

Practical Anthropology and Implications for Mission and Ministry:
Comprehensive Care of Cross-Cultural Servants

by

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Anne

Often these days when people give talks or write books, they begin by telling something of themselves, who they are, where they came from. So that as you listen to someone's ideas, you know something of the someone. It's another way of being contextual, putting the ideas in the context of the person.

We are followers of Jesus, each of us for many decades now. For both of us our journey with Jesus began in our country of origin, the USA. But for John it went deeper, as he describes, somewhere in the Pacific Ocean when he was serving as helicopter pilot on an aircraft carrier. For me Jesus called me to a significant new direction during a year I spent here in Addis Ababa as a volunteer in mission just after college. We have been involved in cross-cultural living and ministry, me for 29 years now and John for 20. While our own mission experience has largely been in connection with our Presbyterian (PCUSA) mission family, in Kenya and Ethiopia we have worked, worshiped and fellowshiped with a great variety of followers of Jesus across the spectrum of denominations, spiritual experience, and nationalities or people groups.

The stimulus for the research and reflection we are sharing this evening has come out of our own experience in mission service and our observations of those serving in mission, namely, that there are often gaps and a lack of coordination in the support provided to mission personnel and that these gaps often have negative consequences. This stimulated an examination into reasons for these gaps in care and support and a consideration of how these might be addressed. Support includes prayer and financial considerations, but we are speaking of support of a much broader content, as will become clear.

For some decades now one of the mantras in mission has been "the whole gospel for the whole world" from Lausanne. We would add two other essential dimensions to the *missio dei* from the human side of God's invitation to partner with Him. We would add that it is the whole church sending whole people as part of God's mission.

I have made up my own mantra. I'm not sure it's catchy as the Lausanne one.

The whole gospel for the whole world
through whole people
supported wholistically

by caring and committed communities (of the whole church)
for the whole calling

That is a lot of wholeness we are looking for.

Going in cross-cultural service is a wonderful opportunity to live among people who are very different from your people of origin. It is also a wonderful opportunity to trust God more fully, in leaving what is familiar—people, places, customs, language, culture.

This is the experience of Abraham in his call in the book of Genesis, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.” We do note though that Abraham traveled with at least some of his extended family unit. We might build a case, beginning with Abraham, that God’s intention when He calls and sends in His mission is to call people in groups and not as isolated individuals.

This practice of leaving the familiar in response to God was intentionally imitated by the *peregrini* of the Celtic Church, monks in the 5th through the 9th centuries who went out from their homeland in groups to learn to trust God more completely. It may be hard for us to imagine, but back then the monastery was a place of safety and relative security. You had community, you had food to eat, you had a rhythm to life, you had security from thieves and marauders—at least until the Vikings showed up. But there was a comfortable safety in the monastery. So if you wanted to completely cast yourself on the mercy of God, you had leave. When you left, you went out in the wide and wild world. And, being in Ireland which was thought back then to be the ends of the earth, or at least the edge of the known world, to leave, you had to set out across the sea. *Peregrini* set out from Ireland in boats, the only way out into the wider world, braving the dangerous sea. They would just let God take them where He would.

While today we do not so much see people going in mission to know God better or to learn trust Him more fully, we often do see these things as a by product of service.

The *peregrini* went out not in red martyrdom, giving up their blood, their lives to death. But they went out in the white martyrdom of leaving everything that was familiar and secure to give their lives as living sacrifices in service wherever God led them, to the place they referred to as their place of resurrection. There they settled, formed a community, lived out their life of service to God and the surrounding people for the rest of their lives. It is a wonderful chapter in the history of Europe, this evangelization or renewal of the Christian faith on the continent through the living sacrifices of these Celtic monks, the *peregrini*.

