

The IFMA and Frontier Missions

■ Is frontier missions a new idea or has it been with us all along? When we carefully look back at some of our historical roots and see the purposes and mission efforts of some of the "granddaddies" of missions we'll be pleasantly surprised. Also we'll need to own up to "our chief and irreplaceable duty" to share the gospel with the remaining unreached peoples of the world.

By Edwin L. Frizen, Jr.

Introduction

The last half of the 19th century, a number of nondenominational missions came into being. They were sometimes referred to as faith, independent or interdenominational missions. Almost all of these were organized by early leaders who were active clergymen or lay men and women in evangelical churches in the various denominations. While the increasing liberalism of the period was undoubtedly recognized as an unwelcome development, it was not the immediate cause for founding nondenominational missions. Maybeth Rupert was correct in stating in her Ph.D. dissertation at Yale in 1974 that the first motivation of the independent mission pioneers was "The desire to proclaim the gospel throughout the world." This was before the rise of independent church movements, except for the Baptists. And so this is the milieu in which the missions came into being.

The denominational agencies were not sending missionaries to the interior. They were not reaching women in "Purdah" or the "Harem." The unreached peoples in places in the world provided strong motivation for the development of the nondenominational missions movement. Thus missions such as China Inland Mission, Regions Beyond Missionary Union, Sudan Interior Missions, and Africa Inland Mission were formed in order to reach the unreached peoples of the world. Usually these nondenominational missions were founded by strong natural leaders who were burdened to reach a particular people or area of the world not being served by other missions. This concern for penetrating the frontiers has influenced missions to seek more personnel in order to expand into new places.

IFMA Founding Missions and Frontier Outreach

African Inland Missions

Peter Cameron Scott, founder of AIM, was born in Glasgow in March of 1867. With his godly parents, he left Scotland in 1885 and settled in Philadelphia. After a crisis conversion, he surrendered his life to the Lord, trusting Him for both spiritual and physical health. His biography clearly shows that he was very weak in body, but God strengthened him at this point. He entered the New York Missionary Training College, and was ordained by Dr. A. B. Simpson. He sailed for Africa in November of 1890 under the International Missionary Alliance, forerunner of the C&MA. In less than two years in the Congo, Scott had buried his brother and had to leave Africa himself because of constant fever. After recovering, he shared his vision for a line of mission centers through East and Central Africa with Dr. Arthur T. Pierson, who was impressed with the possibility of the project. If we don't know the name of Dr. A. T. Pierson we haven't done our history of missions, and I would encourage us to read up and study this man who was a real leader some hundred years ago.

The denominational boards were sending few new workers out to the fields, particularly to the interior of Africa. Primarily this was for two reasons: lack of funds and health conditions. However, a sponsoring committee was soon formed under the leadership of Dr. Pierson, with Charles E. Hurlburt, William C. Pettingill and Reuben A. Torrey, just three of the names of that founding group that became the home council of the Africa Inland Mission. The new mission would focus on the

unreached tribes in the interior of Kenya.

The first workers were Peter Cameron Scott and his sister Margaret, along with six others who sailed in 1895. Another party arrived shortly after that which included Peter's parents and his younger sister Ina. Four stations were opened and a school started during that first year. Peter Scott sent only one annual report to the home council. During his 14th month in Africa he died of Blackwater Fever on Dec. 4, 1896.

After the death of Scott, the mission passed through deep waters. In fact, even though they had more workers come out, all of them but one had either died or had left the field, mainly for health, as a result, the board at home, the new council, felt that they should resign and disband, all except the chairman, Dr. A. T. Pierson. Pierson said, "This is not a time to pull back. It's a time to advance." And so Charles Hurlburt, one of the members of the council, was asked to go to Africa to survey the field. He was the state secretary of the YMCA for Pennsylvania. He went and the Lord touched his heart. He resigned his position with the YMCA and became general director of AIM. In 1901 he took his wife and five children, along with workers, to rebuild the work in Kenya. From this renewed start, God used Charles Hurlburt to direct the expanding work of AIM and to carry out the vision of Peter Cameron Scott. The rest is history.

