voice, focusing on the love of God uniquely manifest in Christ. Miller describes the self-theologizing of this rapidly developing movement:⁹

In turning away from the Umma and Muhammad and the Qur’an, they have turned away from a loveless power they perceived there to Jesus, his Church and the Bible and a deity whose power is perfected in weakness and whose love is stronger than death. And from this experience of the deity’s love-power some have endeavored to build a new identity from the breakage among which they have lived.

As the fire of God becomes Fully Developed, nations which had once been thought of as missionary “receiving nations” also must become “sending nations.” For this action to take place, missions sending agencies must first develop. Latin America, East Asia, and even Africa, to some extent, manifest these encouraging trends.

The Missiology of Decline

When Christianity wanes in a society, a tragic ripple effect impacts all of life. This section, however, will address only those aspects of church life pertaining to missiology. During eras of Decline, both the quantity and quality of missions will likely decrease.

Declining Church Membership and Missions Sending

When a nation witnesses the fire of God in its Decline stage, more churches will close than open. The rate of conversions and baptisms will likewise plateau and then fall. Believers will encounter the discouragement of more people leaving the church than joining it. Missionary output will taper off. The following report describes the Southern Baptist Convention in the

United States, though similar statistics could be provided for many denominations and church movements, Pentecostal and otherwise:

The numbers are the numbers. Southern Baptists may be reluctant to accept the reality of the pervasive presence of decline and the loss of a vibrant evangelistic culture in SBC churches, but the official statistics of the Southern Baptist Convention paint a compelling portrait of churches struggling mightily to reach new converts and to hold on to people already in the fold...LifeWay Research reports that from 2011-2018, the SBC lost an average of 1,144 churches a year who gave up their SBC ID number. Also, in 2000 the average number of baptisms per SBC church was 9.97. By 2019, the average number of baptisms per church was 4.9, a drop of 50%. ... A Convention of churches declining in membership, worship attendance, and baptisms is unlikely to produce steadily increasing numbers of missionaries, and church planters. In 2018, with a budget \$16,000,000 higher, the *IMB had 1,574 fewer missionaries under appointment than in 2010*.¹⁰

Western Christianity does not stand alone in witnessing Decline. ReligionNews.com recently reported:

For many years now, Christianity has been the dominant religion of South Korea. However, if you look at the numbers there has been a marked decline. A 2015 poll reports that the younger generations are becoming increasingly less Christian and less religious in general. Furthermore, church attendance by those who remain is declining as they find religion less and less relevant. This is a surprise coming from the small country that sends out more Christian missionaries than any other country save the U.S. itself. Religion as a whole has been declining, but this is a manifestation of a deeper issue.¹¹

Small numbers of believers, if on fire for God, can ignite spiritual fires and revivals. However, declining numbers may reflect deeper issues. On a visit to South Korea in 2014, a missions leader shared with me that the early morning prayer meetings—every day in every church—which were the spiritual engine room of Korean revival, were not as well attended anymore. Likewise, the number of full-time missionaries sent out from South Korea was projected to decline.

Mission Creep

Since *missions* is not a featured biblical term, potential exists for the term to be filled with alternate and changing meanings. Alan Johnson's helpful work on "Apostolic Function" provides a biblical anchor for the term missions.¹² Johnson equates missions with a two-fold apostolic function: preaching the gospel where it has not been preached, and planting churches where they do not exist.

In the past century, however, missiologists have offered various visions of what *missions* might mean. While Johnson has taken a narrow, biblical focus, others argue for a much more expansive interpretation. Christopher Wright states, “when I speak of mission, I am thinking of all that God is doing in his great purpose for the whole of creation and all that he calls us to do in cooperation with that purpose.”¹³

While such a broad perspective includes laudable points regarding the *Missio Dei*, two threats emerge. First, an expanded mission may result in a Social Gospel emphasis in which the indispensable stages of Ignition and Growth have been skipped. Instead, missions may result in merely the transplant of the structures and accoutrements which have resulted from previous Fully Developed fires, but which are now in Decline.

Second, as Stephen Neill has briefly summarized, “If everything is mission, nothing is mission.”¹⁴ A watered-down or overly broad understanding of missions will necessarily result in halting and scatter-shot efforts on the field. Revival requires focus.

