

Church Planting  
By Robert Strauss

If I were to devise a strategy for cross-cultural church planting, I would first turn to the Steffen Five-Stage Model presented by Tom Steffen (1997) in *Passing the Baton: Church Planting that Empowers*.<sup>1</sup> Below is a table that identifies the five stages and describes the primary activity in each. The key to the model is starting with the end in mind. From the beginning the church planting team must be thinking about the exit strategy.

Pre-entry	Pre-evangelism	Evangelism	Post-evangelism	Phase Out
<p>This important stage of church planting involves preparation. What is the task? Who is sponsoring and coordinating it? Who is needed to accomplish the task? What are the selection criteria for team members?<sup>2</sup> What training is needed? The training is based on what competency models? Who</p>	<p>This stage is the key. In pre-evangelism the church planting team is learning the culture and language of the host society. Concurrently, relationships of trust bonds are being initiated, nurtured, and development (Marvin Mayers, <i>Christianity Confronts Culture</i>). During pre-evangelism the church planting team is identifying the worldview</p>	<p>When relationships of trust have been built and the teachers have reached a proficiency in culture and language acquisition so that they can communicate effectively at a spiritual level, evangelism begins. It is important that the delivery system matches the host society. For example, if the recipients are concrete relational learners, the presentation should be in a corresponding</p>	<p>Once a church has been established, the work just begins. Venn, Anderson, Nevius, Ralph Neighbor, and others have implored that the missionary not pastor the new church. This emphasis on role is important. Both Hesselgrave (1990) and Hiebert (1999) lack this strong emphasis in their writings. Leadership development is the key to an</p>	<p>Though listed last, this stage is in the forefront of the church planting team's mind from the beginning. Somewhere in the process, the church planters and the local church leaders will identify when, where, and how to transition the roles of the church planters. The key to this</p>

<sup>1</sup> David Hesselgrave (1990) in *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally* offers the Pauline Cycle as a model of church planting. My bias is that Hesselgrave's model is merely descriptive of the process recorded in the book of Acts, but is not a normative model for cross-cultural church planting.

<sup>2</sup> Tom Graham, President of COMD in Colorado Springs, has provided the preeminent work on missionary selection. First implemented in the Peace Corps, Graham (1982) devised competency models that helped Mission to North America and Mission to the World understand how to select both pastors and missionaries.

<p>are the competent trainers? What is the basis for evaluating training outcomes? What is the geographic area? What are the known cultural issues in the broader area? What are the definitions of terms? What does the symbolic frame look like – vision, mission, and values?<sup>3</sup> Who will do what? What are the benchmarks? What is the</p>	<p>components that underlie the cultural institutions and the outward human behavior.<sup>4</sup> It is during pre-evangelism that one attempts to create tension between the worldview assumptions of the host society and biblical truth (Francis Schaeffer 1968).</p>	<p>format. David Kolb (1984) has developed a powerful model of communication that is based on experiences, but also incorporates reflection, abstract conceptualization, and action plans. Chronological Bible teaching / storying has been a proven methodology for communicating the Gospel (McIlwain 1987; Steffen 1999). CBT is a seven-phase process that lays foundation from the Old Testament in preparation for the presentation of</p>	<p>ongoing church multiplication. Additionally, the impact of the Gospel and the outcome of salvation should be impacting every facet of daily life for the new believers. The change in community will spring forth from the change in the new believers. Note the values emphasized by David Shenk and Erwin Stutzman (1988) in their book about communities of the kingdom.</p>	<p>stage is entrusting the ministry into the capable hands of the local elders. Phase out does not mean severing relationships with people, but simply a change in roles. The goal from the beginning is not to spend a lifetime in the host society.</p>
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<sup>3</sup> Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson are credited with the concept of the three “self’s” – self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating. Venn, a British missionary, is called the father of the indigenous church. Anderson, an American missionary at the same time in the late 1800s, argued that no missionary should pastor the church that is planted. Another key missiologist from the 19<sup>th</sup> century is John Nevius whose 1888 book called for converts to remain in their cultural roles rather than to be hired by the missionaries (a common custom at that time). Nevius’ contribution is the emphasis on the indigenization of the church plant rather than imposing foreign forms and functions on the host society. Another author that has impressed me is Melvin Hodges (1953), an Assembly of God missionary in Central America, whose clear writing about contextualization is years ahead of its time. His writings are on par with Paul Hiebert, Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tienou (1999).

