

Mission Faithfulness Requires Short-term Missionaries

By

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A recent headline in the local newspaper, “Missions have been life’s work for local optometrist,” grabbed my attention. What shocked me was the apparent confusion of the news writer. Instead of noting that a local optometrist has dedicated considerable time to missions as one of his life’s interests, the writer flipped profession and missions. Now, the author was not writing about someone with a passing interest in missions, rather, about Dr. Paul Gamertsfelder who he declares “knows well what it means to witness for one’s faith through work” (Mahoney, Columbus Dispatch, October 6, 2006).

Did the journalist make a common mistake by relating “anything one does in the name of Jesus with missions”? Or, was he making a profound observation that Gamertsfelder’s true vocation in life is missions and that his profession, on the other hand, was simply the means of service he used and how he obtained necessary resources to pay his bills?

Mahoney’s article highlights the necessity of discussing how short-term missions fits into any discussion of mission strategy. In a cursory search on the topic on the Internet, one can find hundreds of articles, most of which take short-term missions as a given without discussing the relative merits of this approach within the church’s larger mission efforts. Unfortunately, libraries are not so blessed since few books or journals deal at any depth with the topic. It is not my purpose in this brief article to address this shortcoming or the need for scholarly research. My goal is simply to discuss how the boom of short-term mission programs around the world relates to commonly held mission perspectives. Moreover, how the church can best respond to both the Word and the world today.

My thesis is that faithfulness to the biblical mission mandate and the world’s needs in the twenty first century requires an appropriate short-term missions strategy.

My discussion will be based on seven propositional statements. 1) The biblical mission mandate is both comprehensive and holistic in nature. 2) The call to mission is a call for all believers. 3) Mission requires a pertinent message in each context that is shaped by time and place. 4) How missions is conducted today (missions), is influenced by the intensification of globalization. 5) Long-term missions cannot adequately respond either to the biblical mandate or to the world’s current needs. 6) Short-term missions can and must address some of the shortcomings of the long-term missions approach. 7) Both short-term and long-term missions require appropriate preparation and periodic reeducation and training.

The biblical mission mandate is both comprehensive and holistic

Any discussion about the practice of missions should begin with a solid commitment to a biblical basis for mission. Mission, after all, begins with God. The term, *Missio Dei* recognizes that God's salvation plans, prior even to the "creation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4), are demonstrated by the establishment of a redemptive community "to proclaim his salvation day after day . . . among the nations" (Psalm 96:2-3). Use of the *missio Dei* concept is intended to counter any institutional or individual ownership claims to mission (cf. Bosch 1991, VanEngen 1996). Missiologists emphasize that mission begins with a God who cares enough about His creation to send His people into the world with the purpose of representing His purposes and relaying his blessings. From God's early stewardship charge to his establishment of a redemptive people to his clarification of Israel's calling at Sinai, God initiates and promotes missional responsibility by his chosen people.

While God's initial deployment of his mission agents does not highlight "going," it is clearly God's intention that his people serve as a paradigm of holiness. This is interpreted variously in the Old Testament as "being set apart" for God's service in Leviticus, "proclaiming his salvation" and declaring "his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples . . . in the splendor of his holiness" (Psalms 96:2-3, 10), and "to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God," in Micah (6:8b). Even so, occasionally we do see God's people being sent to other peoples, albeit for brief encounters, e.g. Joseph, Naomi, Elisha, Jonah, and Daniel.

In the New Testament we see a shift from "come see" what God is doing among his people to "go and tell" those who have not heard the good news. Jesus' own incarnation and his witness that he was sent by the Father "to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10) is passed on to his disciples. While recognizing the various expressions of the Great Commission in all of the Gospels, we most often highlight Mathew's version. Nevertheless, John mentions that Jesus referenced his own sending as the model by which his followers were to operate. "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21). We can affirm, then, not only the commissioning aspect, but operational aspects as well. As Jesus, would certainly seem an appropriate way to conduct missions.

