

## STRATEGIES in Missions

Ralph D. Winter, January 1987

There is nothing more creative than a young man desperately impressed by a girl he may only see at a distance. What he will do to figure out a way to get to know her! If at first he does not succeed . . .

The same is true as keen young men and women have allowed God to touch their hearts with the spiritual plight of people groups of the strangest kinds and in the strangest places. It's not that different. God has given us both a natural and spiritual love for those of the opposite sex - and of other races.

Necessity has given rise to invention, and mission strategies if laid out end to end would encircle the globe, etc.

However, in the world today most missionary beachheads have been sufficiently successful such that the bulk of the all the writing and speaking about mission work at this late date in history informs us of FOLLOW-THROUGH strategies. As Harold Fuller of SIM has outlined it, mission work moves through four basic stages. Each has their own set of strategies:

Pioneer Strategies  
 Paternal Strategies  
 Partnership Strategies  
 Participation Strategies

### PARTICIPATION STRATEGIES

We have to start out with the latter, for a reason which will appear in a moment. *Participation* is the stage where most long standing "mission fields" have arrived by now.

In all such places, among all such peoples, no foreigner can rightly come in and start telling people what to do. An invitation is the only way to go and be with group of Christians that is well-established. Oh, you can visit. But you can't simply arrive and say "Here I am you lucky people, I'll tell you what the Bible says and what God wants you to know." You can't even suggest that you and they be "partners." Equal partners? They are already in charge. At best you can help out where and how they suggest. You can politely decline and leave. You can reason and offer suggestions. But, if in the last analysis they are not interested in what you want, you can't *participate*, that's all there is to it! You may encounter against all kinds of courtesies and kindnesses before realizing that you are really not going to persuade them that your agenda has the highest priority.

The Great Commission does not say, "Go ye into all the world and meddle in the national churches." It is, however, a most urgent strategy to be right where most missionaries are right now - in the midst of a large and strong national church - and be in a position to participate with them as they in turn begin to get a mission vision and decide to become part of the worldwide mission movement. Missionaries (and pastors) who are not working with Unreached or Frontier peoples can be just as useful to the cause of the Unreached Peoples as any kind of a frontline worker - if (and this is indeed the big IF) they

do everything within their power among the Christians they can influence to promote the cause of the Unfinished Task.

## PARTNERSHIP

Strategies which grow out of a *partnership* relation are usually only temporary at best. This is a transitional period between the genuine and wholesome *paternal* stage we'll come to, and the *participation* type of strategy we have just mentioned. As leaders develop in the mission situation strategies must adjust. They must be taken into account and given authority, usually through the establishment of a "national church" in which national believers have just as much of a voice as foreigners (e.g. the "expatriate" missionary). Rightly done, church planting may involve national leaders from the very beginning. This has been the goal from earliest times. Whenever "nationals" are on an equal footing with non-citizens from abroad, it is a *partnership* situation. But since there is no inherent right foreigners have to be dealt with in this way, *partnership* naturally and wholesomely gives way to the *participation* stage already mentioned.

One caution here is the use of the word *national*. Can a wonderfully saved group of former Hindus call their group THE national church if all of their people, Christian and non-Christian constitute less than 1% of an otherwise solidly Muslim country? Obviously anyone who is a citizen of X country is a *national* of said country. The same reasoning does not quite fit when you use the phrase "THE national church." Churches run by nationals can at best be called "A national church" because nowadays the English speaking world often uses *nation* to mean *country*. It is a rare country where any one people group constitutes all or even the great bulk of the citizens.

This leads us to the clearly bankrupt strategy that says "we will not send missionaries to any country unless we are invited by the national church." Which national church? Sad to say, but in some places the Christians of one group have been known to try to oppose missionary work in any other group! In some cases they have been known to have worked to get missionaries thrown out of their countries, if those missionaries would not confine their attention to the Christian community that already exists in their own group.

The delicate diplomacy involved is no worse than it is to persuade affluent American Christians to support you as you go to some unmentionable other place on the earth's surface!

## PATERNAL STRATEGIES

Here we face the necessity of parents. This is also a transition. You don't jump from initial faith to full-blown leader overnight. Oh, a new Christian who is already a husband and a father, or even a community leader, will continue in those roles, but the missionary still will make a thousand decisions for him, in effect. The missionary must convey the faith as accurately and completely as possible. He will have to choose what passages to study in the early stages. He will have to assist the new believers to understand what it means in their situation, even if he will have to be very careful and tentative about his conclusions. The new believers will continue their own paternal

relationships to their own families and those spiritual sons and daughters the Spirit of God allows them to have.

But gradually, more and more of the national leaders take up the role and the paternal function of the missionary. What a great day that is, but it does not come suddenly. There is an inevitable seesaw in most cases just as there is in our earthly families. Growth takes time. The parent is always ahead or behind where he ought to be and the younger person usually has a different idea from the parent! Love, affection, forgiveness, the grace of God - all are necessary at every step of the way.

### **PIONEER STRATEGIES**

Obviously if you go where there are no Christians you must take the initiative. There are no Christians, even from nearby (perhaps hostile) groups. This is pioneering. The pioneering stage phases out with success (not failure) as the new Christians begin to grow. They are not like babies, in many respects. They may be leaders who exercise a great deal of authority and responsibility. But in the very early stages even such people, as new believers will be dependent upon the messenger, and it is a great responsibility to be a true witness to the living Christ, despite the immaturities which the messenger himself no doubt still possesses. Again, Grace, the Grace of God is the only thing which can suffice.

Note: In *SEEDS OF PROMISE*, edited by Alan Starling, and much more briefly in *PERSPECTIVES*, pages 170-171, is a more detailed analysis of these four strategic states in mission work, written by Roberta Winter.