

FCC CONNECTION

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FCC CREATE CONFERENCE: REFLECTION & THANKSGIVING

**So grateful to God for all that took place
at the FCC Create Conference.**

The last time we were able to hold a Create Leaders' Conference was May 2019. The events planned for 2020 and 2021 were cancelled because of Covid. So, when we announced (rather late really) in January 2022 that the May Create Conference was taking place this year, we were not sure what the response might be. We had lost some momentum from the last time when 60 or so leaders gathered together. Not only that, but Covid was still making some nervous about gathering together.

Still, we went forward in faith and together with many

IN THIS ISSUE

- FCC Create Conference: Reflection & Thanksgiving
- World Convention of Churches of Christ Announces Name Change and Re-Branding
- Renewing the church
- A Movemental Turn in Missions: Thoughts on New Eras and New Wineskins
- Here's Why I Keep Returning to Leslie Newbigin

phone calls, emails and other messages we managed to communicate well enough so that more than 80 folks came from nearly 30 different churches and mission agencies. It was good to see at least 10 former ForMission students present and 3 current ForMission students attending.

It was a very inter-cultural event with leaders of churches who originate from Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Nigeria, Ghana, Jamaica, Sri Lanka, Fiji, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Hong Kong and the USA. (I may have missed a few nations)!

Nigel Langford of Bible Society, who served as so well in 2019 came again and led two sessions. There were worship contributions from the Rowheath Pavilion, from a group of Fijian pastors, from an Ethiopian young people's group from London, and from Disciple Fellowship Ministries (see the photo below).

This was a time of great encouragement. It seems as though something beautiful is welling up across the churches. As one younger leader commented, "We cannot tell you how blessed we were to have been part of the conference. We took so much on board, and we felt empowered. It was a much-needed fellowship."

Many have asked if they can have a recording of the talks. We have recorded a good deal of the event and there are some video's being edited at the moment. These will be available in a few week's time. They will go on the website and facebook pages and we will make these available to you.

In the meantime, here is a short video introduction to the event to act as a promo for the videos to come. (Click picture below to watch, or click [here](#)). The venue was excellent and so we have booked it again for 2023. **You can mark the dates in your diary now – 8/9 May 2023.**



WORLD CONVENTION OF CHURCHES OF CHRIST ANNOUNCES NAME CHANGE AND RE-BRANDING



WORLD Convention

CHRISTIAN + CHURCHES OF CHRIST + DISCIPLES OF CHRIST

Some of you will know that the FCC family of churches is found in nearly 200 nations around the world. Since 1935, there has been a World Convention that brings together the various strands of this global family. It has normally been held every five years (twice in the UK). There was supposed to be an event in Poland this year but for obvious reasons connected to Ukraine, and the investment of our Polish churches in helping with the refugee numbers, that event has had to be postponed. In the meantime, the whole organisation and feel of the World Convention has changed. Dan Yarnell, who is the FCC representative on the World Convention committee, has sent us the following press release.

Louisville, KY—The World Convention of Churches of Christ announces exciting changes as the organisation unveils the results of a year-long re-branding and strategic planning effort. Included in the re-branding is a name change to Global Christian Connexion. According to Tina Bruner, Executive Director, *“the name was carefully considered and chosen to better describe the purpose of our organisation.”* The new GCC logo is designed with a fresh, modern style, and integrates part of the original World Convention logo to maintain history and familiarity. The new positioning line is *“Bringing Stone-Campbell Churches Together in Mission.”* A redesigned newsletter *“CommUnity Connexion”* will replace the former ChristiaNet newsletter, and a new website has launched at gconnexion.org. The new site is built on a platform that enables better community engagement through information sharing, relationship-building, and stronger event management.

Ms. Bruner explains, “We (myself and our board of directors) recognized the need to be more relevant in supporting our community today. The new name and branding was done, in part, to show our increased commitment to proactively facilitate and foster connections among the three streams of restoration movement churches: Christian Churches, Disciples of Christ, and Churches of Christ. Through in-depth, informal research over the past year, we heard from our supporters and members of our worldwide community that it is difficult to collaborate within their own streams, much less outside of them. We have plans for initiatives and development of resources that will bring us together relationally and promote unity. If there is ever a time for powerful witness that a unified Church can change the world—it is now.”

World Convention has linked Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement churches for more than 92 years — since the first Global Gathering of 10,000 in Washington, DC in October of 1930. *“This year would have marked the 20th Global Gathering in Warsaw, Poland. The war in Ukraine and the necessity for the Polish Church to respond to this emergency situation made it difficult to continue with our plans of meeting together. This crisis highlights the need for a unified effort in prayer, giving, and serving, to point a hurting world toward Jesus.”* explains Ms. Bruner.

