

The Emergence of Mission and Missiology

# Empowering Creativity

## A Look at How We Discover and Recover Our Creative Selves

by Chong H. Kim

### Introduction

A commitment to lifelong learning assumes that we will always continue to ask questions and discover answers that we sometimes don't expect. This commitment is crucial because the world we live in is constantly changing, requiring us to continually learn (and unlearn); if there's one thing we need to learn today, it's creativity. More specifically, it is about how we empower creativity. But in order for us to empower creativity, we first need to understand the need for it.

Creativity connects topics and issues that don't initially seem to be related, a skill that in the modern age has often been associated with highly gifted artists, musicians, actors, and dancers. But in other disciplines of life creativity has often seemed out of place.

In one of these disciplines<sup>1</sup>, missions, empowering creativity has been gravely lacking. It is one thing to say that creativity on the part of carriers of the gospel has provided spurts of innovation to help them get into hard places to share the gospel. It is another thing to ponder what carriers of the gospel have done to empower creativity on the part of the people they went to reach.

Rather than promote and empower creativity, gospel carriers or outsiders have generally discouraged and even squelched the initiative of those people who might have burst into the open to express themselves in their own cultural contexts. Instead, they became used to looking over their shoulders to see if they were doing "right" in the eyes of the outside gospel carriers.

Perhaps a more fundamental problem is that gospel carriers are generally not being creative, or, their creativity is not being put to use on the field. We have been trained to have "black and white"<sup>2</sup> answers to most complex theological and missiological questions. We were taught answers, but without our having asked the complex and difficult questions that precede supposed answers. Furthermore, we were taught to communicate those answers without considering the questions that arise in the field. We've grown accustomed to

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maintaining order by placing our thoughts in prescribed boxes. How different from Plato's experience with Socrates. Plato once said that after each session with Socrates students left more perplexed than before, and that, he said, was precisely how Socrates' students grew in their understanding.

As we will see later, this also has significant personal applications. We will never find our creative selves without freedom: freedom from our past failures, mistakes and wounds; freedom from others' criticisms, which drag us down rather than allow us to discover and to learn; and freedom to be who God created us to be. In fact, freedom in Christ has to be the starting point in discovering our creative selves. When we are free, and thus the creative beings God made us to be, then we can begin to help others discover their creative selves.

We need to make sure that we seek to fulfill our creativity and freedom within the bounds of seeking first God and His kingdom. God's glory and His kingdom are manifested through people who love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength and who love their neighbors as themselves. Any creativity and freedom that deviate from this overarching principle of loving God and neighbors is self-serving and thus not in line with God's purpose.

### *How We Got Here*

We live in a world where post-modern, modern, and in some cases even pre-modern ways of life coexist. The word "modern" is the common denominator. Some people want to leave modernity as fast as they can, having lived through it. Some still want a piece of the "progress" modernity offers. Others are living in it, not knowing for sure what it really means or whether they really want it. Whatever the case may be, modernity, until recently, has dominated our way of thinking and life.

Modernity focused on one thing and has done that one thing well—"to observe the material world around us, to draw logical conclusions, and accept only what

is reasonable" (Houston, 10). Modernity has provided a bewildering array of achievements, and the bottom line is that through modernity we live longer and better. However, modernity has incredible downsides that we are beginning to uncover. And we are realizing that we must not be blinded by all the real and perceived benefits of modernity.

Starting with the Renaissance, Enlightenment, and Reformation, and further emboldened by the Industrial Revolution, the West moved with dizzying speed toward modernity's promise—more, faster, cheaper, and better.



Industrial revolutions, technology, medicine and a general improvement of life led to a population explosion in the West. The West dominated the rest of the world through colonialism and unilaterally decided to "civilize" the colonized peoples, and it made perfect sense to do that.

However, the mandate of modernity began to be questioned and challenged when the moral fabric of western societies began to fall apart. Furthermore, some in the West began to recognize that non-western societies have much to contribute. Also, some missionaries and anthropologists knew that modernity often came to a sudden halt when it encountered pockets of people who resisted, who preferred not to be bulldozed.

What generally triggered the emergence of post-modernity is the idea that all cultures have much to contribute to the betterment of the world's

societies. Modernity was not and is not the given answer to everything in life. Ken Robinson writes,

The essential problem is that many governments and organizations seem to think that the best way to prepare for the future is to do better what we did in the past—just to do more of it and to a higher standard. The fact is we have to do something else (Robinson, 22).