Missiologically-induced Syncretism

The timeless adage remains: The Word of God will keep one from sin, and sin will keep one from the Word of God. Eras of Decline inevitably witness the deemphasis, devaluing, misinterpretation, or misapplication of the Bible. While theological liberalism has plagued mainline denominations, hastening the trajectory of their respective declines, evangelical missiology has been plagued by a different malady—missiologically-induced syncretism.

Syncretism is the mixing together of two elements such that at least one of them loses its essential characteristic. Gailyn Van Rheenen explains, “Syncretism is the blending of Christian beliefs and practices with those of the dominant culture so that Christianity loses its distinctiveness.”¹⁵ David Hesselgrave notes that syncretism impacts the important subject of comparative religions in an aptly-titled article: “Syncretism: Mission and Missionary Induced?” Hesselgrave states, “Syncretism is sometimes induced by underestimating the uniqueness of the Christian faith while overestimating the validity of competing faiths.”¹⁶ If missionaries are inducing syncretism, it naturally follows that the missiologists who have taught them bear responsibility for this syncretism.

God has been concerned about theological syncretism and outright idolatry from His issuance of the Ten Commandments onward. Missionaries and missiologists will inevitably

differ in opinion on some points. Those differences of opinion will not necessarily precipitate the church's Decline phase. Yet, recent field-based experimentation without appropriate theological guardrails has resulted in manifestations of syncretism which jeopardize the core of the gospel.

While a full discussion of contextualization as it relates to the tension between appropriate contextualization and syncretism is beyond the scope of this article, exploratory missiologists indicate they have long been aware of threat of syncretism. Charles Kraft of Fuller Theological Seminary evaluates this tension: "What about the concept of syncretism? Is this something that can be avoided or is it a factor of human limitations and sinfulness? I vote for the latter and suggest there is no way to avoid it."¹⁷

One missiological experiment which has gained traction in Western missiological journals and seminaries is that of "Insider Movements" (IM). IM built on existing missiology, yet failed to recognize the danger of new disciples of Christ retaining their birth religion. Kevin Higgins explains the development of the IM Paradigm (IMP):

In the second half of the 20th century, thinkers such as McGavran and Tippett began to popularize the idea of "people movements." One assumption of the people movement concept was that people in many parts of the world made decisions together rather than as individuals, and that such "togetherness" included tribal, caste, and other types of unity. As I use it, the phrase "Insider Movements" encompasses not only these earlier descriptions of people movements but adds "religion" to the above list of aspects of "togetherness" or unity.¹⁸

Higgins' proposal merits significant reflection and analysis. The IMP does not merely endorse retention of culture, but the retention of non-Christian religious identity and many non-Christian religious practices as well. Indeed, this paradigm recommends continuity of religious adherence. Higgins compares the apostles' continued attendance at the Temple in Acts 3 as a model for Muslims remaining inside the Islamic mosque after coming to the Lord Jesus:

Proponents of Insider Movements, especially among Muslims, have pointed to possible parallels here. They have argued from this passage and others that a biblical precedent exists for new believers from Islam to remain in the mosque and continue to practice other religious expressions of Islamic life.¹⁹

The Islamic mosque exalts the prophethood of Muhammad, who rejected the Lordship, Sonship, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, Higgins does not recognize continued mosque attendance in the long-term as compromise or syncretism. On the same page as the previous quote, he states: "I suggest that followers of Jesus can continue to embrace at

least some of their people's religious life, history, and practice without compromising the gospel or falling into syncretism."²⁰ Interestingly, my wife and I were recently talking with a single woman missionary serving in the Middle East. She mentioned an actual case in which Muslim-background converts to Christ wanted to discontinue attending the Islamic mosque, but a IM-promoting missionary exhorted them to remain in the mosque.

Missiologists may esteem their experimentation as the *avant garde* of what God is doing. Nevertheless, if not bounded by biblical guardrails, this experimentation may induce syncretism. In the final analysis, missiologically-induced syncretism will not create a spark of initial Ignition in an unreached people group or bloc. Such syncretism may rather smolder an ignition under the wet blanket of Decline.