GLOBAL

CHRISTIAN CONNEXION

Today, with Tina Bruner as the first female Executive Director, and also the first to serve from the Independent Christian Church, all three streams of the Stone-Campbell Movement have been represented in leadership in the organisation. Churches and individual donors across all streams are the organisation’s base and are vital to the work.

RENEWING THE CHURCH



One of our FCC ministers, Mike Buck, together with his wife Sue, has spent a number of years working with a Baptist Church in the West Midlands. Through Mike’s work, a remarkable young man, Aaron Jarvis, came to faith, together with his wife, and eventually succeeded Mike as the pastor of the church. His is a remarkable story which Martin Robinson captured on video recently for the Engage West Midlands project. You will enjoy listening to his story of the renewal of an existing church and the planting of others. (Click [here](#) to watch.)

A MOVEMENTAL TURN IN MISSIONS: THOUGHTS ON NEW ERAS AND NEW WINESKINS

by Wes Watkins

Change is a constant in our world. Especially in the last few years, however, it feels that the pace of change is increasing dramatically. I suspect we all know this intuitively. But, as Christians committed to God's mission to redeem the nations back to himself, we might less-intuitively know how to make sense of it all.

The 2020s have been more disruptive for the Church than any other time perhaps since WWII. It feels as if the entire decade is poised for massive upheavals on the world stage. Pandemics, wars, natural disasters, disinformation campaigns, and xenophobic nationalisms all create an atmosphere ripe with fear and uncertainty.

It is not all bad news though. Since the 1990s, in the midst of the chaos, has come a breakthrough in world missions: the irruption of disciple making movements in the Majority World. This development has been captured in the volume, *Motus Dei: The Movement of God to Disciple the Nations*. The scale of the breakthrough, more than 1% of the world's population (which is currently part of a church planting movement), is staggering.

In 1991 a seminal book published by David Bosch detailed how the Church's understanding of its mission has transformed throughout history. Bosch proposed that the Church was experiencing another paradigm shift in mission practice

and awareness. It wasn't so much that the world was changing (it had and was), but more that mission itself was changing.

Bosch was not alone in this claim. Leslie Newbigin preceded him. Darrel Guder published the *Missional Church* in 1998. Further seminal books like *The Shaping of Things to Come* (2003) by Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost justified the need for missional innovation. Ralph Winter had also written on *Three Eras of Mission* and proposed a Fourth Era (but was unfortunately persuaded against publishing it (see pg. 294)). David Garrison's *Church Planting Movements* (2004) was equally seismic. Tom Steffen published *The Facilitator Era* (2011). The list of diverse voices goes on and on.

Both the reality and the rationale for this paradigm shift in mission understanding had become clear. Since the late 20th century, the Church has found itself in a new era of mission. Whether you agree it is accurate to conceptualise this as a new "era" or not is somewhat tangential to my point: new wineskins of mission are being realised and utilised today. We might refer to this as a "turn" in missions.

We admire missionary heroes of old like William Carey (1782-1834), Adoniram Judson (1788-1850), and Hudson Taylor (1832-1905). Their examples help tradition us into the faith today. It's not that all or even most of

their mission paradigm was misguided. But we cannot expect to deal with 21st century complexities using 19th century exemplars.

Some may even deny that we are in a new era and seek to maintain the status quo. Andrew Walls famously stated that one of the most persistent missionary problems throughout the centuries can be traced to the first church (i.e. Acts 15:1); the “Judaizing tendency” which is “the insistence on imposing our own religious culture, our own Torah and circumcision.”

Of course, we do not all agree on how to describe the new era in which we find ourselves. But the difficulty in describing this new era, both in what has shifted and what still needs to change, should not bother us. On this side of eternity, we only see “dimly” and understand “in part” (1 Cor. 13:12). We need multiple perspectives as well as humility in our proposals.

With that in mind, I would like to briefly sketch my personal view of this new era; that is, the tectonic shifts that have occurred in recent mission history, and which are still unfolding today.

From Western to Indigenous

There has been a tendency for highly affluent and educated evangelical denominations in the West to claim to have figured out how to do “church.” Their resulting mission practice is to package their model of church and export it to the world. Unfortunately, many of these same denominations fail to account for the rapid decline of faithful Evangelicalism in the West. This calls for a

holy pause and reflection: to what extent should Western ecclesiology be shared with the nations? God’s Spirit can lead Majority World Christians to biblical applications that fit their context better than imported theology and practices from the West.

The colonialist construct of mission, “from the West to the rest” has been replaced by the rise of indigenous mission structures and theologies. Don’t misunderstand me: the sending of Western and non-Western missionaries is still vital today, especially to unreached and unengaged peoples (regardless of geography), but the posture is much different than assumptions of the previous era. Westerners may serve as catalysts and encouragers, but they are not the centre of the story.

