

Editorial: Education—A Key to Frontier Mission Advance

Spring Training

Spring always brings a new season of baseball to the United States. But before the professional teams begin competing against one another, they each take some time to focus on preparation. Due to the time of year in which it occurs and the purpose of this exercise, they call it Spring Training.

Preparation is also essential for frontier missions. Certainly if there is to be "A Church for Every People" then many hundreds and thousands of Christians must get involved in many, many roles. Each must be prepared for his or her participation.

I realize that there are a great number of missionary personnel already trained and deployed throughout the world. Yet reaching the unreached peoples will require new workers and new supporters, new methods and new initiatives. This means recruiting and training new people and stimulating the previously-educated current missionary work force to see themselves as key players in the effort to finish the task.

But who should be equipped for frontier mission involvement? For which roles? How should they be trained? What is essential to the various curricula? How does frontier mission training relate to existing educational programs and bodies of knowledge?

Every article in this issue represents a portion of the educational task facing the frontier missions movement today. I trust you will find the articles and this introduction provocative and enlightening. In no way should you expect this to be a comprehensive manual for frontier mission training, but rather see it as a springboard for further thinking and planning.

Where it all begins: The local church

Most believers gain their foundational mission education in the local church. It is in this context that they are taught how to interpret the Bible, prioritize their affairs, set goals, view the world, and a host of other basics. A person usually gets their first impressions about missions in the church. Impressions like: Missions is... boring or exciting, overseas or across the street, for perfect people or for the eccentric, and so on. These connotations will affect every denotation about missions they ever encounter in life.

In 1904, John R. Mott published a book recognizing the importance of the local church in mission training and advance. His book focused on the individual with the most influence in the church: The Pastor. We have printed

some powerful excerpts (beginning on p. 47).

Mott believed that the task of world evangelization would move full steam ahead if only the local churches would be more supportive: with finances, personnel and prayer. But to accomplish that, there needed to be solid missions education in the church. And in order for that to occur, the pastor would need to lead the way. Not just administratively, but with all his heart.

I took up residence on the campus of Dallas Theological Seminary in 1993 for just this reason. My family and I moved from Pasadena (we're on staff with the U.S. Center for World Mission) to Dallas to try to impact the thousands of people who received their training at Dallas or who are currently in the process of getting it, with frontier mission vision. Most of the graduates become pastors. Will they be assets to the frontier mission movement?

What about those trained in other seminaries and church-based leader training programs? Are they effectively prepared to lead the churches in world evangelization as Mott mandates?

AD2000: The time factor

It is no secret: education takes time. We humans often take years to learn very simple lessons. So how much time should be invested in educating people for tasks related to the goal of "A Church for Every People by the Year 2000?"

For a moment, let us imagine a significant question in the minds of many who hear about this closure goal: "Is it feasible for young Christians to be recruited, get mission training, raise support, get to an unreached people group, learn the language and culture, and establish a strong, witnessing church movement within the group by the end of the year 2000?"

Now obviously there are other scenarios for getting the job done, but each of these steps is being pursued by those involved in frontier missions. Why?

We must continue to pursue mission training and preparation on every level because we cannot know for certain when the task will be completed. It is not right to focus on the year 2000 to the extent that we neglect to teach our children about God's mission, or fail to prepare a new generation of church leaders for world evangelization, etc. Frontier mission education must truly be for AD2000 & Beyond.

But the key is that *God* is in charge. *He* can cause all peoples to be reached before the year 2000. Today things are

moving faster than we ever expected; certainly *God* is accomplishing things that we did not plan as outcomes of *our* educational systems. Luis Bush highlights this sovereign power of God in his article on "The Changing Role of the U.S. Church in World Evangelization" (pp. 53ff). Will we *by faith in our great God* commit ourselves to doing everything in our power to help evangelize the world by AD2000? Are those of us in educational fields urging our students to join the AD2000 Movement?

Our authority: The Scriptures

All Christian education must be based on the Word of God. Frontier mission education is no exception. Yet historically, Christians have interpreted the Bible in many ways. Can Christians from a wide spectrum of perspectives be involved in frontier mission training, or only those from one viewpoint?

Let me take you back to the world of baseball for a moment. Each summer, the most popular players in each league form an All-Star team, a composite from the different teams in the league. When they play the All-Star game, each player wears the uniform of his own team. So the American League All-Star team has a few players with Detroit Tiger uniforms, some with Boston Red Sox uniforms, etc. But they unite to win as an All-Star team.

In a similar way, there are educators from various "teams" playing ball on the frontier missions "All-Star" team. They are committed to the common game though they may wear a different uniform than you do. There are people from a wide range of evangelical perspectives who are nonetheless committed to establishing "A Church for Every People."

Though this may be obvious, I want to stress this fact of unity in diversity because our views of Scripture are most likely to produce disunity, due to the importance of the Word and our respect for the Lord who revealed it. Will we take sufficient time to listen to each other so we can understand each other and consider the merits of the other's position? I hope so. And even if we still disagree after interaction, I pray we will still accept each other's participation in frontier missions.

The kind of interaction to which I refer surfaces in the article by Harold Dollar and the critique by Hans Weerstra (pp. 59ff). Dollar claims that Luke-Acts portrays the twelve apostles as models for frontier missions, rather than disobedient to the Great Commis-

sion. His view differs from that of Don Richardson, published in the revised *Reader* of the *Perspectives* course. Hans Weerstra takes issue with Dollar, not because he is defending Richardson's view, but because he believes Dollar is interpreting the Scriptures from a pre-understanding that has been shown to be lacking.