Revivalism and Spiritual Re-awakenings

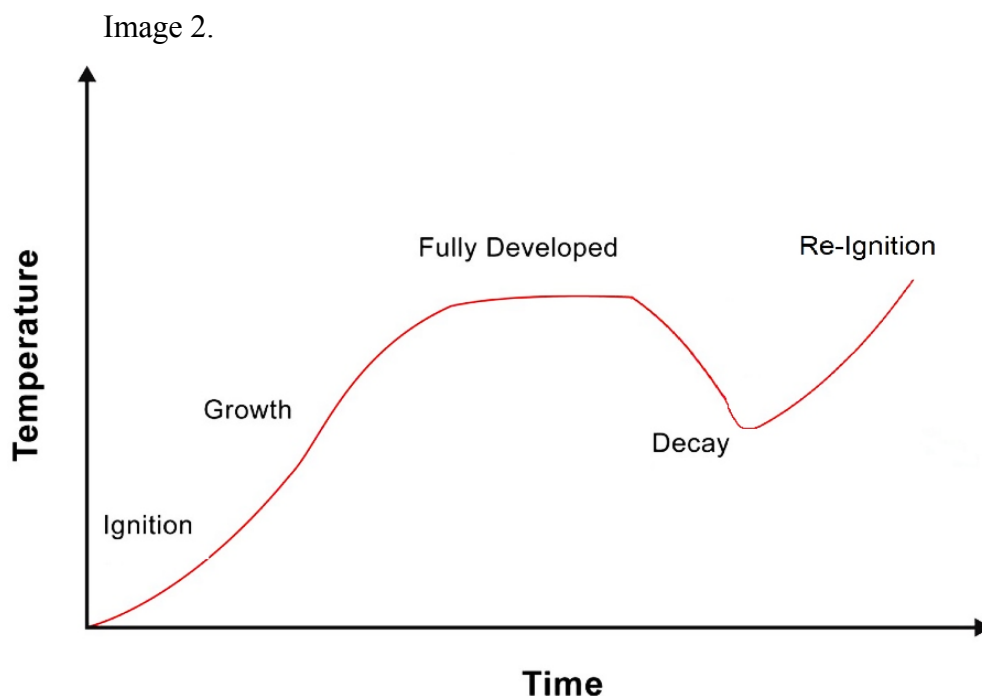
Before considering Re-ignitional Missiology, this article considers the rich history of revivalism and Spiritual Re-awakenings in the Protestant era. Revivalism enjoyed a rich history in Northern Europe, the British Isles, and the New World. In terms of the fire motif, the cooling and downturn of Decline is reversed by the fresh fire of a move of God.

Dating from 1727, Zinzendorf's community at Herrnhut launched a "100 Year Prayer Meeting." Their spiritual vitality manifest in over 300 missionaries sent out by 1791, some voluntarily entering their respective fields of service as slaves.²¹ Significantly, this movement occurred prior to the 1792 publication by William Carey of *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*. This publication and the subsequent sailing of Carey to India are often used as date markers for modern missions.

Revivalist Charles G. Finney articulates the indispensable nature of revivals in reversing seasons of spiritual decline:

A 'Revival of Religion' presupposes a declension. Almost all the religion in the world has been produced by revivals. God has found it necessary to take advantage of the excitability there is in mankind, to produce powerful excitements among them, before he can lead them to obey. Men are so spiritually sluggish, there are so many things to lead their minds off from religion, and to oppose the influence of the Gospel, that it is necessary to raise an excitement among them, till the tide rises so high as to sweep away the opposing obstacles."²²

Finney's prescription can be depicted on the fire graph as in Image 2.²³ A revival constitutes an intense and dramatic re-ignition. People may drift away from God, but to return to Him they must throw themselves unreservedly at His feet as is common in revivals. In theological terms, repentance constitutes a foremost component of revivals and Re-ignition.



