

Monthly Missiological Reflection #13

"Money and Mi\$\$ion\$ (Revisited): Combating Paternalism"

[Monthly Missiological Reflection #2](#) dealt with how money is a two-edged sword, which can either empower or hinder missions. The month's reflection continues the discussion by defining paternalism, describing two historical models for dealing with paternalism, and finally offering specific questions to help evaluate the use of money in missions.

Generations of missions scholars have sought to determine how to overcome or eliminate *paternalism*, or "the dominance of the sending culture over the mission process" (Van Rheenen). Paternalism occurs when missionaries and their sending churches and agencies consciously or unconsciously assume that they possess superior knowledge, experience, and skills and, consequently, exert control over local Christians and their leaders. This control is almost always exerted through financial arrangements and the implicit authority of money. New Christians are reluctant to "bite the hand" of those helping them--even if that hand is manipulative.

The Indigenous Perspective

The indigenous philosophy has been the major stream of thought in handling money and missions. In the mid-nineteenth century Henry Venn of the Church Missionary Society in England and Rufus Anderson of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions developed the Three-Self Formula. According to this theory, young churches should be self-propagating, self-supporting, and self-governing from their inception. Venn and Anderson believed that "spoon-feeding" by missionaries created "rice Christians." They emphasized the need for true conversion, which was reflected by the willingness of local Christians to support the work of the church. The foreign mission, they said, was like scaffolding. When construction is finished, the scaffolding is removed. Many mission works, however, were unable to stand without the support of the scaffolding.

John Nevius, a Presbyterian missionary to China, further developed the principles of Venn and Anderson in his classic book *Planting and Developing of Missionary Churches*. His Nevius Plan, although rejected by his contemporaries in China, became the guiding principles for the mushrooming Christian movement in Korea. These principles were:

(1) Christians should continue to live in their neighborhoods and pursue their occupations, being self-supporting and witnessing to their co-workers and neighbors. (2) Missions should only develop programs and institutions that the national church desired and could support. (3) The national churches should call out and support their own pastors. (4) Churches should be built in the native style with money and materials given by the church members. (5) Intensive biblical and doctrinal instruction should be provided for church leaders every year.

(Terry 2000, 484)

Of Nevius' five points, four dealt with the wise use of finances in developing indigenous churches.

Melvin Hodges popularized indigenous perspectives in the 1950s with the publication of his book *On the Mission Field: The Indigenous Church*. He defined an *indigenous church* as "a native church . . . which shares the life of the country in which it is planted and finds itself ready to govern itself, support itself, and reproduce itself" (Hodges 1957, 7). This formative definition expanded the Three-Self Formula by saying that missions churches should be self-propagating, self-governing, and self-supporting while reflecting God's will in culturally appropriate ways. The church, according to Hodges, must be like a banana plant in Central America--so indigenous to its environment that it requires no special attention to thrive. Banana plants grow in this climate

wherever there is adequate water. A banana plant in Canada, however, cannot survive without special care. Before winter it must be dug up and transported indoors and seldom, if ever, is able to bear fruit (Hodges 1953, 7-8). The fruit of paternalism, according to Hodges, is anemic mission churches that are not allowed to grow naturally in the soils in which they were planted. Missionaries from other countries, not understanding that their roles were transitory, became indispensable in running the missions movement.

Thus indigenous philosophies hold that movements should ideally be self-supporting from their initiation. Money creates dependence and establishes paternalistic patterns within mission movements. Although sometimes ignored, this perspective became the benchmark of mature Christian movements.

Partnership

A second perspective about money and missions began to develop in the late twentieth century, as the world became increasingly interconnected. This interconnectedness led to heightened cooperation among international businesses and governments. By this time the Christian movement in the Southern Hemisphere had surpassed that of the Northern Hemisphere in both number of Christians and missionaries. Many Western missionaries realized that they had much to learn from their non-Western counterparts. *Partnership* then developed within an increasingly globalized world.

