



Fragmentation and disconnection or participation in the Missio Dei in our training?

Virginia Contreras
AG Missionary to Argentina

Introduction

Due to my husband's and mine's backgrounds and present ministry among university students in Argentina, everything concerning education and leadership interests us. The educational crisis in general is a very complex thing. Quick fixes for educational systems are tempting, be that the universities in Latin America or our theological and ministerial training Bible Schools, but; are they really addressing and dealing with the root of the issues that educators, students, academic institutions, the church and societies are facing in the XXI century? Which would be the best practices to bring true transformation, not just to the institutions per se but to the societies that they serve as well? These are some of the questions that we are inviting you to converse and consider with us, while we meditate in Bernard of Clairvaux' s words:

“There are those who seek knowledge for the sake of knowledge; that is Curiosity. There are those who seek knowledge to be known by others; that is Vanity. There are those who seek knowledge in order to serve; that is Love.”

1. Let's talk about movies

There are so many movies that address the difficulties and challenges that teachers, coaches, leaders, students, institutions and societies face in order to succeed. Some of them are: *To Sir, with love* (1967); *The Official Story* (1985); *Dead Poets Society* (1989), *Mr. Holland's Opus* (1995); *Music of the heart* (1999), *The Emperor's Club* (2002), *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003), *Freedom Writers* (2007), *Moneyball* (2011), *Won't Back Down* (2012), etc. Many of them are based on true-life stories. Teachers were challenged with change and students were challenged as well; educational institutions were challenged, and societies were challenged also.

I would like to point out that the movie *Moneyball* is an amazing example of how adaptive challenge looks like, it provokes us to rethink the concept of "success;" to consider it not in terms of being the number one, but success in terms of prioritizing some kind of relationships, success in terms of challenging prejudices and unhealthy mindsets, and success in terms of keeping on experimenting and persevering in order to obtain a change from the roots up. ¹

1.a. Crisis as a Wake up call

"We wake up, take our morning showers, and leave home for work. We run into people we know and people we don't know. We obey traffic lights: if they are green, we cross streets; if they are red, we stop to wait. We do all this without ever once asking ourselves why we do it." Paulo Freire.

¹ "The central premise of *Moneyball* is that the collected wisdom of baseball insiders (including players, managers, coaches, scouts, etc.) over the past century is subjective and often flawed. Statistics such as stolen bases, runs batted in, and batting average, typically used to gauge players, are relics of a 19th century view of the game and the statistics that were available at the time... By re-evaluating the strategies that produce wins on the field, the 2002 Athletics, with approximately US\$41 million in salary, were competitive with larger market teams such as the New York Yankees, who spent over US\$125 million in payroll that same season. Several themes explored in the book include: insiders vs. outsiders (established traditionalists vs. upstart proponents of sabermetrics), the democratization of information causing a flattening of hierarchies, and "the ruthless drive for efficiency that capitalism demands." Wikipedia.

Many books, both secular and religious, are describing the experience of the contemporary global society as a disruptive and disorienting new space where many things are coming apart. Educator Paulo Freire's words challenge us, as newborn Christians in the XXI century, to reflect in community. Is this, the autopilot way, the one we are using to teach, minister and exercise leadership in our churches, Bible Schools and denominations?

In my personal life it was 1997 when I felt a wake up call. The Spirit was taking me to an unfamiliar desert. I knew that my boat was sinking, so it was a matter of either changing boats or learning how to walk on water. Two years later, the movie *The Matrix* came out. In the movie, the main character (Neo) is living in a "dream world;" therefore in this fantasy world he is performing a life script handled to him—which he is not questioning. He is not aware of the true nature of his reality until someone from outside the Matrix awakens him to the real world. The movie was basically asking all the viewers—including me—questions such as: Do you really want "to see" and be awakened to the root of the problem? If so, it is your choice: the blue pill or the red one? In my crisis, I started to consider, ponder and value the voices and new questions of the "outsiders" of my relational circle.

