ACROSS CHASMS

Global Missiology Conference

The Netherlands 2007

INTRODUCTION

Robert D. Kaplan wrote one of the most stimulating books I have recently read on missiology. He is correspondent for *The Atlantic Monthly* and the author of many books, notably *Balkan Ghosts*, reflecting on current events.

I doubt if Mr. Kaplan ever heard the word "missiology" and most especially since spell check does not include the word, and I am certain when he wrote *Imperial Grunts* he was not thinking of any spiritual application. In fact, I resisted purchasing the book for almost two years, both because of its title and its theme.

The premise is that in today's flat world, with communication as it is, and with highly diverse conflicts both tribal and ideological, the most effective way to bring influence is through small, highly mobile, highly culturally teams, rather than through a ponderous bureaucracy. This is expressed through the Special Operation Forces of the USA military. Here are the keys

Humans are more important than hardware.
Quality is better than quantity.
Teams cannot be mass-produced.
SOF cannot be created after an emergency.
The essence of effectiveness lies in the training, both received and given.
Decision-making is in the field, not at a desk.

You have to understand the culture and hopefully the language.
Things must be culturally compatible to be lasting.

Time after time Kaplan spent time with soldiers on the ground that knew history, culture, language, and current events. The book describes the experiences and their meaning.

And I began to think, "this is missiology." This is the attitude and approach we need to consider in this day. If a military can do it, can a church do it?

I reflected back to many conferences, seminars, consultations and events as I read the invitation to present a paper to this gathering of Nazarene missiologists. Many have been good and all had some part in weaving the mosaic, which can now be defined, as the Church of the Nazarene.

It occurred to me that many things once unheard of are now the norm. Helen Keller, blind author, once wrote, "The heresy of one age becomes the orthodoxy of the next." I remember a day when sending untrained teams and especially youth to mission settings was heresy. It is now orthodoxy. Others practices, such as mission fiefdoms in Africa, were orthodoxy. Now they are heresy, and discarded as useless, irrelevant, or even onerous. Times change both people and organizations.
Alfred North Whitehead once wrote, "The art of progress is to preserve order amid change and to preserve change amid order."

I remember studying the heady days of Edinburgh with John R. Mott and others who were convinced they would win the world to Christ in their generation. The events of the 20th century overcame with the power of war, depression, and crumbling of empires those noble impulses.

The question now is "can we win the world to Christ?" If so, how? If not, what are the obstacles? While there is a momentum in the growth of the Christian community, there are forces of opposition in ideology and theology, which sap the energies and distract the attention of the Christian community.

In these preliminary reflections it occurred to me that many of these gatherings have dealt largely with the hypothetical, theoretical, and philosophical. As valuable as this may be, I am inclined to bend this presentation to the practical. There is a time for thought and reflection. There is also a time for decision and action. I believe we are at such a time and perhaps this group can shape those decisions that need to be made.

UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS

My underlying assumptions are neither novel nor new. But to be clear, here they are:
1. We live under the mandate of the Great Commission to "go into all the world."
2. The Church is a body sent.
3. The primary task is not to evangelize but to disciple.
4. This task is best achieved by a body dynamic, a system efficient, and people motivated.
5. Missionary deployment is one component still important in a day of internet and iPod.

We are painfully aware that the notion of "west to east" deployment is still the psychological framework of many while at the same time we acknowledge that missionary sending is the task of all.

Recognizing the goal, it has been my observation that in the West, and specifically in our own organization, we are encumbered by many things, such as contracts, compensation, issues of retirement, legal constraints and fears, the perceived need for large amounts of financial and equipment resources, etc. All of these have become part of a system that sometimes clouds the ability to think clearly, to see far, and to actualize vision for the future.

I have been a mission administrator and I understand that these are important details, which can smother idealism. My appeal to us is to have courage to believe detail can be managed in the interest of the vision to win the world to Christ.

This paper will propose a model, which might be used in the Nazarene context to maximize potential, minimize obstacles, and accelerate impact and results. I fully realize that the model has elements of the radical. I take comfort from the old American proverb taken from the pioneering days of the American West, which says, "It doesn't work to leap a twenty-foot chasm in two ten-foot jumps." In the church we tend to like gradualism. Maybe in this case we should remember Sir Winston Churchill who said, "When the eagles are silent, the parrots began to jabber."

TRUE CASE ALLEGORIES

I have described three true cases in missionary deployment as things "used to be" and hopefully will never be again.

Couple A hailed from New York. They expressed a "calling" to missionary service. A shortage of available candidates accelerated their invitation to be

interviewed and commissioned. There were some reservations relating to a complete lack of experience, but the need was present, and the urgent overwhelmed prudence. The last name of the husband was of Italian extract, thus in their wisdom those making the decisions determined logic would place them in Italy.

From the day of arrival, there was conflict with national leadership who saw little need for the importation of expatriates from America in any case, and problems of adjustments as well as demands for suitable housing and educational opportunities.

A few months in to the assignment, when the issue of learning the language came to the fore, the husband declared with dogmatism that tutors and formal language learning were not needed. A television had been purchased, he declared, and "we will learn language by watching Italian television."

In less than two years, couple A had returned to their homeland.

Couple S was pastoring in a midwestern state a church very small and one that had never shown any statistical growth. After some years of frustration in this small pastoral assignment, couple S suddenly received a Divine call to missions and wrote the Department. Again, a shortage of candidates meant nearly anyone not obviously mentally handicapped would be interviewed.

