

# Models of Missiological Development

Matthew Bixby

Several years ago, we had a group of Seminary students from Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary visit us in Mexico. While these men were in Monterrey, they had the opportunity to visit several Bible Institutes and Bible Colleges. During that time, they posed an interesting question to Pastor Julio Montes, long-time pastor of Iglesia Bautista Genesaret and the administrator of the Universidad Cristiana de Las Américas, where we minister. The question was this one: “Does Mexico need more American missionaries?” Pastor Julio answered that while the need in Mexico was great, Mexico’s primary need was not for church-planting missionaries, but for missionaries to come help train Mexicans for ministry. This caused me to analyze different models of missiological development. Before we consider some models, we need to define the strategic goals of missions.

## **Missiological Goals**

Seeking to advance the cause of Christ through missions, missionary efforts seek to enter into a previously unreached area and establish indigenous churches in those areas. Missiology has traditionally stated that a church is truly indigenous when it fulfills the “Three Selves” (three strategic goals). A church is indigenous when it is:

1. **Self-supporting** (does not need foreign finances to function)
2. **Self-governing** (does not need foreign intervention to govern)
3. **Self-propagating** (does not need foreign missionaries to church plant)

These goals are worthy indeed; however, I would like to suggest that a fourth strategic goal should be added to the Three Selves in order to make a permanent impact on an unreached area:

4. **Self-instructing**<sup>1</sup> (does not need foreign oversight to remain doctrinally pure)

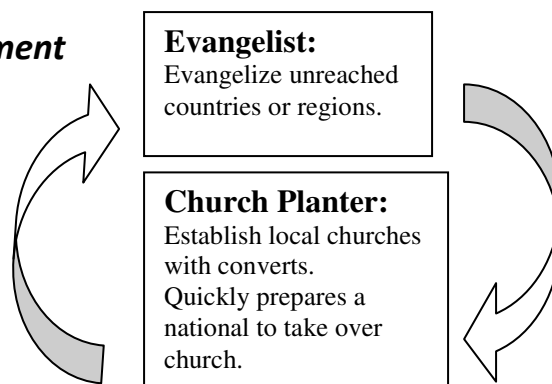
In their haste to accomplish the “Three Selves” many missionaries leave behind churches that quickly succumb to unbiblical influences (more on this later).

Having defined four strategic goals of missiological development, we will consider several common models of missiological development.

## **Traditional Models of Missiological Development**

### **Missionary Church Planter Model**

1. The most popular missiological model. The missionary seeks to establish as many local churches as possible and quickly turn them over to national men.



<sup>1</sup> Missiologist David Bosch suggests “self-theologizing” as a fourth “self.” While I acknowledge that every theologian’s knowledge of God and his Word is incomplete, the relativistic “self-theologizing” done by many who follow David Bosch’s approach often results in significant departures from orthodox doctrine.

2. While this model is theoretically sound, in practice it is often faulty because:
  - a. the national pastor is theologically and pastorally unprepared for ministry.
  - b. the churches are spiritually immature and unprepared for the departure of the missionary and the ministry of a national (who is often not as qualified as the missionary).
3. The flammable combination (of an immature church and unprepared national) frequently results in churches that split often and eventually surrender to the overtures of charismatics and theological error.
4. Many times the missionary becomes a sort of Baptist “pope.”
  - a. He has to return to the churches he planted to resolve church disputes.
  - b. He feels obligated to continually monitor the national pastors to see how they progress. If they fail, he intervenes to remove the national from the pastorate and select another pastor for the church.
  - c. At times the failure of the national is very real, and other times the failure is that the national dared to practice ministry differently than the missionary.
5. At times a Bible Institute may be established to train nationals. Many times these Bible institutes cannot carry out quality theological and ministerial training because:
  - a. the missionary lacks the adequate training himself (Go to Seminary!), and/or
  - b. the missionary lacks the suitable gifts, and/or
  - c. the missionary lacks the necessary time.
6. Does this model accomplish our missiological goals?
  - a. Self-supporting: perhaps
  - b. Self-governing: No
    - i. the missionary has to intervene
    - ii. the churches never learn to solve their own problems
  - c. Self-propagating: No
    - i. the missionary is doing the propagating
    - ii. the churches are so weak they can’t propagate themselves
  - d. Self-instructing: No
    - i. the churches and pastors often abandon biblical Christianity
    - ii. no mechanism has been set up for the nationals to train their own replacements

