

Pioneer Missions

With today's emphasis on unreached peoples and frontier missions is there still any justification for missions outside such categories?

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Abstract

Siegmar Göhner is a missionary working in northern Uganda in the area of pioneer groups and discipleship; his wife is a medical doctor. The essay examines the matter of imbalance regarding the emphasis of most missions when it comes to involvement in reaching out to new and 'unreached' peoples. He questions our understanding of 'unreached' and the sufficiency of pioneer missions alone. Any engagement in missions requires a clear understanding of the mandate of The Great Commission the fulfilment of which he sees as a process which we have attempted to oversimplify. The whole world remains the domain of missions in Göhner's thinking. He goes on to look at Paul's strategies and practices in the light of today's emphases in mission and believes that we have tended to misinterpret many of his procedures and goals.

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Introduction

Missions is not merely a continuous cross-cultural process of witnessing about Jesus. According to Matt. 24:14, missions has the definite goal of preaching the gospel globally 'as a testimony to all nations'. Completion of this task is conjoined with the dramatic climax of world history, the Return of Christ.¹ Understandably, preoccupation with 'finishing the task' seems natural to Christians. Add to that the near magical attraction of ending a millennium, proposing a popular time-frame for closure, and it comes as no surprise to see invigorated mission efforts around each of the two millennial transitions since the Great Commission was given.

At the turn of the twentieth century, this found expression in 'the "incredible whirl of activities" relating to the A.D. 2000 movement'.² The central idea underlying this 'whirl' as well as an assessment of this movement's impact is succinctly expressed in 'Introduction to World Missions'. Moreau, Corwin and McGee write, 'the priority of reaching unreached peoples' ... 'as opposed to unreached people' ... 'has been established in global mission strategy to the position of primacy'.³ Today, the official website of the Joshua Project⁴ speaks of 6,547 unreached peoples groups out of a total of 15,935 peoples. These unreached peoples constitute the major missions frontier of this movement.

I attempt to examine this question: With today's emphasis on unreached peoples and frontier missions is there still any justification for missions outside such categories?

The practical relevance of this question was impressed upon me shortly before being commissioned for missionary work to Uganda, where 66% of the population adhere to Christianity.⁵ A member of my sending church in Germany asked, 'But why Uganda, when there are so many unreached areas elsewhere?' Revisiting this question today, after almost 14 years of service in Uganda, bears some semblance to the Apostle Paul's experience when he presented his gospel to the Jerusalem leaders, fearing he 'was running or had run his race in vain' (Gal. 2:2).

This essay consists of two main sections, plus one practical application.

- The first section deals with core presuppositions of Frontier Missions, leading to an assessment of the validity of its singular focus on the frontier of unreached peoples.
- The second section examines the biblical roots of missions in order to establish whether there remain genuine justifications for missions at other frontiers.
- The third part consists of subject-related impressions from missions in a country with a 'Need-for-Pioneer-Missionaries-Rating' of 0.03.⁶

¹ D.J. Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict: 10 Key Questions in Christian Mission Today* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2005), p. 306.

² D.J. Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, p. 290.

³ A.S. Moreau, G.R. Corwin and G.B. McGee (eds.), *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical and Practical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 2004), p. 221.

⁴ Joshua Project – Unreached Peoples of the World, A ministry of the U.S. Center for World Mission, <<http://www.joshuaproject.net/index.php>> [accessed 19/11/2006].

⁵ U.S. Department of State – Home Page, Bureau of African Affairs, Background Note: Uganda <<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2963.htm>> [accessed 20/12/2006].

⁶ M. Visser, 'Where Are Pioneer Missionaries Needed? The N-Formula', *EMQ* Vol. 40, No. 2 (April 2004), pp. 220-227.

Despite being personally involved, I wish to approach this subject solely as a quest for truth. Hopefully, the findings will be of value to some of the 448,000 foreign missionaries⁷ presently serving world-wide.

The Mandate of Frontier Missions

It is not the objective of this essay to explain or even mention the many concepts, strategies, terms or agencies that have been created and discussed in more than three decades of Frontier Missions. A concise presentation of the central ideas will suffice to demonstrate the compelling logic of this strategy as it builds up towards one conclusive goal, namely the concentration of mission efforts on the remaining unreached people groups. At the same time, Frontier Missions raises questions, which need to be faced squarely to ensure our missions' philosophy remains true to the realities of the world we desire to reach.

The Compelling Logic of this Concept

This is understood best against the backdrop of two major problems.⁸ Paradoxically, it was the apparent success of world evangelisation which obscured the realization of these obstacles hindering the completion of the missionary task.

Obstacle 1: Two Billion 'cut off' despite Christianity's Growth

The following figures, established by the Lausanne Statistical Task Force, show an acceleration of Bible-believing Christians in relation to the total world population.

It took 18 centuries for dedicated believers to grow from 0% of the world's population to 2.5% in 1900, only 70 years to grow from 2.5% to 5% in 1970, and just the last 30 years to grow from 5% to 11.2% of the world population. Now for the first time in history, there is one believer for every nine people worldwide who aren't believers.⁹

This historical perspective demonstrates an encouraging trend! However, if these figures are understood as proof of the missionary task nearing completion, they may, in the final analysis, only prove dreadfully misleading.

