

Preparation for going overseas

Preamble

Remapll – the longer the specific missionary training people have the longer they will stay in as missionaries.

Question re. what missionaries most need in a refresher course? To be taught to think again.

Harold Macmillan reputed saying “Events, dear boy, events”. Some of the most unlikely missionary candidates succeed and some of those who seem the most promising fail. None of us know what the future might hold and how we might react to events and this is compounded by the experience of crossing cultures.

Some negative examples of missionaries experiences that we need to bear in mind as we prepare and assess people

Failure to cope with situation : A promising couple recruited in Zimbabwe in the early 70s could not cope with being on equal terms with Indonesians. Couple who only realised on Orientation Course that they would be living next to Chinese in Taiwan, survived 6 months. Couple who had visited Cambodia on their own, could not cope when they returned with their child. Unexpected reactions cannot be always prepared against. But some can. Need to guard against false ideas about God and his will that may put us into contexts where we already realise it is unlikely we will not cope – example of the 48 hour long term teacher.

Moral issues. Five married missionaries in Philippines – homosexual affairs. Five cases of immorality in one year dealt with by new mission agency director. Lesbian ring in Latin America. Missionary to Pakistan – affair with language teacher and conversion to Islam.

Ministry and Theological issues – lack of systematic theology in most missionary training results in a patchwork of beliefs. Assumed evangelicalism becomes forgotten evangelicalism.

Pragmatism rules – does it produce results rather than “Is it right?”

Little theological reflection or knowledge of the history of doctrinal formation. Baptisms in Muslim evangelism that show little understanding of historic debates and definitions.

Contextualisation that is based on superficial knowledge of the existing religion those being evangelised. Christian church based on Shinto structures. 3 and 40 days in Manado.

Lack of Biblical evaluation of either other faiths or indigenous theology.

Lack of historical awareness – few issues that we face today that have not been faced in previous eras. Insider movement cf. with Reformation debates about Nicodemites.

Production of dependency cultures and unawareness of national perceptions of missionary attitudes (example from one of the Stans; vulnerable mission and Africa prosperity gospel).

Poor language acquisition – increasing number of short termers who will only partly learn the language has meant that the person with half-decent language will be the expert. Often poor example from leaders.

What preparation is possible?

Training appropriate to the task that people are going to do. Those who are going to plant churches and work with national believers need as much, if not more, training than someone who is going to work as a minister in the UK.

Cultural

What it means to cross cultures. Personal adaptability. Patience in developing understanding of others in their cultural context. Servanthood and readiness to suffer.

Academic – knowing the issues and the logical consequences of adopting any particular position. Philosophical and theological basis for thinking through issues of theology and culture. Knowledge of how to find information to investigate issues that come up during overseas service. Basic anthropological tools. Need to relate conventional Western theology into cross-cultural situations. Biblical teaching that engages with the cultural elements in scripture e.g. Ephesians and magic.

Practical – what Christian ministry have you experienced – evangelism, Bible handling skills and teaching/preaching experience, counselling/pastoring, church leadership. Specific experience of crossing cultures.

Spiritual - part of a supporting and stretching church fellowship. Personal spiritual development and appropriate spiritual disciplines. Guarding faith and morality. Able to self-feed and to cope with either fellowship or solitary situations.

Questions

1. What processes do you have in place to assess the spiritual state of your candidates? What criteria would you apply?
2. How equipped are your selectors to assess the theological position of your candidates and what this might involve in the context of the place where they are to work?
3. What recommendations do you give to candidates about the appropriate formal training for the work they are going to do? What steps do you take to assess the effectiveness of such training?