Why this disagreement? I think part of it stems from the fact that some people more readily focus on particular passages, noticing how they differ from other portions of Scripture. (E.g. that God commanded Israel to destroy certain wicked nations, but Jesus commissioned His followers to make disciples of all nations.) Other interpreters see the big picture more readily, identifying the common threads throughout. (E.g. the missionary purpose of God.)

Can these two kinds of interpreters learn from each other? Yes. As we strive to develop a full-blown missionary hermeneutic, let us draw from the strengths of both the detail people and the big picture people. When we teach the missionary message of the Bible, we must demonstrate proper handling of the details in the passage and its immediate context. Otherwise, the detail people will reject our generalizations. But we must also learn to interpret individual passages in light of the mega-context of world mission, or else we will be using the Bible for lesser purposes than the grand, global purpose God is in the process of fulfilling.

I am excited to see healthy dialog taking place. We have much to learn from one another. Let us test our methods of interpreting Scripture with critical thinking and ground our teaching of the Bible in thorough exegesis. That way we will be more likely to convince those not yet committed to frontier missions, and equally important, to accurately communicate God's revealed truth. I commend Richardson, Dollar, Weerstra, Hesselgrave and others committed to frontier missions for their pursuit of scholarly biblical research. Proper understanding of Scripture is not only vital to frontier missions education, but is also essential for the health and vitality of the entire body of Christ. Without it, can we expect the Church to fulfill the Great Commission?

Theology: Relevant issues

Out of our study of the Scriptures and motivated by our need to address the relevant issues of our day, flows our theology. In this issue we include a position paper by Cottrell and Burris regarding "The Fate of the Unreached" (pp. 67ff). They are convinced that people cannot be saved from eternal judg-

ment without hearing the specially-revealed gospel which missionaries bring.

This theological issue ("Are the Heathen Lost?") is key to all missionary activity. In our introductory course on world missions at Dallas Seminary, we devote an entire lecture to this topic. You or I may not agree with Cottrell and Burris on every point, but they have greatly helped us by alerting us to the contemporary debate and taking us to the Scriptures. Will frontier missionary advance be stalled by a resurgence of the belief that God will somehow save the unreached without missionary intervention?

Who should we educate?

As stated above, it is vital to help pastors and other church leaders gain a frontier mission vision. But what about the laity? Ralph Winter makes a strong case for training lay people in Classical (or Frontier) Missiology (see pp. 73ff). He challenges many of the assumptions we have about who should be trained for ministry, where and how they should get their education, and more.

How should educators in existing mission training institutions respond? Should those of us in seminaries or colleges abandon the residential approach and begin missiological education by extension? Is our training accessible to the right people? Which educational approaches will best prepare God's people for frontier mission-active roles such as pastors, lay church leaders, pioneer missionaries, etc. What are the best avenues for general missions education? for specific training?

Educational research

One of the best ways to determine the answers to these questions is to conduct the kind of research Jonathan Lewis is doing. He has taken the DACUM process to Latin America seeking the competencies required of missionary candidates. (See "Profiling the Latin American Missionary" on pp. 81ff). He developed the list of competencies in consultation with those who have a stake in the outcome of the educational process. The resulting profile gives a basis for educational objectives and methods. Look at the profile Lewis compiled. Is there a frontier element missing?

Unreached peoples research

This issue closes with three Global People Profiles. How do they relate to the theme of education? Well, these profiles are the fruit of research and research is essential to the educational process in many ways. Just as in secular fields, a great deal of missions re-

search is conducted in conjunction with academic programs. For example, many people profiles are being prepared by students in the *Perspectives* course. In addition, researchers provide new information for teachers to pass along to their students. Data regarding unreached people groups are obviously essential as we equip folks for frontier mission involvement. What other kinds of research should we be pursuing?

Please give your input

Would you take a few minutes to let us know what you think? (See p. 47.) What kinds of scholarly work are needed if there is to be "A Church for Every People by the Year 2000"? We want to publish the most vital articles in the *IJFM*. Send your comments soon.

Involve your students

As an incentive to get students involved in frontier mission thinking, we are initiating a Student Papers Contest (see p. 48). Careful research, thinking and writing are vital to the educational process. We want to stimulate this process toward completing the missionary task. Will you alert your students and give them advice? If you are a student reader, make plans now to submit a paper.

Fall ISFM: Training for the Frontiers

Consider setting aside time to attend the Fall conference of the International Society for Frontier Missiology, September 18-20, 1993, in Houston, Texas (see back cover). The focus will be frontier mission education. Let us make every advance we can in the educational sphere!

Editorial roles

In closing, I must say that contrary to previous announcements, I am unable to assume the full editorial duties of the *IJFM* due to time constraints. However, I will be assisting Hans Weerstra, who will continue to serve as editor.

Richard A. Cotton
Associate Editor, April 1993
Dallas, Texas USA

CORRECTION

The *IJFM* incorrectly listed Leonard Tuggy as the General Director of the Conservative Baptist Foreign Mission Society in the January 1993 issue. His correct title is Asia Ministries Director at CBFMS.