But such white martyrdom has its own kind of death. St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland who was a missionary to Ireland in the 5th century, spoke to the costliness of answering God’s call. As a sixteen year old he with other youths had been carried off from Britain and taken to Ireland as a slave. For six years he experienced the cold, hunger and deprivation of the life of slavery, keeping a local chieftain’s sheep. Miraculously, by God’s hand and through dreams and visions, Patrick escaped and returned to his family in Britain. Back at home Patrick clearly experiences God calling him back to the place of his slavery and to the barbarian Irish. He eventually is able to return and is mightily used of God to build up

the church in Ireland and by his own deep spirituality lay the foundation for the legacy of the *peregrini* who would come and go in the next centuries. Patrick lived the rest of his life in Ireland in the service of the God who called him. Towards the end of his life Patrick writes a short account of his life and in it he shares honestly,

“Even if I were willing to leave them and go to Britain—and I was all set to go there, and wanted to go for it is my homeland and where my family is—...God knows how much I wanted to do this; I am ‘bound in the Spirit....It is not I but Christ the Lord who has ordered me to come [here] and be with these people for the rest of my life.’”¹

There is a cost to answering this call. But even acknowledging this does not excuse the gaps we have seen in the care of cross-cultural servants.

Another important observation we and others looking at the care, or lack thereof, of people in cross-cultural ministry, have noted is the unfortunate and at times avoidable early attrition of people in mission. People who went out fully intending to give themselves in long term service, but for various reasons come home after only one term or even before completing a term. There can be a sense of failure, tremendous guilt, hurt, lots of questions and not always a good place to ask them.

Kelly and Michelle O’Donnell who have researched, written and spoken about member care, in a seminar they have offered on “Staying Healthy” in the midst of the stress of mission and aid situations, acknowledge that attrition is part of the price of such a calling.

Attrition, historically, has been part of the cost the Church has paid for penetrating the areas of darkness (internally and externally!). People working in challenging settings are vulnerable, and inevitably get hurt. Our weaknesses as people and as sending agencies also make us vulnerable.²

So, we began to ask, what can help sustain whole people for a whole life of service in response to God’s call to cross-cultural ministry over the long haul and the ups and downs, and the things that work and the things that don’t, and the things we thought were so clear and then suddenly aren’t.

God can and does provide for and sustain people in incredibly difficult circumstances in miraculous ways. However, we do not believe that the churches that send their members in cross-cultural mission are to put God to the test either deliberately, organizationally or negligently, by creating avoidable conditions that can only be remedied by miraculous divine intervention. We believe an essential part of the church’s involvement in mission requires a broader intentional engagement in supporting the people who are being sent in cross-cultural life service.

¹*Patrick’s Declaration of the Great Works of God* in “The Patrick Tradition,” by Thomas O’Loughlin in *Celtic Spirituality* translated by Oliver Davies, in *The Classics of Western Spirituality*. New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1999. 78-79.

²Michelle & Kelly O’Donnell, *Staying Healthy Handouts*, www.MemberCareAssociates.org

What we are talking about has over the past 20 to 25 years come to be called member care. How do we help sustain and nurture mission personnel for the long haul? As the O'Donnells have articulated, it's not about creating a comfortable lifestyle, nor is it trusting people rather than God. But it is calling attention to the need to balance the realistic demands of sacrifice and suffering that are part of being gospel witnesses on the frontlines of the kingdom with the need for realistic support and nurture in our lives. The O'Donnells observe that the same discipline that Paul says we need to have to "run to win" the race (I Cor. 9:24-27) is also needed so we might "rest to win" (Matt 11:25-28). They continue, "Think of member care then as a type of discipline. It is a personal, community and biblical practice—an intentional practice—to help renew us and to help us remain resilient."³

We are seeking to help the church at all levels, beginning with congregations and on up through the church or denomination or sending agency organization to think through and plan for how we will make sure that support and encouragement is provided to the people we are sending. Supporting the whole person, the whole family for the whole of their life in mission.

John

As we began to look at what it meant to support the whole person in mission, we first came across the excellent work done by the O'Donnells in Member Care. They have done extensive research on their own and collected helpful ideas from many different people. They have usefully described whole life-cycle issues from recruitment to retirement. They have done an excellent job of describing the roles of different players, the mission organization, the sending body, the receiving body and the individual, and have done this in a way that it all related to the master care done by God. However, the O'Donnells main emphasis has been from a psychological perspective, which is their area of expertise. From my own observations, it was clear that a broader look at human beings would be helpful.

