M. David Sills, D.Miss., Ph.D.
The Future of the Discipline of Missiology

Issue #2: Missiology in a Changing World Since World War II

Abstract

The years following WWII witnessed wave after wave of new missionaries going to the world. Just as birthrates experienced a baby boom, so did the mission fields of the world experience a missionary boom. These men and women were part of a great generation; in fact some are still faithfully serving Christ around the world. Yet the world to which they went and the world to which their children and grandchildren have gone to serve are two very different places.

The discipline of missiology has witnessed significant developments since World War II resulting in shifts in philosophies, strategies, and methodologies of missions. I will address some of the most crucial shifts—people group orientation, issues in orality, the post-9/11 world, missions via creative access platforms, and challenges relative to globalization, urbanization, and immigration in contemporary missiology.

The complexities of each of these issues necessitates an honest evaluation of how the perspective has shifted in the years since WWII, the impetuses for change, and the resulting context in which the missionaries of today find themselves. I will argue that within each of these shifts we have seen both a more faithful understanding of our task as well as emerging challenges. For example, we now understand that we are called to the peoples of the world, rather than to the geopolitical entities of the world. Yet, this understanding has led not only to greater strategic focus, but also to extrabiblical definitions that have resulted in questionable missionary and resource allocation.

If we are to learn from those who have gone before us in order to be faithful to all of the Great Commission, then we must understand the benefits and challenges of the developments that have come. This is a time of unprecedented opportunity as the interconnected, globalized world shares quantities of technology, education, and data never before imagined. Modern missiologists must respond to the challenges and point the way forward for our own generation and for those who follow behind.

The discipline of missiology has witnessed significant developments since

World War II, resulting in shifts in philosophies, strategies, and methodologies of

missions. I will address some of the most crucial shifts—people group orientation,

issues in orality, the post-9/11 world, missions via creative access platforms, and

challenges relative to globalization, urbanization, and immigration in contemporary missiology.

The Second World War and its aftermath brought about massive changes in the understanding and practice of modern missiology. Having served the US armed forces around the world, many servicemen and women returned with a broadened worldview, global perspective, and awareness of the world's spiritual needs. During their time overseas they witnessed idol worship, animism, hopelessness and fear. Many had also seen staggering physical needs in areas of extreme poverty, corrupt governmental systems, and countless orphaned children. Additionally, although they had faithfully done their duty, they were burdened with a sense of guilt for participation in what often seemed to be senseless destruction. God used all of this to call many into missionary service and to birth dozens of parachurch ministries as they sought to go back and give back. The years following WWII witnessed wave after wave of new missionaries going to the world.[1]

No matter how tragic warfare may be, the truth is that medical procedures and technological advances are made in wartime with a speed rarely seen in peacetime. Many missionaries longed to use the skills and training they had received in the war years. These skills were diverse, and often required specialized training such as medical work, radio transmission, or aviation.

Another development following WWII was the growing awareness that diverse cultures communicate using many of the same signal systems, but use them all in different ways. Edward T. Hall applied this concept to his work in the Foreign

---

[1] David Howard, "If I Could Live My Career Over Again: Reflections of a Veteran Missionary," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* October 2003: 474.

Service Corps and penned helpful resources aiding in effective intercultural communication.[2] The primary beneficiaries of his work were the United States diplomats and the Foreign Service Corps workers, but missionaries seeking to reach and teach previously unfamiliar ethnolinguistic groups found this developing field of knowledge useful in countless ways.

People Group Thinking

A significant shift in missiological thought and practice began in 1974 following Ralph Winter's presentation to the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization[3] where his presentation resulted in a massive missiological shift to reach people groups rather than simply geopolitical entities. Many had begun to accept, as early as the 1960's, that the Great Commission was completed due to the presence of a church in every country on the world map. Indeed, some reasoned that the Great Commission was simply to make disciples in every nation of the world based on the English reading of the passage, which appeared to be accomplished. However, Winter argued that in the original Koine Greek text Jesus commands the Church to make disciples in *panta ta ethne,* not merely in the geopolitical designations on modern maps. He argued that there were 24,000 people groups in the world and that we had only reached 14,000 of them since the time of Jesus' earthly ministry. His call to missionaries and mission agency administrators

