



Presenting Ourselves to the World

Rethinking how we talk about ourselves and our message.

Greg H. Parsons



With the “loss of innocence” in the West since September 11, those who work in almost any part of the world realize things are different. Even if things haven’t changed much, they easily could. While many in the States go on now as if nothing has changed—and wish inside that nothing will—most mission fields will never be the same for Americans.

So what should we do differently? Recently, several emails have circulated warnings about secular journalists who are in the Muslim world reporting on current events and writing up articles about evangelicals working in those areas. Already, several have been published in both magazines and newspapers—including the Wall Street Journal.

This is both sobering and exciting. It is exciting because we realize that we have brothers and sisters that have been sent out into these sometimes remote, difficult places. Often, the only outsiders in the country are missionaries. I remember a few years ago CNN was reporting on a crisis that occurred in a remote area. The only person in the area who could be interviewed was an American missionary. Fortunately, he didn’t call himself that, and wasn’t known as that.

What may be necessary is a new way of thinking and talking about what we are doing. We need to get away from some of the jargon that



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has developed around the mission world. Since the Bible doesn’t use the word missionary per se, we certainly don’t need to be tied to this. Of course, many missions have already recognized this. In several countries, it is a well known fact among all those serving in the region, that there are no “missionaries” there, just “workers”! Back in their churches, they are still known as missionaries, and I’m sure that many in the church would not understand it if you had a “workers” prayer board in your church lobby.

Whatever we call them, their work may be focused on church planting, discipleship, development work and/or medical work, but they are all about being like Christ in that

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We could talk about serving and we can send servants. We could talk about encouragers around the world. (Don’t forget the aspect of exhortation in this New Testament concept.) Perhaps we should see them as extensions of the pastoral staff of our church—working through sister organizations (missions structures) with experience in doing missions. We could call them international or global staff.

But I’m not as concerned what we call them as that we consider how we talk about this, and how we think about it.

All these new (to some) sensitivities lead us to the underlying thinking of our mission task. I don’t ask, “Why do they hate us so much?” but, “What could I do to better live out Christ through my life?” While some of that hate is not focused on Christ or Christianity—but all things American—the Scriptures do talk about the fact that the world will hate Christ and his followers. Yet we can hide behind that with an easy answer approach, or a cultural blunder and then say we should expect ridicule and persecution. Perhaps a better question for us is: how often do I bring persecution on myself? How could I do a better job of communicating in this situation? Is what I am doing able to produce lasting fruit in this culture when I’m gone? Or is it so foreign that only people on the fringe will buy into it? Let me illustrate.

Just today in my car, I heard a major ministry leader in this area give an invitation at the end of his broadcast. He said that if you prayed the prayer he led, then Christ had taken up residence in

your life. Is that really true or is it modern Christian jargon? When we get to heaven, does God look back at what we said in our lives and if He sees the right words in the right order He will let us into heaven? Or—as one mission leader said recently to me—does God open our heads, look inside and see if we “think correctly” and let us into heaven? Where is repentance and obedience in all this? Are we thinking clearly? We do need to confess Christ with our lips and produce fruit!

This is another area where we need to look at what the Bible says, not necessarily the patterns in our church culture, which may not fit another. 🌐