The ancient Greeks, and many Christians over the ages, have looked at human beings in terms of two parts. There is the body and the spirit. Emotions and intellect live in the spirit and the body is something that is such a bother because of its incessant demands. This is not a helpful model. It is not a Hebraic model, nor does it fit with modern science.

I found a more helpful expansion of what it means to be human in the book, *Revolution of Character: Discovering Christ's Pattern for Spiritual Transformation* by Dallas Willard and Don Simpson. They describe the person in terms of six parts and speak of the need for spiritual disciplines to address the whole person as part of the process of sanctification. I clarified my thinking on the interconnectedness of the parts through the description of the holistic nature of sin and, thus the holistic nature of redemption described by Christopher Wright in *The Mission of God*. Wade Keckler in his dissertation on missionary care describes eight areas of a person's life. The number of pieces keeps growing. I'm up to ten.

The result is a ten part description of the elements of what makes up a human being, with an additional two elements that derive from our living in the modern world. All of the

³O'Donnells, MC Seminar 1 MC Overview, www.MemberCareAssociates.org

distinctions made are for the purpose of helping us think. The parts all work together, and interrelate. We cannot extract any one piece and study it in isolation. If we try, we end up studying a cadaver, an empty shell, not a living human being. The modern science of neurobiology and the technology of functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) open some windows to our complexity but I believe that even they will not unlock all the secrets of the wonderful complexity of God's creature, the human being.

So, here's my ten. This is the practical anthropology part.

1. Starting from the obvious is the physical body. It is a great complex biochemical and electrical system that houses all the parts and provides the energy to operate all of them, and is our interface with the created world and each other. We have physical feelings such as cold or hunger that directly relate to the body. The body needs air and water and food and a way to deal with environmental conditions. It requires regular use, also called exercise, and regular rest, often called sleep.

2. Next, look at the intellect. This is the thinking, analyzing, learning part of the person. It basically operates through the brain, a particular organ of the body. It does not function well when the body is not functioning well, when proper food, air, water are not supplied, or when environmental conditions adversely affect the body.

3. Now comes the emotions. These are feelings, and moods, states of operation such as depression or excitement. Again, the emotions are partly a function of the body. We are aware of the chemical action in drugs or food that strongly influence feeling and mood. Emotions are also a function of thought. When we dwell on thoughts of gratitude, we experience a mood of joy, whereas dwelling on thoughts of hurt and revenge create the emotion of anger and hatred.

4. A key part of being human is the will. God created us with wills, free wills. We have the ability and responsibility to make choices. Life is very much about making decisions. Science tells us that we make choices by a combination of intellect and emotion. We think rationally about the choice to be made, such as ordering lunch at a restaurant. We consider some parts rationally and desirably in our frontal cortex. However, we also involve our amygdala, the home of our negative emotions to consider the negative consequences such as being sick from eating too much, the idea of being obese, or the emptiness of our wallet to control ourselves. It seems that whichever part of the brain has the most activity in the final reckoning determines what we choose. Part of our moral will is the proper shaping of our emotional understanding of the consequences of our actions.

A trivial but interesting note about how the body and the will interrelate comes from a study done by the British on a prison population. They noted that many felons do not like to eat their vegetables. The experiment was to give half the prison population vitamins to compensate for not eating their vegetables while the other half received only fake vitamins, placebos. Neither the guards nor the prisoners knew which was which. After a year, they observed that the prisoners receiving the actual vitamins had a significantly lower infraction rate, they were making choices that got them in less trouble. Their moral will was affected by their diet. We are most complex beings.

5. The next part of us is our spirit, which Willard and Simpson describe in terms of our habitual response to life. Our spirit is not our intangible life force, but rather more what we call our character. It is the habitual product of our development of our intellect, our predisposition to moods and emotions, and our pattern of choices. (I acknowledge that some use the spirit in the way that I will later describe the soul.) Character seems to be partly ingrained. We have parts that seem shaped even before birth. However, what we choose to think about and what we choose to do has a great force in shaping our character, our spirit. In fact, what we think about even changes the physical structure of the brain.