A closer look reveals that the Christian world population constitutes growth mainly in regions, countries and among peoples where the Church was already present. This means, almost one third of the world's population still remains cut off, because no relevant churches exist within this segment. Should the Church fail to find ways to reach these unreached people groups, this positive trend may eventually come to a halt.

The reasoning behind this concern is rooted in the following observations:

- The gospel's greatest potential for growth is within communities bound together by the same language and culture.

⁷ D. Barrett and T. Johnson, 'Status of Global Mission, AD 2006, in Context of 20th and 21st Centuries', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* Vol. 30, No. 1 (2006), p. 28.

⁸ For a masterly presentation of these insights consult R.D. Winter and B.A. Koch, 'Finishing the Task: The Unreached Peoples Challenge' in Winter, R.D. and Steven C. Hawthorne (eds.), *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, Third Edition, Fourth Printing, 2000), pp. 509-524.

⁹ R.D. Winter and B.A. Koch, 'Finishing the Task', p. 509.

- For the gospel to spread between different people groups, it encounters cultural-linguistic boundaries.
- If such boundaries are reinforced by prejudice and hatred, the extension of the gospel will be complicated even further.
- And since such negative attitudes most commonly exist between immediate neighbours, natural progression from one people group to the next may not readily occur.

Previous mission strategies with their focus on the millions of people still living in spiritual darkness failed to realise this problem. An emphasis on people groups, coupled with a growing readiness to apply social sciences including cross-cultural dynamics to missions, was needed to shed light on this predicament.

What is the proposed solution?

A host of well trained, highly motivated, cross-culturally sensitive Christian workers who consciously aim at penetrating these frontiers! Nothing short of the creation of viable indigenous church planting movements can count as a missiological breakthrough. Such congregations will then effectively evangelise their own people, free from cultural and linguistic encumbrances. This is the logic of Frontier Missions! However, at this point realisation of problem No. 2 sets in.

Obstacle 2: The Scandalous Imbalance

Ralph Winter and Bruce Koch speak of 'The Great Imbalance' while David Barrett and Todd Johnson call it 'The Scandal of World A'. The following quotes explain what they mean:

Only an estimated 10,000 of the global foreign mission force⁷ [their footnote number] are working within the 10,000 unreached groups, while 41 times that number of foreign missionaries continue to work within people groups already reached. What an imbalance!¹⁰

Presently, more than 70% of Christian effort and ministry is directed at people who already profess to be Christians, while less than 5% of our total missionary activity is focused on those who have never once had a chance to hear about the good news of the Gospel. This is the scandal of World A.¹¹

Of course, such scandalous imbalances call for a radical redistribution of all Christian resources.

¹⁰ R.D. Winter and B.A. Koch, 'Finishing the Task', p. 519.

¹¹ World Christian Database, Center for the Study of Global Christianity, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Global Christianity - World A: The Unevangelized World, <<http://www.gcts.edu/ockenga/globalchristianity/worlda.php>> [accessed 27/11/2006]. Definitions of World A, B, C are provided in the Appendix.

Proposed Solution

Barrett and Johnson appeal to Christians, 'to ensure that the resources which are under their own direct control' ... 'get properly shared with all'.¹² Moreover, they do not confine themselves to call for a far greater concentration on World A, they candidly suggest a 'significant' and 'deliberate' restriction of resources to the other two worlds, B and C.¹³

While many Christians will applaud this as appropriate, it also appears like jumping to conclusions and solutions before all the necessary questions are answered or even asked. I propose to ask and attempt to answer some of these questions now.

Answering the Tough Questions

'Imbalance' is not a morally charged word; it may simply state facts without seeking blame. 'Scandal' is associated with wrongdoing, guilt and shame. So, is the Christian world guilty? Or is this uneven distribution of mission resources the result of factors outside and beyond the Church? In other words, is it simply an imbalance or is it a scandal? Finding answers must be relevant to our quest - for reasons we shall soon discover.

Complex realities involving different nations and numerous peoples on the one hand and a multitude of denominations, mission agencies and individual missionaries on the other, would call for a nuanced treatise. The nature of this essay restricts us to merely pinpoint two major options.

Option 1: The 'Unreached' are 'Unreachable'

Writing about the 10/40 Window, where the majority of the least reached peoples are located, Robertson McQuilkin, author of 'The Great Omission', states, 'These are not only the least reached, they are the least reachable, the most resistant. In fact, because of religious, political, and cultural barriers, they are also the least accessible'.¹⁴

Winter and Koch dislike such terms. They insist, 'when a people seems "resistant" it may only mean our approach has been defective'.¹⁵ As proof, they point to the 'Muslim block' which is full of people with 'very favourable attitudes towards Jesus Christ'. Of course, maintaining this positive outlook is imperative for advocates of Frontier Missions, and, we readily admit, Muslim's esteem for Jesus can be a stepping stone. However, this high regard is directed to 'their Jesus', the second greatest prophet, not to the unique Son of God and dying Saviour whom Christian missionaries preach. This biblical Jesus remains a '*skandalon*' and 'stumbling block' (1 Cor. 1:23)!

Theological differences are not the only cause for Muslim hostility; the West's pursuit of dominance, as well as the moral and ethical breakdown of 'Christian civilisation' are other well established factors. Similar factors constitute seemingly insurmountable obstacles for the gospel in more than one place and beyond the Islamic context. Avery T. Willis, Jr., Vice President of the International Mission Board and missionary to Indonesia writes, 'Any time a

¹² D. Barrett and T. Johnson, 'Global Diagram 24', <<http://www.gcts.edu/ockenga/globalchristianity/gd.php>> [accessed 27/11/2006].

