

EDITORIAL: Training for the Frontiers—Back to the Basics

Last September, in Houston, Texas the International Society of Frontier Missiology (ISFM), in joint program with the Evangelical Missiological Society, held its eighth annual conference discussing the theme: "Training for the Frontiers." This issue is a special edition reporting on the events of that conference. Every article (with the exception of the prayer profile on the Fulani) is a literal transcription of a presentation made at the conference.

In most cases—as with the original presentation—the articles are followed by two responses that are followed by comments and discussion by participants from the floor. Except for one or two presentations, and a very stimulating panel discussion at the end of the conference (we are willing to provide cassette copies or transcripts of the panel discussion), every article is reproduced here with the hope to capture the spirit, the direction and the overall message of the conference. We trust that our readers will sense its excitement and above all hear what the Spirit of the Lord was saying to us about training for the frontiers.

William Carey's Challenge

As we celebrate the bi-centennial of William Carey's landing in India, I cannot help but think of the challenge of his day. Carey made some significant proposals and got some startling responses. In his day, the prevailing view in the Church was that world mission, or the Great Commission, was no longer applicable. For that reason the Church was able to say to him: "Sit down, young man; when God wants to evangelize the heathen, He will do it without your help, *or ours*." Granted, this may have seemed an appropriate response, in terms of the Church's theological perspective in Carey's day. So he

went "back to the basics," to lay bare some of the underlying assumptions prevalent in his day concerning the mission task remaining.

In a significant way, at the ISFM conference, we were involved in the same type of dynamics. As a young frontier mission movement people are also telling us some things. Some are saying, "Sit down young man; it's not what you think it is. God has lots of very important things to think about and do. Central to God's agenda is His Church in all its local expressions and complexities. God's other concerns, like the frontiers, are secondary and supplemental. Sure, some Christians may get involved in them, but God forbid that your secondary concerns ever become central. The bottom line is the Body of Jesus Christ and the Church's restoration in Him, young man—not frontier missions to the un-reached nor anything else. Please sit down!"

When William Carey heard the words addressed to him, he didn't sit down! The late Dr. George Eldon Ladd caught it: "Carey had the vision and the knowledge of God's Word not to sit down. He rose up and went to India. He initiated the modern day of world-wide missions." (*Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, 1992:A-79*)

It's as if he couldn't sit down, but rose to the occasion, launching the modern day world-wide missionary movement. Likewise, neither can we sit down, but in the same spirit and vision, finish the task that remains of the world-wide mission movement initiated by Carey.

Back to the Basics

Because of our theme we needed to step back and ask ourselves some basic questions. Hopefully through this publication, everyone involved in mission training as well as our readers in general, will join

us in asking these fundamental questions. We needed to lay bare underlying assumptions, look at key concepts, evaluate basic goals regarding training for the frontiers. Much of what we did had to do with bottom line issues. Like Carey, we needed to go back to the drawing board.

There is little doubt, that a key component in finishing the remaining frontier task is training. As in Carey's day, all of us involved in the movement, needed to see the vision anew backed up with the deep knowledge of God's Word. And so, whether on the level of the local church(es), or on whatever other level, the implication is that it will inevitably involve us in training and mobilizing and equipping the saints in their responsibilities and identity vis-a-vis our relationship as the Church of Jesus Christ to the world.

And here is the clincher The onus by and large is on those of us who train and equip the saints, especially the leadership. It's on the teachers and trainers of teachers, the leaders in the Church of Christ, those who equip the saints and provide direction to the Church. The charge is especially on the exegetes and biblical scholars, the O.T. and N.T. theologians in our seminaries and Bible colleges who in a special way live "close" to the Word. As the Church's leadership, they as none others, are to help us see the vision of God's heart and plan for the fallen world, based squarely on biblical knowledge and divinely revealed understanding. After all, we as Christ's Body need to get the vision, including getting equipped to carry it out, from God's Word. In a special way, we need to see that central to God's purpose and plan both in His Word, is the glory of redemption in Christ for all the peoples of the world—for every ethnos, phule, laos, and glossa in the inhabited world. (Rev. 7:9)

So we need to listen, especially those of us involved in equipping the saints for the Church's world-wide mission. We need to hear—really hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church today. Hesselgrave gets us started. He asks, “Are we listening? To the right source? Are we hearing and, as a result, impacting the world for Christ?” Without doubt, if we listen to the right source—to God and His Word—and hear what He has said and wants to do in the world, following Him in “obedience of faith,” having a missiology firmly founded in His Word, as well as get adequately trained for mission, we can *finish* the task in this generation that Carey *initiated* in his.