To think that doing better—doing more of it and to a higher standard—is the best way to prepare for the future shows a blind ignorance of modern man's true predicament. One of the ways in which Robinson uses the phrase, "out of our minds," is related to the general sense that we have "lost" our minds in preoccupation with intellectual skills driven by an ever narrowing concept of academicism. He rightly asserts that academic ability is not the same as intelligence and that history is replete with people who did not have high academic ability but who had very high intelligence and made significant contributions to society.

According to Daniel Pink, the conceptual/creative age is now upon us. We are still part of the Information Age, but the transition has already taken place. Pink explains that the industrial and information ages have been dominated by the left hemisphere of the brain ("L-Directed Thinking")—"sequential, literal, functional, and textual, and analytic" (Pink, 26). However, the right hemisphere of the brain ("R-Directed Thinking")—"simultaneous, metaphorical, aesthetic, contextual, and synthetic" (Pink, 26)—under-appreciated and under-emphasized in schools and organizations, is beginning to assert itself and take charge of human societies.

Pink's assertion, above, dovetails with Robinson's claim that we have to do "something else." And in order for us to do something else, we have to rely more on the right hemisphere of our brains and allow our creative juices to flow. In fact, in the book, *Juice*, Evan Schwartz shares story after

story about creative and innovative individuals<sup>3</sup> who saw possibilities, overcame odds, recognized patterns, connected dots between seemingly unrelated things and thinking, and changed the course of modern history. In the book, *Inside Steve's Brain* (referring to Steve Jobs), author Leander Kahney explains:

Creativity is just connecting things. When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty because they didn't really do it, they just saw something. It seemed obvious to them after a while. That's because they were able to connect experiences they've had and synthesize new things. And the reason they were able to do that was that they've had more experiences or they have thought more about their experiences than other people... Unfortunately, that's too rare a commodity. A lot of people in our industry haven't had very diverse experiences. So they don't have enough dots to connect, they end up with very linear solutions without a broad perspective on the problem. The broader one's understanding of the human experience, the better design we will have (Kahney, 194-195).

I believe the history of the church is a few steps slower, and continues to be dominated by L-Directed Thinking, descended largely from the 13<sup>th</sup> century academic theology of what Houston calls scholasticism<sup>4</sup> (Houston, 171). Houston reminds us that before the 13<sup>th</sup> century, "all the great theologians, the witnesses to the truth of God, were also great saints. They lived lives of great holiness, and used their intelligence in the service of God. They experienced a *lived theology*" (Houston, 171). Lived theology is miles apart from theology driven by the kind of L-Directed Thinking that gets us "saved" only by cerebrally believing certain truths and doctrines. Thus, by and large, the kind of "Christianity" that was exported to the rest of the world from the West majored in *known theology* rather than *lived theology*. It is no wonder we have been more concerned about what

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people believe rather than how they live out the gospel of Jesus Christ and the kingdom.

### *What About Missions History?*

Many practices of Protestant missions during western colonialism followed the lead of modernism and many missionaries failed to stand against the call to "civilize" and "modernize." Even when missionaries were genuine in their intentions, the propagation of the gospel went side-by-side with charity, which, however well-meaning, often led to varying degrees of what some might call a superiority complex. In retrospect, following the success of independence movements around the world, it is not hard to detect that "religious" colonialism was a part of the broader cultural and economic colonialism of the colonial period.

Some of the more effective missions attempts, particularly faith missions efforts, came about when missionaries distanced themselves from the colonizing government. Even then, however, empowering creativity by new believers and national leaders was generally not in the picture. But things took a turn for the better when Henry Venn of the Church Missionary Society and Rufus Anderson of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, two great missionary statesmen of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, led discussions of the so-called "three-self" principles—self-propagation, self-support, and self-governance. Their concept of three selves was in direct opposition to the generally colonial and paternalistic mentality of western mission societies. Despite the three-self principles they promoted, Venn, in particular, believed there should be "regulations" that would be set by the "parent committee" for indigenous leadership (Warren, 65-66).

