

# The Case for a Global Inter-Missions Network

Patrick Johnstone

## Editor's Note

*In my perspective, two keen people stand out at the global level today as the most influential in the cause of missions:*

*Patrick Johnstone, through his various books, especially Operation World, and Luis Bush, through his brilliant initiatives in the AD2000 movement and now his follow through country-level studies.*

*In this passionate statement Patrick gives a mass of vital reasons why it is bad that we are missing some sort of global network of precisely mission leaders.*

*In other correspondence he deplores the demise of the follow-through structure of Edinburgh 1980. Much of what is brilliantly envisioned in this preliminary document several years ago will be greatly helpful now as moves are made to bring a global network into existence.*

*Just how to do that has been further discussed a great deal. See the addendum to this document.*

The last two hundred years of evangelical growth have been amazing. Evangelicals grew from 85 million in 1960 to 420 million in 2000, but the non-Western component rose from 30 million to 300 million over this period. There are four major strands that contributed to this growth—a growth which has accelerated over this period, peaking in the last 2–4 decades:

*Patrick Johnstone has for many years headed research for Worldwide Evangelization Crusade (WEC), the mission founded by C.T. Studd, one of the famous "Cambridge Seven" athletes who became missionaries responding to Moody's speaking at Cambridge.*



1. The modern missionary movement initiated by Carey and others.
2. The global world evangelization conferences of the past 40 years.
3. The massive increase of newer and indigenous church movements over the same period—often but not exclusively Pentecostal and Charismatic.
4. Missions becoming global in the last 20 years. According to our latest statistics for the new Operation World, almost exactly half of all national/international missionaries are non-Western. Korea has now become the second-largest sender of foreign missionaries.

My concern is for the lack of effective communication between the missions/apostolic and the other streams listed above.

## The Marginalization of Missions in Church History

What has increasingly concerned me is a deficient ecclesiology among Evangelicals which has contributed to the lack of intertwining fellowship between these strands and a downplaying of the biblicality of the apostolic structures. This whole massive cycle of seed planting in the non-Western world and the resulting harvest has been an amazing success story of missionary activity. Yet, the apostolic or mission component in the Church has been downplayed, marginalized and even denigrated as "unbiblical" or "a temporary phenomenon because the Church was not doing the job". This is a re-run of church history which has been an oft-repeated "Kill the prophets and silence the apostles"! Many examples could be given, such as:

- The Early Church. How rapidly the first century Church—with apostles, prophets, evangelists,

pastors and teachers—changed into a 2<sup>nd</sup> century model of only pastors (and bishops!) and teachers. The apostolic and prophetic were eliminated.

- The Reformation, which rejected and even sought to destroy the prophetic and apostolic radical reformation of the best of the Anabaptists. This led to the nearly 300 years of Protestant passivism in missions.
- The Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910 became the seed-bed for the World Council of Churches, which ultimately eliminated the International Missionary Council.
- The modern Evangelical movements, which rapidly move from a mission agenda to an increasingly church agenda. It must be added that this trend is positive in that the rapid growth of the Church requires such attention, but negative if the vital and biblical apostolic component is forgotten or marginalized.

Yet, if world evangelization is to be furthered—and even brought to conclusion—this global apostolic component must be given its rightful place in strategic planning and action in proclaiming the Gospel to the unreached. The problem is that no global (and few regional) mechanisms exist for effective networking among missions for sharing common concerns or for presenting a common voice in international mega-movements.

## The Marginalization of Missions in Modern Evangelical Movements

For the past twenty years I have had the privilege of involvement in both the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (LCWE) and the AD2000 and Beyond Movement, and therefore have been involved in a number of the global visionary

conferences in the years since 1966. One thing that has struck me is that, generally speaking, the major mission agencies have not had a high profile at best, and at worst have scarcely been consulted or involved. Most of the individuals who had a leadership role in international agencies that did participate, did so because of their expertise or gifting, not specifically as representative of their own agencies.