Finney applies the principle of revivalism to international missions:

It is altogether improbable that religion will ever make progress among heathen nations except through the influence of revivals. The attempt is now making to do it by education, and other cautious and gradual improvements. But so long as the laws of mind remain what they are, it cannot be done in this way.²⁴

Thus, missions requires that those who glow with the fire of God seek to transplant that fire into cold and dormant places. In missiological parlance, this equates to reaching UPGs. The principles of ignition and re-ignition contain similarities. In the former case, a fire commences for the first time.

Prayer meetings remain inextricably linked to revivals and spiritual awakenings. Such an event occurred in Massachusetts, USA in 1806 with the "Haystack Prayer Meeting." Five college students, during a discussion of missions, sought shelter from a thunderstorm in a nearby

haystack. Their subsequent prayer meeting is credited, at least indirectly, with the sending out of 1,250 missionaries in the next fifty years.²⁵

Turning to East Asia once again, Koreans have developed contextual “Prayer Mountains” as the loci of prayer for revival. Yoido Full Gospel Church founded Osanri Choi-Jashil Prayer and Fasting Mountain Facility as both a spiritual retreat center and a place of revival intercession. The Korean revival spawned a magnificent missionary movement; wherever one goes in the world, one will likely meet Korean missionaries.

The Pentecostal revival and associated awakenings of the early 20th Century cannot be overlooked. Fire fell from heaven in places such as Azusa Street, Los Angeles. The missionaries who carried the DNA of this fire and transplanted it into hitherto unreached areas have changed the world. Pentecostals now number approximately 650 million followers globally.²⁶ Those who had experienced the fire of God took those burning coals and transplanted them in unreached areas through the preaching of the gospel. These once-unreached areas then burst forth into spiritual Ignition and Growth.

Re-ignitional Missiology

Certain natural phenomena can spare a fire from decay. The introduction of new flammable material will cause the fire to continue burning, as anyone who has fed a campfire can attest. Ventilation can also reinvigorate a fire. In the case of wildfires that have ravaged many forests, both elements exist: Nearly infinite combustible material—trees, as well as high winds, which the fires themselves help to create through searing updrafts.

In the Old Testament, priests were responsible to make sure the fire on the altar did not extinguish: “The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it. It shall not go out, but the priest shall burn wood on it every morning; and he shall lay out the burnt offering on it, and offer up in smoke the fat portions of the peace offerings on it” (Lev. 6:12). This lesson applies clearly to missions.

The New Testament notes the power and potential of fire ignition, for better or worse. Of the tongue, the Bible says, “See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!” (James 3:5). Gossip, for example, can run rampant like a destructive wildfire. On the other hand, missionary work may ultimately result in a spiritual fire that ignites, grows, and then fully develops.

The decline of missions, like the decay of fire, can and must be reversed. In terms of spiritual warfare, praying Christians can launch an effective counter-attack by reigniting missions. Satan greatly fears this type of counterpunch. The missiology behind such an initiative, herein called “Re-ignitional Missiology” must necessarily undergird such an enterprise. The following section sketches five components of Re-ignitional Missiology:

- a. Reaffirming the mission as Apostolic function
- b. Corrective missiology that resists decline in all its forms
- c. Hungering for a Hunger for God
- d. Recognizing our need for Holy Spirit fire
- e. Seeking a fresh Jetstream of the Holy Spirit

A brief treatment of each component begins with reaffirming the mission as Apostolic Function.

Reaffirming Apostolic Function as the Mission

Anyone who has tried to kindle a campfire will appreciate the importance of focusing the spark or match on a specific area of kindling. Missions likewise requires a tight area of focus if spiritual ignition is to be successful. This article affirms the specific definition of missions that Alan Johnson suggests is biblically mandated. Johnson calls this “Apostolic Function,” and describes it as preaching the gospel where it has not been heard, and planting churches where they do not exist. This specificity is necessary to generate enough focused heat to ignite a spiritual fire. Such an understanding remains consistent with the church’s historic understanding of the missionary call and missionary work, from Acts 13 onward. Re-ignitional Missiology represents a return to New Testament practice, rather than a modern innovation.

This discussion merits two points of clarification. First, one can assume that Christians, wherever they will go in the world, will do good deeds. They will be kind, generous to the poor, and compassionate toward the hurting. Nevertheless, these good works cannot, in and of themselves, substitute for apostolic function. They cannot *replace* preaching the gospel and planting churches. This consideration recognizes Neill’s caution above. Anything done anywhere by any Christian should not automatically be considered “missions.”