---

[2] Some of Hall's works include The Silent Language (1959), The Hidden Dimension (1966), Handbook for Proxemic Research (1974), The Fourth Dimension In Architecture: The Impact of Building on Behavior (1975, co-authored with Mildred Reed Hall), Beyond Culture (1976), The Dance of Life: The Other Dimension of Time (1983), Hidden Differences: Doing Business with the Japanese (1990, co-authored with Mildred Reed Hall), An Anthropology of Everyday Life: An Autobiography (1992), Understanding Cultural Differences - Germans, French and Americans (1993)

[3] Winter, Ralph. "The Highest Priority: Cross Cultural Evangelism." In *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: Official Reference Volume, Papers and Responses*, edited by J.D. Douglas, 226-41. Minneapolis, MN: World Wide Publications, 1975.

to turn their attention to the unreached people groups was a game changing moment in modern missions practice.

Winter had arrived at his conclusions after considering and combining the observations of Donald McGavran and Cameron Townsend. McGavran had served in India in the context of thousands of castes sharing the same city but separated by caste rules that prohibited their interaction. He was frustrated that effective ministry was inhibited by these castes in a society that shared language, laws, land, and every other aspect of daily reality. Cameron Townsend's ministry context had been Central America where he served as a colporteur missionary about the time of WWI. Although he was a zealous missionary, the innumerable indigenous peoples who did not read, write, or speak Spanish cooled his zeal. He began to ponder the challenges of reaching and teaching people groups who shared everything but language in their daily reality. He realized that effective ministry among them required providing the Scriptures in their heart languages; thus was born Wycliffe Bible Translators. Ralph Winter noticed that both men had encountered the impact of the boundaries of ethnolinguistic groups on ministry expansion; McGavran was frustrated by the vertical hierarchy that divided them by caste, while Townsend struggled to reach peoples divided horizontally by their indigenous languages.

As the missions world began to adapt to Winter's thesis and realized the new challenges such a shift would bring to the traditional way of missions, they launched efforts to identify all the people groups of the world, and then discover which were without a healthy, reproducing church among them. Although missions groups count people groups in different ways, resulting in differing totals for the world's

reached and unreached[4], the race was on to name and reach every unreached group.

Of course, different metrics for deciding which were reached and unreached caused

confusion, so major missions thinkers met to devise a commonly accepted definition

and metric. The result was a definition of unreached as a people group that is less

than 2% evangelical. What was not initially foreseen or agreed upon by those

meeting was what some have taken as a logical next step. The group merely wanted

to arrive at a common definition for the unreached, or the least reached groups, of

the world.[5] However, some missiologists took the next step of assuming that if an

unreached group is one that is less than 2% evangelical, then a group that is 2%

evangelical is "reached." The logic continues that if a group is "reached" they are no

longer in need of outside help, or certainly not as much of a priority, given the vast

number of other people groups that qualify as "unreached." Missionaries and

missions resources were deployed or removed and redeployed elsewhere in an

unintended consequence this criterion. World Christian Database missiologist, Todd

Johnson, maintains that, "Every people group in the world is unreached from

someone's point of view."[6]

The contemporary people group orientation changed the way missions

groups recruited candidates and funds, and prioritized their efforts. Terms such as

"World A" and "The Last Frontier" began to characterize some mission agencies'

priorities, so much so that many contemporary Christians accept a formula that can

---

[4] According to Joshua Project, there are 16,655 total people groups, of which 7,056 are unreached.
According to the International Mission Board there are 11,487 people group, of which 6,619 are unreached.
Both sets of statistics were obtained online at the organization websites and are current as of May 6, 2012.
[5] Sills, M. David. *Reaching and Teaching: A Call to Great Commission Obedience* (Chicago: Moody
Publishers, 2009), 108-113.
[6] Johnson, Todd. Phone Interview. December 30, 2008.

be articulated as "missions equals reaching the unreached." When reaching the unreached became the essence of missions, speed became the priority. Missions ministries that slowed the advance of the gospel message into unreached groups were seen as not only "lesser than," but actually impediments to completing the Great Commission and were often cut with resources reallocated.

With the growing awareness of the needs of the unreached, new terms were needed to determine which unreached people groups (UPG) should receive the highest priority. Terms such as unengaged (UUPG - those who are not only unreached but who have had no church planting efforts among them in the last two years) and uncontacted (UUUPG - those who are unreached and unengaged, and have never even been contacted, such as hostile people groups in jungle settings). Mission literature increasingly includes references to these distinctions with a growing sense that the peoples with the lowest percentages should receive priority in the allocation of personnel and resources.

