



Missiology and Missiological Research: *Notes for an Address*¹

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Missiology is a derivative discipline. Its academic roots are clearly in church history, Christian theology and ethics, biblical studies, and the social sciences. Missiology has been described popularly as the melding of theology and anthropology.

All of this misses an important reality. In other derivative disciplines (engineering, medicine and education) the discipline makes no sense apart from its involvement with the *doing* of—engineering, medicine and education.

Missiological research is at its best when it delivers principles, not tactical prescriptions. The practitioner's valuing of missiology should be based on principles that foster experiential insights, and more profound understandings of experience.

Definitions embedded in propositions that deserve to be challenged:

Theory—what we know

Practice—what we do

Practice is random

Theory is disciplined

Practice is the product

Theory is the source

Practice is the end

Theory evaluates the means

This sort of dichotomization simply does not serve missiology well.

The importance of social sciences in missiological studies:

The major value of social science in missiology is not defining and mapping the targets; but rather to help us appreciate and effectively relate to humans whose behavior is the observable entry point for deeper understanding through dialogue.

Thesis: Academic social science is more inclined than academic theology to take account of human experience. Theologians in particular, and theological education in general, are disinclined to engage in the study of human behavior. Why?

¹ Ted Ward. Missiology and Missiological Research. Notes for an address to the American Society of Missiology, June 1994

Pedagogical habits that foster and exacerbate the gap between theory and practice:

1. Tendency to teach conclusions apart from the data.
2. Tendency to dichotomize theory and practice and to impute primacy to theory. The assumption that theoretical knowledge must precede practical knowledge.
3. Misuse of theory. Treating theory as prescriptions (especially the prescriptive misuse of theories based on descriptive data—e.g., the Homogenous Unit Principle).

Relating theory and practice:

Praxis—theory nurtures practice.

Practice (experience) refines theory.

These understandings are essential if missiology is to be anything but a form of historical theology. The work of the church in the world needs a missiology that includes applied experience among its sources and its measures of worth.

Mission is not an historical relic. It is the ongoing incisive edge of the work of the church in the world. The mission of the church deserves a missiology that enlightens today's frontiers and tomorrow's vision.