



Missionary Motivation and Support: *Understanding Today, Anticipating Tomorrow*¹

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The assignment to look ahead and to conceptualize a future scenario is both intriguing and forbidding. Once again, I have not been wise enough to avoid or reject it. With Santayana, I believe that we must understand history or suffer the consequences of reliving its harsh lessons. In order to understand where we are going, we must comprehend where we have been. Vision for the future derives from the long run of human experience and also from the more recent circumstances that are represented in today's immediate linkages of past and future. The only tomorrow that is possible for us to imagine is one that continues or discontinues, embraces or resists, maintains or changes what has already been. These choices are worth pondering.

The Persistent Concern about Missionary Motivations

Missionary recruitment is in trouble we hear. The new candidates are unlike those of the past. They are more pragmatic and less spiritual. Even the churches are caught up in a new assertiveness that insists on high correlations among efforts, resources, and products. Prospective missionaries and the churches that support missions have become so bold as to insist on having a voice in the setting of standards and in the processes by which the worth of a given mission activity or approach is judged. Very recently in a small local church (an active member-church in a denomination with its own strong mission-sending agency) the service bulletin distributed during the annual mission conference carried these statements:

[our local church's] Mission Board recently voted to adopt a missions policy called *The Sending Church*. . . to focus our efforts and missionary support so that there is a real sense of personal commitment between the church and our missionaries. . . . Your views and decisions . . . are vitally important in selecting the missionaries we support and in setting our financial budget each year. (private source in the author's files).

This sort of initiative on the part of the churches is likely to become much more common. It is justifiable on many grounds, but it raises questions about the role of mission agencies and will surely lead to some new relationships among churches, agencies, and missionaries. The theological principles are clearer than the practical implications; the latter are particularly perplexing to missiologists and mission executives.

Ours is a troubled era. Perhaps evangelical missions will go into steady decline as has the mission effort in many of the conciliar denominations. Asking practical questions and insisting on

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accountability are evidences of the transformation that is underway. Escobar identifies this trend as “managerial missiology” and sees it as an attempt “to reduce Christian mission to a manageable enterprise” (Escobar 1991, 11). Some mission leaders are inclined to attribute the changes to an increasing spirit of pragmatism within the Christian community in North America. But would increased concern about practical matters and a greater tendency to engage in pragmatic reasoning about method and procedure account for the actual downturn in missionary sending among evangelicals and independent agencies that is now commonly feared? Only indirectly.

A far more serious threat to continuity and expansion of international missions lies in the world’s increasing interethnic tension. Although Christians should be able to take seriously the clear New Testament teachings against interethnic and intercultural bias, there is little evidence of a broad commitment of Christians to interethnic reconciliation. This failure could bring the mission of the church into a severe depression. As the world’s geography shrinks and the world’s political interactions, socio-economic interdependency, and population increase, distance no longer insulates one ethnic group from another. Fear has replaced compassion in interethnic concerns at home and abroad. *Us* versus *them* has become the dominating theme in all sorts of social discussions. The churches are not exempt from these perilous alienations.

Few truly multi-ethnic churches have emerged in North America. Denominations which have successfully expanded into ethnic neighborhoods as a “home mission” frontier now find themselves involved with a wide assortment of mono-cultural churches which rarely show much interest in pursuing Christlike cultural bridging. Thus one of the largest denominations in North America now exults in its churches’ worshipping in over one hundred languages; but few of these many hundreds of churches show any more concern for becoming multi-ethnic than does the parent denomination, in all its whiteness.

This problem is likely to increase and to affect missions negatively. For the most culturally alert and informed churches, the desperate need for missions to neglected sectors in North America will become a stronger competition for funds and personnel. Even the aggressively mission-minded Koreans are seeing their expatriate communities as being under assault by the devil himself, especially as the second generation emerges as a far less committed Christian sub-community. This sub-community of Koreans is now the object of missionary efforts from the home country and is the major objective of home missions among the Korean churches here. If even the Koreans are coming to see the first priority of missionary activity this way, can other national groups of Christians be far behind?

The distinction between *home* and *abroad* is apt to fade sharply as the new century unfolds. The good news is that a true globalization of the cause of Christ would confess that *our* kind are as needy as *their* kind. The bad news is that the more affluent parts of the Christianized world will find it easier to justify not sharing. The net result may be an ultimate ghettoization of all the pockets of Christians around the world and the virtual starvation of the more needy cells while those better off try to preserve themselves.