Unfortunately, the need for speed to reach the unreached of the world has failed to ask what "reached" means. One ministry seeks to place a gospel tract in every home in the world. By their own estimation they have placed a "paper missionary" in almost one and a half billion homes.[7] When they reach their goal of placing the gospel message in every home, will the world be reached? Will Jesus return that day as some understand Matthew 24:14?[8] Surely we must be thoughtful

---

[7] The full quote from which I pulled this example is from the organization Every Home for Christ, "Every day our workers visit more than 200,000 homes. We have reached over 1.47 BILLION homes in the last 65 years, and seen over 110 million people respond to the gospel! Just last year alone we reached over 82 million homes!" Accessed online, May 6, 2012. http://www.ehc.org/inside.jsp?sectionid=1&pageid=51
[8] Sills, *Reaching and Teaching*, 121-126.

enough to argue no, the world will not be truly reached, since many do not read or do not understand the language of the tract. A challenge of modern missiology is to define the task of missions and terms such as "reached" so as to assist missionaries to discern the areas of need among the world's peoples as well as the proper role of missionaries among them.

Issues in Orality

The burgeoning awareness of the oral majority of the world's population is changing the way missionaries engage their target cultures. The International Orality Network reports that two-thirds of the world cannot or does not read.[9] There are five levels of literacy from completely preliterate, or nonliterate, peoples to the highly literate. Many preliterate peoples speak a language that has not been reduced to writing while other nonliterates live subsistence lives that preclude advanced education or access to the world of print communication. The highly literate are typically those who are able to read a book of unfamiliar content, understand the argument, reflect on what they have read, and write a response. The highly literate constitute roughly 20% of the world's population; unfortunately over 90% of all resources for evangelism, discipleship, and leadership training have been developed for them.[10]

---

[9] According to the International Orality Network, there are an estimated 4.35 billion people who are oral learners. Accessed online, May 6, 2012. http://internationaloralitynetwork.org/oral-learning/statistics-facts

[10] I had the opportunity to serve as the Theological Education Chair of the Orality Taskforce for the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization, which gave me access to unpublished statistics such as this one on various aspects of orality. Since that time, the International Orality Network (ION) has been developed and continues to serve missiologists and the Church with a deepened awareness of orality. I highly recommend that anyone working in an oral context contact ION for more information as well as read the 2004 Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization Occasional Paper, "Making Disciples of Oral Learners" available at http://www.lausanne.org/docs/2004forum/LOP54_IG25.pdf.

The missiological implications are significant when one realizes that literacy level does not merely refer to one's ability to read, but also the way people understand, process, remember, and repeat information. Oral cultures rarely understand or utilize sequential, linear logic, nor do they use abstract ideas or direct questions in communication. Since systems of ethnocognition differ among the thousands of oral cultures, researchers must study to identify effective methodologies for ministry with each people of these worldviews.

While our contemporary awareness of the vast number of people groups without literacy challenges our traditional missions methods, we should remember that oral cultures have always existed. Jesus ministered to an oral world, and thus contemporary readers study His teachings in vain to find modern homilectical outlines or logical syllogisms in the Gospels. He used parables, metaphors, similes, and stories to communicate with His hearers. Gutenberg changed everything for the advance of Christianity. It has been said that since Gutenberg, Christianity has walked on literate feet. There was a time when we planted churches and then schools next door in order to teach the children to read and write. Christianity and literacy became virtually synonymous in the history of modern missions. Sadly, I have met faithful believers who have served the Lord for decades and yet lacked assurance of their salvation. They assumed from the emphasis of earlier missionaries' teaching children to read that God must require literacy of those whom He accepts. Unwittingly, missionaries had taught that they could not go to Heaven when they died unless they became literate.

Reaching and teaching oral cultures requires unique methodologies. The content remains the same, but the delivery system must be contextualized. For instance, there are many people groups whose worldview explains creation with an origin myth, defines sin in unbiblical terms, or believes that life continues after death through reincarnation. For any of these groups, hearing that God sent His Son, that He will judge sin, or that it is appointed to men once to die and then face judgment will not be understood without broader teaching and deep discipling.

