

Further Reflections



Joy and Grief

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My wife and I have been here at the USCWM for almost 30 years. An amazing part of being on staff is meeting people from all over the world. Many of them are involved in God's purposes to extend his fame to the least-reached peoples.

Earlier this month I was in Asia again, and was reminded that sometimes our mobilization efforts actually work. I talked with a young missionary who has been on the field just three years. Prior to that, he was in the Navy. While stationed in Asia, he just "happened" to meet a staff member of ours who was there for a year. That staffer felt led of the Lord to give him a copy of the *Perspective on the World Christian Movement* reader. He read it and some other materials including people group profiles. He caught a vision for reaching a specific group in Thailand, where he and his wife and kids now serve.

That encounter came in the midst of discouragement. Sometimes it just doesn't seem like we are getting that far, and unfortunately, it is often differences between Christians that causes a great deal of the trouble and delay.

As I was reflecting and praying this morning—both over the encouraging stories and the great needs around the world—I felt a sense of grief that:

- There is little progress in many Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist people groups. Yes, there are amazing breakthroughs and workers on the ground in so many more locations than 30 years ago, but we can do better. Yes, the harvest is in

God's timing, and He chooses to move when He will, but I don't want that to be an excuse for inaction or ineffectiveness.

- So many Christians are distracted by so many things. Here in the U.S. people get absorbed with material things. In some other nations, they see the same things now and want them, not realizing how much it will "cost" them by distracting them from God's best for them. It can be *good* things that absorb our lives also. Pastor Tim Keller says that while Christians may not have physical idols, our spouses or children, jobs or ministry—anything—can be an idol if that thing is ultimate in our lives...if "we'd die" without it. Only God is ultimate.
- Differences of opinion related to field strategies are becoming more and more confrontational. Many of these are far more focused on specific field strategies than on doctrine. We seem to have forgotten that Jesus never seemed concerned with defending a certain position—except who He was and even then, He isn't as clear when asked directly by certain people (like Pilate). He does get frustrated over unbelief and he gets angry when religious leaders lead people away from God. I'm sure he was "careful" with what he said, but not overly so, or there wouldn't be different ways to interpret his meaning in a number of passages.
- Rumors and misinformation are being shared, in various forums, so that excellent evangelical workers are

forced to spend time defending their positions. There are enough problems on the frontlines to last global field workers years. They don't need harsh criticism, false accusations or rumors to distract them just because they are trying something we might not do back home.

I just received a prayer letter from a very effective global servant I've known for 30 years. He described this exact situation quoted from a recently published book that had what he calls "a complete fabrication" of information related to the people group he serves. What was written, which was related to a translation issue in the Bible, was "easily verifiable." The book's authors did not care to check and now have created yet another distraction for this brother and many others. I know for a fact that my friend is working to stand for the core truths evangelicals hold, yet with the sensitivity the cultural situation requires.

We may disagree with a particular brother or sister in practice while we agree in areas of clear biblical teaching. Perhaps we should allow others the freedom to apply different field strategies as they and those in their mission determine and not second-guess them at every turn. Jim Petersen, author of *Church Without Walls* and other books, said it this way:

"We do not need to convince the rest of the body, to get everyone to agree that we are right and they are wrong. All we need is the space to pursue our calling to the lost. In the end the proof will be in the fruit" (Acts 15:7-9). 🌐