

# Embodying the Seven Movements of Christ: Postures and Pathways for Participation in Mission

The logo for the Evangelical Missiological Society (ems) is displayed in orange lowercase letters within a dark blue circular background.

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Vol 4:1 2024

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## Introduction

In the 2009 movie *Star Trek*, a character is presented with a seemingly impossible task. Spock suggests that in order to complete their mission, they will need to transport people from a planet to a starship that is currently speeding across the galaxy. The response, given by Scotty, is that “the notion of transwarp beaming is like trying to hit a bullet with a smaller bullet whilst wearing a blindfold, riding a horse” (Abrams 2009). When I talk with churches and students about the challenges Christians face today in participating in global missions, given the changing state of the world, this quote has been helpful for naming just how complex and impossible it feels to even begin thinking about how to do it well. Recent complications like COVID, refugee crises, war, poverty, and terrorism layer onto historical factors such as colonialism and denominationalism, not to mention long-term trends of church expansion in much of the majority world and church contraction in many western nations. Given those challenges, what’s the best way to responsibly participate in Christian missions?

Analogies from science fiction may be useful for describing the complexities we are facing and the emotions we are feeling (see Howell 2013), but where can we find other useful resources for educating missional practitioners today? How can we think differently about participating in mission that could make it more manageable and less mystifying? How can we find a vision for education in contemporary missions that is more reasonable, practical, simple, and accessible for the church? One place to start is to return to the central language of the earliest disciples and missionaries.

In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus primarily uses the language of the “Kingdom of God,” while in the Gospel of John the idea of “eternal life” takes center stage in Jesus’ conversations. The Apostle Paul, though, leaves those expressions aside and orients his communication around the idea of being “in Christ.” Paul uses that

phrase, or a slight variation of that phrase, almost 100 times in his letters (Gorman 2001, 36, ft. 39; Rom 6:8-11; 8:1, 10; 1 Cor 9:1; 2 Cor 13:5; Gal 2:20; 3:28; 5:6). Being in Christ is the centerpiece in Paul's missionary correspondence. It's the major theme on which all of his other concepts and counsel are built. We could think of being in Christ as the key or the cipher or the puzzle box lid that helps us piece together what his vision for the people of God was all about.

Michael Gorman notes: "this language is not so much mystical as it is spatial, to live within a 'sphere' of influence. The precise meaning of the phrase varies from context to context, but to be in 'in Christ' principally means to be under the influence of Christ's power, especially the power to be conformed to him and his cross, by participating in the life of a community that acknowledges his lordship" (2001, 36). One fascinating example of how Paul uses this idea is found in Colossians 1:27-29, where we see the participatory, interrelated dynamic of what it means to have "Christ in you" and for you (as a disciple) to be "in Christ." But how does this work? How can a person be in Christ as well as having Christ in them? One way of understanding this is through the metaphor of breath and how we inhabit air: "Just as the air of life which we breathe is 'in' us and fills us, and yet we at the same time live and breathe 'in' this air, so it is with St. Paul's fellowship of Christ: Christ in him, he in Christ" (Deissmann 1912, 128).

Following this line of thinking, then, being in Christ is both the mode and the model for missional engagement of the world. Whatever mission looks like, it will need to look like Jesus. While that seems like something that could be taken for granted, tragically churches, missions agencies, and missionaries have often not followed the way of Christ. Christian missions have done harm when we have allowed colonialism, racism, sexism, and other powers that be to co-opt our original purpose, aims, and programs. Effective education for contemporary mission should be a call for and training in practical and personal participation in Christ in the world (see further Gorman 2019). That kind of radical, practical Christology leads to a missiology that is primed to help us engage the complexities of our world.

This article will begin by looking at an underused paradigm for missions touched on briefly near the end of David Bosch's seminal work, *Transforming Mission*. His short proposal for missional engagement is based on the major movements in Jesus' own story. Then we will look at how an adaptation of that framework has proven useful for preparing missional practitioners in Mozambique and the United States as it helps unpack the story, skills, and strategies for embodying the way of Jesus in the world. This approach outlines an embodied, practical theology of mission that is reproducible and flexible for the church to engage in possibilities for ministry in a variety of contexts.