Teaching oral cultures is more complex than merely reading to them; even the format and logical flow of point-by-point teaching is lost on them. Missionaries have found that chronological Bible storying not only communicates the Bible's redemptive narrative, it does so in ways that they can understand, remember, and retell. Moreover, storying facilitates a worldview change as they hear and embrace new explanations for the primary questions life presents. Other missionaries have used oral methodologies such as repetition or teaching basic catechisms to communicate with oral cultures in ways that they embrace and continue to use even when the missionary leaves. Even so, some missionaries express concern for the oral nature of biblical teachings, preferring a static copy of God's Word to oral methods. There are many challenges to such a preference.

There are more than 6,800 languages of the world today according to Wycliffe Bible Translators, and only 471 Bibles exist for these groups.[11] Unfortunately, these languages could be further subdivided into many more languages and dialects that are not truly mutually intelligible. In order to enter a

---

[11] Wycliffe Bible Translators, "Translation, Literacy and Language Statistics," Accessed online, May 6, 2012. http://www.wycliffe.org/about/statistics.aspx.

culture context with an unwritten language, learn to understand and speak it, reduce it to writing, produce lexicons and grammars, translate the Bible, teach literacy so that there will be readers of the new Bible, and produce a complete Bible requires as much as 40 years.[12] Certainly a static copy of the Bible and trained exegetes in every language is the goal, but missionaries cannot wait until this is accomplished. They must use oral methodologies in the interim.

The challenges presented by animistic oral cultures often push missionaries out of the nest and on to the next unreached group prematurely. Arguing that the group has an oral culture and that our Great Commission goal is not to change their literacy level, some have left after a verbal witness and initial acceptance of the gospel. Sadly, the gospel is often not understood as intended but rather results in a syncretism of biblical teaching with animism or another world religion's worldview. One needs only survey the high percentage of baptized Christians in countries such as Rwanda at the time of the genocide, Haiti in the grip of Voodoo, Cuba and its pervasive Santería, Brazil and the many forms of Umbanda, or the Andean mixture of Roman Catholicism and the Pachamama mother earth worship to see that high numbers of professed Christians have not been discipled to truly understand the claims of Christ and the teaching of the Bible. For effective ministry of highly literate missionaries among oral cultures, modern missiologists must research, understand, and practice evangelism techniques, discipleship methods, pastoral training, and

---

[12] Reports from Wycliffe personnel of a range between 25 and 40 years to complete the full cycle of a translation project. The challenges associated with this process as well as the 40 year example is found in the following source: Wycliffe Bible Translators, "And the Word Came—By Persevering," Accessed online May 6, 2012.
http://www.wycliffe.org/go/careers/typesofwork/languagework/translation.aspx?CaseStudyId=92&ModuleID=831

church planting that embrace all levels of the literacy scale and diverse ethnocognition.

Post-9/11 Missiology

The subsequent developments in the world following 9/11 continue to drive changes in modern missiology. An awareness of the threat of terrorism worldwide has changed the way missionaries travel. Even in a day of greater availability in international travel options, the airline and visa restrictions relative to who may travel and where they may do so, with what kind of baggage, and where they go are increasingly regulated. Another result of Al Qaeda's attack on the USA on September 11, 2001 is an increasing awareness of Islam's tenets, adherents, and their burgeoning presence both in the United States and around the world.

Many Christians were unaware of Islam's beliefs, history, and fervent desire to convert others to Islam prior to the attacks of that day. Westerners were surprised to learn how many Muslims were living in European cities such as Berlin, Bonn, Paris, and London as well as throughout the United States. When this was reported, many feared post-9/11 reprisals against Muslims living in the USA; thankfully this did not materialize. Indeed, the Pew Research Center released findings of a study in 2011 that indicates just the opposite.[13]

Immigration and birth rates are resulting in increasing numbers of Muslims in world cities. Cultural anthropologists and ethnographers need to research each of these contexts to determine the nature of Muslim immigrants and assimilation

---

[13] Pew Research Center, "Muslim Americans: No Signs of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism," August 30, 2011. Accessed online, May 6, 2012, http://www.people-press.org/2011/08/30/section-4-challenges-worries-and-concerns/

levels of Muslim populations. For instance, in Europe some maintain that a secularization, or Europeanization, will create a milder mainstream of Islam but research is needed to verify such claims. The reality of dhimmitude demonstrates that Islam is willing to coexist with those of other faiths when Islam has the upper hand. Some maintain that jihad will exist as long as that is not so. Sharia law is not optional for committed Muslims, and legal systems that will not recognize it are seen to restrict full expression of the religious commitment of Muslims.