To give an example, the AD2000 and Beyond Movement drew together a remarkable and gifted group of activists with a vision for world evangelization. Some were leaders of key agencies with areas of specific expertise such as John Bendor-Samuel (Bible translation—Wycliffe Bible Translators), George Verwer (Mobilization—Operation Mobilization), Paul Eshlemann (Jesus Film—Campus Crusade for Christ, International), Patrick Johnstone (Unreached peoples—WEC), but each of these men were there as individuals, not because they represented the missions movement. My concern grew when I watched the emergence of the Great Commission Roundtable (GRC) initiative from 1999 onwards and realized that only a few mission leaders would be involved in the discussion (I could only identify 3 out of the 270 network representatives gathered in the recent conference in Malaysia).

I therefore initiated correspondence in the midst of the efforts to finalize the 2001 edition of *Operation World* to seek to address the problem. I found a varied reaction—from very positive to fairly negative—among the international leaders with whom I shared. I was grateful that John Robb, the convener of this series of discussions, circulated my letter of concern to all participants in the August 2001 gathering in Sweden.

A number of practical reasons could be given for this deficiency:

- Missions were too busy just getting on with the job to become involved in global talking jamborees. One only has to look at leaders involved in global events to realize how many large and significant mission agencies have not been present. Personal involvement of key motivators within mission structures would be needed for

global visions to be embraced at the field level.

- Mission leaders have enough problems of their own without exposing themselves to the problems of others. Many leaders are too busy and so involved in meetings and committees that yet other expense and foreign trips are not worth it unless there is sufficient “value added” throughput for the agencies themselves.
- The organizations sponsoring such conferences (such as the World Evangelical Alliance [WEA], Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, LCWE, and AD2000) were generally not specifically cross-culturally involved. The latter achieved a somewhat higher level

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of agency involvement than earlier global networks. However, it must be added that much was achieved in envisioning the Church for missions through all of them, and this paper is not intended to be an implied criticism! I believe it is more a matter of lack of awareness of what has happened.

- The structure of WEA is such that though the Missions Commission has a very important role globally, the constituent members of WEA are more church- than mission-related. So, although the Missions Commission has done much in the conceptual and fellowship aspects of missions, it remains somewhat distant from the harvesters themselves. In fact, the Missions Commission is a very small body indeed, and is hardly able to be fully representative of mission agencies in global conferences in more than a very general way. One exception would be the valuable WEA conference on attrition of personnel in missions.

- The national Evangelical Alliances (or equivalent) that exist in many countries, while generally supportive of missions, have a national agenda which is more congregationally-oriented. Some have the equivalent of the British Evangelical Missionary Alliance (EMA) or the US's Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies (EFMA) that serves the interests of member missionary agencies. But even these bodies, though able to speak for mission agencies represented in their country, are not equipped to handle international issues.
- The almost complete lack of an international forum at the regional or global level where mission practitioners can discuss issues vital to their calling, or where a collective voice can be raised in the forums of evangelical Christians. One exception is COMIBAM in Latin America. Leaders such as Jerry Rankin of the International Mission Board (Southern Baptist) in the USA and Stanley Davies of Global Connections in the UK have also sought to facilitate such informal forums. At the Global Consultation on World Evangelization (GCOWE) in South Africa in 1997 there was a specific Conference track for mission executives, but many did not desire to see any continuing network and even sought to torpedo the idea. What a pity.

My concern is that because of this lack, the whole momentum for world evangelization has not been as it could have been. We need the activists involved in pioneer outreach to be warmly appreciated and accepted as a vital component for world evangelization.

### Towards a Reintegration of Missions into Global Movements

We are now in a state of flux as the torch of world evangelization is being passed on by AD2000, etc. to something new which we want to see emerge in and for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Is not this the point when we make an effort to correct this deficiency by encouraging a new network of networks as envisaged in the discussions between LCWE, WEA and AD2000

in 1999 and initiated by the GCR in Malaysia and Sweden since then?