## The Movements of Christ (and Dance) in Western and African Contexts

Bosch's overview of different paradigms for participation in missions covers six epochs of Christian history. He notes that "we should . . . with creative but responsible freedom, prolong the ministry of Jesus and the early church in an imaginative and creative way to our own time and context." (1991, 181). Our mission, our being in the world, then, should be done in Christ and it should look like Christ, which will look different in different contexts. Near the end of *Transforming Mission*, in the section titled, "Faces of the Church-in-Mission," Bosch (1991, 512) states,

Our mission has to be multidimensional in order to be credible and faithful to its origins and character. So, as to give some idea of the nature and quality of such multidimensional mission, we might appeal to images, metaphors, events, and pictures rather than to logic and analysis. I therefore suggest that one way of giving a profile to what mission is and entails might be to look at it in terms of six major 'salvific events' portrayed in the New Testament: the incarnation of Christ, his death on the cross, his resurrection on the third day, his ascension, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and the parousia.

Bosch states that these "six christological salvific events" or movements should never "be viewed in isolation from one another" (1991, 518). Instead, together, they collectively tell a compelling story (or way) of living and serving that the church should seek to pattern herself after. Bosch ends his book with the following statement: "looked at from this perspective, mission is, quite simply, the participation of Christians in the liberating mission of Jesus . . . It is the good news of God's love, incarnated in the witness of a community, for the sake of the world" (1991, 519).

It would be hard to overstate the impact of Bosch's book in missiological education since the 1990s. I read *Transforming Mission* in a graduate course before my family moved to serve the Makua-Metto people in Mozambique, and years later, the professor who taught that course led a group of intercultural workers through an exploration of Bosch's six movements of Christ. This proposal for missional engagement is one that I have been challenged by and have been chewing on for many years now. I should begin by saying that I would propose one correction, or change, to Bosch's six movements of Christ (1991, 512-518). While his list includes the Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, Pentecost, and Second Coming, I would add one more: Life

and Teaching. Bosch skips over the ministry of Jesus as one of the “events.” This is problematic for those of us who want to take the Rabbi’s example seriously as the one we disciples pattern our lives after. Christ’s life should also be instructive for the practice of mission as well. These seven movements of Christ have become foundational for both my practice of missions and my pedagogical approach to missions. I am convinced that learning to live each of these movements, postures, or pathways is a prime way to practice robust participation in the mission of Christ.

At one point in my research on these seven movements, I encountered a piece about the seven movements of ballet (Tellier 2015). I was intrigued, not because I have any familiarity with ballet, but because ballet is considered such a challenging form of dance. Tiekka Tellier notes that “ballet is often regarded as the most precise and difficult dance form in western culture. Though ballet includes hundreds of specific steps, the technique is based upon seven fundamental movements of the body” (2015). She lists and describes “the seven movements that provide the basis of ballet pedagogy” (2015), and those seven are listed in the chart below next to a potentially corresponding movement of Christ:

<b>Seven Movements of Christ</b>	<b>Seven Movements of Dance</b>
Incarnation	Plier - to bend
Life and Teaching	Glisser - to glide
Crucifixion	Etendre - to stretch
Resurrection	Relever - to rise
Ascension	Sauter - to jump
Pentecost	Elancer - to dart
Second Coming	Tourner - to turn

This is a way to playfully connect these two lists of seven movements and explore their meaning as practices that one must embody in order to become proficient in that complicated medium or mode. Tellier concludes her piece: “practicing the seven movements described above build(s) the necessary strength, coordination, and control to move fluidly at any tempo. So the next time you think that learning ballet is like drinking from a fire hose, it may help to remember that you’re really working towards perfecting the seven movements. Happy Dancing!” (2015).



Tellier's post captured my imagination. What would it be like to think of practicing the seven movements of Christ like learning the seven movements of dance? Practicing the seven movements of Christ, tapping into those postures, and following those practices and pathways, could be what allows us to become skilled practitioners in his way of being. While both ballet and participating in mission can feel "like trying to hit a bullet with a smaller bullet" while "wearing a blindfold" and "riding a horse" (Abrams 2009), we can break the seemingly impossible task down into focusing on becoming proficient in each of the seven movements. Missions education and formation, then, could be made practical by concentrating on learning and participating in the seven movements of Christ. While it is certainly challenging, this is an embodied way of approaching missional engagement that allows us to see it as part of a lifelong practice (see further Paul 2021, 61-62).

Two concepts have consistently surfaced with American audiences when I describe Christian missions as embodying the seven movements of Christ. First, this paradigm helps us consider missions communally. Ballet is performed by a company of dancers, and participants in mission should also be in good company, as part of the church. Christian missions as a solo project does not align with the biblical accounts of an expanding kingdom and is one of the surest ways to end in failure. Framing the seven movements of Christ as being embodied as part of the company of dancers (the church) has been useful in shifting the discourse with western audiences from focusing education for Christian missions on the individual and broadening it to the communal level.