Identifying And Interpreting The Trends

The task of this consultation and explicitly of this paper is to suggest what may be the meanings of the apparently shifting personal and corporate motives for mission. In terms of the decisions which need to be faced by those involved in education, management, and promotion, what can we anticipate? How best do we understand the emerging reorientations of missionary enterprise? How can the increasing emphasis on managerial decision-making be interpreted? To what extent can harmful trends be corrected? Which trends are, in fact, harmful? Which are benign? What trends are best

understood as merely unfolding and fluid contexts in which there are both hazards and hopes? These questions preoccupy many of us already. How can we best gain insight into the next phases of the mission of the church in the world? What sorts of people should be specifically engaged in carrying the intercultural message of the Gospel? What are the marks of those who are called by God into the next generation of that long procession of saints entrusted with the outreaching motive of the church of Jesus Christ? The answers to these questions are usually formed by the experiences and traditions which are most familiar; our own experiences in the pilgrimage are the most influential. In an era of great change in human societies, the dissonances between an older set of answers and the emerging realities are disorienting. Who will deny that this is such an era?

In matters of mission and message, preconceptions are stubborn. Those whose daily responsibilities are wrapped up in mission research, missionary preparation, mission planning, management, fund-raising, and related responsibilities have already encountered the lively evidences of the dissonances. Private interpretations abound and vary widely. As concerned people we are so preoccupied with personal experiences and observations that any larger view of the matter must first of all square with our personal viewpoints. Alternative explanations must compete with the conclusions that our unique experiences have already suggested to us as individuals. Learning is not easy, especially for older heads.

What Trends are Real?

Many trends are merely symptoms; they will come and go and be exchanged from one year to the next. To take one commonly reported phenomenon as an illustration, the symptoms of lesser spirituality in today's missionary candidates have appeared in several forms. They want to talk about themselves—their needs, intentions, hopes. They ask uncomfortable questions—what do you expect me to do? to accomplish? where? with whom? They get into things that *real* saints would not be concerned about—what if we get sick? start a family? find that we aren't really called to this sort of ministry?

Perhaps this concern for the “wrong” things began when mission organizations began to emphasize just this sort of content in their promotions, their recruitment interviewing, and their required procedures. It is quite possible that today's recruits to missions are simply talking about the things that are suggested by the mission agencies themselves. It makes quite an impact on newcomers to discover the expanding lists of things that are required of missionary candidates. It isn't enough to feel a distinct call of God and to have it affirmed by the home folks. A budget is to be developed. Many others—strangers, at that, must be persuaded to share in the support. Accumulating the necessary promises is a basic condition of being able to go. Writing one's last will and testament is just one of the chores of candidacy. Then also there is retirement planning and, of all things, provisions for support to augment government plans of retirement security. Although each of these matters has its rationale, they add up to a rather pragmatic and business-management sort of basis for eligibility in what started out as a spiritual journey. Small wonder that today's candidates talk about these sorts of things. Some may even wonder what happened to faith in the sovereignty of God.

What do such trends signify? In the sense that these and other *security* needs are matters increasingly common among people who live in a complex and anxiety-ridden world, they are indeed evidences of social change. The underlying causes are real. Christians, as surely as any other sector of society, are caught up in *commonplace concerns*. But to interpret such matters as evidences of decreased spirituality requires quite a judgmental leap. Spirituality leads to the maturity of confidence and boldness; but it does not follow that confidence and boldness produce spirituality. Those who relate to younger Christians, and especially to those who are young in the faith, should carefully avoid interpreting

evidences of the commonplaces of the times as indicators of lack of spirituality. These are better interpreted as open space within which spiritual maturation can continue.

Real trends are those that push churches and their commitments of support and encouragement in a certain direction across time, not just in one fleeting moment. Churches have substantial influence on the ways that Christians understand missions. The shaping of consciousness affects the emerging of motivation. The motivation of a missionary is largely a result of influences and shaping. “Many of our churches are not living up to their potential or responsibility. Without vibrant mission-minded pastors and local churches, the mission enterprise is doomed” (Beals 1993, 2).