2. Mapping our culture

"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new lands, but in seeing with new eyes." Marcel Proust

The XXI century is characterized by upheaval, disturbance and a radical, unpredictable and discontinuous change² that affects all areas of society and its

² Continuous change is that which fits in our previous understanding of the world; discontinuous change is that in which there is not a recognizable pattern of change.

institutions. Sociologist Ulrich Beck refers to our current culture as a “risk society;” where people have to live with different, mutually contradictory, global and personal risks and with a general feeling of uncertainty. In view of the fact that the frameworks or maps of the world as we know it have dramatically changed in the last fifty years; we are facing discontinuous change and transition³. Hence, we urgently need to do an exegesis of our culture in the XXI century.

2.a. Fragmentation. Disconnection.

“I was talking with a friend recently who said she had over 600 ‘friends’ on Facebook but didn’t know anyone in her neighborhood—what’s that about?” BBC Report, December 2009.

Sociologists point out that in Pre-Modern times the local community provided a familiar social environment. In Modern times the abstract systems are means to establishing relationships across large time-space distances.

Fragmentation and disconnection have shaped western modern education and they are present in our educational systems in the form of individualism, atomism, isolation and competition. Educator Parker J. Palmer, in his book *“To know as we are known,”* writes about what he calls the “pain of disconnection”; a pain that permeates education. He states:

“Everywhere I go, I meet faculty who feel disconnected from their colleagues, from their students, and from their own hearts. Most of us go into teaching not for fame or fortune but because of a passion to connect.” (Preface X)

Our churches and Bible Schools are not exempt from experiencing that disconnection. Instructors and students need to be aware of the social construction

³ Change is the event; it happens in the external world around us; it is defined by the outcome. Transition is the internal process and our inner response to the experience of change.

of reality. How could it be possible if we live encapsulated lives inside the four walls of our homes, churches and educational institutions? Therefore, the challenge is to be in touch with our neighborhoods; with the educational institutions in our city; conversing with our neighbors; city authorities; pastors in that city; etc. Why? Because of a “disease” called “institutional blindness.” The outsider, many times have interesting comments or perspectives that we are not aware of.

Awareness comes from learning to listen to others, from inviting people to voice their concerns. We need to begin where people are, not where we want them to be in order to introduce the biblical story so they can relate to it. How do church planters, pastors, Bible School students become aware of what God is up to in our societies if we are not outside the four walls of our buildings intentionally and with consistency? Our Bible School students need to walk this path while being theologically trained: from exploring to awareness, to understanding, to experimenting, to evaluating, to reflection to keeping on exploring and so on. If they are trained to discern God’s ways not in a vacuum, later on as church planters or missionaries they are not going to suffer the effects of “anxiety reductionism,” as some authors call this need to fix people and people’s problems with “canned methodologies” without even listening to them.

When I had my theological training if one of my courses was on missions I would look to see if the instructor had been a missionary himself (someone who had served cross-culturally) before enrolling in a class. What a joy to have someone that has so many insights and wisdom not because of all the good information that he was providing to us but so many stories and experiences of seeing God at work.

When I chose my course on Pastoral Epistles I purposely enrolled in the class that had a pastor-teacher as the instructor. His knowledge of Greek and history was amazing but his heart was used as well by the Holy Spirit to deeply communicate those letters to us. We all long for something more than words, theories and head-knowledge. This other way that integrates information with praxis in order to have genuine transformation was Jesus way of training and equipping leaders.

Reflection/Application:

The place where Jesus spent most of his time was the streets rather than the synagogues and the temple. He spent hours and days walking those streets proclaiming and demonstrating the power of the Good News. The combination of biblical studies and intentionality in reaching out to others in our cities is transformative not just for the audience but for the messengers as well.

- How can we form church leaders that are not dissociated from their contexts but that are constantly in dialogue with ordinary people?
- What kind of hands on and practical assignments could our Bible School's instructors design in order to help the students to "practice" what they have learned in theory in the classroom?
- How can we empower them to listen, to dialogue, to discern, to experiment and reevaluate in community how to be the Latin American church that this XXI century needs?
- To avoid fragmentation and polarization but foster integration and to be intentionally missional to the church's neighborhood: How can we give more participation to the local churches in the formation of Bible School students?