Second, entry into nations in which UPGs reside requires thoughtful and creative platform development. In nearly all these nations, a religious worker’s visa may be difficult or

impossible to obtain. Platform development, or “entry strategies,” may include Business as Mission (BAM) or community development work. Missionaries should seek a plausible, honest, integrated field identity that avoids the identity bifurcation of being a “missionary” at home, but “working for the company” abroad. A full treatment of this discussion remains beyond the scope of this article. Yet, missionaries called by God, and sent forth in the power of the Spirit, must retain a singular long-term focus of preaching the gospel and planting churches, however that may be done. As stated above, mission creep may result in the transplanting of the fruit of community development without the indispensable stages of Ignition and Growth. Though these initial stages may be long in coming, the apostolic focus must not waver.

Corrective Missiology that Resists Decline in all its Forms

Decline must be resisted. The fire on the altar must not go out. The “Missiology of Decline” described above must invariably be countered. For example, missions-induced syncretism has impacted Bible translations written for Muslim readers. These translations comprise “Muslim-idiom Translations.” These translations pose the threat of syncretism through the replacement of Divine Familial Terminology, such as “Father” and “Son of God” with alternate terms. Proponents of MITs argue that these alternatives retain the biblical message, while being both more understandable and acceptable to Muslim readers.²⁷ The challenge is tangible: Islam rejects that God be considered the Heavenly Father or the Son of God.

As Van Rheenen has stated above, a syncretism occurs when two faiths are mixed such that at least one of them loses its essential characteristic. Missiologists such as Adam Simnowitz contend that replacement of the divine referent “Father” with “Guardian,” or “Son” with “Caliph” collapses the heart of gospel.²⁸ According to the analogy employed in this article, extreme cases of mistranslation constitute the equivalent of pouring water on kindling.

Accurately translated Bibles form powerful missional tools in reaching UPGs. Inaccurate translations, on the other hand, stunt the process of Ignition and Growth. The Assemblies of God has provided guidance on the MIT controversy with the paper: “The Necessity for Retaining Father and Son Terminology in Scripture Translations for Muslims.”²⁹ Those similarly concerned with integrity in Bible translation recently launched the “Arlington Statement on Bible Translation.”³⁰ Both of these efforts seek to halt and reverse missiologically-induced spiritual Decline. Though perhaps unpleasant at times, more of these efforts will be needed to safeguard

missions from syncretism and to secure the missiological space for the Holy Spirit to do His work of Ignition.

Hungering for a Hunger for God

Complacency rears up as enemy both to missions and revival. A fully developed fire may quickly decay if those tending the fire are not vigilant. As a missionary who has traveled to nearly 50 countries, palpable differences exist regarding the important characteristic of *spiritual hunger*. Missionaries may raise budgets. Leaders may solicit support for important projects. Spiritual hunger, however, cannot be purchased. Such hunger is a key currency in the Kingdom of God. Spiritual hunger, even desperation, has resulted in Ignition and revival in Iran. This has occurred despite an Islamic theological dictatorship which seeks to jail and kill God's vessels of Ignition and Growth. In Cuba, where the average wage is less than US\$20 per month, spiritual hunger and desperation have catalyzed a Pentecostal outpouring since the mid-1990s. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:7). The equation has not changed.

Those experiencing church life in the Growth or Fully Developed stages may wonder at the urgency recommended here. Re-ignitional Missiology seeks to promote neither unhealthy spiritual discontentment nor unattainable idealism. Instead, Re-ignitional Missiology recognizes that the God who is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29), seeks to spark revival among UPGs through missionaries who carry that flame. As Finney has stated above, God works through revivals.

Recognizing our Need for Holy Spirit Fire

The Holy Spirit remains the Spirit of Missions. Jesus gave His disciples final instructions for their Great Commission during the Upper Room Discourse. He noted that when the Spirit comes, He will convict the world of sin...because they do not believe in Me" (John 16:8-9). This same Spirit came as tongues of fire. He baptizes with fire. When Jesus is preached in the nations, the Spirit glorifies the Son (John 16:14). Through this work of the Spirit, a spiritual fire is ignited, grows, and the church is born.