The Scriptures, churches, prayer, encouragement of the saints—these are the *real* shapers of motivations in those called by God into the ministry of evangelization and the development of the church in other places. As individualistic, modernized westerners we tend to look more closely at the personality profile data than at the social circumstances that generate the consciousness of mission motivation.

Seeking Meaning

For nearly twenty years I have been talking with missionaries about their views of themselves and their ministries. As individuals, families, or small groups, they have shared with me, sometimes in light conversation but far more often with depth, feeling, and tears, very personal expressions of their pilgrimages and burdens. I have learned from them and in this paper I hope not to break faith, but rather to extend the hearing of their messages.²

The Pragmatic Bias. About fifteen years ago, just after the patterns and variations in missionary motivations had begun to seem discernable, I was startled to note a shift. The younger missionary candidates and even older people who were turning their attention toward more active support of missions were talking more commonly about mission motives of the pragmatic, functional, and technological sort. One of the most evident of the new habits of conversation was the tendency to talk about *doing* things, not just *being* a missionary. On the face of it, this shift in emphasis moves in the direction of making the career of the missionary more apparently precise. After all, there has never been a standard job description for the career category *missionary*. But more to the realistic heart of the matter, any presumption that the spiritual mysteries underlying mission and missionary can be reduced to goals and objectives which can be measured in terms of their completion (e.g., “completing the Great Commission in such-and-such a year”) seems apt to add to the confusions caused by this *pragmatic bias*.

As the new pattern became evident to many observers of missionary recruitment, many voices were

² The basis for the generalizations in this paper is less a matter of formal research than of informal inquiry. Although the inquiry began with no intention to publish the findings, standard ethnographic procedures have been used, with one notable exception: sampling. Especially in terms of the open-ended interviews and the non-directive probing of responses, the findings were carefully drawn. But the sampling plan was of the worst sort; it is representative of no systematic population. Most of those represented are conservative-evangelical missionaries, old and young, women and men. Most were inclined toward or were already under appointment by independent sending agencies. Their inclusion in the sample was a matter of convenient accessibility. The interviews and group conversations usually occurred in the midst of formal or nonformal pre-field or in-service educational experiences.

raised in anguish. The anxious cries expressed fear that the spiritual core of missionary motivation was being replaced by an upsurge of mechanistic and humanistic pragmatism. The clues were noted and all too quickly reduced to largely inadequate conclusions. Some expressed concern that rational arguments would replace the voice of the Holy Spirit in the selecting and recruiting of missionaries.

The Revolving Door. One of the better-kept secrets of recent missionary history is the significantly shortened missionary career. Why are fewer new missionaries able to continue beyond the first several years of missionary service? Are the agencies recruiting in the wrong places? Are they recruiting the wrong people? Are those who must make the decisions about support within the agency and within the supporting churches asking the wrong questions as they attempt to discern the difference between those who are responding to God's intentions for their lives and those who are caught up in a temporal promotion of mission images?

Here again a symptom, apparently increasing first-term "failure," is understood incompletely; its cause is imputed so directly from the evidence that little attention is given to deeper meanings. This symptom is one of many that will likely persist into the next century whether or not it is ever fully understood. Its roots are extensive and complicated. For one thing, the unwittingly negative effects of older and more experienced missionaries on newcomers has been systematically ignored for quite some time. As change becomes more rapid, obsolescence of methods and practices will occur faster. Thus any "old-timer" is apt to be locked into activity which even a gentle-spirited newcomer will recognize as being to some extent inappropriate. Older and younger missionaries need each other as never before, but the contexts for eye-to-eye reciprocity are rare.