The growing presence of Muslim immigrants in South America, especially in the southern cone, has been facilitated by almost 800 years of sharing the Iberian Peninsula. Beginning in AD 711 to the Battle of Granada in 1492, the result of so much shared history is that there is much in common between Latin and Arab Muslim culture.[14] The commonalities from sharing vocabulary, culture, medicine, architecture, philosophy, mathematics, and even DNA has resulted in two huge sections of world population that move with relative ease from one to another. During the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella, the Spanish Inquisition became more than a tool for purifying the Catholic Church, it became a mindset; any deviation from Catholic doctrine was not tolerated. The controlling hand in the government of the New World was Catholic. Any of those who sailed to the New World with Muslim allegiances would have kept them out of sight. In addition to the conquistadors, some African slaves forced to the New World as the work force were Muslims.[15]

---

[14] For a broader exploration of the relationship between Latin America and Muslims, see Sills, M. David and Kevin Baggett. "Islam in Latin America," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 15, no. 2 (Summer 2011), 28-41.

[15] This reality is widely cited from the perspective of Muslim historians, African-American historians, and those studying the development of the New World. However, the degree to which the Muslim faith was maintained once those enslaved were in the New World is a matter of much debate between scholars.

Once again any Muslim sympathies would have been suppressed in outwardly, but often continued to color their worldview.

In recent days, the challenges of economic difficulties in the Americas have resulted in creative political alliances with wealthy, petroleum-rich Arab Muslim nations. The ideologies and religious views of those nations often result in prickly relationships with the United States. Additionally, the historical treatment of Latin nations by wealthy corporations closely connected to the United States government has resulted in animosity of some Latin nations with the wealthy North. The need for funds and help against a powerful northern neighbor has caused some Latin leaders to look to Middle Eastern nations, finding there leaders willing to partner with them, providing money for needed projects and a market for their products. The common history and friendly ties between these nations is missiologically significant. Culturally, social interaction between these cultures is often easier than for others. Politically, it is easier for missionaries from Latin America to obtain visas and engage in activities and not be as closely monitored as United States citizens would be. Those who share the most in common with them may more easily attain access for reaching and teaching Muslims in other countries. However, this raises the matter of creative access and modern missiology.

Creative Access Platforms

With governments of the world's mission fields increasingly closing their doors to traditional missionaries and the difficult challenge of obtaining visas to long-closed countries, missionaries have had to become creative to gain access. Since the days of Brother Andrew smuggling Bibles into the former Soviet Union,

missionaries have realized that no country is truly closed; what is needed is creative thinking. Missionaries have utilized creative access platforms such as teaching English, business consulting, tour agencies, and NGO relief work for long enough now that experience can teach lessons to inform the process.

Some mistakenly believe that the platform does not have to be legitimate if it serves the greater good of gaining access to the unreached to share the gospel and disciple believers. Moreover, it is assumed that by the time new believers learn that the missionary has misrepresented himself in obtaining a visa their new friends will not care, as they will be believers and thankful for whatever it took to get the Good News to them. However, testimonies from those working in such contexts reveals that new believers are often shocked to learn of the true identity of their Christian friend, they feel betrayed, and wonder what else was misrepresented. This could be tantamount to learning on your wedding night that your new spouse's identity and background is not what you were told, and the wedding guests were not really family. You wonder what else about this person was a lie. Since Jesus declared that all authority had been given to Him, and commanded us to make disciples in all the world, creative access platforms are absolutely necessary. We should obey Him rather than the local governments when they rule otherwise, but we should do so with integrity. What is the balance for creative access and maintaining the integrity of Christian ethics along the way?

It is true that recruiting missions candidates for such secret missions efforts has resulted in a sort of "Jason Bourne for Jesus" conducting surgical strike missions exercises, and this attracts a certain demographic. Yet we would do well to look at

the long-term effectiveness of these secret agents vis-à-vis the planting of healthy

churches of discipled believers, led by biblically qualified leaders, who have been

trained to teach the whole counsel of the Word of God. There is a better way.

