

Our Visionary Architecture for Foreign Missions

In Memory of Dr. David Calhoun

Philip DeHart (reformatted)¹

What is our church's vision for foreign missions? Is there a guide for establishing and developing our missions program? Such questions are as vital today as they have been in each prior generation. When, decades ago, push came to shove these questions proved to be of utmost importance to the continuing Presbyterian church in the South. Honorary Moderator Don Patterson, a great promoter of world missions, reported:

How good it was to hear how the Lord moved in the hearts of our founding fathers to establish a "continuing Presbyterian Church" that would be true to the Scriptures and to the Confession, and obedient to the Great Commission.²

It was clear to these fathers that biblical faithfulness entails missions faithfulness. Missions had gone horribly wrong in the years leading up to 1973, and the PCA was keen to set a different course. The "first real controversial issue" in the PCA was how to make absolutely sure that our foreign missionaries would be free to minister *as* Presbyterians.³ Since foreign missions means ministering outside of the bounds of the PCA, more guidance was needed than was in our Book of Church Order (BCO). Therefore, GA instructed the newly-formed Mission to the World (MTW, a permanent committee of GA) to produce a policy manual to present at GA's third annual meeting. The Assembly approved hiring someone to draft the document and the scholar-churchman, David Calhoun, was selected.⁴ Calhoun was eminently suitable for the task primarily because he was a student of the Scriptures. He held advanced degrees in both Old and New Testaments. He also had experience both as a missionary and in leading a missions agency. And he was familiar with both northern and southern Presbyterian history – as well as that of the Old World. His legacy has proven that he was well-chosen.⁵

¹ Philip DeHart, "Our Visionary Architecture for Foreign Missions," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 18 (2022): 165, <http://0-search.ebscohost.com/newlibrary.wts.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAI690230814000155&site=eds-live>.

² Wayne Sparkman, "History of PCA Motto: 'Faithful to the Scriptures, True to the Reformed Faith, and Obedient to the Great Commission,'" *The Aquila Report*, 10 September 2017, <https://theaquilareport.com/history-pca-motto-faithful-scriptures-true-reformed-faith-obedient-great-commission/>.

³ This involved two related issues: giving priority to sending ordained ministers and making clear agreements with non-Presbyterian sending agencies. "Some wondered if it would actually tear us in two." Kennedy Smartt, *I Am Reminded: An Autobiographical, Anecdotal History of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Chestnut Mountain, GA: K. Smartt, 1994), 117.

⁴ Smartt, *I Am Reminded*, 118. See *M2GA* p.68.

⁵ He developed a keen interest in how the "Old Princeton" seminary had become a missionary-producing machine. He would later write a doctoral thesis, "The last command: Princeton Theological Seminary and missions, 1812-1862." For a brief overview, see David B. Calhoun, "Old Princeton: Her Missionary Outreach," 18 January 2016, <http://www.placefortruth.org/blog/old-princeton-her-missionary-outreach>. He would also author a magisterial two-volume history of Princeton Seminary (1994 and 1996) that highlights its missionary-

The policy manual that Calhoun and David White⁶ drafted was circulated to all of the presbyteries for study and input. The version of the Manual that was eventually approved by GA⁷ remains to this day, almost intact, as MTW's guiding document.⁸ I will be referencing this approved 1979 version of the Manual because it is available online. I suggest that you print pages 678 to 689 of the *PCA Digest 1973-1993* for reference. It is eminently worthy of study by every session and missions committee as we keep asking the urgent (and controversial) question, "What is the foreign missions vision of my church?"

We can anticipate, from this awareness of its historical milieu, the main concern of the Manual: how to do foreign missions *as Presbyterians*? And, almost immediately on the heels of this question: how to preserve the unity of a denomination that is so deeply concerned about foreign missions and yet so diverse? Every local church and every presbytery continues to answer these same two questions – whether self-consciously or not – in the manner in which they execute their missions programs. I am writing to those who have a role in leading these missions programs, especially pastors, elders, and missions committee chairs. I think that this was also the intended audience of the Manual.