6. God declared that it is not good for human beings to be alone. We are created to be social beings. Part of being human is to be in relationships with other human beings. The Reformer, Martin Bucer said that we are created to exist in relationships of mutual service. This is not a give and take of quid pro quo, this for that, but what Jesus commanded as to love one another. Research shows that we find joy in giving/ doing for those close to us. My life is about you and us as much or more than it is about me. Our society shapes us by teaching us a culture, a common set of habitual associations and responses as we seek to cope with the challenging world we live in. Our thoughts, choices and emotions are deeply influenced by our social context.

7. A more difficult to define part of us is our soul. It is not some life force. It is more than any of our other parts put together. It is not savable apart from a live human being. The other parts must be resurrected for our soul to be there. Again, taking from Willard and Simpson, they say that the soul is both that which holds us together, what give us integrity, and the part of us that connects our spirit and thoughts and feelings with God.

In one sense, our soul connects us with the spiritual realm in much the same way as our bodies connect us with the created physical realm. Like the physical realm, which contains both good and evil, the spiritual realm contains both that which is holy, and that which is in rebellion against God. This is a biblical model that sharply contrasts with that Greco-Roman idea that one is good and the other is bad.

The state of our soul is vulnerable to attacks that come from the physical realm and the spiritual realm. Charles Kraft, in writing about demonic influence, talks about demonic activity being like rats attracted to garbage in a persons life. That garbage can be negative emotions, unhealthy thinking, yielding the will through inebriation, abusive social contexts and many other manifestations of the broken and fallen world. The soul, being an integral part of us is affected by what is going on in the rest of our lives.

8. Work is essential to being human. Before the Fall, God gave human beings both physical tasks in tending the garden and mental tasks in naming the animals. Healthy human beings have meaningful work. Work, of course, is both connected with our inner parts: body, mind and emotion and in our external life: our social relationships. These intersect in the economic realm which is another whole complex part of human life which could have been made a separate aspect. Creativity is closely related here. It also related to the next part.

9. Procreation, participation with God in the creation of new life is another part of being human. Not every person will be a parent, but giving life to new people and raising them to be full members of the community is a work that draws in even those who have no children of

their own. Procreation is closely related to our social context, with our work, with our emotions, with our thoughts and with our bodies. We cannot procreate alone, nor in any purely spiritual sense. It very much involves our bodies and our physical sexual activity. The command to be fruitful and multiply comes before the Fall. Procreation and its processes are part of the very good of God's created order.

10. Somewhat controversially, I name the tenth aspect as being political. This is the desire to shape decisions and be heard. It can be as small as how we arrange the chairs to the big things of national government. The process of governmental and church institutional politics can be the battleground where much evil occurs. The desire to be able to help shape decisions is not inherently evil. This part of being human could be attached to the social or the intellectual or to other places within this analysis. I name it separately because it is something we cannot take for granted.

These are my ten. In the modern world, and because we are looking at people who frequently need to travel great distances, I add an element of mobility. Airline travel and local vehicles are not part of us but they are important aspects of cross-cultural life for many mission personnel. The other addition of the modern world is the virtual world, the world of technology: computers, mobile phones and the internet. Again, though there are not inherent to what it means to be human, because of the way our physical and social context has changed, these cannot be ignored.

Ten or twelve ways to look at people. Ten aspects of life. They are all affected by sin, and there is broken-ness in each part of human life. God is working to reclaim, to save the whole person, but our salvation is not fully complete. Sanctification is still at work in our lives and the world.

The result is that when we send someone in cross-cultural mission, we send whole people, whole in the sense of having these complex pieces. On the other hand, we send broken people, imperfect people like us that need the support of the whole body of Christ and the grace of the Holy Spirit just to get through the day.