David Bosch and others have reminded the church that Jesus did not limit what he had to say about mission to "making disciples," by going, baptizing, and teaching, as spelled out in Mathew's version of the "Great Commission" (cf. Bosch in Shenk, 1983, Costas 1982, Padilla 1975). Just before his final days on earth ended with the crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus described the judgment of the nations. Neither theological affirmations nor religious affiliation were the criteria used by the "Son of Man" to separate the sheep from the goats. It came down to feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the needy, and taking care of the sick and imprisoned (Mathew 25:31-46). Clearly, such an affirmation does not contradict Jesus' commission given a few weeks later. Preaching, teaching, and calling people to repentance and new life in the kingdom were just as characteristic of Jesus' ministry as were touching, healing, restoration, and compassion—all expressions of God's holistic, all-encompassing love.

Both the Early Church and the Apostles demonstrated by their practice their commitment to the holistic nature of mission. While we do not see evidence of all aspects of mission in every encounter, the comprehensive nature of mission is scattered throughout the Acts, the Epistles, and accounts by early church historians (see Neill 1986:35-38). The tired debates about priority

and which should come first ignore the fact that in each encounter, the specific manifestation of God's message and love is determined by the need. That is, while Jesus and the Apostles did not neglect any opportunity to proclaim the gospel, they often began with powerful illustrations of God's compassion and His desire that each individual be made whole by healing the sick and restoring them to their families and communities (Luke 7:14; 8:26-37, Acts 3:1-10; 9:32-41).

In keeping with the biblical mandate, the church must conduct missions holistically. It must also recognize that every dimension of the human condition is included in God's interest and mission mandate. Given the limitations of personnel, finances, and skills within professional missions, the Church can best fulfill the holistic nature of mission by welcoming all those who can provide ministry resources and efforts if even for shorter time commitments. I will argue in the next section that this is not a second best option, but rather, the way God intended it to be.

The call to mission is a call for all believers

A most unfortunate aspect of modern missions is the expectation that a mysterious "call to missions" is a prerequisite for a career in missions. Harold Cook (1954), C. Gordon Olson (1998), and others have pointed out some of the difficulties with this perspective. Cook relates the personal testimonies of some of history's greatest missionaries in "An Introduction to the Study of World Missions," and concludes,

"From this we can see that the missionary call is not likely to come in a miraculous way... if we wanted to define it we should probably have to say that the missionary call is *the 'great commission,' plus the assurance in your heart, no matter how it comes, that God wants you as His witness abroad*" (1954, 95 emphasis in original).

Many of us who work with university students also have to deal with this expectation that those who are called will have some mystical encounter, some voice-in-the-night experience, or a special revelation that they are among the chosen ones. In fact, some young people with a clear sense that God is seeking "workers for his harvest field," and that they are both able and willing to respond, "Here am I, Send me" conclude that they simply are not wanted because they have never experienced that mysterious call. The Bible does not support such a perspective.

To the contrary, we find a shared mission assignment among the descendants of Abraham who, as a people, receive the promise of blessing and the call to be a blessing (Genesis 12:3). Only a materialistic interpretation of Scripture would understand this blessing to be defined by material prosperity. The intent is clarified and reinterpreted at Sinai in the covenant renewal event. God states: "Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5-6). This calling needs little or no clarification because the priestly task is so well understood. Priests serve as intermediaries who speak God's truth to the people, and present the people's petitions and needs before God. A "kingdom of priests" seems a bit exaggerated unless the original Abrahamic covenant is recognized. So many priests do not represent God to each other or each other to God. They represent, rather, the non-priests—those who do not have the privilege of knowing and speaking to God directly. Consequently, then, if the entire nation is called to the priesthood, their task as a people must be to bless the nations by making God's truth and blessings known to all.

The Apostle Peter seems to have understood that covenant relationship this way. He appropriates that meaning and extends it to God's people in his own day. "But you are a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). There is no reason why we should not recognize that this (universal) calling applies to all believers today. Costas, for example, affirms categorically,

While it is true that some among the people of God are given a special gift of evangelization, it should be remembered that the church as a whole has been entrusted with the ministry of evangelization. This means that *the whole people of God are to be responsible for the communication of the gospel at all times and in all places*, using all the means at their disposal (Costas 1989, emphasis mine, cf. Peterson, Aeschliman, and Sneed 2003).