Luis Bush of the AD 2000 Movement defined partnership as "an association of two or more Christian autonomous bodies who have formed a trusting relationship, and fulfill agreed-upon expectations by sharing complementary strengths and resources, to reach their mutual goal" (Bush and Lutz 1990, 46). These autonomous bodies may be mature churches, mission agencies, or a mixture of the two that partner with one another to evangelize an unreached people or accomplish some other agreed-upon Christian ministry. For example, the North Boulevard Church of Christ in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, is partnering with the 1,200 member Nsawam Road church in Accra, Ghana, to support and oversee national preachers in Mali. OC International helped to initiate a mission society in Northeastern India, where the Christian movement is relatively strong, in order to send missionaries to Uttar Pradesh, an unreached area of India (Keyes 1994, 229-35).

During these initial years, however, partnership has frequently become a disguised form of paternalism. Without their realizing it, money supplied by wealthy missions agencies forced national church leaders into unnatural patterns: Those providing the money encouraged local leaders to implement their programs and communicate the Gospel according to their foreign paradigms.

These paternalistic abuses, however, should not negate wise partnership in international urban arenas and in contexts where churches have come to maturity. Samuel Chiang describes seven principles of effective partnership. He advocates that missions partners must (1) agree on doctrine and ethical behavior, (2) share common goals, (3) develop an attitude of equality, (4) avoid dominance of one over the other, (5) communicate openly, (6) demonstrate trust and accountability, and (7) pray together (1992, 288). These qualities imply that *both partners must be mature in their Christian faith*. Bush's definition also implies five significant qualities imperative to effective partnership. These are (1) trust, (2) interpersonal relationships, (3) accountability, (4) mutual complementation, and (5) a well-defined goal (Van Rheenen 1996, 191-195). Thus partnership must not be naively constructed but governed by fundamental Christian principles. Too often inauthentic partnerships take place with young Christians who are spoiled by their new-found riches, work without local accountability, and seek to please the visitors from afar but are not responsive to Christians who are near.

Guidelines for Use of Money and Missions

Both models for combating paternalism that are discussed in this reflection are valid and should be used appropriately in various world contexts. My book *Missions: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Strategies* describes where each model is best used.

Generally, indigenous perspectives apply to rural, face-to-face cultures, which do not have a high degree of specialization and do not relate extensively to the international arena. Urban situations are frequently quite international, and models of partnership are more likely to empower the church rather than to create dependency and control from the outside. In most urban settings developing church movements have an extremely difficult time beginning without some type of partnership with churches and agencies of other countries. Building standards are stringent, and partnering is necessary to provide the urban space necessary where rents are high and hotels inaccessible.

Mission history indicates that operating without any model of church maturation tends to predestine a work for paternalism. These models equip missionaries . . . and church leaders to begin mission works in line with the patterns and realities of local economies rather than planned on the basis of Western economies and to be sensitive to differing economic realities in various cultural contexts.

(Adapted from 1996, 202)

Following is a list of specific questions that will aid in evaluating the use of money in missions.

- Are missions resources used to maintain local churches or to plant new ones?
- Does support create unhealthy dependence or encourage national church initiative?
- Are national church leaders ethically, morally, and spiritually responsible to other national church leaders who understand their culture?
- Are missionaries ethically, morally, and spiritually responsible to teammates on the field, national church leaders, and church leaders of their sending congregation or agency?
- Do supported national leaders expect to be supported by their own people in the near future?
- Are national leaders supported on a level consistent with the local economy or on the economic level of members of the supporting church?
- Does the support of one national leader create jealousy because other equally qualified people are not supported? Who determines who is qualified or not?
- Does support unknowingly create hierarchies so that churches and institutions are controlled by the West rather than by local Christian leaders?
- Do missionaries from other countries live on a level that local Christians feel comfortable visiting and fellowshiping in their homes?

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