

Editorial Comment

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In a few condensed pages you can sense the tone of the meeting in Singapore, and you can sense the significance of the theme of “advancing strategies of closure among all unreached people groups”

Dear Reader,

For us to concern ourselves with “frontiers” of mission is our business, our calling, our assignment, our burden. And, it’s a hazardous endeavor if you don’t want to be misunderstood!

At Singapore ’02 the purpose was to renew focus on the Unreached Peoples and mission frontiers in general.

The Conference Itself

The material in this issue of *Mission Frontiers* is a condensed report reflecting on a huge amount of marvelous insight, the details of which you can see in the January 2003 issue of the *International Journal of Frontier Missions*. [How to subscribe? See note on page 15.] There you really can almost visit the meetings by glancing through the detailed reports of the small-group discussions, etc.

What you can’t do, of course, is to taste the thrill of meeting smiling faces of warm real people from the remote corners of the planet, all eagerly unified in their desire to set goals and reach those goals in terms of closure at the Unreached Peoples level.

What I Said at Singapore ’02

My personal contribution at the meeting was almost counter to the overall theme. What I said may tend to push closure off further. I presented a paper entitled “From Mission to Evangelism to Mission.” That may sound like the familiar sequence of mission stages in which initial *mission* work results in a national church which then

reaches out in *evangelism* and finally its own cross-cultural *mission* effort.

Rather, I referred to something very different. We have gone to Japan, for example, and done *mission* work. *Evangelism* is now being carried on by the Japanese themselves, and even *mission* outreach is going on from the tiny basis of the Japanese church.

So? Well, a big problem remains. Horrors, there apparently is not yet a truly indigenous Japanese church! Whoa! Do we have to go back to initial *mission* all over again and build a new basis for a truly Japanese church movement?

Point? What you can see in Japan now is a highly Western church. Only a few Japanese have joined it over the years, and the vast majority have then gone out the back door. It is less than one percent of the population.

This is an unfamiliar frontier—starting all over again! But not only in Japan is there often still urgent need for a more native, national, indigenous, contextualized breakthrough. How can a Westernized Christianity that is less than 1% of Japan be considered the end of mission work there?

Well, at Singapore ’02, those 212 key leaders from all over the world faced this challenge and many others. I personally was encouraged in that mix to see still more frontiers for mission.

A Major Concern of the Conference

The discussion process of the conference seemed to highlight as

its most urgent goal some sort of a global coordination of effort of frontier mission agencies—perhaps a modest global association of mission agencies that could rise above the limitations of regional or national perspectives.

How this may fully work out we do not yet see in detail, although certain initial steps are clear.

Obviously the United Nations is not going to create such a structure. Neither the World Council of Churches nor the World Evangelical Alliance (formerly the World Evangelical Fellowship) has ever tried to launch a global association of mission agencies—the kind of entity within which any mission agency from any part of the world would be on an equal footing with the others.

How to Proceed?

First, it seems clear that a few mission agencies need to get together and issue a call for others to send official delegates to an organizing meeting and then get to work—rather than waiting around for some existing global body to take that initiative. [Are you a leader of a frontier-active mission agency? Tell me what you think of such an association! (Email: greg.parsons@uscwm.org)]

Obviously no one is thinking of a body that would legislate the activi-

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ties of its members. Rather, it would simply do on the global level what is already being done very effectively on the national level by such entities as the Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association of North America, or the India Missions Association (of India). The latter is the largest association of

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missions in the world, with over 130 member agencies. Then, there is the Asia Missions Association and the Third World Mission Association, which are still struggling. But no global entity has ever existed where both Western and non-Western member agencies can meet together as equals.

What Could Such an Entity Do?

For example, both India and China have over 60,000 of their young leaders studying in the USA. To deal strategically and track effectively the key people groups *that are in more than one region*, only a global entity can do the job.

Also, workers in the USA need to hear from workers in China as to the backgrounds of these particular students. Then, when they return, workers in China need to be informed of those students' experiences in the USA.

Today there are literally thousands of ethnic and cultural peoples scattered in more than one region. That's what "one world" implies. No national or regional association can readily take this phenomenon into account.

Another example: we hear that the \$270 billion Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country of India is actually matched by the "GDP" of a mere 20 million overseas Indians! (One fiftieth of India outside India generates a GDP equivalent to all of India!) There is, fortunately, a new organization that is attempting to coordinate evangelism and mission within those two "pieces" of India. But a global mission office could have seen the necessity of that kind of globe-straddling strategy many years ago.

OK, so much for the need of an office serving missions globally. That is an urgent frontier. How about a frontier that came up at Singapore but not at the meeting?

Are There Other Frontiers?

I will speak now of "the frontier of faulty design of overseas mission education." All around the non-Western world we see over 4,000 schools for Bible and theological training, growing rapidly in number (see the review of Philip Jenkins' *The Next Christendom* on page 14). These schools, following USA models, are making two enormous mistakes.

1. One mistake is to believe that they can recruit untried young men as students and then, by the right teaching, confer upon them gifts and maturity. It does not work very well. Why? It ignores Biblical counsel as well

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as the now global and very significant Pentecostal method of elevating gifted local leaders (not usually young people) into ordination and *then* into ongoing extension education.

2. A second mistake (which I have been slow to recognize) is that these thousands of schools continue to employ an "alternative" educational model (now mainly abandoned in the USA), that is a non-credit bearing, non-transferable form of education. Evangelicals in the USA slowly learned something in the latter part of the last century as their 157 Bible Institutes, originally following the pattern of the Moody Bible Institute, virtually all finally converted over to standard educational patterns.

Nevertheless, for much of a whole century keen Evangelical young people were being channeled into a form of education that did not allow them to go on into medicine, law, engineering, etc.

Thus, for most of a century Evangelicals have not gone into the professions, public service, Congress or the Senate *simply because they got their education in an unrecognized package.*

A recent study reports that 41 "new universities" have sprung up in the mission lands (after a lengthy vacuum). I had a glancing contact with one of the earliest of these in Guatemala just before I left in 1966 to teach at Fuller. It now has 15,000 students.

At the same time in the USA some former Bible schools have now fairly recently transmuted into Biola University, Azusa Pacific University, Hope International University, and Vanguard University—to name four within a stone's throw of our university campus in Pasadena.

The problem is that while every last one of the 157 Bible Institutes in the USA has by now made the shift to standard categories, most of the 4,000 overseas leadership training schools, painstakingly founded by our missionaries, are still giving out diplomas *that count for nothing in the marketplace.*

A few days ago, after the Singapore '02 conference, I was invited to speak to the student body of a well-known Bible College in SE Asia, which has facilities that are far more modern than many a Christian college in this country. But upon graduation the students can't go on to graduate school in the secular system of schools. Is this any way to impact the world?

It could become a Christian University with a stroke of a pen, and it could package its courses in standard patterns which would enable the credits to transfer. How soon will that happen? Or, will a "new university" of the type of the "41" just mentioned struggle into existence to meet that need?

My fear if that does not happen is more fully laid out in my review article on page 14. 🌐