One hundred and three years have gone by. Just this week I was reading the last report of the U.S. director of AIM. It is very interesting, after 29 years in the IFMA office, sometimes I receive more information now from other sources than I did when I was in the IFMA office. I happen to be an offi-

cer of two foundations, and somehow missions send full reports to foundations when they send in their grant requests. And so I keep up with some of my former colleagues in a way that is interesting. But this report by Ted Barnett, the U.S. director of AIM, I believe represents a model. I would encourage all general directors of missions to write to Barnett and ask for a copy of their last annual report because it gives five-year goals, one-year goals and gives a report on the last year, as well as a report on the next year as to what they are trusting God for. At least four items refer to the subject that we are dealing with presently. One of those items was to get the churches to adopt people groups. They had a goal last year that 20 churches would adopt 20 people groups. At the end of the year they were able to report that 19 of those churches had adopted 20 people groups. They hope to have missionary personnel in those 20 by 1995, when they celebrate their centennial.

This is just one indication of some of the exciting things that are happening with the older missions. We say history is dull, but look again, they are learning from it. Many of these older missions that belong to the IFMA now are new missions with new leadership.

Central America Mission

The CAM was founded in 1890 by Cyrus Ingerson Scofield, the editor of the Scofield Reference Bible. Prayer had a prominent place in the beginning of CAM. Two women, discerning Christians, wives of coffee plantation owners in Costa Rica, committed themselves to prayer, praying that God would send missionaries there and share particularly with the Spanish speaking population and the Indians in the area which were virtually unreached with the gospel. Although there was a Scottish Presbyterian Church in San Jose, at that time it was all conducted in English. Virtually no Spanish speaking work was going on and no work was being done among the Indian peoples.

During these years, the 1880s, Dr. Scofield was pastor of the First Congregational Church of Dallas, Texas. For several summers he attended the Niagara Bible Conference. The ministry of J. Hudson Taylor caused Dr. Scofield to study the importance of missions as seen in the Bible. We need more Hudson Taylors to get pastors today to see missions throughout the Old and New Testament. In 1888 he became aware of the deep spiritual need in Costa Rica

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and shared his findings with a small group of dedicated men in his church. He called them to a prayer fellowship.

Luther Reece, one of these men, made a trip down to visit Costa Rica and other countries in Central America. He discovered that the need was great in this whole area. At this time there was a small Presbyterian work in Guatemala and a Moravian work in Nicaragua. Dr. Scofield became convinced that God would hold North American Christians responsible for those in America's "Samaritania" who were not being reached with the Gospel. He found that none of the existing mission boards were prepared to begin new work in Central America. Therefore, on November 4, 1890, Dr. Scofield's Central America Missions was organized.

CAM missionaries have undertaken responsibility for Bible translation in several tribal languages. While still a CAM missionary, Cameron Townsend, founder of Wycliffe Bible Translators, began translating the New Testament into Cakchiquel, one of the Mayan languages of the area. He started the Maya School for the Cakchiquel in 1919, and the Robinson Bible Institute in 1923.

In 1981 CAM related churches in Central America formed the Evangelical Missionary Agency which has agreed to a partnership arrangement with the Africa Inland Mission to facilitate evangelism and church development in Africa. This is not the CAM mission. Rather, it is the church that was produced by CAM that has entered into this agreement and is sending foreign missionaries not only with AIM but other mission agencies as well.

China Inland Mission (Overseas Missionary Fellowship)

At twenty-one years of age, James Hudson Taylor sailed for China on September 19, 1853. As the first English missionary of the Chinese Evangelization Society, he worked for several years under its auspices. After a few years, and a friendly separation, Taylor went independent until 1860, at which time he had to go back to England due to ill health.

He became convinced that God was working on him to go into the interior, but as he said in his own testimony, he didn't have the faith to believe that God would really do it. Mr. Taylor reported that there were only ninety-seven Protestant missionaries in all of China in 1865, and they were all located in ten or eleven port cities. He became burdened for the souls of two hundred million

Chinese in the inland provinces for whom nothing was being done. He urged the Chinese Evangelization Society, and other missions to move inland. But they all declined. They had neither men nor money for expansion.

Back in England, Hudson Taylor had an experience that changed his life and led to his being known as the father of faith missions. Taylor writes: "I had the growing conviction that God would have me seek from him the needed workers, and go forth with them. But for a long time unbelief hindered my taking the first step....Perishing China so filled my heart and mind that there was no rest by day and little sleep by night, till health broke down."