Perhaps the universality of the calling would seem more convincing if believers were to recognize that Jesus includes all of his followers in Matthew's rendering of the great commission (28:18-20). Nowhere does he qualify any aspect of the commission. He testifies first that he has been given "all authority in heaven and on earth." Evidently, he recognizes no limitation of his commissioning power. Then, in his specific command to "make disciples of all nations" he again does not establish any boundaries around the areas to which his followers are to go, unless they have some specialized qualification or calling. A proper rendering of the original text, while somewhat awkward in the English language, could read, "while you are going, make disciples of all peoples ..." It is hard to imagine a more inclusive way of stating the commission. Could that really have been what Jesus intended?

The hundreds of thousands of people, probably over a million every year, according to Huyser, who are participating in short-term missions are testifying to their belief that the call is not as exclusive or as limited as often thought. Some short-term missionaries may still believe that there is a special call that applies to long-term or career missionaries, but they would certainly argue that they too were doing missions on their trip, although it was brief.

In *Maximum Impact Short-Term Mission*, Peterson, Aeschliman, and Sneed argue that,

Our Biblical mandate, with roots reaching several millennia into Old Testament history, must be repackaged today into a facilitating structure which purposely releases the church's average man and woman, the church's average boy and girl—the laity, the non-professionals, the real people, the people who appear foolish, the people who appear weak, the people who appear low, the people who appear despised in the world. That package looks, tastes, and smells quite like what the church already calls 'short-term mission' (2003:28-29).

Could the shortage of career-missionary prospects indicate a need to revise our emphasis on a unique calling to the responsibility of all believers to faithfully, and even, sacrificially offer their lives as cross-cultural witnesses, whether in the home country or in any other? If there is no over-whelming biblical or historical evidence to suggest that there needs to be a different kind of calling for long-term service than there is for short-term service, should not the appeal to obedience and cross-cultural mission be broadened and made more inclusive? However the Lord guides, whether it is to service in the home country or to distant lands should not signify any essential difference in missionary service.

The message must be pertinent in each context –time and place

Can the church get so used to doing things in a given way that it misses the “new thing” that God is doing in another context? The Jerusalem church was in danger of such a culturally biased (ethnocentric) view of the world. Believers from the home church, who took a mission trip to Antioch, informed the believers there that they were not getting things just right. They declared that the new Gentile believers needed to continue certain Jewish practices, without which “you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). How incredibly familiar that sounds!

Here God had been changing the lives of numerous people, certainly a multicultural mix, including Jews, but nobody had gotten around to circumcising the non-Jews among them. Then, along come Paul and Barnabas telling about the conversions they had witnessed in Asia, but they too had failed to enforce the Jewish religious customs among new Gentile believers. Apparently, the visiting believers from the home church were eager to help the missionaries do things the right way. Guided by deeper theological insight and cross-cultural understanding, Paul and Barnabas successfully defend the integrity of Gentile conversions while protecting their cultural rights as Gentiles. In the end, the Jerusalem council concludes that salvation is a gift of grace received by faith in Christ and knows no cultural limitations.

In his magnificent study of contextualization in the New Testament, Dean Flemming (2005) argues that not only did the Apostle Paul adapt his message delivery style to the specific audience he was addressing, but he also adjusted the message content according to the cultural and social context in each location. The same was true of each Gospel writer as it was of the content of the Pauline Epistles. Message bearers, whether short or long-term, must recognize their responsibility to understand the context in order to address faithfully the needs of the whole persons they intend to bless by means of their mission activity.

In the preceding case, the misinformed visitors from Jerusalem could easily represent the many short-term missionaries who remain so briefly in the area where they intend to minister that they unconsciously carry a foreign message based more on their cultural understanding of the gospel than on the heart of the gospel itself. Unfortunately, this confusion of gospel and culture is not limited to short-term mission efforts. In fact, only a few decades have passed since the global mission community has been made aware of the need to contextualize the gospel. It appears that many missionaries have spent considerable effort teaching people in receptor cultures how to do things the right way, “like they do them back home.” From the proper way to dress, organize and program activities, provide leadership, and use resources, to how to worship properly, think about God, or do his work. The idea that context should significantly impact how missions is conducted is still foreign or unacceptable to some folk however related to missions. Contextualization, nevertheless, is indispensable. We are indebted to Flemming for clarifying this fundamental mission concept. He says that contextualization refers to

...the dynamic and comprehensive process by which the gospel is incarnated within a concrete historical or cultural situation. This happens in such a way that the gospel both comes to authentic expression in the local context and at the same time prophetically transforms the context. Contextualization seeks to enable the people of God to live out the gospel in obedience to Christ within their own cultures and circumstances (2005:19).