¹³ Since definitions of Word A, B, C give room for more than the singular frontier identified by Frontier Missions, this call becomes more acceptable. Nevertheless, because of their close relation, especially in popular perception and influence, they are taken together here.

¹⁴ R. McQuilkin, 'Reached and Unreached Mission Fields', in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions on CD-Rom*; printed edition: Moreau, A.S. (General ed.), *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000), p. 809.

¹⁵ R.D. Winter and B.A. Koch, 'Finishing the Task', p. 519.

major religion aligns with a political power or has the support of a political system, it resists the gospel and does not allow its people freedom to choose Christianity.¹⁶

In view of this, terms like 'resistant' or 'inaccessible' seem to be valid descriptions of the world in which missions is carried out. Such factors cannot be ignored, when it comes to thinking about the great imbalance in the distribution of missionary personnel and finances! They should not be taken as excuses, but they do offer one genuine explanation. And should this situation not change considerably, it remains questionable whether a radical reversal in the distribution of missions-resources will lead to the desired success.

Of course, alternative mission strategies like creative access platforms and non-residential missionaries constitute options to bypass 'religious and political gatekeepers',¹⁷ leading to previously barred but ripe harvest fields. Also the rising missionary force of the Two-Thirds World, which does not wear the negative ethical, political and historical sticker of the West, offers genuine hope.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the existence of resistance to the gospel is a reality that cannot be denied!

Given the case then that the unreached peoples are still not easily reachable, we may ask, 'Why should millions of unconverted people who are accessible and perhaps even receptive be ignored?' To simply state, 'They do not qualify, because they do not live between the designated latitudes or they belong to the wrong ethnic group', will not be satisfactory! We readily agree to give special attention to unreached people groups, yet it remains questionable whether it is helpful to the cause of missions to deliberately restrict human and financial resources toward any mission field that does not lie in these frontiers. The legitimacy of such considerations is consolidated by the fact that the missionary capacity of today's Church seems big enough to accomplish both.¹⁹

Option 2: Missions has fallen into the Trap of Ease and Success

The writers of 'Introducing World Missions' make no attempt to be pleasing. To them it is indisputable,

many of the least-reached peoples remain that way because when choices need to be made, other avenues of service appear much more fruitful and attractive. Reaching the least reached requires so much energy and focus that it rarely fares well when more immediate and receptive competitors have a stake in the missionary's time.²⁰

This may simply appear like the other side of the same coin; yet in my view, it is an altogether different currency of unacceptably low value. The reason is this: The reality of 'resistance' and 'inaccessibility' locates the root cause for insufficient missionary involvement beyond the missionary community's influence. Missionaries could still be blamed for lack of ingenuity, fear, or feelings of inability ... attributes and emotions which may be unnecessary, unfounded and at times they may carry an element of moral wrong. Yet, generally, they are understandable and human, but not evil.

¹⁶ A.T. Willis, Jr., 'The Unfinished Task' in J.M. Terry, Ebbe Smith and Justice Anderson (eds.), *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History and Strategies of World Missions* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), pp. 668-684 (673).

¹⁷ A.T. Willis, Jr., 'The Unfinished Task', p. 675.

¹⁸ J.D. Chancellor and Jeffery Wasserman, 'The Religions of the Middle East: Islam and Judaism' in J.M. Terry, Ebbe Smith and Justice Anderson (eds.), *Missiology*, pp. 379-399 (392).

¹⁹ Winter and Koch calculated 'approximately 670 churches in the world for every remaining unreached unimax people group'. R.D. Winter and B.A. Koch, 'Finishing the Task', p. 523.

²⁰ Moreau, A.S., G.R. Corwin and G.B. McGee (eds.), *Introducing World Missions*, p. 222.

On the other hand, negligence of hard places based on considerations such as personal success or comfort, reflect motivations strongly condemned by biblical values. For this there is no excuse!

To conclude, I state the obvious: The uneven distribution of missionary resources is both an imbalance and a scandal. The reality of 'resistance' and 'inaccessibility' calls for continued prayer, ingenuity and courage. At the same time it seems to justify a missions' perspective which makes allowance for frontiers other than the frontier of unreached people groups. Wherever wrong aspirations and sinful motivations have contributed to the predicament of the remaining unreached peoples, a return to high ethical standards is necessary. This would do a lot on account of both, correcting the imbalance and reducing the scandal. Whether it is realistic to expect this to happen on a major scale is another tough question. We will not attempt to answer it now. There is, however, one further question that needs to be asked.

How compelling are the concepts of Frontier Missions in reality?

Since these concepts are rooted to no small extent in the field of human sciences, rather than divine revelation, it may not only be permissible but necessary to question their authority for missions. Science, by definition, excludes the supernatural which is so essential to biblical missions. What about God's own initiative and ingenuity to overcome obstacles for the gospel? And then, is it really so easy - almost manageable - to plant a church that becomes a viable church planting movement?

Also, the many uncertainties related to constantly developing definitions and changing qualifications underlying the huge amount of statistical data that is so basic to Frontier Missions, constitute another aspect that calls for caution. Yet, despite evidence of awareness in missiological circles,²¹ a great proportion of the Christian community seems to have succumbed to the compelling rhetoric of Frontier Missions, unquestioningly so! And it is here, I propose, where harm may have been caused by the justified, yet sometimes undifferentiated and too radical calls for redistribution of missionary resources.