For its architectural vision, the Manual's first step was to establish historical and constitutional continuity. There would be no fads or special interests controlling our foreign missions. In particular, the distinctively American philosophy of pragmatism would be vigorously resisted. Foreign missions must be thoroughly and solely grounded in Scripture according to the Westminster Standards. The Manual's second step was to establish the focus: "Priority and Urgency of Planting and Strengthening Presbyterian Churches Overseas."⁹ The third step was the "how" – only Presbyterian ministry methods will produce Presbyterian churches. Lastly, the crowning vision of the Manual was the entire church working together seamlessly and effectively. In sum, the Manual's architectural vision for our church's foreign missions grounds us in the Scriptures and Confession, provides us with a focus, defines our method, and promises effective collaboration.

I will take these step by step, leading you through the document. But first allow me to address a possible misapprehension by setting "presbyterianism" over against "denominationalism." Since "Presbyterian" is obviously a denomination, I need to clarify

training heritage. He would then balance the tables with David B. Calhoun, *Our Southern Zion: Old Columbia Seminary (1828-1927)* (Banner of Truth Trust, 2012). His commitment to the cause of foreign missions throughout his lifetime is evidenced by his recent book, David B. Calhoun, *Swift and Beautiful: The Amazing Stories of Faithful Missionaries* (Banner of Truth Trust, 2020).

⁶ Dr. Calhoun recalled that he "was assigned the biblical and theological matters related to world missions" while David White wrote most of the more practical parts (perhaps he meant by this the ancillary Missionary Handbook). Personal correspondence January 23, 2016.

⁷ Paul R. Gilchrist, ed., "MTW Policy Manual," in *PCA Digest 1973-1993* (Atlanta, GA: Presbyterian Church in America, 1994), 674–89. <https://pcahistory.org/pca/digest/index.html> (Open the link to Part IV of Vol. 1.)

⁸ Unfortunately, the Policy Manual was bound together with the more transient Missionary Handbook into a single document. Consequently, the distinction between the two documents intended by GA (and recently reminded by the Administrative Committee of the 47th GA) began to dissolve. No doubt this contributed to taking the Manual out of general circulation and giving it the flavor of a rather tedious introduction to an operational Human Resources document. More importantly, changes and additions to the Handbook proceeded over the years without adequate grounding in the Manual.

⁹ Unless referenced otherwise, all quotes are from Gilchrist, "MTW Policy Manual."

why denominationalism and presbyterianism are incompatible with respect to missions. Denominationalism plants flags. It seeks to establish the authority of man-made institutions disguised as the church. In this way, denominationalism would destroy foreign missions. Presbyterianism answers to the Great Commission, bowing to the universal authority of Christ by His Word and Spirit. Presbyterianism, in its doctrine and church government, clings tenaciously to the Lordship of Christ in every detail and has absolutely zero tolerance for the rules of men. Christ is the exclusive Lord of His church. Christ is Lord not of churches with the name “Presbyterian,” but of HIS church as a whole (see Westminster Confession of Faith, or WCF, chapters 25 and 26). Christ is Lord not only over His church as it exists but also over its mission. When the Manual recommends presbyterianism, it is not promoting but destroying denominationalism.

As we now launch into the Manual, I will pass over the introductions (which have been substantially changed over time) and focus on the second section, “Reformed Theology and Practice of Missions” (pages 678 to 689). This is the meat of the document and is where Dr. Calhoun’s contribution is perhaps most evident.

Grounding: A Theological Mission

The singularly important aim of the Manual is to establish the church’s missions program in the church’s theology. It lays out a deliberate and all-embracing structure of theological *foundation* leading to theologically norming *practice*. “The order of the division is important. The first part of the section deals with theology and the second part with practice. Theology must always judge practice. It can never be reversed.”