From Linear Management to Holistic Complexity

Related to this discussion is the Enlightenment fallacy that all problems can be solved, including mission. In previous eras the goal was to engineer a mature church, and only after that had been accomplished, to attempt to increase its capacity to multiply. In other words, the goal was to make disciples by planting a single healthy church first.

Jesus modelled a different approach: less linear and more holistic. He spent time with the marginalised, healed and cared for the poor, asked a lot of insightful questions, proclaimed to crowds, and mentored his friends. In short, Jesus made disciples who made disciples. He did not “plant a church” using the methodologies that some would

advocate for today.

In Jesus' process of disciple making, his disciples grew cognitively, affectively, and behaviourally, all at the same time. They started serving in ministry immediately, thus growing towards maturity. "Church planting" naturally resulted from non-linear, holistic disciple making through much sacrifice and commitment.

Embracing complexity in this new era of mission is an exercise in epistemic humility. We cannot claim to manage mission any more than we can manage Jesus: he is our unpredictable, wild Messiah. Like him and the Apostle Paul, we make disciples in order to plant churches, not the other way around.

From Pastor-Centric Leadership to Mutual Polycentric Leadership

We need to rethink today's typical, pastor-centric ecclesiology; it sure is a lot to ask of one person. Thankfully, mutual polycentric leadership is not a hierarchical structure (nor a flat structure) but one with many centres that interrelate with each other. It involves leaders who share responsibility and engage in both leading and following in mutual submission. The Reformation reclaimed the priesthood of the believer in theory, but the new era attempts to reclaim it in practice. It is this kind of decentralised leadership that is best poised for healthy multiplication, and to this final shift we now turn.

From Institutions to Movements

One summative way to describe what I have written up to this point is the turn in mission to *movements*. By this I mean disciple-making movements. Church-planting movements. Holistically-transforming, indigenously-led, organically-complex, ecclesiology-adaptive, gospel-propelled, God-glorifying, Bible-based, Holy Spirit-dependent, Jesus-centred movements.

In the previous era, biblical faith was all too easily conceived and practised in its institutional form. Yet today we see ways in which the Church is breaking free of its Constantinian captivity. The adaptive ecclesiology witnessed in movements provides evidence of this. "Church as institution" is shifting to "church as movement." Institutions remain vital to mission, but they should serve movements, not vice versa.

By nature, healthy movements are missiologically and theologically integrative. They bring Global North and Global South participants together in a proper dynamic. Leadership moves beyond the autocratic, celebrity style of leaders-with-all-the-answers. Instead, movement catalysts bring people together to experiment and innovate according to the opportunity and need.

Join the Dance

We shouldn't be surprised that these four shifts are much closer to the New Testament than the practices of the previous era. We are in a period when we are joyfully re-discovering biblical-movemental principles. Actually, perhaps we can see that movements are more of a "normal" approach to mission, rather than an exception. And instead of thinking of the 2020s as disruptive, we might better view it as a catalyst for freeing the Church to connect with the movement of God.

In the Motus Dei Network, we treat this movemental turn as a new vintage with new wineskins. The task isn't to merely imitate Western Christian heroes of previous generations. The aim is to recalibrate faith afresh to the teachings of the Bible and especially the person of Jesus Christ. There is no one better and nothing more exciting.

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- *This piece first appeared [here](#).*

HERE'S WHY I KEEP RETURNING TO LESSLIE NEWBIGIN

by Trevin Wax

Lesslie Newbigin was a missionary from Great Britain who spent 40 years working in India during the 20th century. When Newbigin went back home, he experienced a greater shock than anything he'd confronted in India. The churches in his own country—the churches that had sent him to the mission field in the first place—had succumbed to a false story about the world, and no one seemed to notice!

With the eyes of an outsider, Newbigin saw that the church in his country had been co-opted by the “myth of progress”—the idea that the world is moving forward on an evolutionary trajectory toward greater and greater heights of human knowledge and moral behaviour. People expected Christians to outgrow their silly superstitions (belief in miracles) and their old-fashioned rules (adherence to traditional morality).

Newbigin saw how this secular mindset had infiltrated the thought and practice of his fellow church members. Many of them agreed with their unbelieving neighbours that religion is a personal and private reality, not a message true and powerful for the whole world.

Newbigin saw the damage this myth of progress did to the church's witness. After all, at the heart of the gospel is the claim that something has happened: Jesus Christ, the crucified Messiah, got up from the grave! In light of the resurrection, the question cannot be “What is my truth?” or “What is your truth?” but “What is the real truth about the world?”

Legacy of Lesslie Newbigin

One of the reasons I have long appreciated the work of missionary theologian Lesslie Newbigin is because of his understanding that the whole world is a mission field. Missions is not just something that requires cultural analysis and biblical exegesis for people out there, but is an orientation that requires us to look at every culture (including our own) with discernment.