A second significant connection with western audiences concerns our view of habits. Drawing on the work of Daniel Kahneman (2011), Jonathan Haidt (2013), Charles Duhigg (2012), and others, we can see that much of what we do as humans is instinctual rather than based on deliberate cognition. While people often perceive themselves as being rational creatures who consider every behavioral choice, in reality, most of our behavior has already been decided by our habits. By framing the seven movements of Christ as practices or habits, over time we can transition these actions out of the deliberate mode and turn them into behaviors that are ingrained (what we do naturally and automatically). To actually live the movements of Christ, we will need to practice them and make them habitual. One phrase that has been useful for discussing this dynamic is this following reminder: practice makes the complicated automatic.

In presenting the seven movements of Christ in Mozambique, in southeast Africa, two things that consistently resonated with church members are worth mentioning here. First, there are practical implications of Paul's contrast of being in Christ to being

in sin or evil (Rom 7:14-17). In the breathing analogy, our Makua-Metto friends connected with the truth that the more time we spend breathing in (living in the reality of the Kingdom of God), the more that reality gets inside of us. And the more time we spend in the competing Kingdom of sin, death, and Satan, the more that air gets inside of us and keeps us from breathing well.

To illustrate this dynamic in Mozambique, the following example was helpful. Many vehicles in Mozambique have faulty emissions systems and it is common to see cars and trucks belching out smoke. I would ask groups to imagine themselves trying to hitchhike to a nearby town. Picture a person who ends up getting a ride in the back of an old pickup truck. This dubious vehicle is ancient and rickety (will it even make it?) and the driver looks untrustworthy. But tired of waiting, they pay the fare and hop in the back. As the truck starts moving, though, the rider realizes that this truck is spewing all kinds of fumes out of the exhaust and these fumes are rolling up into the bed of the truck. The rider cannot see, their eyes are burning, and they are breathing toxic air into their lungs. All of the passengers begin coughing as this noisy, cloud of fumes bumps along the road. The passengers are so concerned with trying to breathe amid the noxious exhaust that they do not even notice that the truck has stopped moving. The driver is drunk and asleep at the wheel. The truck is stuck in a ditch, but it continues belching its toxicity as the motor runs even though the truck is not going anywhere. Then another driver comes along and stops. Our passenger is so busy coughing, though, that they do not even notice. Suddenly, a hand reaches through the fumes, grabs our rider, and pulls them out. This friend offers our passenger a ride to where they were intending to go all along. In this car, the rider is now breathing in fresh, clean air. No longer in the smoke (and having the smoke in them), our passenger has stopped coughing and can enjoy the driver's company along the road, leaving the toxic truck with its drunk driver behind.

For our Makua-Metto friends, this was a helpful way to explore how Paul considers being in Christ in contrast to being in sin or evil (Rom 7:14-17). This story connected the truth that life in sin and evil is bad, and bad for you, and how riding with Christ is infinitely better. For Christians, then, “the presence and power of Christ have replaced sin as the power that lives within him and the power within which he lives” (Gorman 2001, 38-39). Understanding it this way shapes our own experiences of healing and transformation, as well as ways to participate in the liberating mission of Christ in the world.

Additionally, the seven movements of Christ especially resonated in Mozambique as a way to talk about Christology in a multifaceted way. Serving in a predominantly folk-Islamic context created challenges for approaching the identity of Jesus, but the seven movements provided a framework for surveying different ways of relating to and seeing Jesus, for example, as Firstborn, Rabbi, Prophet, Companion, Traditional Healer who overcomes death, King, Guide, and Judge (Howell and Best 2021, 132). The seven movements approach not only deepens our missional participation in Christ, it also fills out our picture of Christ, as it aids us in contextualization. The seven movements of Christ, then, is both a way to frame our missional engagement as well as to deepen the impact in that context.

## **Story > Skills > Strategy as a way to explore the Seven Movements of Christ**

The seven movements of Christ intersects with my overall pedagogical approach to missions. When teaching missions courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels, I have found it useful to frame missions education in terms of the following inequality: Story > Skills > Strategy. Although sometimes people assume that success in missions is about finding the silver bullet strategy, in reality, that is the least important thing. We are wiser to focus on being rooted in the right story and being skilled in the spiritual disciplines and only then allow discernment to lead us to the best strategy for that season and situation.