Whether long-term or short-term, missionaries need to make learning about the cultures in which they work central to their efforts. Unless culture is comprehended at a deeper level than

the observable superficial traits and cultural patterns, missionaries cannot communicate the gospel effectively without mixing their own cultural understandings into the message and lessons they proclaim. Neither will they be able to encourage the resulting church to make the gospel authentically its own, nor fully applicable to its context. We will revisit this theme in the section dealing with orientation and training.

Globalization is intensifying and encompassing much of the world

In many circles, globalization is spit out as a dirty word. Furthermore, it is frequently associated with imperialism, which is seen as the cause of most of the world's present ills. Poverty, corrupt political systems, moral decay, and the loss of traditional values and cultural ways are viewed by many people in various world areas as a consequence of globalization foisted on the rest of the world by the United States and the Western European cultures.

Thomas Friedman agrees that the European and American communities were the primary promoters of what he describes as globalization 1.0 and 2.0. Many of us find it difficult to agree with his optimism, however, when he states, "Individuals from every corner of the flat world are being *empowered*" by this third period of globalization (2005:11, emphasis mine).

Without glossing over its negative aspects, Michael Pocock (2005) defines globalization more acceptably as "a trend of accelerating, compressed interaction between peoples, cultures, governments and transnational companies. It is a heightened multi-directional flow of ideas, material goods, symbols and power facilitated by the Internet and other communication, technologies, and travel." In that light, we need to recognize how powerfully globalization influences the mission enterprise, in many ways positively. Pocock and fellow authors believe, "God has a purpose in globalization, and while we may not have clarity on that purpose, he will not permit it to be thwarted." They argue, "The fundamental fact of population migration, the presence of people of many cultures living together the world over, is not a theological 'problem.' It is a phenomenon we are called to embrace and even to engage" (2005).

The increased awareness that people all over the world have of each other allows —begs, rather, the global church to respond to desperate needs in distant places. Undoubtedly, some responses are temporary or too superficial to provide long-term solutions or to make a significant impact on the focus group. Nonetheless, God appears to be using the greater awareness, greater accessibility, and greater availability of resources because of globalization to mobilize his church toward areas of immense need in ways never before imagined. A few minutes of reading the testimonials on the Church of the Nazarene Web site should be sufficient evidence of this new thing that God is doing. Could it be that this almost limitless throng of volunteer missionaries, facilitated by accelerating globalization, will be the means God intends to use to accomplish a worldwide harvest in this age?

The magnitude of the world's problems appear so devastating that many people might ask, what good can I do when the need is so immense? One ophthalmologist did not allow the vastness of the problem to intimidate him; he collected, rather, as many eyeglasses as possible, and with his skills and expertise proceeded to treat hundreds of needy people in distant places. While his short-term mission efforts did not change the whole country, they certainly changed the persons he was able to treat. Moreover, using specialized skills and gifts, he demonstrated Jesus' loving compassion in a way that few long-term missionaries could have done.

Limitations of long-term missions

Mission history provides innumerable stories of men and women whose lives were spent sacrificially for God and the people around the world. From William Carey's days to the past decade or so, the missionary calling has been understood commonly as a life calling although all missionaries have not served on the field until the end of their days. William Taylor's study, "Too Valuable to Lose: Exploring the Causes and Cures of Missionary Attrition" (1997), suggests that missionaries are "long-term" resources that are being lost (by whom?) because many are ending their service earlier than in decades past. While the study focuses on causes, unfortunately by asking mission leaders instead of the "lost" missionaries themselves, the research does not address a larger question. Does God have anything to do with this apparent loss, or could He be orchestrating the involvement of multitudes of lay-missionaries by redirecting the careers of many former long-term missionaries?