It is not my intent to empty the concepts of Frontier Missions of all value. In fact, I find many of them rather attractive! In the end, it may be exactly this attractive 'neatness' which raises a degree of doubt, whether these concepts can live up to the complex realities in which missions takes place. If they can not, the neglect of all other mission frontiers in favour of unreached people groups would prove disastrous.

Christ's Mandate for Missions

While scrutinising different motives employed to challenge the Church for missions, David Hesselgrave, cautions against 'human invention' which 'can obscure divine intention' and proposes 'a missionary motivation that holds more potential and promise.'²² God's Word itself, 'provides the basic context, content and correctives that the Spirit uses to guide and guard us in global mission.'²³

To the Word of God we will now turn! Does Frontier Missions rightly reflect Christ's Mandate? We shall seek light from Christ's Great Commission and Paul's Missionary Practice.

²¹ E.g. G. Corwin, 'Just Where Are the Frontiers?', *EMQonline.com* (April 1992)

<https://bgc.gospelcom.net/emqonline/emq_article_read_pv.php?ArticleID=2974> [accessed 20/09/2006].

²² Hesselgrave, D.J., *Scripture and Strategy: The Use of the Bible in Postmodern Church and Mission* (Pasadena: Evangelical Missiological Society, 1994), pp. 138-141.

²³ Hesselgrave, D.J., *Scripture and Strategy*, p. 144.

Justification from the Great Commission

The five versions of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-49; John 20:21; Acts 1:8) define various facets of missions. At least four arguments, in favour of missionary service in areas other than those defined by Frontier Missions can be drawn from this.

Discipleship Demands Time

The 'finite imperative' from Matthew's commission is 'make disciples'.²⁴ Obviously, this points to work beyond the proclamation of Good News. 'Go' in the context of 'all nations' is a directive for crossing borders and prohibits 'settling down'. Yet, how long are missionaries allowed to stay? When does discipling end?

The difficulty lies with interpreting 'teaching them to obey everything ...' George Peters assigns ample time, 'Discipleship is a perpetual school which may lead from one degree to another but does not graduate its scholars.'²⁵ This apt remark holds certainly true in a general sense, but is it appropriate in the context of the Great Commission? In the final analysis, our finest churches would qualify as mission fields! R. Garret, Professor of Missions, offers helpful advice, 'the specific content of missionary teaching is to develop the skill of "observing whatever Jesus commanded."²⁶ Rather than teaching 'all things', a focus on what 'produces stronger Christians' is necessary. Understood in this way, 'teaching' suggests a longer yet by no means unlimited process.

Since it is impossible to find a definite timetable, we simply constitute the time-consuming nature of this imperative and note that Christ's mandate obviously lacks the 'precise definitions' and 'neatness' so apparent with Frontier Missions.

The Gospel is for 'All People' not just for 'All Peoples'

Matthew's and Luke's '*panta ta ethnè*' is the preferred lens for Frontier Missions to view the world. It would be unfair to suggest its proponents deny that ultimately 'all people' should be given a chance to respond to the gospel. However, this comes more like an afterthought. It took 15 years for Thomas Wang's 1980 theme 'A Church for Every People by the Year 2000' to be enlarged to include '... and the Gospel for Every Person'.²⁷ The missionary's task is predominantly a church-planting focus on unreached peoples. Reaching people is shifted away from 'missions' to 'ordinary evangelism'.

Strategically this makes sense! And surely it is not unbiblical. But is it binding? And, does it reflect the biblical ideal?

The 'whoever believes' in Mark's commission puts focus on individuals. While those who have no access to the gospel are in a disadvantaged position, they are not more 'lost' than those who have a church nearby. But in the end it will be individual people '*from every nation, tribe, people and language*' who will stand before the heavenly throne (Rev. 7:9 [my emphasis]).

²⁴ E.J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission* (trans. E.J. Schnabel; Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), vol. 1, p. 355.

²⁵ G.W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), p.189.

²⁶ R. Garrett, 'The Gospels and Acts: Jesus the Missionary and His Missionary Followers' in Terry, J.M., Ebbie Smith and Justice Anderson (eds.), *Missiology*, pp. 63-82 (74).

²⁷ D.J. Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, p. 289.

The fact is: The Great Commission includes both! It is the command to take the gospel to 'all peoples' and to 'all people'. Therefore, unconverted people constitute a valid mission field, even if they do not belong to unreached people groups.

The Whole World constitutes the 'Arena for Missions'

'Jerusalem, all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' are geographical rather than ethnic descriptions²⁸ and do not stop short of complete coverage. The 'and' of Acts 1:8 binds the whole world together! Therefore, missions - according to Acts - is mission at the frontiers of unreached peoples living in the 10/40 window 'and' unreached people everywhere! The word 'all' (in connection with Judea and Samaria) gives saturation evangelism an integral place in the missionary task. Of course, this stands in contradistinction to the concepts of Frontier Missions. Additionally, because the Great Commission places responsibility on all Christians – regardless of nationality -, missions is truly and increasingly 'from everywhere to everywhere'!²⁹

Fulfilling the 'Complete Process' of Missions

The Gospels and Acts present us with 'five versions' of 'one commission'. Therefore the missionary task is best understood as one package! Going, evangelising and discipling belong together. Only 'together' do they constitute the complete process of missions.