Rigidity. Another important root cause needs attention. In the years to come it may be less the traditional straight-laced conservatives who make the most effective missionaries. As being a missionary becomes even less popular, it may be the countercultural Christians who are most apt to bring vigor and perspective to the communities of expatriate missionaries. Their values and lifestyles do not represent the norms which form the *yuppie*, *baby-boomer*, *baby-buster* and now *generation-X* stereotypes. For these more radical Christians, life seems more important and needs to be lived with greater urgency. Their urge to get on toward fulfillment of life's more basic meanings can become frustrated when they find themselves in the wrong sort of missionary context. Where planning is lacking, skills are not assessed and developed, language learning is dragged out interminably and is inappropriately designed so as to frustrate ministry itself, where goals are not set, accountability is not expected, and when missionary activity is a matter of each person doing independently whatever comes to mind, these newcomers may not be willing or even able to adapt. Barna summarizes their just concerns:

The Church attempts to operate effectively without having the necessary information on which to base key decisions. I'm not dismissing the importance of prayer or the leading of the Holy Spirit. But God can use information to lead us into a better set of circumstances. (Barna 1991, 13)

The *pragmatic bias*, the *revolving door*, and *rigidity* are apt to persist. Along with dozens of others, these symptoms are easy to observe; further, they lend themselves to facile conclusions. The tendency to jump to conclusions is always a threat to careful reflection and the development of sound understanding. Every trend and clue about change should be examined, but they should be weighed for their advantages as well as for their disadvantages. *Pragmatic bias* may lead toward more prompt consequences and greater effectiveness in the outreach of the church. The *revolving door* may reflect God's concern that many people should experience missionary work in other nations but only a few should stay. *Rigidity*, considering the commonness of the avoidance of theological rigor, the abandonment of the Bible as source, and the consequent relativism in many sectors of Christianity,

may be just the medicine a drifting church needs.

Because of the extensive stimulation of thought that mass media facilitates in today's complex world, it is likely that the missionary recruit as well as the mission committee in the local church will be aware of a wide range of socio-political matters related to missions and the missionary career. Not all of this information will be understood well nor will it be interpreted with appropriate nuance of the implications for missionary activity. Thus mission agencies will face a much greater need in the future for becoming the interpreter-informant to churches. What will be needed has far less to do with the *party line* of mission-biased propaganda than with a respectfully honest sharing with the churches of the best thinking that can be brought to bear. Internationalists, political scientists, and representatives of nonwestern sectors of the Christian community need to be empaneled from time to time to deal with sociopolitical issues. White papers of position, policy, and anticipation should be produced and made available at least on restricted circulation. Churches are likely to demand better information and better strategic planning from the agencies with which they cooperate. The "old-boy network" is defunct.

Considering the World Context of Mission

The conditions and welfare of Christian missionary activity depend upon far more than the motivations and intentions of the churches and mission agencies in the "sending country." The socio-economic-political contexts of the world, at home as well as abroad have great bearing on the determination of what sort of missionary activity is possible and what the consequences will be. Following are several of the contextual factors likely to have the most significant effect on missions of the next decade.

The Urgency of Reconciliation and Healing in a Fragmented World

The era of ideological war has largely been replaced by ethnic warfare, an evidently far more stubborn, extensive, and bloody affair. Perhaps the only ideology left to cause wars is the "mother of all wars," the evil abuse of human difference. Cultural difference, one of the most eloquent expressions of God's infinite creativity, has since the fall in Eden been satanically perverted into the root cause of two besetting sins: pride and fear.

Had the church been doing what it was commanded to do all along, the current world scene would likely not be so bleak. The church was intended to be a training center for those who would continue the work of Jesus Christ, reconciling humankind to God and to one another. The followers of the Prince of Peace have rarely been able or willing to undertake the mediational and reconciliatory tasks. In so few churches has the hinge-point of the ethnically reconciled congregation been accepted as the intended plan of God.

Never before has there been such a need for Christlike intervention in human society. The anticipation of this next century is filled with foreboding. Considering the swelling human population, the pressures of urbanization, and the interfacing of heretofore alienated ethnic groups, the situation is grave. The Hoplers put it well: "Unquestionably the world is increasingly urbanized. The issue Christians face is whether we will see this as a problem to be overcome or an opportunity to take advantage of" (Hopler and Hopler 1993, 149). Those who step into inter-ethnic conflict of the years just ahead will be motivated by greater dedication and greater courage than needed in the recent past.

Mission as Partnership

To be effective and satisfied in the role of missionary today requires a rather different view of oneself and of the situations in which the works of the Gospel are carried out. The colonial mindset is far less tolerable; thus the North American must learn to be subordinated to others. The importance of

teamwork, even to the extent of multinational and multicultural partnership as peers, is required in far more situations today.