<sup>4</sup> Hesselgrave (1994) argues that worldview assumptions drive cultural values, social institutions, and outward human behavior. He bases his worldview model on the earlier work of G. Linwood Barney. Hesselgrave writes that stories create worldviews. George Walker goes further, positing that since this is true, that God can use rival stories to displace worldview assumptions that are inconsistent with God’s character. Jim Slack and J.O. Terry (1997) state that stories represent the last frontier in working at a worldview level.

exit strategy?		Jesus Christ in the New Testament. <sup>5</sup>	Hesselgrave argues that the church precedes Kingdom values (book to be published in 2005).	
PREPARING	PERCEIVING	PRESENTING	PERFECTING	PARTING

With a goal of being successful in a church planting endeavor, I would place a great deal of emphasis on pre-entry. It is extremely important that the right people are doing the right things in the right way at the right time. Jim Collins (2001) in *Good to Great* stresses that successful companies have disciplined people (the right people) thinking and functioning in disciplined ways. The formula is not complicated. These management principles do not take the place of complete and total dependence on God. The process from beginning to end should be done in faith. Faith in God is demonstrated in a variety of ways, but perhaps will begin with prayer.

What areas have been missed by contemporary authors relative to cross-cultural church planting? I would suggest the following four areas that need additional attention:

- 1) **Worldview Analysis** – If it is assumed that the church planting team must understand the worldview assumptions of the host society in order to teach and minister effectively, then it would be helpful to have more detailed methodologies related to worldview analysis. What is a worldview? How does one know that in peeling away the layers of culture, one has arrived at a worldview starting point? How do symbols, rituals, and stories (Steffen 1998) work together to form schemas? Some answers to these questions may be available from cognitive anthropology (e.g., Claudia Strauss’ and Charles Kraft’s new books on schemas – to be published in 2005).
- 2) Agencies and churches should place more emphasis on pre-entry and particularly pre-field training. This training must be developed using competency models that describe the outcomes or training objectives (Robert Ferris 1995; Jonathan Lewis 1992; David Agron 2002; Strauss – to be published).
- 3) Much more emphasis should be placed on pre-evangelism. In the Worldview Resource Group cross-cultural church planting seminars, this area is one of the weakest links for the missionaries in attendance. Almost everyone seems to present the Gospel message too soon without having bonded with the people, without sufficiently understanding culture and language, and without knowing the core worldview assumptions that drive the culture. The roots of this deficiency lie in

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<sup>5</sup> McIlwain’s approach does seem to need several revisions. It is presented as a not to be altered model that will work in all contexts. It would be more helpful to demonstrate how it could be adapted depending on the recipients. McIlwain does not sufficiently tie together evangelism and discipleship, whereas Tom Steffen, Dell Schultze, Mark Zook, George Walker, and others are thinking about discipleship from the beginning of pre-evangelism. In other words, it matters later in the church plant how one moves into the host society, who does the initial work of house building and airstrip preparation. The seeds of phase out are planted on the first day.

theory and anthropology. From a theological perspective, people seem to believe that the Gospel will penetrate culture and do its divine work. Though many years of hard labor, missionaries have learned that the Gospel is not like pixie dust that magically does its work. Christian anthropologists have been speaking to missiologists for the last three to five decades about the need to interface anthropology and missiology (Eugene Nida; Allan Tippett; Louis Luzbetak 1975; William Smalley; Kraft 1979, 1996; Hiebert 1986, 1999; Charles Taber 2000). From an anthropological perspective, people are inclined to confront cultural forms and institutions without a clear understanding of their meaning (Kraft 1979; Ralph Linton 1936).

- 4) It is rare to find missionaries with big picture strategies that address the beginning and the end. Many seem to be sincerely serving Christ, sharing the Gospel, addressing what is perceived, correctly or not, to be non-Kingdom values. Why did they start where they did? Where are they going? These are important questions.