Paul Hiebert, in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, added a fourth self—self-theologizing. This crucial insight undergirds the three-self formula by empowering an indigenous church to read and interpret Scripture in its own cultural context.

But knowing the four-self formula and practicing it can be two different things. While many would agree that the formula is absolutely necessary, it is usually very poorly implemented. Why? Perhaps because missionaries have to answer such questions from home as, "What are you doing on the field?" and "How are we spending our missions money?" It seems to me that these can be difficult questions because the process of implementing the four-self formula requires patience but little or no action on the part of the outsiders. Therefore a successful four-self program may appear to be in conflict with the goal of seeing local churches engaged throughout the world.

Underlying the four-self formula is the crucial idea of empowering creativity among national believers. The "self" program is about starting an effort and maintaining it with very little direct outside help or resources. Certainly outside help, coaching, and partnership may be beneficial when requested, but outsiders generally should stay away from initiating and dictating. I believe empowering creativity is at the heart of insider movements. Self-initiation requires that the gospel interact within a culture, among members of that culture, with outsiders asking probing questions and being exceedingly patient. However, before the self-initiation process can take place, the insiders' creativity needs to be affirmed and encouraged. This is creativity empowered.

### *Freedom and Adult Learning Principles*

This creativity-empowered process involves finding freedom as a people

and a culture. In his first “official” sermon at a synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4: 18-19), Jesus said:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.

One of the important aspects of Jesus’ mission was *freedom*: “to preach good news to the poor. . . to proclaim *freedom* for the prisoners . . . to *release the oppressed*, to proclaim the *year of the Lord’s favor*.” The two examples Jesus gives are Gentiles—a widow in Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian. Both of them needed *freedom* from the religious grip of zealous Jews.

Later, the Apostle Paul’s ministry was essentially to free Gentiles from the unhealthy religious duties preached by the Jews, especially some of the Jewish followers of Jesus. Paul’s calling was to tell Gentile believers that they could remain as they were—free to be who they were under Christ. Rightfully, Paul’s unbending stance in the book of Galatians is about freedom in Christ.

These biblical exhortations have significant ramifications. Do the “Gentile” believers of our day have the freedom to be who they are without feeling they must adopt a so-called Christian culture and its religious practices? Do they feel free? Do they need a champion like the Apostle Paul to defend them from the onslaughts of our expectations? How do we then encourage believers who are different from us to be free? It is my assertion that if we can successfully promote freedom, then the kind of creativity that will jump-start the four-self formula will gradually take root, aided, when requested, by our coaching and assistance. In short, without freedom, there is no creativity.

For societies, particularly those in the Global South, that view conformity as a norm and a virtue, freedom and creativity are even more important.

And they are important *because* of these views about conformity, not despite them. It is hard to make a general observation here, but shouldn’t we view this cultural norm of conformity as something that needs to be transformed rather than something that is inherently redemptive and positive? My experiences in the majority world tell me that when people’s creativity is awakened, that creativity becomes infectious and people are on their way to becoming fully alive. At the same time, they become easily impatient with cultural systems that promote



religious and societal conformity when it does not have the substance of godliness. If these creative people can resist the pressure to conform, they become effective and creative change agents in their societies.

In practical terms, empowering freedom and creativity ties in deeply with what some people call “adult learning principles.” Malcolm Knowles popularized the term “andragogy,” which basically refers to learner-focused education for people of all ages, as opposed to “pedagogy,” which is teacher-focused education.<sup>5</sup> Jane Vella, in *Teaching and Learning*, simply yet profoundly asserts that the end of teaching is learning. Albert Einstein said that it is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge. This means that in order to be effective teachers we must unlearn our tendency to be teacher-oriented. It also means that we must be very careful to

sensitively learn and understand the contexts in which we are working.

Allow me to go one step further. We have to go beyond learner-focused education and training. It has to be learner-driven. Self-initiated learning is the most powerful and lasting. Thus, our teaching must generally be in response to requests from the field, arising as people in their own cultures interact with the Scriptures. Since we come from a different cultural point of view, we shouldn’t assume what things people in another culture need to know and do not need to know. They should decide, and we can help coach them, if it is appropriate. Furthermore, since learning is best facilitated when it is coupled with self-reflection and self-evaluation, outsiders can help that process by asking questions of learners and probing for answers together with them.