This is not empty virtue-signaling, but a rock-solid solution for a desperate need of the hour. The Manual offers penetrating analysis of the prevailing plague of pragmatism. This pragmatism had recently burst aflame in the missiology of liberation theology. “Theology from above” was being challenged by praxis-oriented “theology from below.”¹⁰ The Manual recognized that nothing but the deepest theological pursuits and assertions are able to stave off the corrosive effects of this pragmatism – and of all forms of pragmatism. “We commit ourselves to be a theological mission. We reject pragmatism as a guide for our action. We deplore a superficiality that seeks biblical grounds for positions already taken for other reasons.” If we fail to be theologically driven, it amounts to “death not only of theology but also of missions.” Our practice “must live under the domination of theology.” The language of “commit,” “reject,” “deplore,” and “domination” is vivid and appropriately passionate. The weight of this stewardship of missions, under the threat of “death,” is intended to elicit the most extreme sobriety.

¹⁰ The basic argument of the liberation missiologists was that theology had been, until they came along, captive to a Western paradigm of starting with theory and moving to praxis (action). They considered this approach to be not only irrelevant to the needs and theological approach of the non-Western church but also a form of oppression. Their own missiology was thus the liberator of the church. The same idea was modified by evangelical missiologists who, no doubt wanting to affirm orthodoxy, allowed for theology to provide some kind of “fixed” boundaries. Yet, for some of them praxis remained primary. The result is a “theology from below” with an appeal to a “theology from above” which is artificial.

The Manual's dive into a biblical theology of missions begins with the Westminster Standards. It establishes the norming authority of the Standards by opening with the Westminster Shorter Catechism on covenant theology:

"God, having out of His mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace to deliver them out of the estate of sin by a Redeemer." (Q.20)¹¹

God "created man in His own image for fellowship with Himself" (do not miss this creational grounds for covenant theology). He will therefore bring to fruition this grand purpose in history by means of covenant (WCF 7.1). Adam having locked the covenant-of-works-door forever, God opens another door for the Second Adam to pass through – the covenant of grace. Upon the foundation of this covenantal structure of Scripture, the Manual proceeds to build a biblical framework for a theology of missions. As it moves from Old to New Testaments it repeatedly returns to the tenets of covenant theology.¹² God's sovereignty alone means nothing to the work of missions unless it solves the problem of the guilt and corruption of sin and is favorably directed towards the church in covenant (WLC 65). God's covenant purpose for a people in "fellowship with Himself" is the church's motivation for missions. Recognizing the Scriptures as the authoritative covenant document, the Manual insists that "we must work diligently and openly with all the Scripture, seeking to do justice to the whole will of God and not bending or ignoring any word in the interest of a theory." The purpose of dwelling upon this biblical framework is covenantal obedience – that we only "do the will of Him who sends us."

Before moving on from the biblical theology section into the "Reformed Practice of Missions," the manual once again raises a warning against pragmatism: "What we do with these biblical data and with other related parts of God's Word will determine what we do in missions." There is an overwhelming emphasis here on the absolute necessity of a constant, vibrant, studied, grounding in theology through-and-through: "Theology is not a preliminary activity; it is the controlling force in all our activity." Theology does not merely provide the parameters of missions activity, it is the consistent and constant "controlling force." Hence, the two sections of the manual, Theology and Practice, must never be separated. The "practice of missions" is always theological-practice.

Theological grounding always reflects on history. The whole church across the ages is the recipient of revelation. Hence, we disavow autonomy when we disavow innovation. The Manual's continuity with the historic church does not end with the hermeneutics of the Westminster Standards. It proceeds to ground MTW's identity and function in terms of the PCA's BCO and history. It quotes at length from the PCA's letter "to all the churches,"

¹¹ This is abbreviated from the original, ". . . sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer." Perhaps this is because the context of the quote, rejecting popular liberalism, focuses on man's sin. Or perhaps it is a typographical error since the Minutes of the 4th GA record the original wording.

¹² This contrasts with theologians of the ecumenical movement who, concerning the ingathering of the nations, downplay the distinction between the forms of promise in the OT and fulfilment in the NT.

claiming MTW to be totally unique. This is not the uniqueness of innovation but the uniqueness of uncompromising adherence to its historic Presbyterian identity.