This view would question the practise of aspiring mission-agencies entering areas of an already established church. Yet it would certainly justify the continued ministry of the initial missionaries and their respective agencies, for some time, after the initial period of conversion and baptism has passed. I want to recommend this as a rule for healthy missions practise! The benefits could be tremendous!

Mission-fields, oversaturated with personnel of different agencies, often suffer from competition. Such problems would be limited if the influx of aspiring mission agencies could be redirected to contemplate new and unreached mission fields. Instead of intensifying the scandal of missionary imbalance such practice would gradually help to reduce it. Targeting new frontiers as well as teaching disciples would be taken care of in a fair and healthy manner.

Considerations from Paul's Missionary Practice

If there is a pattern of missionary ministry in the New Testament, it must be found in the life and work of the Apostle Paul. What can we learn? Herbert Kane, formerly professor of missions at Trinity Evangelical School, suggests,

Like every good missionary, Paul had two goals in mind. His immediate goal was the speedy evangelization of the world. His ultimate goal was the establishing of local churches. The latter could not be accomplished by a ten-day crusade; so Paul made a practice of remaining in each city long enough to establish a church.³⁰

²⁸ E.J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, vol. 1, p. 373.

²⁹ M. Nazir-Ali, *From Everywhere to Everywhere: A Worldview of Christian Witness* (London, Collins, 2000).

³⁰ H.J. Kane, *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective* (Michigan: Baker Book House, Paperback edition, 1989), p. 82.

Two important questions: 'What was Paul's strategy for "the speedy evangelization of the world"'? And, 'How long is "long enough to establish a church"'? These questions relate to the heart of missions in general and to Frontier Missions in particular.

What was Paul's Strategy for World Evangelization?

Paul's method of evangelizing the world through planting churches is not under dispute here. However, three questions deserve attention.

Did Paul's Churches constitute Church Planting Movements?

Kane is enthusiastic, Paul planted 'mission-minded churches' ... 'in the major centers of population and they in turn engaged in "saturation evangelism", making 'themselves responsible for the total evangelization of their own regions'.³¹ Sounds wonderful! Is it true?

We do not need to insist that Paul personally and literally ventured into every town and village to spread the gospel. Yet to create the impression, that the indigenous church readily accepted and executed this responsibility, unaided by missionary support, plainly runs contrary to the biblical account. For example, Acts 18:23 indicates an extensive regional involvement on the part of the Apostle. Secondly, Pisidian Antioch and Ephesus are two locations from where the gospel spread throughout their respective regions (Acts 13:49; Acts 19:10, 20). However, the expansion originating from Antioch was the concurrent by-product of the missionaries' city-wide crusade (Acts 13:44). The regional expansion from Ephesus is directly linked with extraordinary miracles and exorcism (Acts 19:20). Again, God's primary instrument was the missionary (Acts 19:11)! Further, F.F. Bruce's suggestion, that a number of Paul's colleagues founded the churches in the nearby Lycus valley during this same period, would explain Paul's relative 'lack of personal acquaintance' without excluding his missionary supervision (cf. Col. 2:1; 4:12-13).³² These are the scriptural factors leading to the extensive evangelisation of these regions; and they were all part and parcel of Paul's missionary involvement, not a post-missionary indigenous endeavour!

Defining missionary responsibility from the 'original textbook' rather than putting popular ideas into it, would assign to missionaries a more comprehensive role than the one assigned by certain recent publications.

Did Paul think in Terms of Ethno-Linguistic People Groups?

Most references to Paul's apostolic calling mention 'Gentiles' and 'Jews' alike (e.g. Acts 9:15). During New Testament times, 'Jew' was a primarily religious designation, whereas 'Gentiles' pointed to the entire non-Jewish world.³³ Galatians 2:7-9 assigns strategic priorities along these lines. Additionally, Paul's calling was 'to all men' (Acts 22:15). Other scriptures include geographical details (Acts 22:21; 26:20) or point to the spiritual frontier between 'darkness' and 'light', i.e. the dominion of Satan versus God's rule (Acts 26:17-18). Terms like 'regions' and 'no more place' in Romans 15:18-24 confirm that Paul's strategic thinking was along geographic rather than ethnic lines.

³¹ H.J. Kane, *Christian Missions*, p. 82.

³² F.F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., reprinted 1986), p. 389.

³³ P.A. Blair, 'Gentiles', in J.D. Douglas (Organising ed.), *New Bible Dictionary* (Illinois: IVP, 2nd edn, 1982), p. 414.

Closest, perhaps, to a missionary awareness along ethnic lines are phrases like 'all the Gentiles' (Rom. 1:5; 2 Tim. 4:17), because they highlight the plurality of nations. But New Testament commentator, Leon Morris, interprets Paul's fondness of the word 'all' simply as 'largeness of vision', as opposed to provincialism.³⁴ Whether Paul understood his vocation to include literally 'every' people group remains doubtful. Because of the statement 'by the command of the eternal God' in Romans 16:26, some missiologists see a direct link to the Great Commission.³⁵ Again, Morris thinks the additional Greek preposition 'eis' before 'panta ta ethnè' gives it the more likely meaning "as far as" the Gentiles; i.e., it reaches throughout the world'.³⁶ The distinction between gentile nations in Romans 1:13-15 indicate broad categories like 'civilised' and 'educated' as opposed to 'savage' and 'ignorant', not separate ethnicities.³⁷

If at all present, 'people group thinking' - in the sense of Frontier Missions - seemed to be very faint in Paul's call and theology. The frontier of unbelief, strategically viewed in geographical and broad cultural blocks, was paramount! In comparison, ever finer definitions like 'unimax people' appear quite particular! Did Paul have a conscious missiological reason for placing strategic emphasis on geography rather than ethnicity?