On Sunday, June 25, 1865, unable to bear the sight of a congregation of 1,000 or more Christian people in Brighton, England, all rejoicing in their own security while millions were perishing for lack of knowledge, Taylor says: "I wandered out into the sands alone, in great spiritual agony, and there the Lord conquered my unbelief and I surrendered myself for His service." Two days later, on June 27, 1865, Mr. Taylor received a check for ten pounds, and he deposited it in a bank in the name of "China Inland Mission." He then began to pray for twenty-four workers to go with him to China. On May 26, 1866, Hudson Taylor, his wife, four children, and sixteen workers sailed for China on the *Lammermuir*. By the end of that year, twenty-four workers were settled in four central stations in China.

Inland South America Missionary Union (South America Mission)

The British branch of the mission was founded by a Scotsman John Hay in 1902 as the Paraguayan Evangelistic Medical Mission. Its purpose was to reach the Indians. It was said that the Indians were "uncivilized and savage," and that they had never been taught a word about God and religion, an unreached people. As the work began to spread into Argentina and Brazil, the name was changed to Inland South America Missionary Union.

From the U.S. side, a man by the name of Joseph Davis, who was raised in a Catholic home in Detroit, went to law school, and not only practiced law but then was asked to run for a judgeship until he found, with all of his idealism, that the people that were backing him wanted a judge in their pocket rather than a judge for the people. He was so disillusioned that he left the practice of law. Davis actually

"bummed his way" across the country to California where he lived for a couple of years. He lost his health and became an agnostic.

At the Home of Peace in Oakland, Calif., which he thought was a sanitarium, he went to get help. He was converted and married one of the staff members. After his conversion and marriage, Joseph Davis pastored a church in Denver, Colorado. But, concerned for the Indians in South America, the Davis family went to Paraguay in 1914 to work among the unevangelized peoples. They called their work the Paraguayan Mission.

Joseph Davis and John Hay met in 1916 and realized they had a common evangelical emphasis and objectives. Their friendship led to the merging of the Paraguayan Mission into the Inland South America Missionary Union in 1919.

Davis returned to the United States that year for family health reasons and became the American director of the ISAMU. Bolivia was added as a field in 1922 and Peru in 1923. From the beginning, the work has been pioneer in nature. The main objective was to present a clear gospel witness to the unreached Indian tribes and mixed-blood peoples, and to establish indigenous national churches among them.

The work has developed among the Indians throughout the past sixty years, in spite of murders of missionaries, all of the privations, isolation, and loneliness. John and Alexander Hay, along with the Canadian and British missionaries, withdrew from the mission in 1922 to form the New Testament Missionary Union. Joseph Davis became the general director of the Inland South America Missionary Union.

In 1934 work was begun among Indian tribes in Colombia. The mission's name was changed to South America Indian Mission. In 1970 its name became South America Mission. Currently Bob Anderson is the general director of South America Mission. They still emphasize Indian work and reaching out into unreached peoples, including using native Indian evangelists.

South Africa General Mission (Africa Evangelical Fellowship)

A highly respected minister of the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa, Dr. Andrew Murray, found a group of intercessors in an early pastorate

who had impressed him with a sense of urgency for evangelization of the Africans. In addition to writing devotional books, for which he is well known, Dr. Murray also was a prominent conference speaker. At the Keswick Convention in England, he met William Spencer Walton who was a prominent evangelist and hymn writer.

Following evangelistic meetings in South Africa, Mr. Walton agreed to start a mission if Dr. Murray would serve as president. On his way back to England, Mr. Walton spent much time in prayer over a large map of Africa. Swaziland

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claimed his attention in a particular way.

In England, he consulted with J. Hudson Taylor, F. B. Meyer, and others. He enlisted the support of Christian leaders willing to serve as council members, with Dr. Andrew Murray as president—a position he held until his death in 1917. The mission was legally organized on March 12, 1889 as the Cape General Mission. Walton returned to South Africa in September 1889 with five young men for the work. The first station in Swaziland was opened in June 1891.

In January 1894, the Africa Evangelistic Mission merged with the Cape General Mission to form the South Africa General Mission. Because the mission had expanded into countries other than South Africa, in 1964 its name was changed to Africa Evangelical Fellowship. Today AEF has workers in thirteen countries.

Sudan Interior Mission

Walter Gowans, Roland Bingham and Thomas Kent, concerned with the spiritual needs of the people of the Soudan (S-o-u-d-a-n), went to Africa in 1893 as independent missionaries because they could not interest a mission society in the Soudan. It was then one of the world's largest totally unevangelized areas without a resident mission-

ary among its estimated 60 to 90 million people. Calling themselves the Soudan Interior Mission, Gowans, Bingham and Kent expected to set up a base on the shores of Lake Chad. However by the end of the next year both Gowans and Kent had died, and within six more months, Bingham had to return to Canada because of illness and the lack of co-workers. Also at this time there was no board or council behind them.