I recently picked up **Michael Goheen's excellent overview** of Newbigin's missionary ecclesiology, and I underlined nearly half of the book. Goheen explains how high the stakes are:

The choice for the church in every age will always be, Will our identity be shaped by Scripture or by our culture—by the biblical story or the cultural story?

Ecclesiology (the doctrine of the church) matters because “it demands we return to the Bible to find out who we are and whom we are meant to serve”. That's where Newbigin's work offers so many stimulating and beneficial insights. Even when I disagree with some of his conclusions or emphases, I keep coming back to Newbigin because his writings are such a deep well of biblical and cultural reflection.

Today, I offer up just a sampling of my favorite quotes from Newbigin that are found in **Goheen's recent volume**. Ponder these quotes and consider how these truths can equip you for mission wherever God has placed you.

THE BIBLE AS COSMIC HISTORY

“If we take the Bible in its canonical wholeness, as we must, then it is best understood as history. It is universal, cosmic history. It interprets the entire story of all things from creation to consummation, and the story of the human race within creation, and within the human race the story of the people called by God to be the bearers of the meaning of the whole, and—at the very centre—the story of the One in whom God’s purpose was decisively revealed by being decisively effected. It is obviously a different story from the stories that the world tells about itself.”

That’s one paragraph, but it packs quite a punch, doesn’t it? Goheen breaks it down into four interrelated themes:

1. The Bible is universal history that narrates the true story of the whole world from creation to consummation.
2. A central thread in the biblical narrative is that God has chosen a people to be the bearers of the end and meaning of this story.
3. At the centre of the story, Jesus reveals and accomplishes the end and therefore the purpose of universal history.
4. The cosmic story is comprehensive and so is incompatible with all other cultural stories.

THE VICTORY OF THE CROSS

“It is there, on Calvary, that the kingdom, the kingly rule of God, won its decisive victory over all the powers that contradict it. The cross is not a defeat reversed by the resurrection; it is a victory proclaimed (to chosen witnesses) by the resurrection. . . .

The centre of the revealed mystery of the reign of God is the Cross. There the power of God is revealed—but it is revealed as weakness. The glory of God is revealed—but it is revealed as humiliation. The victory of God is revealed—but it is revealed as defeat.”

THE CHURCH AS THE HERMENEUTIC OF THE GOSPEL

“The primary reality of which we have to take account in seeking for a Christian impact on public life is the Christian congregation. How is it possible that the gospel should be credible that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross? . . . The only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it.”

Goheen summarises the six characteristics in Newbigin’s thought regarding what should be true of this faithful community living in light of the gospel.

1. It will be a community of praise in a world of doubt and scepticism.
2. It will be a community of truth in a pluralist society that overwhelms and produces relativism.
3. It will be a selfless community that does not live for itself but is deeply involved in the concerns of its neighbourhood in a selfish world.
4. It will be a community prepared to live out the gospel in public life in a world that privatises all religious claims.
5. It will be a community of mutual responsibility in a world of individualism.
6. It will be a community of hope in a world of pessimism and despair about the future.

MISSIONS AS THE ACID TEST FOR BELIEVING THE GOSPEL

“The Gospel is the truth, and therefore it is true for all men. It is the unveiling of the face of Him who makes all things, from whom every man comes, and to whom every man goes. It is the revealing of the meaning of human history, of the origin and destiny of mankind. Jesus is not only my Saviour, He is the Lord of all things, the cause and cornerstone of the universe. If I believe that, then to bear witness to that is the very stuff of existence. If I think I can keep it to myself, then I do not in any real sense believe it. Foreign missions are not an extra; they are the acid test of whether or not the Church believes the Gospel.”

MISSION AS THE OVERFLOW OF COMMUNION WITH GOD

“All true vitality in the work of missions depends in the last analysis upon the secret springs of supernatural life which they know who give time to communion with God. All true witness to Christ is the overflowing of a reality too great to be contained. It has its source in a life of adoration and intercession. . . . Any real power that God may give them will come through those secret channels which are in this age, as in every age, the true means of blessing for the world.”

THE CHURCH'S MISSIONARY ENCOUNTER WITH THE WORLD

“If the Church is going to meet and master the forces which are shaping the secular world of our time, she needs to put a far greater proportion of her strength behind the work of the theologians; she needs a theology which is not the mere product of changing moods and fashions but deeply based on Scripture, stated in terms in which the world lives, relevant to the forces which are actually shaping the lives of men. It is not sufficient for the Church to attend to tactics: she must attend first to truth.”

Reading Newbigin

If you're looking for a good overview of Newbigin's thought, start with Goheen's ***The Church and Its Vocation***. If you want to start with Newbigin himself, go with ***Foolishness to the Greeks*** or ***Truth to Tell*** as a brief introduction, and then go to ***The Gospel and a Pluralist Society*** for a more comprehensive introduction to his thought.

- *This piece first appeared **here**.*