American mission centers do not need to send their people to do for emerging mission agencies what they can better do for themselves. Far better to avoid competitive structures and instead join hands to share our experiences and technical competencies. (Hedlund 1990, 279)

Perhaps the new requirement of willingness to work as a member of a team rather than as a *Lone Ranger* is turning away some who would otherwise go into missionary work. If so, it is likely good. In any case, for many Americans, Chinese, Koreans, and others, being a willing subordinate and entering into intercultural partnerships at the level of continuous interpersonal contact are matters that test a newcomer's commitment to the work of Christ.

Development of Leadership within the Churches.

Without missionary activity—in the neighborhood, community, among those who are nearby but ethnically different, and through deliberate outreach across the world—the church is simply not fulfilling an adequate definition of being the church. This growing awareness with its secure biblical foundation is emerging hand-in-hand with the parallel understanding of the church itself as the place for the development of leadership.

What is important is for the church to emphasize community and mission. Life in the church is not some optional extra. The fact is we cannot be fully Christian without clinging to the church, even as we reach out to others in fulfillment of the mission. The New Testament knows nothing of unattached Christians. So the church remains vital to any evangelical ministry. . . . (Shelley and Shelley 1992, 56)

Reflecting ways which are much closer to the apostolic era than to the colonial style practices of the nineteenth and twentieth century's notions of "modern missions," a basic transformation of missionary activity is underway. The mission of the church is well on its way to becoming the outgrowth of the development of leadership gifts among all of God's people. The church that takes seriously the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the potentialities of every saint to actively participate in the ministries of the church in society will see more and more of the overflow of its gifted people moving into the extending of God's family around the world.

Maintaining and Enhancing the Coherency of the Churches

Autonomy and independent decision-making within the local congregation are always mixed blessings. On the one hand, local initiatives and management of matters such as missionary support and leadership development are a consequence of substantial commitment within the congregation. On the other hand, independence of this sort often represents an isolated stance and a potentially harmful disaffiliation with the larger body of the communities of faith. Many things are done better and more wisely by collective clusters of churches. Biblical teachings about interdependence and the avoidance of privatization in either interpretation or action are violated and individuals engaged in full-time ministries are commonly put into untenable positions by the unilateral actions of an "activated" church.

In the years ahead it will be important to help the churches act upon their increased concern and willingness with wisdom and due caution. Churches will be called upon to make informed decisions in regard to their participation in the support of missions. Thanks to the interventions of the ACMC [Advancing Churches in Missions Commitment] and related encouragements by denominational and independent missionary agencies, many churches now have been encouraged into a Spirit-centered consciousness of their stake and voice in missions. But for many, missions is still a sort of "out there" in which they can engage or escape, meddle or blithely follow, according to whatever wind blows at the moment. The burden of steady, reliable support, willingness to help without controlling, and the

importance of accepting differences of opinion without becoming vindictive and harsh awaits yet another stage of collective conscientization.

Getting Beyond Ourselves

In recent years the growing awareness of the unreached sectors of the world has resulted in a reawakening to the need for “frontier” missions. Because of its emphasis on first-level evangelism, this emphasis in mission has predictable appeal to many evangelical churches. Whether these same churches recognize the emphasis after it has been re-packaged as “church planting” is not nearly so clear. For reasons that are easy to understand, many North American missionaries find themselves much more comfortable in institutions and established stations. For one thing, these afford much clearer images of one’s “going to work” each day and having fairly clear assignments and schedule.

In this era of cooperative mission activity under the responsibility and leadership of established churches, it is going to be very important to make certain that missionaries do not get trapped in the already established centers of Christian activity. Supporting churches could establish a relationship with an appropriate sister-church on the field in order to encourage those Christians and their own missionary on the scene to find the frontier and to engage in outreach evangelization. Such an effort, perhaps encouraged by the missionary agency, might even give the supporting church a push toward discovery of its own home front frontiers. Yamamori describes the problem:

The Christian world receives 99 percent of all Christian literature, 90.9 percent of all foreign missionaries, 95 percent of all full-time Christian workers and 99.9 percent of all output from Christian radio/TV. Even overseas ‘mission field’ churches are clamoring for mission funds for their own local needs while mission vision for the fields still beyond receives only about 10 percent of mission monies and personnel. We must press for a greater shift toward the unreached peoples. (Yamamori 1993, 17)

Four Interpretative Hypotheses

Following are four factors that likely account for some of the apparent shifts in mission motivation and missionary characteristics. These four hypotheses can be tested for their interpretative value in understanding the impressions and messages that are picked up from today’s missionary candidates.