Trying again, with two companions, Bingham again sailed for Africa (Nigeria) in 1900. But, because of illness, this attempt also was unsuccessful. The next attempt by four pioneer missionaries sent out by Bingham and the mission council resulted in establishing the first station at Patigi, Nigeria in April 1902. SIM entered Niger in 1924, Ethiopia in 1927, Upper Volta in 1930, and the Sudan in 1936.

While the mission has continued to extend its outreach and ministries, the real strength of SIM is seen in the strong national churches that have developed and grown at a rate greater than that of the mission. The Evangelical Churches of West Africa (ECWA) was organized in 1954. The Evangelical Missionary Society is the mission arm of ECWA. At the end of the '80s EMS had over 900 Nigerians in missionary service.

During the decade of the '80s, SIM had two successful international mission mergers. The Andes Evangelical Mission, with 66 missionaries, became SIM's South America field on January 1, 1982. The merger with International Christian Fellowship on January 1, 1989 added 153 missionaries and Asia as a field.

Evangel Fellowship is the association of churches related to SIM around the world. The fellowship represents more than 7,000 congregations and 3,000,000 people in 13 national church fellowships in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. SIM has entered a number of unreached people groups in cooperation with national churches.

Woman's Union Missionary Society (InterServe)

As the husband of one of the board members of this society, I am well acquainted with the history of the WUMS. They started five years before the China Inland Mission in 1860 in Boston and New York, because "the men's boards," as the denominational boards were called by the women in those days,

would not send single women.

Because of the social systems of the East, primarily the Purdah, the Zenana, and the Harem, many women of Asia were inaccessible to a Christian witness by male missionaries. Missionary wives did what they could, but because of heavy responsibilities for their own families in foreign lands, most had little or no time for ministry. The denominational boards would not send single women because of travel conditions and other hazards.

While on his way home to America from Asia in 1834, missionary David Abeel of the American Board challenged the people of England concerning the condition of women in China and India. He brought the same appeal to America, urging that single women volunteer for service, and that women of the church organize to support them. It was a revolutionary concept.

There was an immediate response in Great Britain. In 1834 women of various denominations formed the Society for the Promotion of Female Education in the East. In 1852 the Indian Female Normal School and Instruction Society was organized.

After some years there was a division in this mission in 1880. One group became the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society and the other became the Zenana Bible and Medical Mission. In 1952 the churches in India and Pakistan asked the Zenana Bible and Medical Mission to send out men as well as women. Because men missionaries were included, the name was changed in 1957 to Bible and Medical Missionary Fellowship. In 1979 it became BMMF International, and in 1986 it was changed to International Service Fellowship, now commonly known as InterServe.

Mrs. Thomas C. Doremus heard David Abeel in New York in 1834 call for single women to minister to women and girls in the Orient. Although she was a prominent Christian and influential in New York, she could not persuade the denominational boards to send out single women. For twenty-five years, Mrs. Doremus led the crusade on behalf of the women of the Orient.

On November 16, 1860, nine women in Boston organized the Society for the Promotion of Female Education in the East. A year later this group merged with a similar society in New York, which had been organized on January 15, 1861 by a group led by Mrs. Doremus and Mrs. Mason. The new organization was named the Woman's Union

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Missionary Society of America for Heathen Lands. Mrs. Doremus was its first president, serving until her death in 1877.

The mission was to be "an independent undenominational society of women with a management of unsalaried officers to send out single women, untrammled by family cares, to christianize heathen women who cannot be reached by men missionaries."

Throughout its 115-year history before its merger, WUMS sent out women nurses, doctors, and teachers to Burma, China, Japan, India, Pakistan, and Nepal. WUMS had a large full-time national staff of women Christian doctors, nurses, teachers, and evangelist converts through their ministry united with existing churches. The society endeavored to be a helper to many churches, rather than to establish churches.

On January 1, 1976, the mission merged into the Bible and Medical Missionary Fellowship (BMMF), now called InterServe. This merger joined together the ministries of two of the oldest missions in IFMA. The impetus for organizing both of these agencies had come from appeals in England and America in 1834 by David Abeel.