For any such network to function it needs to be:

- Gathered round a visionary statement related to the fulfilment of the Great Commission.
- An informal structure with minimal extra expenses.
- Of value as a meeting point or forum for discussion and representation.

What would be the objectives of such a network? It would basically provide a regional or global forum for both discussion of international issues of mutual concern and also act as a voice in international gatherings to ensure adequate representation and two-way communication. It would have no legislative or directive power. It would also need a commonly agreed doctrinal position (e.g., WEA Statement of Faith, Lausanne Covenant).

What would be the practical value in such a network?

It could be:

- a mechanism for international sharing of resources, research results, experience and information;
- a forum for consultation for newer missions; and
- a forum for inter-mission consultation about starting new fields.

It could address such issues as:

- Effective deployment of personnel—secondments, partnering, etc.
- Providing field entry, stay and evacuation co-operation.
- Member Care.
- How best to help in MK issues.
- Ministry issues—church planting, social ministries, NGO/tentmaking, health issues (especially AIDS, TB, malaria).
- Church-mission relationships.
- Coping with Christian tourism, short term ministries, direct sending churches, etc.

While we praise God for all the value given through international discussions involving missions concerns (such as definition of unreached peoples, contextualization, the gospel

and social concern, missiological issues, etc.), the practical issues that directly affect operational issues are what concern many mission agencies. For example, no mechanism exists on a global level (and only rudimentary

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ones at the regional level) to address the following scenarios:

- A Norwegian mission looking for a new field in Africa.
- A Korean agency desiring a partnering or entry strategy for a new field.
- African missions struggling to cope with draconian legislation which prevents funding of their international operations.
- The lack of common policy on crisis management—such as in the evacuation of a field in an emergency.
- The sharing of costs and personnel to set up a viable inter-mission MK school in Africa.
- Finding out key information on a specific unreached people that is found in more than one region.

So we need something simple, practical and global in scope, but often regional in operation.

### **A Proposed Starting Mechanism**

It is better to start small and lean, yet with mechanisms for growth as its value is perceived and felt needs met.

I therefore suggest that we need to:

- Establish a focal point with a small email-based committee of those mission leaders already involved in leadership roles in international bodies.
- Specifically involve the larger evangelical mission agencies of around 500 workers or more which recruit and deploy workers from and in multiple countries. The reason for this is that national missions with a single field of operation will usually be effectively served and represented

by their national networks. It is the international missions who have no meaningful means of intercommunication.

• Set up a communications tool. The best model could be BRIGADA, but with a circulation largely comprised of middle and upper leadership of international missions. This would do several things:

- Provide interactive news from mission agencies—not publicity, but the information fitting for a mission executive.
- Provide addresses for more specialist e-discussion groups and for key resource people.
- Act as a clearing house for mission executive inquirers.
- Become a contact point for international mission events.
- Give a mechanism for commonly agreed public statements or communication with global and regional networks.

A specific regional or global conference would be arranged only as and when it felt right and met a specific felt need. Such a conference could well be planned to piggy-back other larger events.

### **Summary**

I hereby propose that we initiate as soon as possible an informal network mechanism for the leadership of mission agencies with international recruitment which could be linked by means of an e-zine for information and email forum(s) for discussion.

### **Addendum: How To Get Started**

*It is perfectly reasonable to consider Patrick's reasoned statement a "motion" to proceed. Most of this issue of Mission Frontiers can be considered a serious "second" to that motion. The Singapore '02 conference also constitutes an impressive "second" to Patrick's motion.*

*A letter is going to all of the 212 Singapore participants inviting them to come together in a fairly brief meeting to issue a formal Call, what we are calling The Third Call.*

*If you are a mission leader, would you want to be part of that meeting? You are invited. Respond to [thirdcall332211@aol.com](mailto:thirdcall332211@aol.com). 🌐*