Missions history is replete with examples of tentmaking missionaries.[16]

Patrick Lai has been joined by a host of contemporary missiologists to help the

Church understand the origin and diverse uses of this term. Harking back to the

Apostle Paul making tents to earn his living, which enabled him to stay and preach

the gospel, the term has biblical precedent and warrant. However, as with many

methodologies, there have been detractors because of unfortunate abuses. It has

been pointed out that some tentmakers are job-takers, working in positions that a

national could have done. Others are said to be job-fakers, pretending to be

computer consultants but knowing nothing about technology. Still others are job-

makers, earning their own living, providing needed services such as drilling water

wells or ministering to tsunami victims, and employing nationals in the process.

Some tentmakers are simply Christians who are deployed overseas by their

companies who want to help churches and missionaries wherever they are. Another

form of tentmakers are those who intentionally obtain a job with a company that

will send them to a particular country with the intention of engaging in kingdom

work on the side. There are also tentmakers who need a company's "covering" of

employment in order to get a visa to live in the country, and while they legitimately

work, the money they earn is only part of their income. They are also commissioned

missionaries through a missions agency. Finally, there are the tentmakers who have

---

[16] Lai, Patrick. *Tentmaking: The Life and Work of Business as Missions*. (Colorado Springs, CO: Authentic Publishing), 2005.

a company's covering, even if it is a non-functioning "shell" company, so that they may get a visa and gain access to the country. They receive all of their salary from their donors or a mission agency.

Most tentmakers maintain a well-rehearsed short tenable statement that answers queries about why they are in the country. These tend to break down when neighbors notice that the missionary never goes to work, or when other businessmen note that he never has any business in his shop, yet he lives well month after month with no visible income. When direct questions begin to proliferate, a well-rehearsed brief statement is not tenable without lying. Providentially, a better way forward is growing in popularity.

Business as Mission (BAM) is one of the most popular concepts in contemporary missiology. Indeed, traditional theological seminaries are developing programs to train missionaries in theology, Bible, intercultural missions, *and* business skills. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has just entered into a program whereby students desiring an MA in Missions may also earn an MBA from the University of Louisville concurrently. Students will not merely have the credentials necessary for obtaining visas as businessmen and women, they will also have the expertise from one of the USA's best business training schools enabling them to help the peoples of the countries where they will serve.

History may show that the closing of the doors to historically open countries was not a negative era in missions advance. It is entirely possible that this move, which forces our missionaries to obtain training to help the nations where they go and obtain visas with a vast variety of skills and credentials, may add a level of

credibility to Christian missions that we have lacked in many lands for many

reasons. In fact, all of which are as needed as they are legitimate. A final positive

result must be noted.

While we argue for creative access platforms and conduct think-tank

sessions to devise and deploy methods to get North American missionaries into the

world's "closed" countries, perhaps there is an even more creative access that would

yield more fruit. As we have witnessed the massive growth of the Southern Church,

we realize that the majority of Christians now live outside of the USA. Indeed, more

missionaries are sent from our enormous little brother than are sent by us. Is the

era of our missions involvement over? Or if not, what does the Church in the United

States still have to bring to the table?

I would argue that we are to remain engaged and involved, that there is still a

place for the Western missionary, and that our greatest participation may still be in

the future, but it will be different from what we contributed in the past. It may not

primarily be as the residential missionary in the least accessible countries of the

world. God is calling out and sending forth increasing numbers of missionaries from

Latin America, Africa, and Asia; Brazil now the second largest sending nation. Our

most helpful participation in the future may be that of educating our brothers and

sisters of the Global South in theological education, cross cultural ministry skills,

mission agency administration, support development, and even the provision of

funds to facilitate the enterprise when possible and prudent. Rather than spend all

of our efforts to get our own missionaries into countries where they are extremely

limited in movement and types of activity, perhaps we should spend and send to get

our missionaries to the countries where there are great numbers of Christians with a missionary call longing for training. As we go to countries that many have considered reached we can train national believers and facilitate their going into places with more easily obtained visas, serving in places we cannot go anyway.

Urbanization and Immigration

The growth of the Southern Church that has resulted in this massive new missions force is influencing other realities. Modern missiologists must not fail to notice, account for, minister appropriately to, and embrace the phenomena of diaspora missions, globalization and urbanization. The diaspora of peoples around the world has grown in the contemporary global movement of peoples. Ethnic groups tend to locate and live in close proximity to one another in the cities where they settle. Expatriate diaspora are sometimes created by personal choice, other times by terrorism, wars, and natural disasters that displace populations. The result is the same; countries increasingly have millions of their citizens living outside their geopolitical borders.

