

Partnership for the Sake of the Least Reached

An Evangelism Model for our Times

INTRODUCTION

Missions is impossible without money. Money often sours relationships between western missions and the national church they have birthed. The recipient feels that those with the money have the power. On the other hand the mission has to account accurately and faithfully to its supporters.

With the rapid development of third-world missions many former assumptions about the wise use of the missionary dollar are under scrutiny. Both the new global reality and the maturity of national churches have forced the wealthy-nation mission agencies to rethink the old assumptions.

In this article I will point to a way forward for mission/national church partnership in world missions.

THE CURRENT DEBATE

We live in a major transition period of world missions. Western agencies are rethinking their policies or partnership with the developing world church missionary program. On the one hand groups like Christian Aid and Partners International raise huge amounts of money in the west to support indigenous workers. For example the Mission Statement of Christian Aid U.S. states: “Christian Aid seeks to establish a witness for our Lord in every tribe and nation (Matthew 24:14) by supporting highly effective native missionaries who serve with competent indigenous missions boards in poorer countries overseas.”ⁱ Some of these groups have left the impression that the day of the western missionary is over because “native” missionaries can do the job better. After all they know the language and culture much better than a foreign missionary.

At the other end of the spectrum are those who still invest heavily in sending people. They feel that by only sending money and not people, the missionary nerve-cord of concern will be severed. They believe the “go” command of the Great Commission is incumbent on all. Dr Ralph Winter and Glen Swartz from the US Centre for World Evangelisation are exponents of this view. Jim Plueddemann, General Director of SIM expresses it this way; “If that call is ever diluted to simply “Send money,” we will lose our sense of God’s heart for the world. Our missionary vision will be reduced to fundraising and mission’s tours. Of course we must help national churches to fund their ministries. But we need to help responsibly, without creating an unhealthy dependence that robs churches of initiative and ownership in their missionary outreach.”ⁱⁱ

Between these two extremes, some wealthy-nation mission agencies have begun to reassess their former non-negotiable policies in regard to indigenous support. They have realized that true partnership is found when each party brings its own resources to

the table, placing equal value on the mutual contribution. For example, some from the west have tended in the past to place too high a value on finances and technology. Some now place a higher value on the resources of personnel, language fluency, cultural identification, and accessibility to target groups offered by the non-western participant. They have come to recognize these resources may be more valuable than money and technology. With this mutual understanding, new avenues are opening for the development of partnerships that will empower third-world missions in ways that have been elusive in the past.

A RECENT MODEL

In Bangkok recently the Alliance World Fellowship, Asia Pacific Region launched a new strategic missions partnership involving eight Asian churches and four Western C&MA mission agencies. The purpose of the partnership is two fold. First to reach Thai students, contract workers and professionals world-wide. Second, to facilitate the emergence of a missions agency in the C&MA Thai National church. The International Network for Thai Overseas (INTO) is facilitated by a Filipino missionary couple to Thailand, which is the contribution of the C&MA Filipino National church to the partnership. Finances and prayer support for the partnership come from other partners. The Thai national church will contribute by seeking a couple to begin church planting among an Unreached Thai group in another nation, possibly Isaan contract workers in Taiwan. Hand in hand the partners from East and West will work for the evangelisation of the Thai.

CONCLUSION

In this new era of missions, missionary recruits cannot just come from the West, Asia, Africa and Latin America. As the World Evangelical Fellowship, Iguassu Affirmation declares: "Participation by, and awareness of the global church, as well as mission from people of all nations to people of all nations, are needed for a valid Missiology in our time."ⁱⁱⁱ Recognizing the financial inequalities between churches, the Apostle Paul urges the Corinthians to give so that "at the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need."(2Cor.8: 13) Therefore we must all work together to do this task. Let us combine our resources, old and new, experienced and pioneer, church and mission, western and non-western, and hand-in-hand, carry out the task to completion.

ⁱ From Christian Aid's web page.

ⁱⁱ What is the Cutting Edge in Missions?, Article on the SIM web page, 27th January 1999.

ⁱⁱⁱ Iguassu Affirmation, Global Consultation on Evangelical Missiology, October 10-15,1999, Iguassu, Parana, Brazil.