At issue, then, is whether there are enough long-term or career missionaries to fulfill the mission mandate and adequately address the world's current needs. Even if the attrition problem could be fixed, the stark reality is that no denomination, church, or mission agency has enough long-term resources, human or financial, to adequately address the needs in the world today. Two-thirds of the people in our world, approximately four billion people, are unreached by the gospel. Add to that challenge, the fact that nearly half of those same people are victims of immense suffering caused by political turmoil, the dehumanization of poverty, slavery, war, and the Aids/HIV pandemic.

In avoidance of attrition and other contingent problems, the church seeks to prepare long-term missionaries properly which results in long delays in field deployment, contributing further to the shortage. Not only do aspiring missionary candidates have to spend many years acquiring the necessary education, but also have to add extra years in order to pay off the accumulated debt before they can actually go to the field. This not only signifies the loss of precious time, but also youthful energy and creativity, which may get stifled along the way.

Along with the time and financial burden accumulated in the preparation stage, many long-term candidates become so specialized in their focus that they are not comfortable with basic witnessing, discipleship, and other general ministry practices. The church wants and needs experts in building, communications, technology, bookkeeping, literature preparation, and many other fields. While justifiable, this specialization can also contribute to discomfort with the more fundamental obligation of all believers to communicate their faith effectively and the capacity to disciple new believers, and welcome them into new communities of believers.

Some years ago, a former colleague reminded me in conversation that he was assigned to the field to teach a given subject area. On another occasion, one colleague made clear that his mission was to build buildings, and yet others indicated that their jobs were to take care of the mission finances. Without question, these particular tasks must be done, but the issue is whether that was really their mission. They seem so at odds with what the biblical mission assignment entails. Can any missionary, whatever her or his specific assignment may be, be anything less than a full-time witness of the gospel, a dedicated disciple maker, and a committed church planter/builder? Perhaps one effect of the long-term missionary assignment is the entrapment of process and procedure to the extent that vision and mission calling are lost in the details.

Peterson, Aeschliman, and Sneed argue that there is a need “for both the professional and non-professional (short-term) missionary,” albeit “the non-professional is still God’s number one choice, because the fools who succeed only do so because it’s obvious to everyone else that it’s God Himself working through them” (2003:23). While their statement seems provocative, we may need to take it seriously. Could our attempts to send out only the best, those that we have chosen by elaborate assessments, field-testing, and specialized training create unnecessary, and perhaps, unbridgeable gaps between those who go and those they are sent to reach? Certainly, history informs us that God has often used the simple, the less educated, and the unsophisticated to perform wonderful ministries.

A myopic understanding of the missionary task may also result from and promote a non-incarnational approach to ministry. Missiologists and mission historians have often noted that isolation behind walls and fences, or office centered ministries which largely isolate missionaries from the hurting people of the country of assignment do not look like the intense, culturally significant relationships which Jesus and Paul cultivated throughout their ministry careers. Lack of full immersion into the community and culture also prevents an adequate understanding of the “multi-dimensional” needs in that context. It is too easy to see the drunks, the street children, or the prostitutes without developing an adequate understanding of the deeper systems of evil that work themselves out in these manifestations of sin. The church cannot fully engage people in their reality with the whole gospel unless the mission community fully grasps that reality.

One of the probable results of the incarnational approach is the development of pertinent ministry responses specific to each context. Because no context is identical to another, cloned approaches usually do not fit because they do not fully engage the unique characteristics of the culture, the particular needs of individuals in each setting, nor take into account the available gifts and abilities of those God has placed in that context. Incarnation, contextualization, and strategy are interlocking components of New Testament missions.

A short-term missions strategy may help address some of these limitations

The lamentable shortage of resources –finances and long-term missionaries– is not true when you add short-term missions into the equation. The new paradigm is one of limitless resources. Because every generation, every church, and every nation can be –must be– involved in missions, available resources become infinite. Dare we believe that God’s plan is big enough to encompass the entire world in every generation? Could He intentionally have left some out in spite of Jesus’ claim that he didn’t want “any to perish” or Paul’s assertion in 1 Timothy 2:3-4 that God “wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth”? I do not believe that God is at fault either in His plan or in His communication of that plan to His people.