Using greater than language to compare the importance of story, skills, and strategy, allows us to consider their relative influence. We should center our participation in mission around the story of God's work in the world. When our pet doctrines or favorite programs have the most influence or gravity, though, things go wrong. The story then orients our engagement in mission more than a favorite strategy. Disciple-making, then, is less about having the right plans and more about being the right kind of person, formed and shaped by the big story. Skills like study, sabbath, stillness, sharing, hospitality, singing and worship, fasting, and discernment are all crucial to involvement in the mission of God. So being oriented around God's story moves us to be grounded and learn these practical skills.

Story	Skills	Strategy
Jesus invites us into the Kingdom of God, calling us to be his disciples (filled with the Holy Spirit).	We align our lives (body, soul, spirit) with the Kingdom of God by rooting ourselves in the spiritual disciplines.	We contextualize and implement proper plans of action to achieve the goal of making disciples of Jesus.

The focus in this section is on describing the story, skills, and strategy of each of the seven movements of Christ to help us all learn how to embody them in everyday life. These short (and certainly not exhaustive) popular-level descriptions have been proven useful in introducing the concepts and setting the stage for further conversations, explorations, and applications. That will then be followed by a chart with summary statements about each of the movements and their impact for shaping the practice of Christian missions.

### **Incarnation (John 1:1-18; 14:9)**

**Story:** Jesus is God-in-the-flesh who came to live among broken, impoverished humanity, fully identifying with us and integrating himself into culture, revealing the depth of God’s commitment to creation, and ultimately showing us what God is really like. Instead of merely following a holy book, Christians have a holy, living model (God-in-Christ). Through the incarnation, God’s message to humanity is this: “I want to be with you.” The church, as Christ’s body, is the second incarnation, showing a broken world what the true God looks like.

**Skills:** Keywords—Humility, Presence. We practice being fully and humbly present with others so that those postures will become automatic in our lives. Disciples of Jesus must accept our limits as human beings—we can only be in one place at a time. In this movement, we see that God is willing to go small in a big way by pouring life into a handful of people, so I can also be focused on those around me. This movement can help us keep the fear of missing out from having too much power over us. We can focus our lives and our attention on doing a few things well.

**Strategy:** We learn language and culture as core elements in an incarnational approach. Jesus’ ministry began after thirty years of being among us. Since God’s response to the world is personal, our response to the world must be personal, too. We must be wary of impersonal ways of sharing the gospel. If we don’t dwell with people,



we are taking a different gospel. Gospel witness requires gospel with-ness. Like Christ, we must go to people and meet them on their turf and even become culturally savvy. That personal approach shapes both our methods and our message (for example, how we engage cultures that are primarily oriented around guilt, shame, or fear).

### **Life and Teaching (Matthew 5-6; 9:35; 11:25-30; 23:1-4)**

**Story:** Jesus went from village to village calling for true change by announcing the Kingdom, teaching about citizenship in the Kingdom (loving God and loving one's neighbor), and demonstrating the Kingdom life through powerful service. When the church follows her King's lead and lives well, we will be bearing true witness in word and deed.

**Skills:** Keywords—Invitation, Demonstration, Transformation. We practice what we preach and connect with others in ways that draw them into the Kingdom. This movement reminds us that to be a disciple, we must also be involved in making disciples. We also become proficient in imitating Jesus' radical commitment to loving his enemies.

**Strategy:** We evangelize and make disciples the way that Jesus instructed us to (e.g., looking for people of peace, Luke 10). We call for and model a change in devotion/heart, thinking/mind, and actions. We follow Jesus' commitment to walk alongside others. Knowing that any kind of brokenness that Jesus encounters he addresses, we also work diligently to act holistically. Since, in Jesus, we see how the preached Word is the practiced Word, we too will practice what we preach. Strategically, our main way of engaging the world is by making disciples of Jesus, teaching them to follow his life and teaching.

### **Crucifixion (Mark 8:31-38; 10:35-45)**

**Story:** Jesus, the true suffering servant, brought about his Kingdom by living out his calling all the way to his death on the cross—a shameful death that points to his glorification. Christ's followers also take up their crosses daily and follow him, embracing suffering, selfless service, and servant leadership for the sake of his kingdom.

**Skills:** Keywords—Sacrifice, Service, Radical Forgiveness. We embrace suffering and service and forgiving others even at a deep cost because we are committed to taking up our crosses as well. We follow a God who says to humanity: "I'm prepared to die for you" and deals with sin so that it does not get in the way of relationship.

