



This issue of *Mission Frontiers* deals with the frontier of the “Re-Amateurization” of mission.

Ralph D. Winter



Dear Reader,

This is not a “frontier of the month” club. My last editorial was about the frontier of science vs. religion. But that frontier is still very much with us.

This issue of *Mission Frontiers* deals with the frontier of “The Re-Amateurization” of mission, a topic we introduced in these pages quite a while ago.

And that frontier also is still very much with us.

In fact, the uneven, mainly inadequate quality of the new generation of missionaries has got to be one of the most serious and profound limitations to the cause of missions in the near future.

Whoa! Don’t think I am trying to run down the current generation of outgoing young people who are as eager, dedicated and relatively sophisticated as ever before!

The problem is that today they are mainly going out not to join longer-term missionaries (who after 40 years on the field have turned a number of totally unanticipated corners in their thinking). No, they are mainly starting from scratch, in new places and in new fields.

This situation existed once before. This is the reason for speaking of the “re”-amateurization of mission. Once before the massive “Student Volunteer Movement” suddenly pumped thousands out into the field, too many and too fast to build on wise foundations already there. In that case, however, the young, earnest “goers” stayed long enough for the valued “on-field” education to take hold. But in their earlier

years they caused a lot of setbacks. They eased national pastors out of pulpits on the grounds that they were inadequately trained. It took almost forty years for the SVM generation to gain a widespread confidence in local leaders (and thus catch up with the perspective of the earlier missionaries).

Today it is still true that local leaders without formal theological training far outnumber those with “safe” classroom training. In the so-called mission lands it might be 2,000,000 to 100,000, or 20 to one. The enigma is that the “safely-trained” pastors are usually far inferior to the others despite their training as “real” pastors.

But, can new, young people easily understand this? Don’t look now, but the 25,000 newest churches even in the USA are mainly pastored by informally trained people. It is not that formal training harms people. It can be very valuable. The problem is that formal training is not readily available to these real leaders in their thirties and forties.

What else might young people not understand? Islam is in the news. So, take an example from that sphere.

In today’s world there are probably 60 million Christians whose Bibles and worship employ the word *Allah*, not *God* (which is a more recent, Nordic, pagan word – something like *deus* in Latin, or *theos* in Greek).

Believers in Jesus Christ were praying to Allah for over 500 years before Muhammed was even born. Thus, if young people rush out today to pressure individual Muslims to pray using a Nordic term instead of a near-Biblical term for God, little will be accomplished. Muslims need to know

more about Allah. They need to learn to pray to him as a father, for example. Even Christians need to know more about God.

Today, I hate to think that we may be in the position of using our incredible Western wealth to unleash thousands of young people upon the Islamic world. Many may go out for only a few days with the idea that they need to get Muslims to turn against their families and communities and accept the designation “Christian” in order to be counted as Bible-believing followers of Christ. This can happen. Why? Because the average young person does not realize that no follower of Christ in the New Testament employed the sneer word “Christian” to describe himself.

The word “Christian” occurs only three times in the New Testament. In 1 Peter being called a “Christian” (“messiah-nut”) is part of expected persecution. Once in Acts it is reported that the believers in Antioch “are being called Christians.” They did not call themselves that. Then, Agrippa, finally, suspects Paul is trying to make him into a “Christian.” But Paul himself does not employ the term.

Mission is not a simple calling, requiring merely goodhearted people. It is often exasperatingly baffling and mysterious and requires one generation building on another.

The issue is simple once it is clear, namely, if circumcision avails nothing in itself, certainly calling one’s self a “Christian” does not get you any place. Repentance and faith will cer-

tainly do so, however, with or without any particular label.

But this is not the place to treat mission issues in detail. The overall burden of *Mission Frontiers* this time is the simple fact that mission is not a simple calling, requiring merely goodhearted people. It is often exasperatingly baffling and mysterious and requires one generation building on another.

Let’s never suppose that linking young people and their congregations with exotic places is all we need to do. It is mainly wonderful that so many teenagers are able to spend a few days in foreign lands, and deepen their spiritual lives in the process.

But isn’t it unfortunate that despite the phenomenal explosion of short-



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termers today, our long-term missionaries, missionary-anthropologists and missionary scholars are not growing at the same speed? Have we falsely assumed that would happen?

Would we increase the number of doctors if we sent thousands of young people into hospitals for two or three weeks? The answer is "yes" if they were enabled to understand what is really going on and got to know the workers they encountered. The answer is "no" if they thought they were supposed to heal people while there those two weeks.

The problem is even more serious than that because in many cases people back home have been getting the idea that missions has about run its course, and that today missions is merely a case of being friendly with Christians across the world since Christians are now everywhere doing their local evangelism.

Yesterday in my local church (while the pastor is on sabbatical) Gary

Haugen, founder of the International Justice Mission (IJM), gave the sermon. He vividly portrayed the dire circumstances of child labor, child prostitution and wage slavery in many places around the world and the spectacular things the IJM is doing about it. (He could have included our own country.) He asked the question, "Can people caught in these conditions believe God is good?" Then, he asked dramatically, "What is the answer to these evils? We are the answer." Who else?

If our task is to glorify God among the nations, we cannot be content to do nothing about conditions which make it extremely difficult for people to believe God is good.

Then, last Saturday I attended the funeral for Jonathan Chao (died at 65) along with what seemed like a thousand serious, believing, and in many cases, wealthy Chinese. Only a handful of non-Chinese were present. Jonathan Chao, perhaps more

than any other individual in the world, has for many years labored behind the scenes with the various networks of house churches in China.

But the thought went through my mind, "Why did he have to die at 65, and fairly suddenly, of cancer?" Yet in all of the rich and inspirational statements in the funeral (he was one of ten children) no one raised the question, "Should believers in the name of Christ go on allowing cancer to claim the lives of our leaders?"

The next morning in church, Gary Haugen's rhetorical question thus burned deeper, "What is the answer? We are the answer, we are the salt and the light of the world." We are the ones whose good works are to glorify our Father who is in heaven.

Yes, making sure people in dire circumstances know more of our God is an essential part of our mission. Yet, tackling these profound and ugly problems cannot, for the most part, be done by short-termers. 🌐

New Members of the Frontier Mission Fellowship

INTRODUCING



← **Betty Leung**, a Southern California native, is excited about being part of the work at the U.S. Center for World Mission. Betty had previously been working in marketing research before coming to the USCWM, and has been to China, Brazil and El Salvador on mission trips. She is currently serving in the Strategy Division as assistant to Dr. Ralph Winter.

Spencer & Jacqueline Presley →

Another Northwest Arkansan joins the ranks here at the U.S. Center for World Mission this year. Spencer Presley comes to us from Fayetteville, and it is no coincidence that this is the second Arkansan to join us lately. Spencer married Jacqueline (Janson) this past December. Spencer will start off in the Personnel office, while Jacqueline has been assigned to work in the *Perspectives* office.



Is God calling you to join them in the Frontier Mission Fellowship? The FMF is the agency behind the U.S. Center for World Mission and other key projects in the frontier mission movement. To learn more, contact David.Flynn@uscwm.org or see www.uscwm.org/explore.