The combination of economic challenges and new political realities are changing the ethnic landscape of the world. For instance, almost one million Brazilians live in the United Kingdom with Italian passports, having obtained this new passport because a father, grandfather, or great-grandfather was an Italian citizen.[17] As a holder of an Italian passport, they are allowed to move to England as a

---

[17] The statistic referencing the number of Brazilians living in the United Kingdom was quoted to me by a missionary living in London and working among the Latin American population. The information regarding the practice of obtaining Italian passports is widely reported, such as in the Italian news blog article, "The Great Italian Passport Scam," Accessed online, May 6, 2012. http://www.corriere.it/International/english/articoli/2010/03/19/passport_scam_italian_brazil.shtml

member of the European Union. Immigration, political refugees, and other peoples involuntary displaced from their traditional communities result in diverse peoples living in urban environments. However, once settled in new communities, they often share more in common with their neighbors than they do with distant cousins in their home countries, especially when they immigrated years or generations ago.

Displaced peoples facilitating kingdom advance and proclaiming God's glory have been at work since Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden. Naaman heard of the power of God from a slave girl captured during a military raid. Barbarians, Celts, and Vikings all heard the gospel from displaced people. Today, immigrants, political refugees, students, and businessmen travel from creative access countries to live for a time in Western countries. The role that Western missionaries have to play in reaching lesser-reached countries may be through ministries afforded to us by our new international neighbors. Missiologists must help the Western Church to understand and reach the diaspora among us. Many of the ones we reach may return to countries closed to our missionaries, and be better missionaries among their own people than we could have ever been.

Globalization is the inevitable result of our world's connectivity with Internet access in virtually every country of the world. Cell phone numbers rival the population in some countries. I have been in a deep conversation with a feathered and painted indigenous shaman in the Ecuadorian jungle when his cell phone rang and he had to take the call. I was in Cuba at a time when cell phones and computers were prohibited by law, but all of my Cuban students there had a cell phone and a laptop. The McDonalds, Coca-Colas, Subways, KFCs and Papa Johns may be an

eyesore to the purists among us who would prefer to find traditional cultures living

in traditional ways, but all efforts to preserve the world free from electricity,

Western music, or television's reality shows are naïve and hopeless. The world's

interconnectivity must be embraced and utilized rather than avoided as ostriches

with heads in the sand.

Urbanization is another dynamic that challenges the future of missions. With

or without the diaspora reality, urbanization has changed the face of missions.

Megacity missiologists report that the urbanization of their countries in a globalized

world is developing new urban tribes that are virtually a matrix made up of many

people groups from diverse socioeconomic strata sharing space and creating new

cultures. The urbanization of the world[18] is a challenging reality for modern

missiologists since the majority of missions success has historically been in the rural

areas where there was only one culture, language, religion, and worldview to learn.

In the cities there is a mixture of many of these and they often live behind doors in

apartment buildings with security guards and gated neighborhoods impeding

access.

It has been my observation traveling the world that in many countries

between one-third and one-half of the population lives in the capital city, with new

immigrants arriving daily. The new arrivals either strive to assimilate quickly or

form the ubiquitous Chinatowns, Little Italy's, and Calle Ochos of the megacities.

Regardless of their socioeconomic strata, they tend to live sequestered lives and are

---

[18] United Nations. *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2005 Revision Population Database.* United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, New York, 2005.

often suspicious of inquiring outsiders, making it difficult for missionaries to reach them, learn to interact, and develop relationships for sharing the gospel. In addition to all of these realities, there is the principle of acceleration; these dynamics are not only true, they are increasingly true. Today, the realities of globalization and urbanization create enormous challenges for missiologists.

Conclusion

Modern missiologists face some of the discipline's greatest challenges ever. The complexities of people group orientation, issues in orality, the post-9/11 world, BAM creative access platforms, and the impact of urbanization and immigration in contemporary missiology are all issues that undoubtedly complicate missions strategy. However, this is also a time of unprecedented opportunity as the interconnected, globalized world shares quantities of technology, education, and data never before imagined. Modern missiologists must respond to the challenges and point the way forward for our own generation and for those who follow behind.

Author Bio
M. David Sills is Associate Dean of Christian Missions and the A.P. and Faye Stone Professor of Christian Missions and Cultural Anthropology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Prior to serving at SBTS, David served as a missionary to Ecuador, pastor, and church planter.