1. Seeing Missions Through the Filters of Today’s Culture

In any society in any age certain habits and values are commonplace. People think about things that are familiar. These commonplaces change from time to time. Those who are older can remember that missionaries once carried card games into the field. Mostly, they were properly sanctified card games—Rook, Flinch, and several variations on Old Maid. Today’s missionaries carry miniature computer games and an infinite variety of marvelously clever electronic games and simulations which reflect the more technological and even more individualistic lifestyle that is now commonplace. Missionaries in earlier times were more familiar with cleaning carburetors and replacing head gaskets and sewing clothing. Today these skills are no longer commonplace.

Health insurance, retirement programs, assistance in the preparation of tax returns are several of the commonplace expectations in today’s North American societies. It should be no surprise that prospects and newly recruited missionaries of this era ask about these things and expect definitive answers.

Today’s commonplaces of culture are filled with reflections of modernity. As Guinness points out,

these elements are rarely supportive of counter-cultural Christian values. “Church growth on the basis of the church growth movement’s ‘new ground’ is no answer to the crisis of modernity because the use the ‘new ground’ itself is an uncritical accommodation to modernity” (Guinness 1993, 21).

It should not be surprising that many of those called into missions today and more so in the years ahead will need support in their continuing spiritual maturation. Today’s Christians simply have more to overcome and more to deal with in terms of the subterfuge that modernity has brought into Christian philosophy. Those who lead and nurture the mission teams of the future will need more substantial preparation and more thorough understandings of the Christ-and-culture issues than ever before. Herein lies one of the greatest challenges to academic missiology.

2. Dealing with Discrepancies Between Expectations and Discoveries

Severe reduction of motivation for missions is often attributable to the contrasts which emerge when the concrete realities of the missionary context, process, and activity are discovered firsthand. Especially when expectations are highly idealized and hopes are very high, disappointing discoveries are damaging to motivation. The damage to specific categories of motivation is different, and thus one person will be more damaged than another. For example, the *compliance* motive (responding to the will of some other, whether God, the Bible, parents, or other influential persons) will survive many disappointments which are more threatening to the *action-product* motivation (doing something, accomplishing a goal, fulfilling an intention).

3. Communicators Please Note: What You Say is What You Get

Those who are being recruited to missions today are in many cases responding to a different set of signals than the previous generation of missionaries. The assumptions underlying much of the promotion of missions today are based on a more specific image of the “audience.” This image, while indeed more narrowly defined, is not necessarily more precise for the particular people whom God is calling into missionary ministries. The assumptions that promoters of missions are making are often inappropriate generalizations.

The complicating factor is that much of this promotional communication uses literal and graphic language which sets up a semantic and conceptual frame of reference. Thus when people respond to the missionary challenge they do so in terms of what they have been hearing. Here is the vicious circle: mission agencies assume that they must say highly rational things, they must list the arguments for the importance of certain kinds of activity which they assert have greatest importance for their fields. They use technical and technology-tinged terms (e.g., *church planting*) to describe long-standing and venerable processes such as introducing people to Christ and helping them establish themselves as church communities. From this sort of semantic bias missionary candidates and mission supporters learn a different language and use it to talk with the people from the agencies. And the agency people react with disappointment and anxiety: “Missionary motivations are changing!”

In many cases the skill being displayed is the widely known human quality of telling people what they want to hear. Many candidates learn quickly to talk about their motives and purposes in ways that reflect what they think they have been hearing from mission promotions. The tone and content of mission promotion and recruitment have changed, and with these changes have come changes in the semantics of candidates and supporters.

4. Clusters of Motivations Expressed in Contrasting Semantics

Missionary motivation is complex. Within each person are many different motivational themes, each seen as having some degree of importance. Further, most missionaries express their motivations in a variety of semantic frameworks, depending on the nature of the communicative purpose, context, and conversational style which seems to be most appropriate in a given situation.