We shall, therefore, endeavor to do what has never been adequately done – bring out the energies of our Presbyterian system of government. . . We are not ashamed to confess that we are intensely Presbyterian. We embrace all other denominations in the arms of Christian fellowship and love, but our own scheme of government we humbly believe to be according to the pattern shown in the Mount, and, by God's grace, we propose to put its efficiency to the test.¹³

The Manual's theological opponent – pragmatism – is a constant obstacle to missions and is constantly changing shape. At the time of writing, it was prominently manifested in the Church Growth Movement (which spanned the 70's and 80's). The Manual addresses this issue directly by laying out multiple dimensions of true church growth. This sets a precedent for the Manual to be kept current. GA would be asked to add guidance to the Manual as issues are faced in each generation of missions.¹⁴

Our theology is “confessional” – a pledge of unity among all elders, deacons, pastors, and missionaries. This unity is always challenged by different aspects of ministry that some of us get excited about. The Manual seeks to bring balance to this pull of interest groups in different directions. “Missions is necessarily concerned with the establishing of the whole ministry of the church. . . .” In order for the work of missions to move forward in good order, GA will need to speak to divisive issues that threaten the peace and purity of the church as they emerge. And, again, it is specifically our confessional theology which will function as the “controlling force” in each instance of controversy.

Given these theological convictions, the Manual defines its own role. Together with the PCA's Constitution (BCO and Westminster Standards), it functions as MTW's exclusive mandate. By following it closely (and requesting revision or guidance where necessary), MTW faithfully fulfills its obligation to “obey fully the directives of the General Assembly, to be sensitive to its mood and style and to maintain humbly its role as servant.” “We recognize that the work of missions is the work of the whole church. We will listen to our church as it speaks in its various ways, and we will obey as it speaks through its highest court.” The Manual also sets its own limits of authority. It must not control the missions programs of PCA churches and Presbyteries (although it does control how they relate to MTW missionaries, as we will see).¹⁵ Limits are also implied by where the Manual is silent. It

¹³ The entire quotation from this letter is worth careful reading. It was borrowed from a similar letter written by J.H. Thornwell in 1861. The fact that this is the second Thornwell quote in the Manual is significant. For context, see Philip DeHart, “Power for Missions Restored,” *Reformation21 Blog*, 22 April 2019, <http://www.reformation21.org/blog/2019/04/power-for-missions-restored.php>. The “government” for missions is explored below under “Method.”

¹⁴ “Insider Movements” is an example of a more recent manifestation of pragmatism in church growth, for which GA provided guidance in the form of a study committee report.

¹⁵ The Manual quotes BCO 14-1, “the church recognizes the right of individuals and congregations to labor through other agencies in fulfilling the Great Commission.” Hence, “MTW acts in the spirit of the statement when it seeks to respond to and guide individuals and congregations who wish to use their right in laboring

refrains from speaking where the church has not spoken. And where the Constitution has already spoken adequately, the Manual says no more. For example, the Manual assumes that a "Presbyterian church" is defined by our Constitution. It further assumes that the essential labors involved in planting and strengthening churches are sufficiently covered in our Constitution. The Manual clarifies only where necessary and thus avoids muddying the waters. To say more would be to risk schism. Mission policies would do well to follow suit.

The church must speak authoritatively where Scripture speaks clearly and only where Scripture speaks clearly.¹⁶ By NOT saying many things, the Manual asserts and guards the authority of Christ over a united (and fallible) church. One area of silence in the Manual, for example, is the lack of definition of "world missions." Some may expect to find the popular terms "cross-cultural" or "unreached peoples." This silence, however, is not as deafening as it may seem. A Presbyterian definition of foreign missions follows different lines of thought than sociological definitions. First, ministry is essentially the same everywhere (WCF 25.3). It only varies in its circumstances. Second, as we will see below under "Method," the primary distinctiveness of foreign missions ministry has to do with how it is governed. For example, when God calls someone to serve as a missionary, this is unlike any other ministry call. The commissioning church must recognize that "in a real sense his [or her] work is an extension overseas of their own local [church] or presbytery ministry." Yet, at the same time, that work is being carried out within the jurisdiction of another (non-PCA) church (whether already present or yet to be established). This uniqueness entails a unique governing structure. The Manual does indeed define "foreign missions" by providing its governing structure. But it deliberately stops just there.¹⁷

Focus: Presbyterian Churches

The Manual clearly asserts the singular focus of MTW's work: "Priority and Urgency of Planting and Strengthening Presbyterian Churches."¹⁸ The rationale for this focus is compellingly set forth:

Therefore, the [A] priority and urgency of planting and nurturing churches overseas and [B] our God-given Reformed doctrine and Presbyterian polity mean that [C] our mission to the world must, through our own efforts and in cooperation with compatible Reformed churches, be engaged primarily in the work of planting and strengthening true Presbyterian churches.

through other agencies in fulfilling the Great Commission." [The current edition of the Manual does not contain this note.]