Contrary to other mission tendencies, short-term missions is a lay movement, which includes spontaneity, enthusiasm, naïve trust in God’s grace and power for ministry, and the will to go anywhere and do just about anything. In spite of its shortcomings, this movement follows patterns established by the New Testament believers, the monastics, the Moravians, Wesley’s mass movement, the “Jesus Freaks,” and other more recent popular movements. History, of course, reveals many flaws in those movements that may blind us to the incredible contribution they made and are still making to the Gospel’s impact on the world. Indeed, without them, we would not be followers of Christ, or promoters of His mission.

An essential aspect of the short-term missionary movement is that every professional skill, ability, talent, and gift is potentially available for ministry, albeit for short time periods. Other resources, as well as boundless enthusiasm, awe, and expectation that great things will happen often accompany such skills. Furthermore, short-term missionaries are strongly connected and supported by home communities and churches that eagerly anticipate great things to happen while their representatives are on the field. The potential for increasing prayer and financial support is notable.

Most short-term mission assignments are often, if not usually, directly in contact with the people of the focus area. With appropriate guidance and training, these contacts are inclined to be incarnational, relational, and practical. When short-term missionaries do not have direct involvement with the people, they usually protest. Young people, especially, have little interest in projects that do not allow them to interact with the people with whom they seek to share their love and energy. Because of this, ministries carried out by short-term missionaries are mostly hands-on, with the additional benefit that these encounters do not last long enough for short-term personnel to take ownership and create dependence.

Short-term missions also helps the church get involved in community projects beyond those ministries usually classified as spiritual. They involve compassionate responses to the hurting, to those that the surrounding society considers “outcasts,” and may indeed address the needs of the entire community, whether part of the believing community or not. Because these short-term mission activities are incarnational responses to local needs, they are not viewed as foreign nor irrelevant projects.

Any rosy optimism about short-term missions, however, must be tempered by the results of ongoing discussions and research. In a series of exchanges on ChristianityToday.Com during June and July 2005, Abraham Huyser Honig, Kurt Ver Beek, Robert Priest, and others discuss the long-term benefits, stewardship issues, and the resulting effects of short-term missions on the receiving communities. As I read the discussion, it appeared to me that the scope of the research was insufficient for any clear-cut conclusions about the validity of this mission approach. On the other hand, it certainly should serve to raise “red flags” about unconditional endorsement without addressing the real or potential dangers of this approach. Randy Friesen’s research (2005) while uncovering several positive results of a short-term mission thrust in Kenya also discovered that the long-term effects on the team members were less than positive. The implications he derives from his study support a strong emphasis on training before and after any such assignments.

All mission participants require ongoing educational orientation and training

The root of many mission challenges is theological. What is mission about? There needs to be clarity as to the holistic nature of missions, the “universal priesthood of all believers,” the holistic approach of Jesus and the Early church to the entire person, to the community. We must maintain the central truth of the first Church Council in Acts 15: that salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ and is not dependent on the works of the law. It is too easy to forget about the cultural challenge to the faith in Acts 15, and Paul’s claim that in Christ the cultural, ethnic, and social boundaries have been torn down (Eph 2:12-18). We humans seem to devise and erect barriers of one kind or another to demonstrate that our interpretation of Christianity is superior. It seems, at times, that we are not convinced that the Holy Spirit can guide the national believers into all truth without our assistance and intervention. Missionaries, whether long-term or short-term, need to

set aside the task addiction that afflicts so many of us, to engage in theological discussion of the nature of our calling and how we might contribute to its critical contextualization. Without a doubt, this should occur no less often than annually, and should include the national leadership.