- What would it look like for Bible Schools to work more closely and in partnership with the local churches to which the students are part of?
- What would it look like for the pastor to mentor the student that is taking courses in the Bible School?
- What would it look like for the students to apply whatever course they are taking (be that by preaching/teaching in a small group/Wednesday night/youth service) and be graded by the pastor with a grading system provided by the Bible School?
- What would it look like to evangelize with a small group from the church in the church's neighborhood by applying the different tools that he/she is learning in one course and for the professor to receive a report on that field-work?
- What would it look like for those taking courses on missions to help the church planters in their own countries so the denomination is enriched by their contribution and the student's gifts and talents are put into practice?

2.b. The “cultural shaped” Gospel

If you turn on the radio or TV in Latin America sometimes⁴ you hear the proclamation of “another” Gospel. This “other” Gospel promises personal success, fulfillment and realization through financial prosperity if a “covenantal” financial promised is made⁵. This “other” Gospel deepens the self-absorption, extreme

⁴ Please **do** notice that I am saying “sometimes.” There are many sound doctrine centered preachers, pastors and teachers in Latin America.

⁵ In John 15:18 Jesus made it clear that his disciples would suffer persecution. His call to come to Him was not about achieving riches or a perfect health on this earth, but to “come and die.” Are we making disciples that love God just for his benefits and his actions on their behalf?

individualism and materialism of the XXI consumer society that the Gospel of Kingdom of God opposes. One of the consequences of the proclamation of this “cultural shaped Gospel” is the mindset that everything is about me, me and my needs. Maybe sometimes, is about us; and with great effort, about them (the outsiders). When individuals shaped with this “other” Gospel come to our Bible Schools, why do we expect them to act differently? If everything in the Christian life is about what I can get from God and my neighbor without consideration of what I have to give up for the service of God and my neighbor, why are we going to be surprised by the consumer and demanding mentality that some have?

Sometimes Latin American pastors ventilate their frustrations with church members pointing out to their lack of commitment, lukewarmness, superficial faith, etc. Church members are also frustrated with some pastors due to what they perceived as being treated as mules to carry out the pastor’s vision and not as sheep to be taken care of. Sometimes the Bible Schools boards and instructors blame the students for their apathy, indifference, light spirituality, self-centeredness, etc. At the same time the students sometimes complain about the poor condition of the buildings, the lack of variety at the cafeteria, the amount of homework that the instructors give them, etc. Sometimes pastors express disapproval toward the Bible Schools effect on the students that attend them (they say that sometimes students come back from the resident programs and just complain about everything in their congregations with a proud judgmental spirit and do not fit in there anymore). Sometimes the Bible Schools authorities object at the lack of understanding, help and cooperation that they have from pastors—such as not encouraging their

members to be theologically trained in the Bible Schools or if so, not to financially help them. The thing is that blame shifting is a dead-end road, blind alley, takes us nowhere. So...do we dare ask the hard questions and go to the roots of the problem? Let me just make one observation: *the kind of Gospel you preach will determine the kind of disciple you will make.*⁶

2.c. The Mission of God (*Missio Dei*)

The Good News of the Gospel proclaimed by Jesus are clearly presented to us in Luke 4:18-19. The mission is unfolded with different action verbs such as “send, preach, proclaim, recover, liberate and proclaim.” According to Mathew 5:13-16 the embodiment of these wonderful good news for humankind is us, the people of God. We are good news for the outsiders and as good news, we are sent out by God. Hence, the *Missio Dei* is about our sending God entrusting to us His mission. As sent ones we need to read our context in order to discern how to participate in God’s mission in Latin America in the XXI century. How can we become aware of what God is up to in our cities and nations if we live enclosed the four walls of our buildings?

God's mission defines us. Sometimes we just expect people to show up in our churches but we, the people of God, are the sent-ones. The Great Commission is for us to go, to live as sent-ones⁷, not to wait for them to come to us or to our buildings. Do we see God out there ahead of us in the midst of the lost people or do we see God

⁶ Title of my sermon delivered in Vancouver, Canada in 1997.

⁷ **Matthew 9:37-38** Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, **to send out** workers into his harvest field.” **Luke 10:1-2** “After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and **sent them** two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

just confined the four walls of the church? The force at work in Pentecost is centrifuge or centripetal? We need to set our eyes outside of ourselves and fix them on the harvest. In other words, the church is not about self-actualization, at least not the Body of Christ, maybe the “Oprah assembly” is. The body of Christ does not exist for itself, but for Him and to carry on the *Missio Dei*.