**Strategy:** We risk in order to serve others and lead sacrificially. The cross also leads us to die to our own cultural preferences and to be vulnerable in engaging in cross-cultural relationships. We will participate in the pain of those around us. We give and receive hospitality in light of the cross.

### **Resurrection (John 11:1-27; 1 Cor 15; Eph 1:19-20)**

**Story:** Jesus defeated death, so the grave no longer has the final word! The resurrection of Jesus proved his identity and that event has become the linchpin of history and is the central pillar of our faith. Through the resurrection, God inaugurates a new creation at work here in the present. The church is made up of disciples who share in Christ's resurrection life, participating in his powerful victory over sin, death, and Satan.

**Skills:** Keywords—Hope, Power. We practice hope and live with the assurance that death cannot defeat us and that the power of the resurrection is present in our lives. Since Christ's resurrection paves the way for our own and that even now Jesus has a body (that's how committed he is to us), we cultivate courage that empowers us to live creatively revolutionary lives. This hope leads us to bring our whole selves to solving complex problems in broken humanity, believing that the power of God inside us can impact the world around us.

**Strategy:** We embody new life to a dead and dying world. We follow God's commitment to creation and work to redeem and renew broken cultures. As disciples of Jesus, we do not fear death, and that leads us to participate in systems and institutions in ways that can breathe new life into them through our strategic resurrection presence.

### **Ascension and Enthronement (Acts 1:1-11; Rom 8:31-39; Rev 1:12-18; 7:9-11)**

**Story:** Jesus' ascension means that even now he sits on the heavenly throne in powerful authority. Jesus entrusts and empowers the church to guard and carry out his mission until his eventual, similar return. Visions of the ascended Lord sustained martyrs like Stephen and can sustain us as well.

**Skills:** Keywords—Confidence, Patience. We practice serving from a place of deep conviction that intercultural workers are sent by the ruling Lord of heaven and earth. Authorized by the one on the throne, who is worthy of worship, we act with confidence and patience. We practice disciplines that prepare us to give our lives for the cause of Christ.

**Strategy:** We act in confidence and with patient endurance as we have the stamina to practice long-term engagement. We will try different approaches in engaging the world because our allegiance is not to them, but to him who sits on the throne. As we disciple others we equip them with patient endurance, knowing that this path may mean eventually embracing martyrdom.

### **Pentecost (John 14:15-27; Acts 2)**

**Story:** According to Christ's promise, God's Spirit is breathed out and poured out on his disciples. Through the Spirit, Christ is inside all of us. The church has not been abandoned, it is not left alone, but relies on the Spirit's power and presence in every one of the members of her body to breathe life and joy into the world.

**Skills:** Keywords—Power, Presence, Protection, All Disciples. We practice practical dependence on the work of the Spirit in our lives and the global church community. Christ through his Holy Spirit will take up residence in his disciples and work in us to show the glory of God and fulfill God's purposes. Filled with the presence of God's Spirit, we all are empowered to live well as people of wisdom, discernment, and holiness.

**Strategy:** We practice empowering partnerships and resisting hierarchies. Pentecost means that the same Holy Spirit that is in us is also in them. God's Spirit levels the playing field and fills all of his servants empowering us to follow the example of Jesus, writing the new law on our hearts, helping us to find seekers, and sanctifying both us and them along the way.

### **Second Coming (Matt. 25; 2 Pet 3:8-14)**

**Story:** This age will not simply continue as is, but at some point Jesus will return and judge the world, bringing his heavenly kingdom in its fullest form to the earth. The end of time will involve heaven crashing down on earth. The church (Christ's bride) prepares herself and others for the return of the bridegroom (Christ). Though the date and details of his return remain a mystery, the church keeps waiting, working, and witnessing, bringing our end goal nearer and sooner with every act of love and kindness, trusting that God will make good on his promises on that great day.

**Skills:** Keywords—Urgency, Expectation. We have a proper sense of expectation and urgency that comes from our confidence in Christ's return. Since Christ is coming soon to judge the world and see his redemption plan through to the end, we speak to that while also resisting the temptation to act as judge and jury. The spiritual disciplines

keep the truth in front of us that Jesus will put an end to sin, death, and Satan. Enacting this future reality means that participating in it will look less like following a script and more like collaborative improvisation as we bring this reality into being with God.