Although missiologists have been advocating the study of anthropology as a means of understanding and learning other cultures, cultural competency has yet to gain more than a nod in the preparation of future cross-cultural workers. Louis Luzbetak, Eugene Nida, Charles Kraft, and Paul Hiebert have all written extremely helpful texts on the ministry of the church in other cultural contexts, and how missionaries should approach their task with cultural understanding. Some cross-cultural workers seem to view culture as little more than a collection of strange customs, different perspectives on time and space, and use of a distinct language. Hiebert, especially, offers guidance to missionaries so they can comprehend how worldview provides the underlying assumptions on which cultures are established, and how these provide guidance for everyday cultural practices (1985).

Most recently, writing specifically for short-term missions, David Livermore calls for “Serving with Eyes Wide Open.” How could anyone argue with that, particularly with the sub-theme: “Doing Short-Term Missions with Cultural Intelligence” (2006)? Livermore’s numerous anecdotes illustrate how misguided many short-term mission participants are in their attempts to carry out mission, if indeed that is what motivated them to participate on any given mission trip in the first place. Sadly, not only do we recognize misguided team members, but badly informed congregations and the use of improper motivations to recruit participants. With his discussion of improper motivation, Livermore’s text could be sub-titled “Doing Short-Term Missions with *Theological* and Cultural Intelligence,” certainly a necessary corrective.

Understandably, Livermore doesn’t pay attention to the need for language proficiency since he is writing for short-term missions. Sadly, he also reflects a North American bias against language learning. The popular perspective is that since people all around the world are learning English, “why should I bother learning another language that I may never need?” As missionary anthropologists emphasize, you cannot fully understand another culture nor clearly communicate the gospel unless you learn how that culture expresses its deepest meanings. Language is the primary vehicle for doing that. While participants in short-term missions can hardly be expected to master a foreign language, even a serious attempt to learn basic expressions is a powerfully convincing demonstration of love and commitment to those who receive short-term missionaries. Long-term missionaries should be excused even less from serious language learning. Moreover, it should be a life-long pursuit, perhaps sustained as a validation of a career commitment.

Furthermore, missionaries need to be learners rather than sages. Both short and long-term missionaries do not take Christ with them to people in other places. At best, the goal is to introduce people to the Savior and Lord who is already there, long before we get there, and guide them in their initial attempts to become His disciples. While a greater temptation for long-term missionaries, short-term and long-term missionaries may both be tempted to believe that they are taking the solution to peoples’ problems with them. Missionaries, however long they stay, need to remain learners since many underlying issues are not readily visible to cultural outsiders. Before you can give the answers, you have to know the questions.

Closing Comments

Does short-term missions fit into the long-term mission strategy of the church today is certainly a valid question. On the other hand, it may also be legitimate to ask whether long-term missions is the best answer to the world's current needs and the most suitable projection of the biblical mandate to missions. As is true of many other issues, the response can hardly be to affirm one approach while rejecting or seriously limiting the other. I agree with Livermore that short-term missions must be incorporated into the church's larger missional response. In fact, as I have argued from the outset, I do not believe the church can be faithful today, either to God's mission mandate or to the global challenges that confront the church without doing short-term missions. I would add the qualifier, without an *appropriate* short-term missions strategy.

Without an intentional training and re-educational process it is unlikely that the full potential of non-professional short-term messengers can be realized. Even so, do we really need to develop a program that regulates, certifies, and eventually stifles the short-term mission efforts that arise from the church's periphery as a serendipitous –Spirit inspired– embracing of God's calling? I believe the answer should be a firm no. Don't meddle with what God is doing! Yet, the church could encourage thoughtful discussions of the biblical and theological foundations of missions, provide appropriate training materials that promote cultural intelligence, eventually leading to a full contextualization of the message and practice of the church in every place.

In many ways, the Church of the Nazarene has a leading edge on missions preparation since several colleges, universities, and seminaries around the world offer missions programs in their curricula. Moreover, mission training programs such as the program offered by the *Centro de Formação Missionária* (Missionary Training Center), in Campinas, Brazil, recognize the need for mission education to be available for those who do not need or intend to complete formal theological programs. Unfortunately, the availability of such programs for those who intend to participate in missions, not necessarily as career or long-term missionaries, is not widespread. A global dialog about missionary preparation, whether long or short-term, should provide the basis for a curriculum that local and regional agencies could make available to all those who wish to fulfill the biblical mandate in more meaningful and culturally appropriate ways.

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