

“The Holy Spirit Draws the Mission Map”

Defining the future of the Church in IAD

Cancun, Mexico Sept 7, 2019

Lowell C Cooper

Introduction

We meet here this weekend to think about the future for one reason—the future represents change. Change from the past, change from the present, change over which we have no control, and change which we create in order to be relevant to what the future presents.

The only sure thing about the future is that things will change. The practice of leadership will change, church attendance and participation will change, the environment for mission will change, political and economic structures and processes will change. But we need not fear. God remains on the throne and He will ensure that His mission survives and succeeds.

“Christ has promised the gift of the Holy Spirit to His church, and **the promise belongs to us** as much as to the first disciples... This promised blessing, claimed by faith, **brings all other blessings in its train...**

—Ellen G White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 672

In our circles we speak much about the Holy Spirit. Yet it seems that we have a lot of homework to do in understanding the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Old Testament prophets, the teachings of Jesus, the drama of the book of Acts and the writings of John, Paul and Peter have much to teach about the person, role and work of this third person of the Godhead. At the risk of over-simplification Bible teaching about the Holy Spirit might be summarized under four main headings:

The Holy Spirit:

1. Brings divine presence and power to human life
2. Guides the Church in understanding truth
3. Equips the Church for mission
4. Gives spiritual gifts to all
5. Superintends God’s mission and draws the mission map
6. Brings glory to God

Today we shall focus our study primarily in the book of Acts and discover how the Holy Spirit leads, guides and blesses the church as it encounters different boundaries in its experience. In summary we shall see that the Holy Spirit draws the mission map. These chapters reveal that a major aspect of Holy Spirit work is to lead God's children to a deeper understanding of His ways and His will.

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.” —John 16:12-14 NKJV

When we speak of maps we generally think of the geographical map that helps us to orient ourselves in the physical and political world. But there are other maps to keep in mind, such as:

Mental maps:

- The map of social status
- The map of ethics/integrity/morality
- The map of identity and self-worth
- The map of proper etiquette
- The map of ethnicity and prejudice
- The map of organizational structure and control
- The map of theology/doctrine
- The map of social norms and culture

Fortunately for us the book of Acts is a treasure chest of stories that trace new map lines, reconfigure boundaries and deepen our understanding of God and His work relating to all of these maps. The basic realization that comes from reading these stories is that the Holy Spirit superintends the growth of the Church in all its dimensions.

1. The map of elite spiritual status (Acts 2)

Throughout Bible times many of God's chosen ones, particularly the Jews as a people and especially the men, fell victim to the idea that God's calling of them placed them in an elite status. That God's favor

and blessings rested upon them more than on others, that God's plans intentionally and prejudicially favored them and that others, 'outsiders', were of little value in God's sight and therefore in their estimation.

Three blessings that Jewish men prayed at the start of the morning prayer: 'Blessed be He that He did not make me a Gentile; blessed be he that He did not make me a slave; blessed be he that He did not make me a woman.'

Old Testament prophets expressed a message of God's embrace of all people yet in the mind of the chosen people that message was largely forgotten and little understood. Then came Jesus! Then came Pentecost! And mental maps were re-written.

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit is democratized (Acts 2:17-18)

- "upon all flesh"—on "sons" and "daughters," on "menservants" and "maidservants" alike

The actual expectation of most Jews was that the Messiah would pronounce judgment on the Gentiles, resulting in their destruction. The Jewish believers who witnessed Gentiles receiving the Spirit after Peter had preached to them (Acts 10:44-45) were 'astonished', while the Gentiles were 'glad' (Acts 13:48)

2. The map of ethics and morality. (Acts 5)

In Acts chapter 5 we are introduced to the sad story of Ananias and Saphira. It is indelibly etched on our minds.

They sold a possession, ostensibly for the good of the church, but kept back some of the proceeds while pretending too have kept a promise. Peter directly addresses this dishonesty and says that Ananias has lied to the Holy Spirit and to God. It was not just a subtle dishonesty among colleagues. It was a matter involving relationships with the divine. About three hours later Saphira shows up and repeats the lie. Both Ananias and Saphira die as a result.

Here we encounter the map of morality and ethics. The whole idea of the Holy Spirit being involved with human life carries with it an ethical

demand. God is not to be trivialized. Words and actions matter. Honesty counts and is required. The holiness of God must be reflected by holiness of people. For, as William Law says, “It is impossible to live one way and pray another.”

The moral map drawn by the Holy Spirit is broad. It encompasses all of what we refer to as character. For some of us, the gospel introduces a confrontation with our habits. For others, it challenges our attitudes. For all of us, the gospel initiates warfare with our idols and our self-centeredness.