Reflection/Application:

- Send-ness (sent-ness) is part of our spiritual DNA. How are we putting into practice this reality in the way we live out our Christian lives and the way we “do church”?
- In which practical ways are we training our students to be and fully grasp that the church is a sign and witness of the new creation in Christ and the fact that the Kingdom of God is here and at work among us?
- How can we more practically empower our students to understand their environments and equip them to engage those outside their religious circles?

2.d. Catholics in Latin America.

The English metaphorical idiom, “the elephant in the room,” is a graphic representation for an obvious problem or reality that is purposely being unaddressed or ignored. It is impossible to overlook the fact that there are 1.2 billion Roman Catholics in the world and that more than 40% of them live in Latin America: Brazil has the highest Catholic population of any country, more than 150 million; in Argentina, the 92% of the population is Catholic. The Democratic Republic of the Congo in Africa has almost 36 million. It is interesting to notice that since 1970 Africa has seen a growth in Catholics—from 45 million in 1970 to 176

million in 2012. Asia now has almost 12% of the Catholic population in the world. In our mission emphasis we usually stress the fact that Muslims are lost without Christ and the urgency to reach them with the Gospel. There are also about 3,100 people groups in the world that are unengaged; therefore frontier missions compel us to reach them with the Gospel. These are vital and important facts to work upon but are we convinced that Catholics are equally lost or do we see them as “almost Christians” or “not so lost” as Muslims?

Author Chris Castaldo⁸ differentiates between:

- a) Traditional Catholics (they have aversion toward personal Bible study and the subjective dimension of personal faith. They consider Protestants as a cult therefore they would not visit an evangelical church (the same way we react towards Jehovah's Witnesses' invitation to study the Bible with them);
- b) Cultural Catholics (even if the last time that they attended a Mass was ten years ago in filling a survey or completing a form for a census they registered themselves as “Roman Catholics.” Maybe they go to church when someone in their family has being diagnosed with a terrible disease but the truth of the matter is that the Bible and Christian faith has no relevance in the way they live out their daily lives (like many US Protestants going to church after September 11th and not showing up again in the last 10 years);

⁸ Former Catholic Chris Castaldo is Director of the Ministry of Gospel Renewal for the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College. <http://www.chriscastaldo.com/2013/02/13/reaching-catholics-in-your-community/>

c) Charismatics Catholics (author George Weigel refers to them as “evangelical Catholics” due to the fact that lay people are empowered with deeper knowledge of the Bible and Spirit-centered meetings in order to serve the larger community, therefore they listen to Evangelical radios; watch evangelical preacher on TV and read evangelical books and are open to participate in prayer meetings with Protestants).⁹

I was Catholic and my family was very strong traditional Catholics. The Gospel metaphor used by many born-again Christians to evangelize Catholics in my country was the one of justification by faith. It was considered very important to counteract the concept of salvation by good works that many Catholics embrace. The thing is that when proclaiming the Gospel in this way ordinary good intentioned Christians started to slide into pointing out all the shortcomings of the Catholic church before Luther’s time and the initial proclaiming of the Gospel sometimes ended up in a heated verbal war throwing out the shortcomings of both priests and pastors. So coming back to my story, it was not justification by faith but the Gospel metaphor of a new creation in Christ that brought me, and part of my family, to the experience of being born again.¹⁰

⁹ International Christian evangelist Luis Palau wrote on Twitter on March 15, 2013: “Some reflections on my friend, Cardinal Bergoglio, now Pope Francisco. We prayed together many times, and I think we, as he requested, must keep him in our prayers.”

¹⁰ Please **do** notice that in conversing with Catholics it is extremely important the teaching of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ as an essential ground for our justification. This is the heart of the Gospel. My point in here is to think alternative Gospel metaphors to start evangelizing such as the possibility of being made a new creation, of being born again (which is another result of Jesus work on the cross on our behalf).