Shifts in the apparent motivations of missionaries from one era to another do not necessarily indicate the abandonment of one set of values for another. As often as not the issue is semantics and the nature of human dialogue. People tend to talk about things that are currently dominant, both in theme and in style. Even if other matters are substantively more important, they will go along with the dialogue and even will shift their semantic frame-of-reference to accommodate the discussions of the moment.

Rather than to see the increased semantic range as a negative matter, it should be welcomed as a manifestation of broader and more flexible situational orientations of the sort that the Apostle Paul suggests in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. Spiritual concerns are likely as important as they ever have been in the general realm of missionary motivations. Although contemporary conversations about missionary experience are more apt to be centered on one or another concrete function and application of missionary efforts, the deeper spiritual meanings are only a step or two away from the center of the conversation. Virtually any deliberate attempt to test this hypothesis will reveal a willingness of the missionary or the candidate as surely as the mission supporter in a local church to shift the semantics in the direction of personal and body-life constructs indicative of the spiritual nature of the purpose of God's mission in the world.

Today Christians in mission-supporting churches have more information and images of the varieties of the activities which occupy the time and efforts of missionaries. Thus there is more to talk about in quantity and in variety. Talking about missions and missionaries has become easier and, at least among Christians, more common. It should not be surprising, then, that people do not limit their conversations to narrowly "spiritual" matters and specifically biblical illustrations. Almost everyone talks more about the practical and social aspects of missions.

Relating Motivations to Semantic Context

Following is a list of categories of motivations. It represents the data from a fifteen-year accumulation. Other categories may be needed to accommodate data from other sources. The major value of the model is in its representation and accommodation of four major conclusions

1. Missionary motivations are complex. In almost every case, missionaries, missionary candidates, and mission supporters within the churches, if probed deeply enough, will identify with seven rudimentary motivations: Thanksgiving, Community, Altruism, Compliance, Activism, Self-fulfillment, and Discovery. The relative importance or intensity of each of the rudimentary motivations varies, of course, but in ways that are not highly correlated with intensity of personal commitment to participation in or support of missions.

2. The specific array of motivations of today's missionary candidates and supporting churches is not substantively different from those a generation ago. Although the relative strength or intensity among the various rudimentary motivations usually seems to be distributed differently, no additions have appeared nor have any disappeared.³ An individual is driven by more than one motivation. Combinations of motives are more important the intensity of any one motive.

³ One additional category of motivations has emerged in a few interviews in more recently years: *adventurism*. Perhaps it is not new but merely a result of greater candidness and willingness to deal with less theologically acceptable motives. It applies to so very few cases that it has not been entered into the rudimentary list. One might wonder if sensitivity of the interviewer to this motivation might have revealed a similar frequency in previous years. In any case, it is dangerous to engage in retrospective inquiry using this technique!

3. The emphasis on spirituality lies across each of the motivations as a sort of “third dimension”. Unless one accepts the dualism of spiritual *versus* practical or spiritual *versus* secular or material, a Christian understanding of motivation would always accept the presence of a basic spiritual dimension. Thus it is unwise and surely unnecessary to argue that spirituality is either a separate sort of motive or category of motives. Spirituality develops and even for categorical motives that may stay rather constant across the years of one’s ministry, the continuing walk of faith is usually rewarded by the deepening of one’s faith and the enlivening of the spiritual dimension of life’s motivations and fulfillments.

4. The conversation about one’s motivations for missions has a semantic context which ranges from spiritual to social emphases. A person tends to talk about mission motivations in terms of personal preoccupation (familiarity with particular words and ways to talk about the motivation) and in terms of the way others are setting the context of the conversation. In other words, the semantics of expressing a motivation reflects familiarity and preference for the way the motivation should be represented and, at the same time, a capacity for attuning the semantics of the conversation to the semantics of others in the conversation. This increased semantic range is very important in understanding today’s conversations about motivations for missions. Many people now talk from a larger scope of consciousness.

The qualitative range of this semantic consciousness is a sort of spiritual-social overlay. Here we must presuppose that for the Christian, spiritual consciousness and social consciousness are not polar opposites. Instead they should be seen as complementary and mutually enhancing.