The apostle Paul makes it practical.

“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above...Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God... Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry... But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another...”¹

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.”
—Ephesians 5:8-10 NKJV

The hard reality of the gospel is that it reframes everything in our lives. We may accept Jesus as Lord on the basis of gratitude for His forgiveness of our past. The gift of the Holy Spirit will not leave you undisturbed. Day by day His lordship in our lives leads us to new territory that is to be claimed for Him. We discover there are new ways of thinking. We learn to use our eyes, ears, voices and hands differently. The lordship of Jesus makes new claims upon how we use our time, energy and resources. This doesn’t happen overnight—we grow in the life of discipleship.

¹ Colossians 3:1-11, The Holy Bible, New King James Version

3. The map of new frontiers in mission. (Acts 8)

The activity of the early church is really centered in and around Jerusalem. Things get hot and heavy. Stephen who, “full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people” is accused of blasphemy and becomes the first martyr for the gospel. We talked earlier about the Holy Spirit and suffering. That a life of faith is not on cruise control, it is beset with danger on all sides. But the Spirit who enabled Stephen to see heaven also enabled him to face death. God used the suffering of Stephen and the persecution of believers served to spread the gospel (Acts 8:1, 4).

Persecution broke out in Jerusalem and believers were scattered in all directions. But scripture says that “those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” Philip went to Samaria—do you recall the ethnic tensions between Jews and Samaritans—and “the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip.”

Philip was later instructed by an angel to journey along a desert road leading from Jerusalem to Gaza. He went simply in obedience to instruction, no strategic purpose in mind. But the Holy Spirit had a plan. An Ethiopian was traveling that same road, reading a scroll of Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go near and overtake this chariot.” Philip is able to enlighten the man about a prophecy concerning Jesus. Within a matter of minutes, the man is baptized and becomes the first missionary to Ethiopia.

The spread of Christianity through the centuries and the spread of the Seventh-day Adventist message since the mid-1800s have not always been by specific planning of men and women. Instead God has used unconventional means, unintended consequences and unplanned actions to advance the knowledge of Him in the earth.

This short episode in Acts 8 ought to stimulate our awareness that we can really never know the result of a seed sown for the kingdom of God. Philip, prompted by the Holy Spirit, merely gave a Bible study to a person unknown to him but the man instantly became a follower of Jesus.

4. The map of proper qualification. (Acts 9)

Acts chapter 9 describes the dramatic conversion of Saul. Ananias, a disciple in Damascus is instructed in a vision to “Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight.” —Acts 9:11, 12 NKJV

Then Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.” But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.” —Acts 9:13-16 NKJV

Ananias went to the house, laid hands on Saul, told him that Jesus sent Ananias so that Paul could receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Saul received his sight, arose and was baptized!

Now the lesson that Ananias learned, and which we sometimes struggle to learn yet today, is never to write someone off as useless in the work of God. You and I can never know what will happen in a person whose life is filled with the Holy Spirit. A sordid history, a bad reputation, lack of refinement—these are not impediments to the Holy Spirit.

This reminds me of a statement of Ellen White:

“There is no limit to the usefulness of the one who, putting self aside, makes room for the working of the Holy Spirit upon his heart, and lives a life wholly consecrated to God. —E G White, *Christian Service* p. 254

5. The map of ethnicity and prejudice. (Acts 10)

We march along to Acts chapter 10 and read of the fascinating work of the Holy Spirit erasing ethnic boundaries and prejudice in Peter’s mind. Cornelius, a Gentile centurion, in a vision is asked to send men to Joppa

in search of Simon Peter. The men begin their journey. The very next day Peter, hungry and waiting for a meal, falls into a trance. He sees a great sheet “bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things and birds of the air. And a voice came to him, “Rise, Peter, kill and eat.” —Acts 10:11-13 NKJV

Peter protests, “Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.” —Acts 10:14 NKJV

“And a voice spoke to him again, the second time, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.” —Acts 10:15 NKJV This was done three times.

The next day Peter met Cornelius and a large company that had come together. Peter addresses them, “You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean... In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.” — Acts 10:28 and 34, 35 NKJV

Talk about a dramatic change in Peter’s thinking! He is a died-in-the-wool Jew. But the Holy Spirit breaks down his prejudice and at the later Jerusalem Council Peter becomes a key advocate to other Jews that God’s grace extends to Gentiles.

6. The map of organizational structure and control. (Acts 11)

Acts chapter 11 brings us to Antioch—a place where some of the Jews, scattered by persecution in Jerusalem, had settled and because of their preaching a small church had been established there.