Strategy: We will engage the powers that be, speaking truth to broken individuals and institutions about justice and a day of judgment. We work with diligence and intensity to dismantle injustice. We are enacting this future realm of reality as we comfort the afflicted and help them anticipate our own resurrection, where God will make something even more glorious out of us. The second coming of Christ also reminds us that the future involves both cities and gardens—the church will reach both urban and rural contexts knowing that the future reality will incorporate both of them.

Seven Movements of Christ	Seven Movements of the Christian in Mission Summary
Incarnation	Being fully and humbly present with others
Life and Teaching	Living the disciple life—one marked by invitation, demonstration, and transformation
Crucifixion	Embracing suffering and service and forgiving others even at deep cost
Resurrection	Assured that death cannot defeat us, we are filled the hope and power of a new creation
Ascension/Enthronement	Authorized by the one on the throne, we bravely act with confidence and patience
Pentecost	Filled with the presence of God’s Spirit, we all are empowered to live and serve well
Second Coming	Confident of Christ’s return, we have a proper sense of expectation and urgency for a just reality

## Conclusion: The Seven Movements of Christ in Practice

The phrase *playing God* is often used to refer to the ways that dictators, kings, leaders (and even missionaries) pridefully act in ways that are destructive and disastrous. They



fail because they play the roles that gods like Mars, Venus, and Mammon model for them. Christians, however, are to embody Jesus' practice of power, since he "is the God we are meant to play" (Crouch 2013, 281). The seven movements of Christ are a practical and memorable framework for education for playing God as revealed in Jesus in contemporary mission. While they do not provide foolproof step-by-step instructions for missional practitioners, they provide postures, pathways, and possibilities for robust participation in mission. In conclusion, I will share three ways to use the seven movements framework to encourage further personal and communal exploration and application.

The first tool is discussion questions that are useful for helping groups unpack the significance of these materials. Early in the teaching process, have people consider something they are good at. Follow that up by asking: How did practice play a role in you getting good at that skill? Who helped you? How was perseverance involved in your improvement? These questions get people to begin thinking about the seven movements in terms of habits and practices. Later, after they are familiar with all of the movements, further questions are helpful: Who do you know who embodies one of these seven movements well? What does embodying that movement look like in their life? Which of these movements does the church do well? Which one of these does the church need to practice more of today? What else stood out to you regarding the movements? How do we see the early church practicing these movements? Questions like these have proven effective in stimulating discussion.

A second tool I have used involves analyzing case studies from the life of William Carey (Howell 2023). Case studies have also played an important role in missions training and education. Many of us are familiar with and were formed by Paul and Frances Hiebert's influential book *Case Studies in Missions* (1987). While that book focused on training for challenging cross-cultural situations, it can also be helpful to use case studies that explore different aspects in the overall formation and work of a missionary. My students read and analyze a series of seven thematic and illustrative case studies from the life of William Carey in light of the seven movements of Christ. After formulating principles gleaned from each of the case studies, I ask them to offer their reflections on the life of Carey as a whole, how they see each of the seven movements of Christ in Carey's story, and how this contributes to their understanding of mission strategy today. Combining the seven movements of Christ with historical case studies has stimulated productive conversations about the past, present, and future of Christian missions.

A third resource for provoking further conversation about application of the seven movements is exposure to art. I show my students pictures of seven wood carvings that my wife Rachel created with a Mozambican wood carver. These carvings represent each of the seven movements of Christ, and I love the way that the scenes depicted are also contextualized to and shaped by Makua-Metto culture. For example, in the incarnation carving, Mary and Joseph are sitting in front of a hut. In the resurrection scene, Mary is carrying a baby on her back the way that our African friends carry them. It is important to remember that missional practitioners will need to contextualize these seven movements of Christ in different contexts. Living out the urgency of the second coming, or the confidence of the ascension in one context may look different than another. We develop discernment skills to know how to practice and participate in each movement well cross-culturally.

The framework of the seven movements of Christ empowers us to participate in the mission of Christ in the world. When Christology shapes our missiology, we corporately honor God in our expressions of ecclesiology in a given context. The seven movements of Christ help missional practitioners develop the missiological imagination necessary to effectively engage and impact the complexities we are encountering in the world today. Educating for contemporary mission is not about trying to choose the silver bullet strategy and “hit a bullet with a smaller bullet” while “wearing a blindfold” and “riding a horse” (Abrams 2009). Instead, participating in Christ through a seven-movement approach is more like learning and embodying ballet proficiency where we are practicing one movement after another while part of a company of dancers in local ways around the world.

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