If highlighting the unifying aspects of Christ's work (Eph. 2:14ff) was Paul's way to safeguard the fragile unity of the church, would strategies based on ethnic distinction not carry potential danger? Surely, Paul showed cultural sensitivity (Acts 16:3, 1 Cor. 8:13) and willingness for personal adaptation (1 Cor. 9:19-23). Undoubtedly, there is a place for contextualisation and indigenisation. But if these aspects are elevated to unrestrained heights, will they not soon prove counterproductive to the Church's universal culture, the new identity in Christ? Whatever is planted into newly tilled ground is what we should expect to grow and harvest later. The future will show whether an almost singularly ethnic outlook in missions will bring forth an entirely good crop.

Did Paul have a Concept of Closure?

Commenting on Romans 15:18-24 Howard Marshall deliberates:

Paul saw himself as entrusted with at least part of the major task of proclaiming the gospel to all nations as the necessary condition for the parousia of the Lord Jesus. His aim therefore was to hasten that coming by getting round the world as quickly as possible. It was sufficient for this purpose that he preached the gospel 'representatively' in each area of the world rather than that he literally reached every person.³⁸

However, Marshall then concedes, 'there is nothing of this consciousness in Romans 15' and suggests to best understand this passage as 'a strategic endeavour to found churches as centres of continuing Christian work'.³⁹

Instead of involving ourselves in speculations, we can safely draw these conclusions: Paul's statement, 'there is no more place for me to work in these regions' (v. 23) points to the possible end of a missionary era in a particular region. Combining Paul's claim, to 'have fully

³⁴ L. Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), p. 51.

³⁵ A.F. Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God's Mission in the Bible* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2003), p. 291.

³⁶ L. Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 547.

³⁷ L. Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 61-65.

³⁸ I.H. Marshall, 'Luke's portrait of the Pauline mission', in P. Bolt, and Thompson M. (eds.), *The Gospel to the Nations: Perspectives on Paul's Mission* (Apollos, IVP, 2000), pp. 99-113 (104).

³⁹ I.H. Marshall, 'Luke's portrait of the Pauline mission', p. 104.

proclaimed the gospel' (v. 19) with our earlier findings about apostolic involvement in regional expansion, we might feel confident to define (only from the strategic point of view!) what may constitute the end of the missionary era for any particular region. I propose two factors: Pioneer church-planting should have covered a considerable area and the gospel should have spread widely. Only then may we turn our eyes to new fields! And as we do, we should be mindful, not to duplicate or exploit other missionaries' efforts (v. 20). In such a way, there is hope for our present mission fields, hope for regions yet unreached, and finally there is hope for closure!

How long does it take to establish a church?

Kane rightly reports that Paul's church-planting activities were often cut short by the fierce hostility of religious opponents. Nevertheless, Paul 'usually managed to remain at least two or three months. In some cases, such as Corinth and Ephesus, he stayed much longer.'⁴⁰ What about the results? Kane claims, 'in every city' ... Paul 'left behind a strong and growing church that could carry on after his departure.'

I suggest filling in a few details will create a scenario, more faithful to history, and more helpful for missionaries aspiring to follow the biblical pattern.

A Case Study: Ephesus

Ephesus seems suitable, first because a detailed record is available and secondly, it was one locality Paul left voluntarily.⁴¹ Ephesus, therefore, constitutes a 'complete' pattern of missionary church-planting, not an aborted one. Here are some relevant details:

- Three years seem like a reasonable time-frame (The time Jesus needed to disciple the Twelve). Teaching was comprehensive and of highest intensity (Acts 20:27, 31). Extraordinary miracles and power encounters were expediting factors (Acts 19:10-20).
- Paul's initial visit merely created interest, yet he expressed a desire to return (Acts 18:20-21). Meanwhile other highly qualified Christian workers continued with the work (Acts 18:19-26). After returning, Paul found at least twelve disciples, deficient in certain areas, yet teachable (Acts 19:1).
- Paul spoke persuasively in the synagogue for three months (Acts 19:8) before increasing opposition forced them to assemble in the lecture hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9-10). Here, Paul continued this arduous ministry for two years.
- And - as if all of this was not enough - Paul later called for the elders to meet him on the way for further encouragement, warning and instruction (Acts 20:16-38). Finally, Paul had to 'tear' himself away from these elders (Acts 21:1). Was his awareness that they would not meet again the only reason for this? Or, did he consider these three

⁴⁰ H.J. Kane, *Christian Missions*, p. 82.

⁴¹ A riot put pressure on Paul (Acts 19:23-20:1); however, the Apostle had already decided to leave earlier (Acts 19:21).

intense years still not sufficient to detach himself without reservation? The content of Paul's instructions supports both.