Reflection/Application:

- Are we in our Bible Schools preparing church planters, future pastors and Spirit-filled marketplace leaders that can engage and present a vibrant and relevant Gospel to the Catholics in Latin America?
- How are we equipping church leaders to pay attention, reflect on the values and beliefs, and engage in conversations with the majority people (Catholics) in Latin America?
- Which other Gospel metaphors could we use to bring to saving faith to the Catholics in Latin America?
- How are we equipping our students, and with which tools, in order to create a Kingdom culture in their churches and to evangelize “the other six days” in an organic way?
- How are we equipping them to create a culture of evangelism, discipleship, service and hospitality to their neighbors?
- I have a long list of “elephants in the room.” Which others could you name?

2.e. Politics in Latin America.

In most of the Western affluent nations people are more “political” when presidential elections are approaching. People vote, trust that those who have been elected are going to do their job and move on with their private lives. This is not the case in many countries in South America. Just as it was in the 60’s and 70’s, in Argentina, as it is in Venezuela, people are nowadays extremely political. Even inside churches there are two groups clearly politically divided: those who love our presidents and those who hate them. Politics is part of daily lives, conversations and

social activities. The solution is not becoming apolitical but to whom our allegiances and commitments are made.

Christian discipleship is political by nature. “The political nature of Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection is signaled throughout the New Testament by references to the messiah, to the new lawgiver, and to the new Joshua.”¹¹ Graham Ward explains that discipleship is political “because it is explicitly engaged in ushering in a kingdom.”¹² He argues that

It is implicated in a messianic reversal of established values and in a challenge to received authorities and principalities ... Christian discipleship is political because it demands to know in what relation to Christ stands any other sovereignty ... Discipleship has always been a political matter because it concerns the commission to preach and enact the kingdom of God.¹³

Reflection:

Politics is like soccer in Latin America; they are part of daily conversations and have the potential to separate relatives, close friends and even members of a congregation. In the last fifteen years we have seen the “Latin American sixties political mentality” being installed in our society and especially in the secular educational system. Young people are attracted to ideologies that are presented as a solution to poverty, social injustice, etc. They should be concerned with injustice but not to find a human ideology as the solution but Christ and the kind of discipleship that he invites us to. His discipleship involves Christlikeness which becomes intentionally a politics of resistance to the powers of this age and to the

¹¹ Ward, Graham, *The Politics of Discipleship*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academy, 284.

¹² Ibid, 284.

¹³ Ibid, 284, 285.

dehumanizing agendas because “in a culture that glorifies the buzz and the adrenaline rushes of living in the present [it] is not simply an act of resistance but a testimony to an alternative understanding of what is true.”¹⁴ Most of all, in these challenging times, it is a good reminder that “prayer is thus the most political act any Christian can engage in...”¹⁵

Application:

- What kind of discipleship are we providing to our young people in our churches and Bible Schools to call them to a risk taking, sacrificial lifestyle for the *Missio Dei* and the introduction of his Kingdom in all areas of the society?
- How are our ideas of discipleship being implemented in our churches? (Is just about ten lessons of a discipleship manual to complete? or is it a lifestyle with accountability and worldview transformation?)
- In what kind of creative ways are we empowering our students to usher the Kingdom of God to their neighborhoods, schools, etc.?

3. Technical challenges and Adaptive challenges.

“We cannot solve a problem from the same mindset that created it.”
Albert Einstein

When facing leadership problems—be that in a secular company or a religious organization—something is vital: to distinguish technical problems from adaptive problems. Technical problems are those for which an organization is equipped and have the skills to find the solutions; therefore technical leadership is applied. In other words, technical leadership is about authorities using their familiar

¹⁴ Ward, Graham, *The Politics of Discipleship*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academy p. 279.

¹⁵ Graham Ward. *The Politics of Discipleship*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2009, pg. 281.

expertise and procedures to solve problems in their organization. On the other hand, when crises arise or an organization and is confronted by disruptive change we are in the presence of an adaptive challenge. In this case new discoveries, discernment, experiments and adjustments from different players and places in the community are needed. Adaptive challenges are more difficult because they usually entail the change of attitudes and behaviors in an organization. Hence, adaptive leadership is about people struggling with a problem and learning new ways to bring about deep transformation. Quick fixes are easy; genuine transformation is costly and prompts resistance because it challenges people's values and habits.