The church at Jerusalem heard about believers in Antioch. It is quite possible that they wondered how this could happen since it wasn’t directly a result of their efforts, plans and organization. Barnabas was sent to Antioch. On his arrival he “saw the evidence of the grace of God.”

This story illustrates some things to consider about organizational structure and authority in mission. It is possible that one can carry an idealistic view of the Early Church—that everything functioned harmoniously and that everyone was fully engaged in mission. But evidence from the New Testament quickly alters that idealistic view.

From its NT beginnings and for varied reasons the institutional Church gradually exercised increasing control of ecclesiastical functions and resources. An uneasy coexistence of the institutionalized church and private initiative developed.

Illustration: Peter Waldo, 12th century French merchant

- Wanted to restore New Testament teachings
- Translated scripture into vernacular
- Encouraged Bible study and memorization
- Was branded as a heretic
- Followers persecuted, scattered, and destroyed

Illustration: John Wycliffe, native of England

- Translated Bible into language of masses
- Taught that laity could participate in ministry
- Branded as a heretic, enemy of Church
- Died a natural death
- Council of Constance 40 years later, bones exhumed and publicly burned

Illustration: Protestant Reformation

- Heart of the reformation was the conviction that all believers were priests
- Every believer has right and responsibility to study Bible, to be involved in ministry, administer sacraments

It is a matter of history that the great missionary movements of the 18th and 19th centuries began as endeavors of laymembers and lay-lead groups, not the organized churches of the day.

Illustrations of the tension between private/individual initiative and institutional/denominational activities are not limited to previous

centuries. I believe it is clear that Church history underscores the importance of organizational structure in connection with mission action and results. However, in this environment the Church has always had to wrestle with its self-perception as an institution or a movement. Institutions tend to define, protect, and preserve their role. Movements are always dynamic and run the risk of dissipation and loss of focus. How can the Church embrace both ideas without becoming schizophrenic or ineffective?

Perhaps it would be advantageous to ask some questions such as:

1. To whom was the Gospel Commission given? To individuals, to groups, or to organizations? It is important to ask this question because one might easily entertain unwarranted assumptions depending on one's circumstances. For an employee or leader in the Church, it is natural to think of the Gospel Commission as being given to the Church organization. Therefore one might be lead to believe that it is appropriate for Church structure to have authority over the mission enterprise and to exercise control over church member resources in regards to mission activity.

On the other hand, an individual with resources or a small group of individuals, without participation in a formal organization, might have the conviction that the Gospel Commission is given to individuals. Therefore, they undertake quite independently, with their own resources and plans, an initiative to travel to a far away land and there spread the gospel. It is a matter of history that the great missionary movements of the 18th and 19th centuries began as endeavors of laymembers and lay-lead groups, not the organized churches of the day.

2. What is the role of organizational structure, any organizational structure, and specifically Seventh-day Adventist Church structure, in respect to Christian mission throughout the world?

I don't propose that we can answer these questions today. But if and when we do give further attention to them, I suspect that our solutions will center on the following principles for the role of organizational structure:

More to coordinate than to control
More to collaborate than to compete
More to optimize means than to create machinery
More to communicate priorities than to restrain initiative

7. The map of obstacles and opportunities. (Acts 13-16)

Holy Spirit sends Barnabas and Saul on missionary journey (Acts 13:1-3)

Violent opposition at Iconium, Barnabas and Saul flee to Lystra and Derbe (Acts 14:1-7)

“Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.” — Acts 16:6-10 NKJV

When Paul was in danger of not going in the right direction, the Spirit interrupted his plans and sent him to Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10), and later to Jerusalem (20:22-23). The apostles made their plans and followed their own initiatives under the belief that they were doing God’s will. When their plans did not work out they did not fret or cast blame upon each other. Instead they attributed changes in plans to the guidance of the Spirit. For them, there was no accident or coincidence. The Holy Spirit was in charge of the mission map.

8. The map of theology and doctrine. (Acts 15)

The Jerusalem Council marked a watershed moment in the experience of the early church. At issue was their fundamental understanding of the gospel. They saw that Gentiles could become believers—but did they need to come to Christianity through Judaism?

An example of the Spirit-community model of identifying the will of God is reflected in Acts 15:22, 28, where the role of the Jerusalem community is prominent in arriving at the conclusion to welcome Gentiles into the church. Where there was uncertainty and limited scriptural guidance, the believers looked to the Spirit to facilitate the correct conclusion.