I believe that part of the responsibility of the sending agency and the sending community is to have a concern for the whole of the person that they have sent in mission. They, together with the receiving community and the individual themselves have a responsibility for the health and continuing growth of the mission worker. At the place we call home, it is possible to take for granted that we all know how to have all the needs of each part of us met. Even at that, we know that neighbors, fellow Church-members and co-workers have personal crises from time to time. We cannot take for granted that life is secure for a cross-cultural worker living far away. Their physical and social context has changed. I believe that their spiritual context has also changed and the state of their soul is under threat because they have made themselves a higher profile target in the spiritual war. We need the imagination to find practical ways to address all of this reality.

Implications

Anne

So, as we recover an awareness of the whole person and the biblical understanding that we are not neatly divided into body and soul and life and ministry cannot be categorized in

spiritual as opposed to physical, we take seriously the need to support the whole person. The time is far past when we assume that those going out in mission are spiritual giants who need only rely on God for their sustenance and sustainability or whom we should expect to just “gut it out.” As the church, the body of Christ, whether that be as a local congregation, a denomination or mission sending agency and as colleagues, we recognize our responsibility to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, to encourage one another, to love one another in real ways even when we are not physically together. While we may not all be sent in cross-cultural witness, we all have a calling to support those who are being sent.

Returning to the O’Donnell’s study on the causes of attrition, if we accept that part of the mission calling of the church includes the sustaining and nurturing of mission personnel for the long haul, then we need to take responsibility for doing and providing all we can for those we are sending in mission. Something we have learned over the years is that you cannot assume someone else cares for the mission worker. In our experience congregations thought the denominational mission office was taking care of the person or family, and the mission office assumed it was the receiving church that was taking care, but it was always someone else’s responsibility. It’s not. Biblically, as members of the body of Christ, it is our responsibility to one another.

So, from our model of the complex and whole human person sent in mission, we would make a few suggestions of what the care of one another in mission and cross-cultural witness should include.

Physical – planning an adequate financial support package, teaching about the health hazards they might encounter, knowing what immunizations are needed and having some idea of health care. Most western agencies do a pretty good job in this part of things. But it also means paying attention to exchange rates and cost of living changes in places of service and being willing to make timely adjustments along the way. It also means asking people if they are taking care of themselves. Are they getting enough rest? Are they keeping sabbath, which is one of the ten commandments, isn’t it? The O’Donnells spoke of racing to win but also resting to win. People need to be encouraged to do the latter.

Intellect – it is important that we help mission workers continue learning and have opportunities to reflect on what they are learning through their work. This could include providing books, professional materials, opportunities to interact with people in similar occupational or theological fields. And asking if they have a healthy mental space in which to work? Some environments are more difficult than others and some missions have learned that workers need regular breaks from especially stressful or demanding environments. This is about both intellect and emotions.

Emotions – dealing with emotions is often thought of as pastoral care. However, it’s also part of the selection process of cross-cultural workers and the orientation process of helping people understand their own emotions and emotional needs. It also means helping people process new and sometimes unexpected emotions when encountering new challenges in cross-cultural living. This pastoral care need not be done just by pastors or professional counselors. The American psychologist and author, Dr. Larry Crabb, has been convinced by research that any layperson/friend who has learned how to listen can be as much help as a trained counselor in nearly all circumstances. We need to take time to ask one another in mission and ministry,

“How are you? How are you really?” And then we must be willing to listen openly and non-judgmentally to whatever comes.

John

Will – Moving into a new culture for gospel witness involves making many choices which would not necessarily have had to be made at home. There are choices of lifestyle, housing, dress, behaviors, diet, ways of worship and thousands of other things that affect our ability to have a viable and authentic witness. Part of orientation and or training is equipping people to discern the realities on the ground that will help them make these decisions wisely. But there will be many things that cannot be completely anticipated. People may be helped by having someone to talk with about these decisions. They also need to be affirmed in the decisions they have made or sensitively challenged.