Reflection:

Doctor Craig Van Gelder is Professor at Luther Seminary in Minnesota. At a conference he once shared the following example: *Students in that Seminary were graduating with high levels of debt. Hence, the Seminary told the students not to accumulate debts. As a result the students took part time jobs and so instead of graduating in four years now it was taking them more than six years.* Think about it, in order to find a solution the Seminary insisted on focusing on the students and in doing so the Seminary was communicating to the students: "You are the problem." This is an example of technical approach to a system or institution going through disruptive change. In this case what is needed is and adaptive leadership approach. The students were not the problem; the Seminary was.

As a consequence Van Gelder commented that the Seminary started to do some experiments. One of them was to create cohorts learning (students did not need to leave their homes or cities. It was just required for them to be on campus for

two weeks due to the fact that all courses and curriculums were on line). After implementing this new approach they came out with this result: *the capacity of learning in terms of mastering the content of the courses was about the same but the character formation went higher in those doing it on line.* Why, because of students being in their own contexts and not artificially planted in a Seminary building to study theology in a vacuum. The Lutheran Seminary still offers the residential program and the online program.

Application:

In this XXI century some of our institutions need self-correction, some need adjustments due to the effect of the phenomenon of *glocalization*,¹⁶ but all of them need to embrace and defend our non-negotiable biblical tenets of faith. To move forward it is key to examine and appreciate the ways of doing ministry of those who have preceded us, but as one professor told me once: “you do not honor those who walked before you by repeating their same mistakes.” Ergo, according to what we have been discussing so far:

- What are the challenges for equipping future church leaders, missionaries, church planters and Spirit-filled marketplace leaders?
- Which are some “not biblical believes and values” but “human made traditions” or ways of doing things in our institutions that we treasure but may be the Holy Spirit is showing us that we need to let go or transform?

¹⁶ Sociologist Roland Robertson defines *glocalization* as “the simultaneity --- the co-presence --- of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies.”

- What would it look like to have courses done on-line through a cohort system? Which means that neither the facilitator/instructor of that course nor the students need to travel to the Bible School's building to be part of it. The students are required to read and interact with the material just once a week (a computer with web access in an "internet café" (cybercafé) are very common in Latin America and price accessible to the average citizen. On the other hand it would be required for this modality to log on just once a week to post comments, assignments, etc.
- What other ways could be implemented for students that are "technologically challenged" or do not fit in this modality?

3.a. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) or the power of asking positive questions

"The leader of the past may have been a person who knows how to tell, but the leader of the future will be a person who knows how to ask."

Peter Drucker

We know the power of asking questions. Not questioning for the sake of questioning because wrong questions have the potential to lead us into wrong answers. I am not just talking about asking "yes or no" questions; but to ask "how" and "why" questions in order to capture valuable information. It is vital to ask better questions. Facing adaptive challenges *Appreciative Inquiry* (AI) is a valuable tool to consider.

If you have taken any course on organizational leadership you are aware that it was Davis Cooperrider who developed this technique (AI) in the 80's. Instead of searching and pointing out what is wrong in an organization (which would be a problem focused approach) the (AI) is an appreciative evaluation that looks for

what is right; the strengths and what has worked well in the past (solution focused approach). It inquires into what people appreciate and value the most about themselves and their organization. In the (AI) approach there is no denying of what is wrong in the organization neither ignoring the problems, but the (AI) seeks not to allow the negative to become the major focus but to appreciate where the organization is in the present and to envision how the best future would look like for them.

In practice (AI) asks possibility-oriented questions focusing on what is working and what is possible in the organization in order to encourage a collaborative action. The (AI) used by the appreciative leader guides people from the “land of winning” to the “land of blessing” by maximizing the strengths of the members of the team and not placing all the energy in the negative. The five basic processes of (AI) are: 1) Discovery (appreciate the best of what is); 2) Dream (new possibilities for the future); 3) Design (plan for what could be); 4) Destiny (create what will be). Remember what Albert Einstein said, “Imagination is more powerful than knowledge.”

Reflection/ Application:

Using (AI) for Bible Schools:

- What purpose moves us?
- What keep us going?
- What do we want more of in our Bible Schools?
- What do we wish to conserve?

