

Partnership: God's Mandate for Success

by Ebenezer Sunder Raj

A few years ago, just before the Deepavali festival, I read a news item in the Indian Express. It was about an agreement reached by cinema film distributors. They had agreed about when each one would release his new film for festival, where it would be screened, for how much, etc. The purpose stated was to avoid duplication, unhealthy competition and to build coordination and cooperation in their business. I was greatly surprised to learn of such a high level of business ethics especially among cinema film distributors -- a group engaged in a vocation which pollutes our children's minds.

Partnership among business houses is increasing at a very fast pace in India today. In the process of liberalization, there are multitudes of partnerships being formed nationally and internationally among business establishments, production plants, service agencies and financial corporations.

In the liberal economy, while the concept of free enterprise is basic to an individual's survival and

growth; the practice of partnership, cooperation and coordination ensures their collective survival and growth. When the whole business world understands and practices this simple truth, why do Christian missions and organizations not do so? Our Lord lamented that "The children of the world are wiser than the children of the kingdom."

Though we must guard against the danger of making market dynamics our model, we need to learn what we must, from secular human experiences. That is one of the reasons why the Lord placed us in the secular world.

What are the factors that hinder or help partnerships between Christian organizations? There can be many. We do not know them all. However, a few important points are discussed below:

Shared Goal: There needs to be an agreed upon common goal. All secular business houses can state with absolute clarity what they produce or plan to produce. No two business houses can ever enter into any partnership unless their product is definable and

measurable - whether goods or services.

In contrast to this, many of our missions and parachurch bodies cannot define or measure what their product is - whether goods or services. While most of them may vaguely speak of their "goals" and "vision," many of them do not quantify.

Some may be unable to define or measure their product; others carefully avoid any measurements. For such organizations, the mandate for their birth came from the ego of their leader, their growth by a process of carnal manipulations and their present goals from the pressure of expectations from their donors.

We must thank the Lord for the increasing number of genuine evangelists and church-planting pastors. However, we must also be concerned about the mushrooming of parachurch organizations. New organizations are being floated at the drop of a hat as "God's guidance." A majority of them should be asked by their supporters to merge with existing mature organizations. Supporting a legion of undefined

and non-measurable parachurch bodies is one of the surest ways of wasting God's money and manpower.

One organization may work among the blind, another in Christian literature, one among the urban elite, another among tribals, one among students and another in mass media. Allowing for all such diversity and distinctiveness, what is disturbing is the vast number of organizations that claim to be doing the same type of work in the same locality among the same people or group or class.

Going by the reported statistics, the collective total of souls saved in India exceeds the total number of Christians in India, the amount of literature distributed exceeds the Christian literature produced in India, and the total number of persons reached exceeds the population of India.

Goals achieved through multiple partnerships are reported as if they were achieved exclusively by each organization so that the total figure far exceeds the reality. Such dishonesty is an effective killer of partnerships.

One essential prerequisite of any partnership is output measurement. While spirituality cannot be measured by human scales, spiritual activities are and should be measurable. When we make our activities measurable we become answerable; when our ministry actions are countable we

become accountable. Otherwise no one can assess who is doing what where and why - an anarchic situation graphically depicted in the book of Judges (Judges 21:25).

Individualism: Individualism is a major hindrance to partnership. We Indians have been traditionally community-oriented. For millennia our villages were governed by corporate leadership. Our personal enterprises derived their motivation as well as resources from the collective good of the community. The individual found his identity, personhood and purpose in the group. However, in the modern era, many malefactors are fast destroying that value by encouraging the individual's self-interest over that of the collective good. Evangelicals may curse the name of Charles Darwin to their heart's fill, but what we practice in our mission enterprises is in fact the Darwinian paradigm in its purest form - the survival of the smartest. Though free enterprise is a necessary evil in the economic world, individualism is (and has been through the ages) a serious hindrance in building the Kingdom of God. The Holy Scriptures are full of warnings against this antigen. When several Christian organizations do the same work in the same area and claim to have the same goal, but still stubbornly refuse to merge or even partner or cooperate with

one another, malignancy has afflicted the body of Christ.

If saving the people is our confessed goal, our mission enterprises must resemble the serious teamwork in a surgical theatre or a fire-fighting police squad. Instead we seem to resemble a bunch of musical chair competitors. We may drift fast from our proclaimed goal of winning a soul to winning a chair.

We are a divided nation. Manu, that great Brahmanical prophet segregated us according to skin color and caste. We have killed more Indians on his inspiration than all the Indian wars put together. Then the European colonists divided us along the national boundaries of medieval Europe. We fought the European wars on our soil and killed our countrymen in the name of the Dutch, French and British. Then came the modern missionaries who molded us along seventeenth century denominational castes. Now come the "sponsors" who regroup us according to their parachurch or private labels. The ego of the individualistic foreign "sponsor" finds its love mate in the ego of the Indian loner. This is the pedigree of the proliferating species of one-person organizations across India, who will not relate to anyone else. Partnership is prostitution to such a "chaste virgin espoused to her one lord," the sponsor.

The number is swollen by the surge of fast-track young men who are either dropouts from credible organizations or have never worked under anyone. They recognize that the sure way to avoid learning is to become instant leaders. So we have men in leadership who have not poured water on the hands of the prophets, have never trod the tearful path of obedience, nor endured shame for the Gospel.

Some of our Bible colleges also seem to breed this species, marked by its greed for instant leadership. Going by their products, one gets the impression that the core curriculum taught in these schools is not the Acts of the Apostles but "how to start your own organization." One man organizations do not seek partnership. Supporters' Expectations, The last important factor is the maturity of our supporters. There is what is called the "giver's fatigue." One gets tired of giving to the same cause or group year after year. The supporter looks for variety, for new kicks to keep his interest alive. This is understandable. However, this can, if not balanced, lead to extreme manifestations, especially if the giver or sponsor is egocentric. He may want to show his "partner" or supported group as a jack-of-all-Christian-trades and therefore force it to expand into all sorts of works, all over India. He may

want to see his supported group as the "Only Hope for a perishing India." This insatiable craving of the supporter can drive the group to dizzy heights of delusions, to become involved in all sorts of activities while they know full well that there are many others around doing many good works and are more qualified or experienced to do so. Partnership is not sought by jacks-of-all-trades.

Partnership is not new:

Partnership is not a complicated concept nor as modern as many may think. It is as old as Adam and Eve and as simple as the marriage of Eden. Marriage partnership is founded on the one clear (God-given) goal of procreation of a godly generation. The husband recognizes that he is only one half of a person and that he cannot fulfil that God-given goal without his female half, however smart he may be. Partnership is sought only by a person (or organization) who recognizes that he is only a part. Self-sufficient men and self-contained organizations never seek partnership.

Partnership is Biblical: Why should we partner? What is the prime reason for entering into partnership? The reasons may vary according to our perception and worldview. The Westerner may see it as a means to achieve, and the Oriental may see it as an achievement in itself because the Westerner's identity is based more

around what he does and the Oriental's identity is based more around where he belongs. Both are important and both are scriptural.

However, partnership in the ultimate analysis is not only what we have achieved, but how we have achieved it. Partnership is not just a means to an end but a scriptural end in itself, as much as a godly marriage without a child is. Our Lord prayed in His high priestly intercession not that we all may have won but that we all may be one.

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- Share with at least four other ministry leaders you know what you are learning about the power of collaboration, partnership and network development that might increase the effectiveness of your ministry.

*All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.

1. David B. Barrett, James W. Reapsome, *Seven Hundred Plans to Evangelize the World: The Rise of a Global Evangelization Movement*, New Hope, 1988

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