

DELTA COURSE

Introduction

Introduction – 7

“EVERY TRIBE, TONGUE, AND NATION”

INTRODUCTION

This course is designed to supplement the information in the Omega Course. But the Omega Course is almost a thousand pages! Isn't that enough? For many church planters, it is. However, it would take more than a lifetime to learn all of the principles that experienced missionaries, pastors, and church planters have discovered during centuries of ministry.

The primary goal of the Omega Course is Saturation Church Planting—establishing a local church within the reach of every person. Therefore, a major emphasis of the Omega Course is on how to plant the *quantity* of new churches necessary to make one available to every person. The Omega Course also emphasizes the *quality* of the new churches, discussing universal qualities that churches everywhere should possess in order to be biblical. These characteristics include the importance of grace, the importance of cell groups, the centrality of worship, the training of leaders, etc.

For church planters who are working in their home area, with their own people, the Omega Course serves as a relatively complete guide to the multiplication of churches. However, believers ministering in more complex cross-cultural situations will soon discover that it is not enough to simply create *copies* of the churches from which they came. Instead, the new churches must be *different*. But what can and should be changed to adapt to the new culture and what must remain the *same* in order to be biblical?

Believers ministering in complex cross-cultural situations will soon discover that it is not enough to simply create *copies* of the churches from which they came.

This course is designed specifically for believers who are ministering to people of another culture, language, or worldview. The differences encountered in cross-cultural ministry are not trivial. Cross-cultural church planters need a great deal of patience, understanding, and wisdom in order to minister successfully. This course, like the Omega Course, is intended to be intensely practical and applicable to real-life church planting situations.

I. THE NEW ERA OF MISSIONS

Typical students of the Omega Course can faithfully serve the Lord by planting new churches among their people so that their unique cultural traits are represented before the throne of God. However, if they become missionaries to other cultures, they need to appreciate the positive values of the new cultures and make sure they are included in the worship of the new churches. This cultural sensitivity is all the more important today because of the following facts:

- There is a huge increase in the number of non-western church planters around the world.
- Travel is so much easier and more affordable in this day of cars, planes, and trains.
- More and more believers are going to other countries and languages, for work or ministry.
- More Western nations are recognizing the value of non-western church planters and helping them to go to diverse people groups.

- Refugee relocation, immigration, students studying abroad, and other people movements are bringing diverse peoples into contact with each other—it is no longer necessary to go in order to meet them—they are *coming*!

All of these points illustrate the tremendous *opportunity* that non-western church planters have to work cross-culturally today. However, little has been done to address the need for cross-cultural *training* for these non-western missionaries. This is the emphasis of this course.

II. LEARNING FROM HISTORY

Almost everyone, including churches in the West, understands that Western missions have made tremendous cultural blunders throughout the past few centuries of missionary activity around the world. In most cases, the methods of ministry were probably well-intentioned, and they did manage to establish national churches around the world. However, paternalism and feelings of superiority often left terrible scars on both the missionaries and the churches they founded. To this day, we are reaping the results of cultural insensitivity, including

Western missions have made tremendous cultural blunders throughout the past few centuries of missionary activity around the world.

- Spiritually weak national churches and leaders
- Materialistic believers more interested in aid than in godliness
- Strained relationships between Western and national Christians
- Jealousy over funding and educational opportunities
- “Western-looking” churches that do not fit the local culture or attract unbelievers
- Rationalistic patterns of theology and teaching that do not resonate with the needs of local believers
- Musical, literary, and worship styles that are “foreign”
- Resistance to Christianity as a “Western religion”

Western missions, for the most part, now recognize that many of their past styles of ministry were wrong, and are working diligently to find and implement better strategies. Admittedly, they have a long way to go, but they are moving in that direction. However, “if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall” (1Co 10:12).

It has been said that “those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.” As church planters from countries around the world begin to move out into foreign harvest fields, they must be careful not to repeat the same mistakes that Western missions have made in the past. The grave danger is to think the problem of cultural insensitivity is “Western” when in reality it is “human.”

It is human nature to think that our way is best. Pride is a result of the Fall and affects every person to varying degrees. Even missionaries with extensive training in culture can fall victim to pride in their own cultural superiority. How much easier for a well-meaning church planter with no understanding of culture to try to build an exact copy of his home church among another people! Russian churches do not fit into Kazak culture and Brazilian worship does not match Senegalese style any more than American preaching fits into Filipino society. Any church planter going from any culture to another must adapt to the new situation.

Russian churches do not fit into Kazak culture and Brazilian worship does not match Senegalese style any more than American preaching fits into Filipino society.

III. EXPANDING OUR WORLDVIEW

It is impossible to plant a church that “fits” into another culture until we understand the unique traits of that culture. This is easier said than done. Behavior and outward appearance are not hard to see if we are observant. But the inner thought processes, values, and beliefs that are so much more important to understand are hidden deep within people. Their worldview—a way of looking at the world—must be discovered through diligent effort, unwrapping the levels of culture like peeling away the layers of an onion.

If we are honest, we will find that God has created certain values and characteristics in every culture that are superior to our own. Others traits may be inferior. Some will reflect God’s glory. Others will be fueled by sin. We must identify the things that are good, the things that are bad, and the things that are neutral. It takes great wisdom and much prayer and humility to determine which is which.

An important goal of cross-cultural church planters is to value the new culture in which they minister. In the process, they need to recognize those God-given nuggets of personality that must be preserved in the church planting process. As they do so, they are in a better position to plant and grow a church that will flourish in the new culture, reflecting the Lord’s character.

IV. COURSE LAYOUT

[To be completed later—include section goals, number of lessons, expected outcomes, etc.]

CONCLUSION

In order to fulfill the Great Commission, we must establish worshipping and witnessing communities of believers across the globe. There are three aspects to faithfully completing this task:

1. *Quantity* – We need enough churches within the geographic reach of every person.
2. *Quality* – The new churches must conform to the biblical pattern we have been given, worshipping in both spirit and truth (Jn 4:24).
3. *Diversity* – The new churches must reflect the unique God-given cultural traits that demonstrate the Lord’s redemption of “every nation, tribe, people, and language.”

Church planters who minister in a cross-cultural situation must grapple with the implications of the third characteristic of the new church. It will not be easy since cultural traits arise from deep within the worldview of a person. Furthermore, every culture is a mix of good, evil, and neutral traits. The task is not impossible, however. The church planter who proceeds with humility, prayer, observation, and a learning spirit can steadily unwrap the layers of culture and begin to understand and value the diversity of God’s creation. Only then can they plant a church that is all the Lord intended it to be. This course is designed to help with that important process.

DRAFT