- How do we more fully understand each other in the Bible School and the churches and communities where we are planted?
- How can we engage this time of upheaval in a creative way? How can we create conditions for everybody to contribute —according to personal gifts—in order to move forward?
- What do we wish to incorporate to our Bible Schools in new ways of training Christian leaders that has not been part of our past history?
- Which were the best moments in our Bible Schools?
- What are the things we value the most about how we work together—staff, board, instructors, relation with the national church, relation with students, etc.
- How does (what and how we teach) reveal the central tenets of our faith and implement our commitment to the *Missio Dei*?
- What things could we do to have the best team work in our Bible Schools?
- What things could we do to have the best relationship and cooperation with the national church leaders?
- What things could we do to have the best relationship with our neighborhood/city to serve them in practical ways?
- What things could we do for our students to have the very best biblical knowledge, faith development and faith in action?
- Name three wishes for our Bible Schools

3.b. Creating provocative proposals: possible fresh expressions of Bible Schools

“Leadership is about mobilizing people’s capacity to sift through and hold on to what’s essential from their past. Sift through their organization’s past, or from their family, neighborhood, or community’s past, and hold on to what’s precious and essential from that past. To hold onto what’s essential. They carry that forward, and discard and let go of what is no longer essential.”

Ronald Heifetz

The times have changed; institutions such as Bible Schools must change with them. What are the no-negotiable values and beliefs? What would a fresh expression of a Christian community that empowers and trains leaders look like in the XXI century in Latin America? How can we form disciples that are “mastered” by Jesus’ values, words, and deeds so they love and serve their neighbors as Jesus did?

Awareness comes from listening not just to our own voices but also to those outside. Rich conversations give us understanding. Along with community discernment comes exploring, experimenting, evaluating and discerning again to keep on moving forward.

Reflection/Application:

- How—by training and equipping in our Bible Schools—can we touch our neighborhoods and society and not just the church?
- How can the Bible, ministry, missions, applied theology, etc., be taught better?
- Is there a better way to biblically and practically equip Christians in Latin America than by our Modernity shaped Bible Schools?
- How can we nurture an environment of open-mindedness, honesty, creativity and empathy among Bible schools personnel (staff, board, teachers, students), national churches (denominations authorities, pastors,

congregation), missionaries, etc., in order to address the challenges of the XXI century?

Conclusion

The Latin American educational system in general is in need of change. It has not changed accordingly to the change the world has experimented in the last fifty years. Many experts argue that this change is not a matter of superficial reform but deep transformation. Bible Schools are not the exception.

Bible colleges were established in the XIX century with the mission of providing biblical studies, theological education and preparation for church ministry through ministry training. The "Bible institute/college movement" has been described as "a protest to the inroads of secularization in higher education and as a base for the education of lay workers and full-time Bible teachers, evangelists, and pastors."¹⁷ In the most recent years Bible colleges, as many other institutions are being experimenting a variety of problems, challenges and changes. Experience is making evident that they are not technical but adaptive ones. Therefore, as we train and equip future pastors, church planters, missionaries, Spirit-filled marketplace leaders in our Bible Schools in Latin America let us be constantly reminded that is not about us (the instructors, staff, etc.); and it is not about them (be that the students or non-Christian nationals) either. Rather it is all about Him: His mission, His purpose, His name and His glory.

¹⁷ Larry J. McKinney, "The Fundamentalist Bible School as an outgrowth of the changing patterns of Protestant Revivalism, 1882-1920", *Religious Education: The official journal of the Religious Education Association*, 84:1, 589-605. Page 594

Sometimes we struggle with the issue of our churches or our Bible schools being small. Some ministries may be small in numbers but what is “the small” that is really dangerous? In this wake up call from the Spirit we need to confront the fact that the danger is to be small in terms of service to the city and nation where God has planted us; or small in terms of our involvement to world missions, or small in our understanding of the power of the proclamation and demonstration of the Kingdom of God, etc. Are we willing to be challenged by God to examine which kind of smallest is the one that bring sadness and burden to our souls?

Having this mindset, let us move forward with the creativity that the Holy Spirit impart to us by the spiritual gifts at work in us and with trust in the One who holds the future.

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