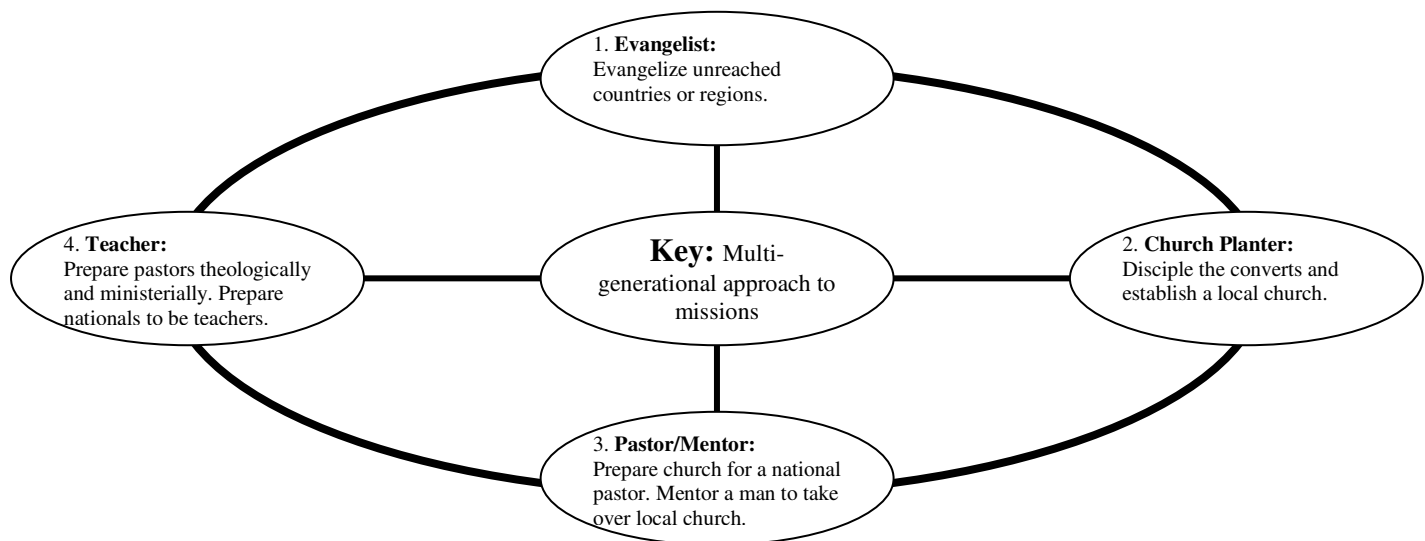
### Missionary Pastor Model



1. In this model the missionaries go into a country or region establishing churches and remain to pastor the church. This model is faulty because they don’t prepare an exit strategy.
2. Once they realize this and begin to prepare for someone to replace them, it is often too late to adequately prepare the national replacement. The result is either:
  - a. a national pastor that is unprepared for independent ministry in either pastoral skills or theological maturity (resulting in the same flammable combination mentioned above);
 or,

- b. the retiring missionary summons another foreign missionary to replace him as the pastor (which is a strategic retreat).
- 3. Does this model accomplish our missiological goals?
  - a. Self-supporting: Perhaps (though the long-time presence of the foreign missionary often implies the long-term presence of foreign money)
  - b. Self-governing: Perhaps
    - i. Yes, if the national takes over when the missionary leaves (but this often ends up in disaster)
    - ii. No, if another foreign missionary comes to pastor the church
  - c. Self-propagating: Perhaps (if the church is sending out its own church planting nationals)
  - d. Self-instructing: No
    - i. If a national replaces the missionary, the churches and pastors often abandon biblical Christianity, and
    - ii. no mechanism has been set up for the nationals to adequately train their own replacements
    - iii. If a missionary replaces a missionary, there is no self-preservation

## A Suggested Model of Missiological Development



1. In this model the missionaries do the initial evangelization and church planting, but also prepare for their own exit by mentoring men to take over their own local churches AND by establishing a mechanism for quality theological and ministerial training.
2. One missionary will probably not be able to complete all these cycles. It will probably take many years and several generations of missionaries to complete this cycle, and each of the stages may be ongoing simultaneously in different areas of a country.
3. By intentionally and actively preparing for eventual replacement and long-term preservation, we:
  - a. accomplish our strategic goals of being self-supporting, self-governing, self-propagating, and self-instructing, and

- b. can withdraw missionary resources from one country and invest them elsewhere, beginning the cycle in other unreached areas.

*Born in Spain to missionary parents, **Matthew** spent most of his growing up years on the mission field. While attending college in the United States, Matthew developed a burden for training nationals at a high theological and practical level. In 2002, Matthew and Susan moved to Monterrey, Mexico, to minister at the Christian University of the Americas, where Matthew serves as executive vice-president and the chair of the theology department. Matthew and Susan and their three children are also involved in planting a church in Santa Mónica, a neighborhood on the outskirts of Monterrey.*