

'Disappointed and Grieved'

A Frontier Missionary's Response to *Christian Mission Magazine*

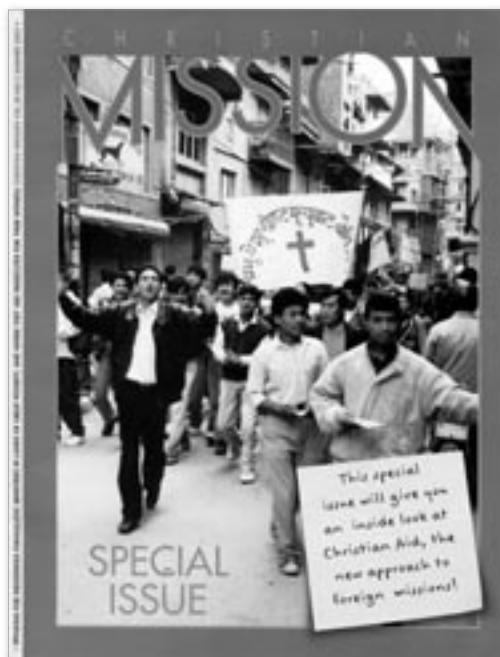
The author is a long-term, frontier missionary serving in South Asia.

Having just finished reading the Summer 2005 edition of Christian Aid's *Christian Mission* magazine, I am disappointed and deeply saddened by their disingenuous and manipulative approach to fund-raising and "kingdom-building." We live in an age in which God is doing wonderful things throughout the earth, mobilizing and anointing His worldwide Body – East, West, North and South, in unity and partnership – to go forth and reflect His glory among the unreached peoples of the earth. This magazine – filled with half-truths, overstatements, and faulty reasoning – represents a mighty step backwards for the cause of Christ and His Kingdom purposes.

There are numerous biblical, cultural, historic and strategic errors found throughout the pages of this magazine, but perhaps sadder than any one specific error is the overarching tone of the whole edition.

Any time one portion of the Body tries to tear down another portion in order to increase their support base, there are anti-Kingdom forces at work. This is certainly a "divide-and-conquer" magazine.

My grief is intensified by the fact that there are, of course, some kernels of truth underlying many of Christian Aid's assertions – and the issues that are raised should be discussed, prayed over, and jointly (in partnership) processed. There is always a need for repentance, growth, change, and re-evaluation.



Sadder than any one specific error is the overarching tone of the whole edition.

The missionary movement since the time of Christ has been one filled with fallible human beings, stumbling forward imperfectly. But let us not "throw the baby out with the bathwater." Historic ways of doing mission should be judged within their historical timeframes. But instead of discussing the issues in a spirit of cooperative understanding, I believe this magazine simply sets up "straw men" of extremes that they then tear down and replace with supposedly perfect answers.

Let's look at some specific problems and errors:

► *Christian Mission* claims, "Foreign missionaries are still not allowed in Nepal, but with the help of Christian Aid the number of believers has grown to more than a million." Actually, foreign missionaries have been in Nepal for decades both officially and as tentmakers, students, etc. These people have helped love and mentor the few Nepali believers forward into their destinies. More than 20 years ago some "foreigners" from our own mission organization (now primarily staffed and led by nationals) were thrown into prison alongside their Nepali co-laborers – together suffering for Christ and His Kingdom, together laying seeds that

would be watered by the Lord and eventually bear much fruit. Nepali leaders today speak gratefully of these outsiders' pioneering and persevering efforts, and welcome other foreigners who want to work in Nepal and partner together in Kingdom work even now.

▶ *Christian Mission* states that they are connected to about “400,000” native missionaries and that many of these are “closed off to missionaries from America.” The 400,000 number seems excessive. Do they mean cross-cultural, church-planting missionaries among unreached people groups? I hardly think so. They must be speaking of any non-westerner involved in any type of ministry. Although these nationals are certainly worthy of our respect and support, they shouldn’t be necessarily designated as “missionaries,” and most are certainly not frontier missionaries among the unreached.

▶ I especially want to address *frontier missions* – that is, getting the gospel established (by church planting) among unreached people groups. Here is where the logic of *Christian Mission* is particularly flawed. Throughout the magazine, it is asserted that foreign missionaries run “roughshod over our fellow believers who are already there.” What fellow believers are already there in an unreached people group? That’s why they are called unreached! They say that “national believers already speak the language.”

If you mean the language of the unreached people group, that is not always true. National believers from Kerala and Tamil Nadu do not necessarily speak the Ansari dialect of Urdu, nor are their customs or culture very similar to North Indian Ansaris. Thus, they too need to cross cultures, learn new languages, and make major adjustments.

▶ Or take the high-caste Brahmins of North India. Many Christians in India come from peoples and backgrounds (castes) that Brahmins look down upon and sometimes even despise. A foreigner, such as an American (outside of their caste system) who is culturally sensitive and deeply committed, can often find inroads for the gospel among these people – while a “national” believer might face greater struggles, barriers and closed doors.

▶ Or take any Muslim people group with fewer than 1% Christians. Years ago a faithful, godly, committed American woman missionary was part of a team seeking to reach one of these Muslim people groups. A speaker (with an agenda similar to Christian Aid’s) came to her home church in the U.S. and pitched his case – “all foreigners are useless, they bring more harm


than good to Christ’s cause, nationals will finish the job for 1/20th the cost, etc.” The speaker raised much money, and the mission committee at this church bought into his message and immediately cut off support for their American missionary. She had been living on less than \$500 per month and was far from extravagant – bonding with her adopted people, learning language and customs, etc. Now she had zero support and eventually had to return to the United States. And back among the unreached Muslim people group? *NO* nationals were either willing or able to take her place. So much for strategic Kingdom advancement!

▶ *Christian Mission* approaches mission almost entirely from a financial perspective. For example, they paint a picture of excess and extravagance among foreigners. While I’m sure there are some cases like that, I also know a huge number of American and other non-western missionaries who are living on incredibly low support levels. They make a case that nationals can survive happily on \$50 per month, but that is rarely true. They also fail to

acknowledge the financial abuses and extravagances that sometimes occur in national situations as well. They claim to exercise accountability for all their national workers (from their American headquarters?), but a much more effective

accountability system to have foreign and national workers living and working together (or nearby) with open books and open hearts. Lastly, after accusing Americans of “free enterprise business models,” *Christian Mission* then applies the same reasoning to their arguments – emphasizing that nationals are cheaper and therefore better. Where is the room for the Holy Spirit’s involvement in calling and funding?

Instead of an “either-or” approach to mission, we should affirm a “both-and” approach. God is raising up wonderful, powerful national workers and non-western missionaries, but He is also continuing to call American and other foreign missionaries to strategic service. Let’s stop the petty attacks and start moving towards strategic partnership. Let’s not attack and cut back – let’s cooperate, encourage, assist, and move forward corporately for the Kingdom of God until every tribe, tongue, nation and people are represented before the throne of God. The Lamb that was slain is worthy! 🌐



Let's stop the petty attacks and start moving towards strategic partnership.