But we need to pray, especially while we train and equip others. So let's pray for the “The Fulani: A People Who Need our Prayers.” We publish this people profile at the beginning of this issue (with a color photo of a Fulani woman on the front cover), to stimulate us to prayer and intercession for the Fulani, a people still “hidden” from the gospel.

Leonard Tuggy, last year's president of ISFM, reminds us of our position and task. Get this: We as members of the ISFM, are not armchair theorists nor missiologists “refining the fine points of a scholarly discipline.” First and foremost of all, “*we are missionaries, concerned with the eternal destinies of persons clustered in unreached people groups.*” What a reminder! But read on.

If we are going to do anything significant in training for frontier missions, we seriously need to look at the goals and premises underlying our training programs and institutions. The question is not whether we should abandon old goals and adopt new ones. Ralph Winter says we should abandon goals whether they're old or new *if they're bad*. In the Church and mission industry are we ready to evaluate our training goals? Are we ready to abandon some—especially those that hinder the world-wide mission effort?

After hearing what Winter and his two respondents—Ken Mulholland and William Taylor—say (all three are major “stakeholders” in equipping the saints), we can come to the conclusion that some goals are truly questionable, to say the least, viewed specifically from a frontier perspective. This becomes all the more apparent when we have seen the vision accompanied with a deep understanding regarding God's redemptive purpose and plan for the world. In that light we can conclude that our goals for training need to be reevaluated, and some, outrightly abandoned.

Two presentations are given by Two Thirds World leaders. The first is by Panya Baba, from Nigeria in West Africa, reminding us of the seriousness of the task, with the call to servanthood and suffering in the cause of world missions for the unreached. Another is entitled “Training Latins for the Muslim World” written by Pedro Carrasco (a pseudonym), a church planter and

Latin mission leader in the Muslim world. Both Panya and Pedro emphasize the importance of the informal and non-formal training. The question is, how can you equip or train others for suffering, for humility and servanthood? How and when does that happen and where? Our international participants, as well as the responses and comments made by the respondents, reveal how it happens.

Gary Corwin's presentation, followed by his two respondents, Gailyn Van Rheenen and Thomas Steffen, though last but certainly not least, identify the main players in the training game, i.e., the role of academics, the mission agencies and the mission mobilizers, or as Corwin calls them “admonishers.” Each has its unique role to play in mission training. But it's clear, and get this: *neither can do the job by themselves*. Corwin challenges us to work together, for synergism—which we desperately need in the Church and missions to finish the task. It's a basic ingredient!

Tom Steffens asks: “Have the institutes left behind the basics?” Well, in certain sense they haven't. Professors in their respective institutions are still teaching an array of solid Bible courses, theology courses and courses in missions, intercultural studies, history of missions, world religions, etc. But is it still *necessary to go back to the basics*?

We need to take a closer look! What's actually taught in those courses, especially in Bible and theology? What is the integrating focus of those courses? Is there any such integration? What vision is imparted through these courses based on God's revealed will? Do students, going through our training institutions, taking the core courses, come out seeing the big picture, the mega-context “a missionary hermeneutic,” as Hesselgrave calls it, running clear through the whole of Scripture, even in the Old Testament? (See Hesselgrave's “A Missionary Hermeneutic” in IJFM, Volume 10, No: January 1993)

Is all of this worth our while? We'll allow Jim Reapsome in his January EMQ editorial to remind us,

All Christian need the terrier of the unreached peoples movement nipping at their heels. They need it because churches, schools and agencies are notoriously prone to lapsing into unconsciousness regarding the world's vast never reached populations. As sure as I dribble spaghetti sauce on my shirt, the church easily finds many great projects to pursue other than pursuing the never reached.” (EMQ, 1994:2)

Let's remember the seriousness of the task, including the essential ingredient of training for the frontiers, and be about our Father's business—all of it.

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PS. Letters, comments and enquiries to the editors are very welcome.