“For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.” —Acts 15:28, 29 NKJV

Although the Bible is a fundamentally important source of guidance, it does not exist to provide answers to every question that may be posed. It was originally written for readers who existed in ancient cultures and eras that are inevitably different from those living in later generations. Therefore, to view it as the neat basis for all decision-making for all times, even with reference to the life and practices of believers, is not always appropriate. Principles may be gleaned and applied, but care in providing contextually appropriate guidance is always necessary. The recurring theme in the seven messages to the churches in Revelation is ‘hear what the Spirit says’ (Rev 2:11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

9. The map of social norms and culture. (Acts 16)

Paul and Silas proceed to Philippi, the foremost city in Macedonia, and attend Sabbath worship outside the city with people, primarily women. There was no synagogue in the city—perhaps because the minimum of ten men (Jews) was not present.

A merchant woman named Lydia is there. She is a worshipper but perhaps not Jewish since she came from Asia. She sold a line of products for wealthy people and likely circulated in that niche of society. She listened to Paul and Silas, believed on Jesus, was baptized, and then invited Paul and Silas to stay in her home.

Perhaps it should be of more than passing interest to us that the first convert in Philippi was a woman. She represented a population that was

not considered very important, but Paul was ready for anyone to become a believer and witness. Further, she was wealthy, but eagerly accepted the gospel because she had hungers that mere possessions could not satisfy.

Perhaps the lesson here is that we should not be hesitant to work in any community—even if by social standards of the day there doesn't seem to be much promise. Maybe in our day it is the wealthy that seem hard to reach and so we concentrate our efforts in areas where we feel we can achieve higher numerical success.

It seems to me that Paul was not interested so much in numbers as he was in individuals whose lives would be dramatically changed when they understood the gospel he preached.

10. The map of personal spiritual growth.

Paul contrasts the 'fruit of the Spirit' (Galatians 5:22-23) with the 'gifts of the Spirit' (Ephesians 4:11-12). How are we to understand the distinction for in a sense the fruit of the Spirit is also a gift of the Spirit?

The fruit of the Spirit is what happens in my life, my nature, my character when the Spirit comes into my life. He does not remain dormant. Instead He sets about to accomplish sweeping changes. My consent and cooperation is required. It is not easy work but let me assure you the results are worth the cost.

Paul compares the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit:

“Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” —Galatians 5:19-21 NKJV

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against

such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." —Galatians 5:22-25 NKJV

Human nature is ultimately self-oriented. And if we are to become anything other than that we will need some divine assistance to transform us from within. In our deepest level of self-understanding we acknowledge that the heart of man is desperately wicked.

The fruit of the Spirit is what the Holy Spirit does in my life that I may become more like Jesus.

David Brooks, in his book, *The Road to Character*, talks about résumé virtues and eulogy virtues.

Résumé virtues are those characteristics we emphasize when we are looking for a job: technical knowledge, talents, competencies, experience, accomplishments, interpersonal skills, etc. We craft the list to make us look good.

Eulogy virtues are those things that people use to describe us after we are dead. Hopefully such words as kindness, honesty, courage, love, service and faith would be included in our eulogy. Nor is it surprising that the Holy Spirit's work in an individual's life is largely devoted to the eulogy virtues—this is what is known as character development.

Conclusions:

1. The Holy Spirit wrote the map of mission for the early Church.
2. He lead the believers through experiences that fundamentally changed their perceptions and expectations. Through the Holy Spirit's leadership, the Church came to a new, deeper, broader understanding of God and His purposes in this world.

“We have many lessons to learn, and many, many to unlearn. God and heaven alone are infallible. Those who think that they will never have to give up a cherished view, never have occasion to change an opinion, will be disappointed.”

—Ellen G White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 37

3. The Holy Spirit did not lead them away from the Bible. Instead He lead them to a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of things and truths already embraced or foretold in Scripture.

“The fact that certain doctrines have been held as truth for many years by our people, is not a proof that our ideas are infallible. Age will not make error into truth, and truth can afford to be fair. No true doctrine will lose anything by close investigation. We are living in perilous times, and it does not become us to accept everything claimed to be truth without examining it thoroughly; neither can we afford to reject anything that bears the fruits of the Spirit of God; but we should be teachable, meek and lowly of heart.”

—Ellen G White, *The Review and Herald*, “Christ Our Hope”, Dec 20, 1892

“He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.” —John 16:14 NKJV

4. The Holy Spirit superintends the work of the church in all its dimensions. He leads, guides, and convicts individuals and the church in ways that adjust our thinking and presuppositions and aligns our mind with the mind of God.
5. The Holy Spirit is the agent for Christlike character development.

No wonder Jesus declared that “He will guide you into all truth.”

As you journey on the Christian pathway, in company with the Holy Spirit, please be sure that you are not carrying outdated maps. The Holy Spirit is in the business of re-writing them.