Perceptive leaders discern when the Fully Developed fire stage has plateaued. Coasting replaces the original spiritual urgency. From that point forward, Decline will set in if something

is not done. The United States Assemblies of God (AG) burst forth from its Ignition on Azusa Street in 1906. That fire quickly entered the Growth stage and soon was Fully Developed. A half century later, those early leaders had departed for their heavenly reward. Other great AG leaders carried the torch forward, yet plateau had begun to set in as the AG movement grappled with the contextual milieu of the 1960s and beyond. Everett Wilson explains:

While the movement's modification may have been anticipated—change is inevitable—constant renewal, by definition, is required of any religious revival. The challenge was to retain its early fervor in the face of a social and cultural evolution that tended to dampen its intensity and threaten its effectiveness.³¹

At that time, J. Philip Hogan began to champion something which in retrospect could be described as Re-ignitional Missiology. Hogan's vision for world missions set ablaze the AG movement with a fresh vision to glorify Christ to the ends of the earth. Wilson continues:

While the denomination was going through this process of metamorphosis, socially, culturally, and institutionally, the feature that helped stave off self-serving interests and disruptive internal conflicts was the frequently reiterated commitment to global evangelization. While everything else was in flux...missions was an inspiring unifying force that gave the movement a transcendent reason for being. Further it may well have been that the denomination's overseas efforts—its sacrificial, collective vision for reaching out to a needy world—was its principal stimulant to inspire its youth and mobilize an increasingly passive or even alienated laity. In any event, the argument is compelling that its missionary focus has played an important role in keeping the denomination on course, resisting or forestalling drift and deterioration.³²

Hogan's success was two-fold. First, his missions vision and practical application thereof rekindled fires within the sending churches. Second, those sent out brought Ignition throughout the Global South. These fires have grown with breathtaking results.

Seeking a Fresh Jet Stream of the Holy Spirit

Ventilation can enhance a fire. Blowing on a campfire will cause the fire to grow. The Spirit who comes by fire also comes as a rushing wind. When the Spirit comes as a wind, He transforms lives and nations. Jesus stated, "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it is coming from and where it is going; so is everyone who has been born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). Jet streams high in the atmosphere impact the weather conditions felt on the ground. The Holy Spirit, the rushing wind, seeks to create a jet stream in missions which can fan the flames of Ignition among an UPG.

The Holy Spirit turns souls around. He can turn nations around also. The full picture remains a mystery to us. We hear the sound, but we do not know where the Spirit comes from or where He goes.

So, it is in international missions. The Holy Spirit can turn around nations. Near-dormant fires can spring to life as the Spirit begins to blow. Decline can be reversed. Spirit-led missiology, re-ignited and re-focused, can be used by God to ignite a UPG as well as to re-ignite the senders.

Conclusion: Washing in a Pool Called “Sent”

This article calls for Re-ignitional Missiology in our time. Such a missiology can halt and reverse the downward spiritual trajectory of Decline observable in many contexts. Growing national churches need challenging goals. Our youth need to pursue the missionary quests to which the Spirit may be calling them.

Jesus healed a man born blind in John 9. This man represents us in our spiritual condition before meeting Christ. Interestingly, Jesus did not instruct him to wash in a pool called Prosperity, Multiplication, Grace, or Business as Mission. Jesus “said to him, ‘Go, wash in the pool of Siloam’ (which is translated, Sent). So, he left and washed, and came back seeing” (John 9:7). The blind man washed in a pool called *Sent*, embodying the missionary call. The formerly blind man—his name is never given—was unshakeable in testifying of Christ, even to the religious leaders.

A church baptized in a pool called Sent will fulfill its apostolic calling. Simultaneously, a church so baptized will stave off any spiritual Decline. Its fire will continue to burn bright. Its lampstand will illuminate the nations. Re-ignitional Missiology may spark such a sending. In doing so, it will result in UPGs being reached, as well as the fires of the sending churches being kindled afresh and re-ignited.

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