¹⁶ It is not appropriate for the church to speak with equal authority to every circumstance. (WCF 1.6)

¹⁷ With the governing structure in place, all of the other questions about what legitimately constitutes "foreign missions" is left to that government to decide. Is missions focused on "unreached people groups"? Should priority be given to the "10-40 window"? What about ministries of mercy and justice? All such questions are submitted to the governing structure (and not for a GA committee to decide autonomously).

¹⁸ This "priority" is set over against a secondary "propriety" – "The Propriety of Cooperative Work With Evangelical Mission Agencies in Service and Support Ministries." This language does not exist in the current version of the Manual.

Since, according to our theology, [A] is true and [B] is true, then [C] is necessarily entailed. The missionary programs of churches and presbyteries could benefit from such a clear statement of priority.

But how? The church-planting jurisdiction of the PCA is North America. It is only within this geographic area (with rare exception) that the PCA has presbyteries that can properly look after churches. Churches that are planted by PCA ministers outside of North America are not normally PCA churches – they are not bound by our BCO but by their own – so it is beneficial that such work be shared. And obviously it would be shared with “compatible Reformed churches.” Remember from my introductory comments that a true Presbyterian church knows itself to not be the only game in town and stands rigidly against denominationalism. The Manual insists emphatically that “it is of greatest importance that the PCA find Reformed churches overseas to which it can relate its mission work and create such churches through its own witness where these do not exist.”¹⁹ In our missions work, PCA churches always relate to other churches – whether those churches already exist, or we are involved in planting them.

This “relating” of PCA to non-PCA churches is organic rather than institutional. It inspires creativity and leads to intimacy. It may involve PCA missionaries generally, MTW missionaries specifically, . . . it may not. The Manual does not try to manage all this diversity of organic relation. It confines itself to those instances where “relating” involves MTW missionaries. This is the sphere of our greatest responsibility as a denomination. Nevertheless, the Manual’s principles serve as a guide for any variation on the theme of relating church-to-church in mission work.

Method: Presbyterian Ministry

I have already been hinting about what the Manual identifies as theologically sound methodology: Only Presbyterian ministry will reliably produce Presbyterian churches.

But how do missionaries go about the work of planting and strengthening Presbyterian churches outside of the jurisdiction of a PCA presbytery? The first concern of the Manual is that of polity – by what authority (meaning by what power and government) the work will be carried out. This is a distinctive feature of Presbyterian missions that requires elucidating. Presbyterian polity is covenantal. It declares that ministry is by Christ’s authority and Christ’s authority alone. Jesus charges his disciples to mission, but “He does not delegate it to them.” “The book of Acts sets forth the scriptural role of the church—the local church—as the sending authority.” Here the Manual adheres closely to the clear instruction of the BCO:

¹⁹ The Manual added this wise warning: “There are problems and difficulties in establishing such relationships. Considerable time may be required. There must be care and caution.” [Sentences that are not in the current version of the Manual.] This is not the easiest path for missions work to follow. While pragmatism would find a faster way, our theology insists on the longer, slower, and humbler road.

“The church is responsible for carrying out the Great Commission.” “The initiative for carrying out the Great Commission belongs to the church at every court level.²⁰ . . .” (Chapter 15-1).

The covenantal connection between Christ and His church in ministry is bi-directional. Christ’s power runs downward to each ministry while accountability runs upward to Christ. It is the whole church that is the recipient of this Holy Spirit power. It is the whole church that is accountable to her Head. If a ministry becomes isolated from the church, it is deprived of power (it cannot accomplish anything spiritual) and it is deprived of accountability (the rule of men usurps the rule of Christ). Every watt of power for ministry is Christ’s power and there is not an inch of autonomy. Presbyterian churches will be established by Presbyterian means.