### ***Community Development and Empowering Creativity***

Many would agree that sustainability in international development work is an important key. Anyone who is involved in international development would also agree that it is important to have an exit plan even before beginning a work within a community since the work must eventually continue without the outsiders’ involvement. This ability for a work to continue on its own is called *sustainability*. Sustainability puts “process” over “products” because products come and go, but with process in place there is great potential for a work to be sustainable.

However, sustainability will not come to fruition without empowering creativity. If one is to merely sustain something that has been brought in from the outside, even if it was brought with good intentions and a fair amount of dialogue between outsiders and insiders, it is not going to last. However, if creativity is empowered and is woven into building godly DNA in individuals and into the larger society, then it has a better chance to survive and be sustainable.

### *What Does This Mean for Us as Individuals?*

Ken Robinson offers a helpful definition of creativity. He defines it as *imaginative processes with outcomes that are original<sup>6</sup> and of value* (Robinson, 118). My definition of creativity starts with God the Creator, who made us in His image. We are creative beings, reflecting the very image of the Creator God. The ultimate beneficiary of our creativity is God and His Kingdom—its expansion and building. Thus, my working definition of creativity is *imaginative processes with Kingdom-expanding and Kingdom-building outcomes, which are original and of value*. The primary purpose of finding our creative selves is not so much to better our lives, but to channel our creativity to love God and to expand the edges of His Kingdom. This should be the ultimate aim and natural outcome of discovering and recovering our creative selves. Our creativity should be unleashed to reflect the glory of the Creator God in our lives and around the world.

However, we won't get to our creative selves until we experience freedom. Freedom from the bondage of bitterness, anger, deep wounds, and sins is a must if we are to experience our full creative capacities. Most of us know this as inner healing or deep healing. It is understood that we will never experience complete wholeness on this earth, but we do need to put our past wounds in the past.<sup>7</sup> One encouraging and exciting thing is that God often uses the process of healing in our lives to bring about similar healing in others' lives. As we become whole, we become "wounded healers." As E. Stanley Jones reminds us, "The happiest people in this world are the people who deliberately take on themselves sorrow and pain to help others. Their hearts sing with a deep, wild joy" (Jones, 98).

In my view, inner healing and hearing God are closely tied. Our ability to hear God will bring about the

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constant healing necessary for us to be free. All of us have the innate ability to hear God's voice. I've heard Ralph D. Winter comment many times that our (evangelical) prayers are not very different from Buddhist chants in that we don't take time to hear God's voice. We are so busy speaking to God about our needs and requests that we often forget to be still and hear His voice.

Now let's turn the corner. Helping, coaching, and encouraging others to hear God should become a critical part of our discipling process. This may sound simplistic, but as we disciple others to hear God, they develop the ability to be whole and to be free, and are thus one step closer to expressing their God-given creativity. Further, as their creativity is unleashed, helping them to become God's "fearfully and wonderfully made" creations, these creative disciples begin to express a collective creative energy in their God-loving and kingdom-building endeavors, and thus begin to live out the Great Commission. The Great Commission text in Matthew 28 urges us to teach them to *obey* as we make disciples of all nations. We have short-circuited this passage to overemphasize teaching rather than obeying. Teaching is a means to the end, but the end is obeying. It is my conviction that Jesus' call to obedience can be summarized in His Great Commandment, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love our neighbors as ourselves.<sup>8</sup>

### *What Does This Mean for Us as an Organization?*

Two core aims of the organization I lead are to be "catalytic" and "transformational." We express these qualities through coaching and training. Our hope is that you will find your creative

selves and that you will in turn help others to reach their creative potential. We can and will commit to remove obstacles and barriers that prevent people from reaching their maximum creative potential. We do this in two ways. One is to help you become aware of the incredibly strong cultural forces that shape who we are, most of the time without our knowledge or comprehension. Often these cultural forces overshadow and steer us away from biblical values. This is what I tried to point out at the beginning of this paper. Ken Robinson says that "cultural conditions can kindle or kill creativity" (Robinson, 11). Rather than biblical values dictating and shaping the cultures around us, we have allowed cultural forces to skew our correct understanding of the Bible. So a major part of our training and coaching should be spent in pointing out these discrepancies and "deprogramming" us from cultural forces that do not reflect biblical values.