The interview revealed deficiencies in experience and understanding, but these were overlooked and the couple was commissioned and deployed to a high growth field in the Caribbean. Almost immediately they took on the trappings of missionary life (in direct contrast to life as a home mission pastor) with expectations for equipment, security, housing, automobiles, and all the rest.

For their wedding couple S had been given a set of china, which was not especially valuable but highly treasured. One of their sacrifices was to store the china rather than transporting it to the field.

On arrival they were plunged into daily life, struggled with the language, and were expected by virtue of their contract to supervise those who already highly successful ministries. The results were predictable and inevitable. The couple could not tolerate church procedures outside of their own experience in the Midwest of the United States, and soon conflict developed.

In less than three years, couple S was returned to their home area.

Couple H were thrilled to be assigned to Israel. While well educated, nothing had prepared them for ministry in a complex and demanding area.

Interviews revealed the possibility of failure, but nevertheless, they were deployed. Mrs. H was ecstatic because at last she could see "where Jesus walked", the words of a song she often sang in public.

Soon after arrival the complexity of culture overwhelmed them to a point of their own paralysis. As months passed, the novelty of "walking where Jesus walked" passed. The grim reality of life in the Middle East set in. Before two years had passed, couple H realized that a mistake had been made, and offered their resignations, which were accepted.

These are three true stories and there are many more. On the other hand, a percentage of appointments have been successful with long years of effective service.

But now the question is, how do we open up the possibility of a vastly larger number of those expressing short or long-term calling to serve the church and win the world?

PROPOSAL

George Will in one of his columns writes, "the future has a way of arriving unannounced." For us, announced or not, the future is now. How then, shall we "win the world" if this is our true goal, in part with the deployment of missionaries, if we still think there is validity to the notion of missionary?

I would propose a network of sending agencies, which are accredited under rigid standards. This committee standards and oversight committee would be composed of representatives of the General Board and of the Regions.

The legal line of accountability would be to the General Board and the operational entity would be the Department of World Mission or its successor body.

Each Region would determine over time how to organize what geography would constitute the sending agencies. They could be one for a Region. There could be several based on cultures or field definitions. In some cases the agency may be a national board, or the RAC of the respective Region.

These agencies would be legally registered in such a way as to facilitate the negotiation of compensation and contracting away from the General Board.

This could be done by committee recommendation through the Regions or by a "stand alone" agency.

Financing would be done by bloc grant from WEF or other funds through the Regions.

Advantages of this system would be

1.   A sense of ownership by the sponsoring field, region, area of its deployed personnel.
2.   Reduced potential for liability to the General Board.
3.   Quicker access for evaluation and deployment.
4.   More numbers moving more places more quickly.
5.   Fewer obstacles presented in serving the church and fulfilling a calling.

There are many potential complications

1.   Such a system would have to be worked out in stages and there should be one or more pilot efforts to deal with the unexpected "bugs" that will emerge.
2.   A system of curriculum and training would need to be strongly supported by Regions, fields, agencies to ensure doctrinal integrity and continuity of purpose and mission.

There is no question in my mind this new system would multiply the numbers of potential missionary deployment. The question is, would it simplify? Without the benefit of testing, it is an open question.

One key component of this system would be the concept of accreditation. That is, there would be developed criteria for the integrity of any recognized agency. A monitoring body would evaluate, supervise, and accredit each agency. If accredited, those commissioned and contracted would be considered "Nazarene missionaries."

This system would apply to the United States as well as to all Regions.

Here are some issues, which would need to be resolved.

1. How would one called be deployed across agency lines?
2. What would be the criteria for the use of WEF or other funding for bloc support grants?
3. What would be the nature of and the legal implications of the General Board link, worldwide?
4. What set of policies would be universal and what set of policies would be tailor-made by the agencies?
5. What system would be used, database or others, for personnel directors to have knowledge of need and to match resource with need?
6. What accountability line would be enforcing for the field personnel and for the administrators?

There are other issues as well. I did not claim this would be easy. I do claim that the current system is not going to accomplish the task as we have stated it, and that it is not efficient.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

Let me dare to push the envelope even further. Let us think of a world where we have no missionaries at all as we have known them for the last centuries.

Rather, we encourage volunteers, teams, university students, national leaders and evangelists, the Body of the church itself, to all be engaged in mission. A world where the only paid personnel are educators, administrators, and field supervisors.

If we were to consider moving in this direction, what would the net effect be in terms of accomplishing the mission of winning the whole world to Christ?

CONCLUSION

In my lifetime I have seen changes in the way the Church of the Nazarene does mission work. A few of these are

1. The use of volunteers
2. The proliferation of centers of influence (such as Work and Witness, Compassionate Ministry, involvement of universities in cross cultural sending, volunteers, early business retirements, etc.
3. The development of regional structures beyond what anybody had envisioned.
4. The growth of the church resulting in hundreds/thousands who want to minister, many of them across cultures.
5. The development of technology, which has flattened the world.

Yet, at heart, the Church of the Nazarene still recruits, trains, funds, contracts, and deploys missionary personnel in essentially the same ways. The question now is whether it is time to consider a dramatic shift?

It is not my expectation that this proposal, per se, will be accepted or implemented. Rather, that this proposal will be a part of the discussion and will feed in to the larger picture. I have lived long enough to know that

organizations, and especially those of an eccliastical bent, tend to slip and slide into decision. Religious leaders often like to live in the world of the vague and the ambiguous. Ideas are often few and far between. And implementation of a good idea is a hard commodity to find.

All of that said, we need to give serious consideration to how we are going to "win the world to Christ."