Spirit/character – Life in a different environment will inevitably leave its mark on the spirit of individual. Ideally this will be positive as they see God at work in new ways, learn to trust God in new areas and experience the joy of service. But experience tells us that mission service sometimes works the other way. People can become disillusioned and depressed, or angry and resentful. We don't always see the change taking place in ourselves. A friend or colleague can be helpful in detecting unhealthy trends. It is only when we have knowledge of what is happening with a person that we can begin to discern what changes might need to be made. This means that people with history need to keep in touch with the mission worker. And increasingly the value of visiting people where they live and work is being recognized. We support people not just financially but with personal visits. We don't just wait for them to come home.

Social – We are created for relationships. It's important that we consider that sufficient old relationships are retained and that appropriate new relationships are being made in the place of service. Are friendships developing with colleagues on the field and the people among whom they are serving? This is an essential part of living as a healthy human being. We need friendships with a level of intimacy to be able to talk about what we are thinking and feeling about the choices we're making.

An observation that has been shared by a number of people working with large mission sending agencies is the new dynamic of social networking. With internet, Skype, Facebook, texting, etc. it is too easy to maintain home friendships, as important as that is, but this can hinder the development of deepening relationships in the new culture and place of service.

Language is a key part of relationships. People in cross-cultural ministry need to be helped and encouraged in learning the appropriate indigenous language.

Anne

Soul care – this is particular concern of ours. It was the impetus behind our own doctor of ministry studies in Christian spirituality and mission. It is important that people in cross-cultural service have and maintain an authentic relationship with God. They need a real and growing personal relationship with Jesus and an awareness of and sensitivity to the indwelling Holy Spirit. Intentional disciplines may help and learning how to be attentive to God's presence and actions in new environments is needed. This includes having intentional spiritual conversation, being willing to ask one another, “How is your soul? Where are you seeing God at work? Where are you not seeing or experiencing God?”

It is important for all of us that we have regular worship of God that engages us. This can be a real challenge in new and very different cultural environments. The music, style of worship, the way people gather can all be quite different from what a person experienced in their place of origin. In early stages language may be a problem. This is a question that should not be overlooked, asking, “Are you worshipping God with other believers?” If not, what will help?

The reality of spiritual warfare cannot be neglected. It needs to be openly discussed, requires dedicated prayer and may at times be helped by the involvement of people with gifts in discernment of spirits.

It is appropriate and essential to pray for every area of a person’s life, but especially in this area for those in cross-cultural witness.

Work – We need to be asking along the way how people’s calling and then their actual service relate? Or has the calling gotten lost or buried under the demands of the day and other responsibilities? (This doesn’t just apply to those in mission but to all of us in ministry.)

John

Procreation – Some are called to singleness in service and that has its own challenges and rewards. For others we must take into account the realities of family life and especially the needs of children. Both of these are whole subjects in themselves.

Politics – As we’ve noted, politics is part of the reality of being human. The hurt caused by sinfulness in this area, for some reason seems more obvious at times. The politics of the sending body or the politics of the receiving body are all too often sources of great pain that necessitates hours of pastoral care and healing. We need to be careful about our own political strategies and actions. We need to give people a chance to participate in decision making. We need to help people understand the political context into which they have been sent. And we’re thinking both of the church and the wider public arena. Understanding doesn’t make everything easy but it helps.

That is 10 aspects of the human being and 10 ways to begin thinking about the whole church caring wholistically for the whole person sent in cross-cultural witness. We know that in the area of care there are aspects that are the particular responsibilities of the sending body, the receiving body, and the individual or family themselves. We have tried to focus on ways we can help one another.

Anne

As Abraham, as St. Patrick, as the *peregrini*, many who go in mission cross-culturally go with a deep and faithful desire to respond to God’s call. To live a life of service, of trust in God, of deep spiritual authenticity. But they go also as deeply complex human beings.

In many ways what we have talked about relates to all of us as members of the body of Christ. Jesus has said, love one another and the Scriptures elaborate on this, calling us to encourage one another, exhort one another, forgive one another, meet with one another, pray for one another and so on. Unfortunately all too often the church has assumed that mission personnel are super human and don’t need these one anothers. They are only and fully human. We need to help each other be whole and healthy humans ready to continue for the long haul of answering God’s lifelong call across cultures and to the ends of the earth.