The second way we help people reach their maximum creative potential is by promoting inner healing and freedom, since the combination of our sins and Satan's deceptive work has hindered or even blocked our freedom, and thus, our creative selves.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, we promote holding on as much as letting go. We have to "find" ourselves, our strengths, and our passions.<sup>10</sup> As we find ourselves, we hold on to these strengths and passions as God's unique design of who we are. Saint Irenaeus, the wise bishop of Lyons in the last quarter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, said that "the glory of God is man fully alive." This is worth pondering. The intricate part is that sometimes blinding cultural forces and the inability to experience freedom coexist, furthering confusion and preventing us from achieving full creativity.

I hope and pray that this inspires you to pursue your full creative potential, for as we reach this creative peak, our lives become very attractive, so much so that those around us will demand answers, wherever we may be.

To love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love our neighbors as ourselves and to teach others to obey this command of our Lord Jesus Christ in full awareness of who we are as highly creative beings—this is kingdom living at its best. *This* describes the boundaries of our freedom and the benefit of our freedom. *This* is our foundational guiding principle in pursuing full creativity. Only if our creativity allows us to love God and love our neighbors better and more effectively can we reach our fullest potential and be fully the people we were created to be. **IJFM**

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**Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> I use “discipline” both as an academic discipline as well as praxis.  
<sup>2</sup> Paul-Gordon Chandler comments in his book, *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road*, that Mazhar Mallouhi has the most difficulty with two groups: Muslim fundamentalists and Christian conservative evangelicals, whom Mazhar considers as “too black and white on truth” (Chandler, 79).  
<sup>3</sup> The individuals Schwartz explores in his book are confined to the West. There is not a single story from the majority world.  
<sup>4</sup> Houston has his own interpretation as to what scholasticism meant. Some would view scholasticism not as a philosophy or a theology in itself, but rather a method of learning. But a sure product of this type of learning in theology which is based on classical philosophy was a known theology.  
<sup>5</sup> A chart comparing andragogy and pedagogy is helpful (Kohls and Brussow, 63).

involved), social originality (for a particular community), and historic originality (for humanity as a whole) (Robinson, 116). Having said this, let’s be sure that God is not surprised by our creativity. There is nothing new under the sun. What is clear is that God and his kingdom ought to be the ultimate beneficiary of our creativity.

<sup>7</sup> It goes without saying that the need for healing and learning from failures can be two separate topics. At the same time, we should be proactive in acquiring solutions on both of these topics. Without learning from our failures, we will never reach our full creative potential.

<sup>8</sup> The synoptic gospels (The Gospel of Matthew, The Gospel of Mark, The Gospel of Luke) all refer to the Great Commandment, in Matthew 22:36-38, Mark 12:29-31, and Luke 10:26-28 respectively. The Gospel of John does not. However, it is my view that a dominant theme of the *entire* Book of John is to expound on how the Great Commandment is related to the Great Commission.

<sup>9</sup> There is a lot to be said about this statement. The Basics (or OL in Korea) training attempts to provide a framework for achieving freedom and inner healing as well as to develop sensitivity in hearing and discerning God’s voice and presence in our lives. It further promotes the idea is that we can then help others to do the same.

<sup>10</sup> Jones makes an obvious connection which I am assuming in my sentence here, “when you find Christ and his Kingdom, you find yourself” (Jones, 210).

<i>Elements</i>	<i>Pedagogical Teacher-Directed Learning</i>	<i>Andragogical Self-Directed Learning</i>
<i>Climate</i>	Formal authority-oriented Competitive Judgmental	Informal, mutually respectful Consensual Collaborative Supportive
<i>Planning</i>	Primarily by teacher	By participative decision-making
<i>Diagnosis of Needs</i>	Primarily by teacher	By mutual assessment
<i>Setting Goals</i>	Primarily by teacher	By mutual negotiation
<i>Designing a Learning Plan</i>	Content units Course syllabus Logical sequence	Learning projects Learning content sequenced in terms of readiness
<i>Learning Activities</i>	Transmit techniques Assigned readings	Inquiry projects, independent study, experimental techniques
<i>Evaluation</i>	Primarily by teacher	By mutual assessment of self-collected evidence

<sup>6</sup> Ken Robinson’s insight on being original is also helpful. He says that a creative outcome can be original on different levels: personal originality (for the person