Concluding Suggestions

Every prospectus for the future must be tested against the three basic values of Christian perspective: faith, hope, and love (1 Cor. 13:13). Whatever comes will surely reflect the faithfulness and the love that God manifests in the fulfillment of his intentions. God’s people learn early that not always does God go about things the way we might expect or prefer. Sometimes when everything seems to be collapsing, we discover that God has larger plans; the difficulties of one moment become the foundation for an important revelation and transformation. The period of stress and realignment that can be anticipated for organized missions in the next several years should be seen with this sort of hope.

To the extent that there is comfort in awareness and strength in preparation, these suggestions seem appropriate:

1. Never before in the history of modern missions has there been greater need for candor and integrity in communications about missions. The temptations to embellish and to exaggerate should be carefully disciplined to truth itself. Those who most need to have confidence in the mission operations of the church are among those most inclined to reject propagandistic and selective image-building as in the style of modern media.

2. The competitive numbers game must be stopped. Interagency pride and one-upmanship has already cost dearly. Far greater care should be given to the qualitative aspect of recruitment. It is less important to get *many* people into missionary assignments than it is to get the *right* people—those that God specifically assigns to the work of full-time intercultural missions. If the numbers go down, God be praised. If the numbers go up, God be praised. The fact that so many people and so much money is now by-passing the established mission organizations is more than a mere clue; it is tantamount to handwriting on the wall.

3. The doors must be opened wider to recognize, accept, and find practical ways to equip those who are coming to missions out of “less appropriate” educational and experiential backgrounds. Many of the most promising new modes of mission are still outside the domains of interest of standing missionary organizations. Thus we can anticipate that new organizations will supplant many of those which cannot turn the corner. The shrinkage of the *Urbana* phenomenon (recent attendance down 13% since the previous conference) may signal the reaching of a saturation-point regarding recruitment of people by organizations that are ill-prepared to accept them (Kennedy 1994, 48). New forms of missionary deployment should be developed, especially accommodating the economic necessity for effectively utilizing bi-vocational people and those who chose a commitment to austere lifestyle.

4. As the mission task becomes more widely recognized as being integral with the definition of the church itself, mission organizations are more likely to be judged in terms of their acceptance of the centrality of the church. The era of parachurch organizations’ covering bases left in neglect by the churches may be coming to an end. More responsibilities are returning home to the church, especially in missions and in leadership development. The centrality of the church also should be seen in representations of the *mission field*:

In missionary promotional materials it sometimes appears as if the church hardly exists [on the mission field]. . . . or is woefully weak and hardly able to stand on its own two feet. . . . Perhaps [mission agencies] have a low view of the intelligence of Christians. They fear that if they admit the vitality and strength of existing churches “on the field”, people will not be prone to send any more missionaries. (Reapsome 1994, 3)

5. Opportunism and frantic over-recruitment of people to rush into apparently open doors abroad is inconsistent with the reality of a widely established church. North American missionaries must expect to move into situations abroad as helpers, as enablers, and as partners, most often under the leadership of host-nation persons.

Pain often is inflicted on local believers because of grave insensitivity of fellow Christians. . . . Since the opening [of Eastern Europe] there has been a great increase in missionary activity from outside operating in a place where the local church has existed from many centuries. Sadly, the newcomer is unaware of the history of the local church, their spiritual life, their courageous witness, their suffering, sacrifice and martyrdom. (Lee 1993, 11)

These concerns suggest a different profile and mode of operation for both the missionary and the agency. We simply cannot afford to enter as the know-it-all sort of rich uncle or big brother. Colonialism is dead and post-colonialism is quite sick. Yet we still see individuals and groups slamming into sensitive situations with behaviors and attitudes that are, just as they always have been, inexcusable misrepresentation of the models of evangelism and leadership development established in Scripture.

6. The pattern of Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8) needs to be discovered and employed. The disarticulation of “foreign” missions from the rest of the mission of the church is costly. Overseas missionaries should be selected from among those who have already proved themselves in related ministries in home communities and in interethnic ministries nearby. The skills and attitudes of the agent of reconciliation cannot be expected to leap upon a person at the end of an airplane trip.

7. Missionary promotion and recruitment should reflect willingness to deal openly with the spiritual nature of the mission of the church. There should be no condescension to a presumption of lesser spiritual consciousness in today's supporters of missions. At the same time there should be complete openness and willingness to deal with personal and practical matters without branding them as "selfish" or "pragmatic."

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