Such details from the original mission's script do not only paint a more colourful picture than the faint black and white strokes of some more current writers; they raise concern. Will missionaries, with their minds full of task-oriented mission concepts, have equal space in their heart for the spirit of people-concern so forcefully exemplified by Paul? Failing to balance the urgency of world-missions with a deep commitment to spiritual growth and consolidation, would definitely prevent even the best of our efforts to ever reach the standard of Paul's.

What about Paul's efforts which suggest a shorter time?

After re-examining the chronological information of Paul's three mission journeys (e.g. Acts 14:3), I agree with Howard Marshall's suggestion, the "journey" motif needs considerable qualification'.⁴² To interpret these trips as 'a kind of whistle-stop tour, stopping in each place only long enough to establish a small group of believers and then dashing on to the next place' is a misconception. In order to maintain a truthful context, I submit the following - more general - principles:

To consolidate initial church planting efforts, Paul paid personal follow-up visits (Acts 14:21-22; 15:36; 18:23), sent delegates (e.g. 2 Cor. 8:16-18) and engaged in extensive writing ministry. Also, the important interconnectedness between local churches - creating an awareness of the universal church - was ascertained (Acts 16:4; 1 Cor. 16:3; Eph. 3:6). Preaching, teaching and prayer constituted intense struggles for the high goal of presenting every convert perfect in Christ (Col. 1:28-29; cf. Phil. 1:3-11). Despite putting these churches under local leadership and committing them to God's grace (Acts 14:23), his apostolic concern never ceased (2 Cor. 11:28).

I conclude: For Paul, leaving didn't mean forgetting, nor did it mean the end of apostolic supervision. Missions, after all, is not a programme; it is winning people and leading them to maturity in Christ. This can only be achieved by genuine love expressed in an unrelenting commitment to their well-being. Yet, such qualities, once allowed into the heart, are hard to get rid of.

Additionally, next to the structural and doctrinal maturity of the church, the missionary's responsibility includes safeguarding her from 'indigenous isolation' by assuring regional and international relations develop. These need to be added to our previous list of qualifying factors for the possible closure of particular mission fields.

Considering these truths together, one cannot avoid the impression of immense tension between the conflicting demands of reaching out to the regions beyond and the taxing and time-consuming task of establishing the church. Neither the Great Commission nor the practice of the Apostle Paul provides exact data to determine the perfect point of departure for a missionary force. Such lines cannot be as easily determined as some missiological concepts appear to suggest. The biblical record is more flexible; and therefore – in my judgement - more realistic.

⁴² I.H. Marshall, 'Luke's portrait of the Pauline mission', p. 102-103.

Impressions from the Perspective of a 0.03 N-Formula Country

According to Marten Visser's N-Formula⁴³ Uganda ranks at place 160 out of 187. 'N represents the need for pioneer missionaries', which is determined by 'the strength of the existing church' and 'the number of missionaries' already present. Consequently, Uganda's 'N' is a low figure of 0.03. This puts Uganda among the fifty-one countries of 'Category Four' with sufficient missionaries, possibly having an over representation. True? Yes! And No!

Are all 'Missionaries' Missionaries?

David Garrard's contribution to 'The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements' may shed some light on this ambiguity. Pointing at Uganda's poverty status and the AIDS epidemic, he explains, 'The majority of the larger pentecostal denominations are involved in some form of relief' ... 'Many missionaries and mission agencies are involved in relief alone.'⁴⁴

Marten Visser admits, the range of his results would have been 'slightly narrower', if statistics of pioneer missionaries had been available. Since they were not, 'the many missionaries and mission agencies' ... 'involved in relief alone' - as mentioned by Garrard - seem to have tarnished Visser's results. Obviously, Visser is aware of this problem. The explanation of his N-Formula is punctuated with a detailed treatise on possible limitations and he needs to be commended for this conscientiousness! However, who bothers to consider all these qualifying remarks, when a glance at his table can gather 'facts' so easily?

So, here I am - a missionary in a country of '0.03 N'. Should I not better pack my bags and go to ... Poland⁴⁵ perhaps? Or, should I simply stop calling myself 'missionary'?

Why am I here? And what am I doing?

I am here because God called me! I am doing what I perceive to be his will! God's guiding hand is obvious – at least to me, my family, our leaders and home-churches and – I trust - also to our partner church in Uganda.

Christian Relief Work

The problems created by AIDS and 20 years of civil war in Northern Uganda demand a visible demonstration of God's love. Therefore, our mission includes 'some form of relief'. Yet, if this was the only work we were doing - however valuable and important - the 'Foreign Missions' on our letter-heads should perhaps be replaced by 'Christian Charity' or something along that line.

When it comes to church-work, I would classify my work in at least four different categories.

Maintaining International Fellowship and Partnering in Missions

There are occasional visits to regions of former pioneer involvement of our mission. The church in these areas is fully established now and generational transition in leadership and pastoral taskforce bring about a natural phase-out. Can these visits legitimately be called

⁴³ M. Visser, 'Where Are Pioneer Missionaries Needed?', pp. 220-227.

⁴⁴ D.J. Garrard, 'Uganda', in S.M. Burgess (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, revised and expanded edition, 2002, 2003), pp. 273-276 (276).

⁴⁵ In Visser's Formula: World ranking 2, N-Figure 115.01.

missions? Perhaps not! Even our evangelistic preaching should best be described as 'foreign participation in E-1',⁴⁶ because it would be carried out just as well without my involvement.