In order to affirm Christ’s power in the church as a whole, significant emphasis is placed on the limits of the authority of the PCA’s “highest court.” GA must not interfere with the authority vested in the “lower courts.” For example, “sending authority” is vested in the “sending body,” not in GA. “In our Presbyterian system, the proper sending bodies, therefore, are the session of the local church for laymen and the presbytery for ministers.” Crucially, what our BCO articulates for how presbyteries send ordained missionaries is extended in the Manual to how local churches send unordained missionaries.²¹ So two controlling principles define how missionaries are sent: 1) They remain members (with all essential privileges and responsibilities) of their sending church/presbytery. 2) They hold a commission from their sending church/presbytery such that their “work is an extension overseas” of this sending body. MTW must not interfere with these mutual prerogatives between missionary and sending body. If either missionary or sending body drops the ball on this mutual relationship, MTW will feel obliged to (inappropriately) pick it up, putting the relationship in a tailspin.

Not only is GA’s authority limited, MTW’s authority is even further limited. MTW’s authority is not that of GA itself but rather confined to that of a committee. The Manual laid out this structure clearly:

The plan for a Reformed practice of missions presented here discusses 1) the sending bodies — the session and the presbytery, 2) the enabling Committee — Mission to the World, 3) the receiving bodies.²²

Two churches (or presbyteries) are necessarily involved in every missions effort – the sending and the receiving bodies are representative of the “whole church.” In works that

²⁰ The “court levels” of the PCA are session, presbytery, and GA.

²¹ GA specifically asked that the Manual draft provide guidance concerning sending unordained missionaries – presumably because of the BCO’s silence on this detail. See also Philip DeHart, “Ten Steps to the Mission Field,” *byFaith*, 8 September 2021, <https://byfaithonline.com/ten-steps-to-the-mission-field/>.

²² This quotation is not in the current version of the Manual.

involve MTW, there is also an “enabling committee” of GA that is part of “the plan.” MTW is not a third party of equal authority but rather an important helper to the two churches.²³

Authority entails responsibility. Now that the central and foundational concern of authority has been clarified, the Manual proceeds to articulate how that authority is exercised with regards to the missionaries and their ministries:

The responsibilities of these sending bodies, in consultation with the General Assembly’s Committee on Mission to the World, include recruitment, examining, training, support, commissioning, contact and home ministry assignment.

The details of each of these areas of responsibility is helpfully expounded in the Manual (pp. 684-685). In the case of MTW missionaries, this constitutes what your church or presbytery agrees to in commissioning. In my experience, this has seldom been made explicit from the outset – to the detriment of the relationship between church and missionary. Every church and presbytery can find helpful guidance here for their sending responsibilities generally.²⁴

The Manual then returns to the role of MTW. Pragmatism (in missions) has always argued that the agency must do what the church has failed to do. The Manual does not tolerate this. There also seems to be an awareness, perhaps from Presbyterian history, of the (pragmatic) propensity for a servant committee to become an autonomous agency. The Manual takes a stand against pragmatism once again. It draws extensively from BCO chapter 14 to clarify MTW’s role, giving special attention to 1) the limits of MTW’s authority and 2) MTW’s servanthood with respect to all the church courts.²⁵ MTW does nothing by itself; it “does not replace the sending bodies,” but rather “works with,” “assists,” “recommends,” “helps,” and “enables.”

Finally, the Manual comes full circle (in connecting responsibilities to authority) by clarifying the role of Receiving Bodies. This launches a series of guidelines revolving around ministry in a context external to the PCA (thus not governed by our BCO). This is the most complex (and was the most debated) portion of the Manual. It makes a valiant attempt to draw Presbyterian ecumenism into a full-orbed Presbyterian polity.²⁶

²³ In some instances, this model has evolved into a “church partnership,” in which MTW may or may not be involved.

²⁴ This is relevant not only to the particular “sending body” of the missionary but also to all of those churches that participate in sending by their prayer and financial support. See also Philip DeHart, “Staying Tied to Foreign Missions,” *byFaith*, 16 January 2019, <https://byfaithonline.com/staying-tied-to-foreign-missions/>.