On the other hand, severing these historical ties prematurely would not only have deprived the national church of much needed assistance in more than one area; I, the foreign missionary, would have been robbed of valuable friendships leading to fruitful partnerships for outreaches to newer mission fields. If I was to speak about 'success' in our mission, I would consider this partnership between foreign missionaries, mission minded pastors and home-missionaries as key.

Participation in Consolidating 'Evangelistic Districts'

Districts with a limited network of churches and unconsolidated leadership are designated 'evangelistic districts' within the Pentecostal Assemblies of God Uganda. There might be truth in the statement, 'If it was not for the involvement of the Volksmission from Germany, the churches in some of these areas would exist no longer!'⁴⁷ Personally, I would want to emphasise the role of other district leaders and the national executive in this! Today, most of these districts have leadership representation on the national executive.

Evangelism and Church Planting in Neglected Areas

From the very first visit to Karamoja, this most neglected and dangerous region captured the centre of my interest. If there is an overrepresentation of missionaries in Uganda, then it is certainly not felt here. Resistance against Christianity has been registered officially.⁴⁸ Initial objections against missions in this area stated: 'According to the law of missions we should concentrate on the receptive!' Today, the growth of the church in this unreceptive region is the pride of the fellowship.

Would I consider the last two areas 'mission work'? According to my understanding of New Testament definitions: Yes, definitely!

Looking to New Frontiers

In 2006 we made our way to the small mountain tribe of the Ik in the furthest north-eastern corner of Uganda. The Ik do not live in the 10/40 Window and, according to the Joshua Project, they are not classified as 'least reached'. A Catholic Father used to visit these people, but since he was killed many years ago, the fruit of his efforts has mostly subsided. Certain websites give reports of what appear to be more recent 'hit and run' missions, claiming big results but leaving little evidence behind. Now, God has given us an open door to a conglomeration of four small villages. We believe to have detected God's guiding hand and are praying, working and worrying for our first converts to grow and for a church to be established.

And there, standing on these mountains we see Sudan; a country with 141 'least reached people groups' out of a total of 244!⁴⁹

⁴⁶ E-1 is part Ralph Winter's popular concept delineating three kinds of evangelism. E-1 represents 'evangelism among people of the evangelist's own culture'.

⁴⁷ Statement made by the Superintendent of the Pentecostal Assemblies of God to the Foreign Missions Director of the Volksmission during a visit in 1998.

⁴⁸ Karamoja Data Centre, <<http://www.karamojadata.org/ethnicgrouping.htm>> [accessed 1.11.2005].

⁴⁹ Joshua Project, <<http://www.joshuaproject.net/countries.php>> [accessed 30/12/2006].

Do we think of closure?

Yes! At least in the sense of coming to the end of the missionary era in Uganda! But as we think, we continue to work and care, giving priority to areas without a church, struggling to reach these hundreds of thousands of people with a very limited knowledge of the gospel. And in that process we are teamed up with mostly younger people, adept at learning and culturally close to these least reached peoples beyond the mountains.

David Garrard comments about East Africa:

There is still much to be done in terms of evangelism and teaching, but it is most likely that missions in this region need to reappraise their role, as needs have changed greatly during the last 100 years. If East Africa is going to be reached for Christ, it will not be the missions that will make the difference – it will be East Africans.⁵⁰

I agree, wholeheartedly! To help to inspire and equip some of these African Christians seems like another good reason to stay just a little longer. May God help us not to pass on mere concepts, but also the right spirit that is so vital for missions!

Conclusion

I want to reaffirm that it is not my intent to minimise Frontier Missions' important contributions to world-missions, most notably their renewed focus on the least reached peoples. This may indeed be a much needed emphasis for our time! Only, the exclusiveness of their focus, leading to a disregard of other valuable contributions towards the same cause, is not the registered trademark of New Testament Missiology! Respect should be mutual!

In the process of writing this essay, a delayed copy of 'Today's Pentecostal Evangel' was placed in my Post Box. One article caught my attention.⁵¹ Familiar names like 'Corinth, Berea, Thessalonica ...' are mentioned; but also terms like 'barriers' and 'resistant'. The report claims, 'fervent Christianity can be hard to find' ... 'Pentecostal leaders lament the loss of nearly an entire generation ...' The article is interspersed with repeated calls for missionaries to be sent to this 'truly needy mission field!' Was there not someone, somewhere, who said, 'I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ ...' and 'there is no more place for me to work in these regions'?

Appendix

Definitions of World A, B, C

World A is the unevangelized world, or those individuals who have not yet heard of Christ, Christianity or the Gospel. **World B** constitutes those who have heard the Gospel, but have not yet responded. **World C** speaks of those who are professed members of a Christian church. In the case of countries, peoples, cities provinces, and other large segments, World A is those that are less than half evangelized; World B, over 50% evangelised but less than 60% Christian, and World C, over 60% Christian or over 95% evangelized.⁵²

⁵⁰ D.J. Garrard, 'Africa, East (Survey)', in S.M. Burgess (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, pp. 4-5 (5).

⁵¹ K. Horn, "'Also to the Greeks'": An ancient nation at a spiritual crossroads' in *Today's Pentecostal Evangel* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House (May 07, 2006), pp. 18-25.

⁵² World Christian Database, <<http://www.gcts.edu/ockenga/globalchristianity/worlda.php>> [accessed 27/11/2006].

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