²⁵ The Manual reinforced this in its very first paragraph: “Relationship of the Committee to the Presbyteries and Sessions of the denomination is defined by the duties assigned to the Committee by the General Assembly. Its role is to serve and offer coordinating facilities to these church courts.” [These sentences are not in the current version of the Manual.]

²⁶ Much of this section has become obsolete as fewer and fewer MTW missionaries are seconded (loaned) to evangelical agencies in supporting roles. It deserves some updating along the lines of relating PCA missions work to increasingly established churches around the world.

Alignment: Presbyterian Order

The Manual's intent is to foster effective alignment, not only within MTW but also for the PCA as a whole:

We believe that fulfillment of this mission is based on harmony, mutual trust and effective, creative cooperation between the MTW committee and the churches and presbyteries of our denomination.

If our missions work is not well-aligned, how can we expect to build orderly Presbyterian churches? Clearly, the intent of the Manual is that a well-coordinated missions effort (internally) is necessary for orderly relationships with other churches (externally), including those we participate in planting. Hence the leader of MTW is not a "director" but a "coordinator." Biblically-ordered mission work is objectively the most effective and the most efficient. Many of the most critical missiological issues that we face today are resolved in this form of "government we humbly believe to be according to the pattern shown in the Mount."

The Manual ended with an even stronger and broader affirmation of alignment:

This program can maintain the peace and purity of our church and it can unite us in the great work of world missions.²⁷

I would take this a giant step further to say that presbyterian missions will perfect the peace and purity of the churches we plant and strengthen, uniting the PCA with them in "the great work of world missions."

Summary

To close, I will summarize the principal points of the Manual's philosophy of ministry and relate them to issues that many PCA churches and presbyteries are facing today. The Manual:

1. Establishes MTW's identity in the PCA's Constitution and history (over against para-church models and current "best practices"). The missions program of every PCA church would benefit from articulating similar connections to our Constitution and history to provide a unifying grounding.
2. Fosters a zealous commitment to a deeply theological approach to missions (over against prevailing pragmatism, ecumenism, and doctrinal casualness). This is a useful reference for the missions programs of local churches.
3. Promotes a strong emphasis on what is completely unique about MTW – the authority by which its missions work is done (the church rather than agencies). Recognizing that the church is an organic whole with Christ as head, leads to a distinct view of power and accountability for ministry. Presbyterian goals can only be accomplished by this Presbyterian means. Organism cannot be produced by machinery. This is the operational core of any missions program. Surely a greater awareness that the whole church "is

²⁷ This sentence is not in the current version of the Manual.

inherently the missionary community” would stoke the missionary fire of every local church and presbytery.

4. Confines the authority of MTW to a coordinating authority (over against parachurch or secular top-down models). Though limited, this coordinating authority is crucial. These principles are useful for local churches as they consider how to collaborate with other churches and what their role is vis-à-vis that of MTW (or a parachurch sending agency).
5. Presses the urgent planting and strengthening of (specifically) Presbyterian churches as the missiological priority and singular sharp focus for all of MTW's work. Every Presbyterian church and presbytery struggles with how to express their Presbyterianism in their missions program. The Manual offers some compelling arguments and useful language.
6. Streamlines sending missionaries by empowering presbyteries and local churches to do what only they can do effectively. Just as the solution to bad parenting is not the State, so too the solution for slow progress in missions is not the agency. The Manual is a (proleptic) sounding of the trumpet in every presbytery and church to rise to the challenge.

The Manual is brief, non-technical, readable, and practical. It was clearly intended to be absorbed not only by GA commissioners, but by missionaries and sending bodies alike. If you are in search of a concise Presbyterian missiology, this is it. If you are a PCA member and sense a call to missions or to serving on a missions committee, this is a necessary unifying resource. If you are recovering from a distasteful missions experience, you will identify with this document that set out to answer the questions, “what has gone wrong in missions and what must we do to get back on the right track?” We owe a great debt to those who drafted and crafted a unique and effective architectural vision for the PCA's foreign missions.