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Part of the purposes of the founding of the IFMA was to provide for "a united testimony that would hasten the evangelization of the world," a closure concern. Since its beginning, the leadership of IFMA has kept before the membership the urgency of reaching the unreached.

At the first meeting of the IFMA Frontier Peoples Committee on February of 1982 (some 10 years ago), the purpose of the committee was given as follows:

To encourage IFMA member missions, in addition to current ministries, to give serious attention to the claims of unreached people groups presently without a viable church... we see the need to help keep before our constituency the unfinished task and to stimulate member missions to take new steps where possible. At the same time, it is recognized that we are not appealing to missions for radical redeployment or criticizing existent work, but simply stressing the need for fresh personnel and resources to reach out to the frontiers or unreached people groups. While it is recognized that some redeployment may occur, yet the focus is on the mobilizing of new task forces and strategies to reach beyond into the thousands of unreached people groups.

That was early in the year. At the 1982 annual meeting, the theme was,

"Penetrating Frontiers." IFMA member missions recommitted themselves to reaching the unreached peoples of the world wherever they are located. The IFMA Frontier Declaration was adopted by the annual meeting that year.

The work of the Frontier Peoples Committee during the following decade has reminded member missions of the central purpose of IFMA founding and mission. It was none other than to reach the unreached peoples. Committee reports, strategy sessions, brochures and slide series provided tools to missions all designed to help keep their focus on this important priority of ministry. But again because of a lack of funds, and lack of workers, the committee folded. There was a brochure that was printed in 1990, "Catch The Vision." This is published by the IFMA committee. It's packed with information on reaching the unreached peoples of the world.

However, the Declaration is something that ought to be reiterated and should be studied by each of our missions. I want at this time to state it again and remind us all of our commitment. I am encouraged by closure, and would recommend that every mission, IFMA, EFMA, and those that are not members, consider taking the Declaration seriously. Various missions and organizations could plagiarize a few sentences or words here or there, and put their own name on it. At every one of your annual meetings, with every council meeting, field councils, home councils, international councils, we need to read the Declaration over together and then at least have a couple of minutes of prayer. Here is the Declaration:

We the delegates of the 65th annual meeting of IFMA, recognize that the historical objectives of our member missions has been the pioneering church planting evangelist, we declare our new determination to penetrate the remaining frontiers of those people who represent the final barriers to the completion of the Great Commission. We acknowledge with deep gratitude the blessing of God on our whole world wide ministries and we praise Him for the growing, dynamic church at home and abroad. It is our partner in this task.

Yet we confess that though we have been challenged repeatedly to mobilize people in specific prayer or specific fields, and though we agreed to the urgency of that challenge, little has been achieved. [Much has been achieved but little compared to what's still remaining.] That in many instances we stayed too long in established ministries when our resources should have been redirected to new frontiers. That we have not adequately challenged and trained

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others to share in evangelistic outreach. That we have failed to prepare sufficient missionaries for the frontier tasks and challenged them to a life commitment. That we've fallen short as mission agencies in ministering to home churches in that we often have been more concerned about what we receive without adequate concern about what we can give. We therefore declare that we will be more attentive to the plaintive cry of a lost world and the compelling mandate for the glory of God to fill the Earth.

Whereas we regard to the momentous impact of evangelical missions in most countries of the world, yet we acknowledge that all of the world's peoples have not been reached. We reaffirm therefore that our chief and irreplaceable duty is to share the blessing of God with those peoples, and that we are called to do this through prayer, devotion and sacrifice so that we can join with others to complete the remaining task. To that end we reaffirm our highest strategic priority to the planting of churches among the remaining unreached peoples by the penetration of those frontiers. We will do this both by sending new forces to new fields and by conveying new vision in old fields.

We further declare our belief in the primacy of evangelism, yet we humbly desire to follow our Lord by expressing needs of love and mercy especially among the poor and oppressed peoples of our world. We humbly accept renewed responsibility to churches, to labor with them for their full involvement in the penetration of frontiers. We are willing that our methodologies and structures be submitted to the urgent need of new outreach. In this effort, our commitment is to nothing less than the accomplishment of our Savior's command to make disciples of all peoples.

This was 10 years ago. I don't know how much we are committed in IFMA to this. What is our commitment? We make these declarations, we do things, but we need to remind ourselves. I would encourage IFMA and EFMA, at least their boards, once a year to read this and recommit to the Declaration, hopefully in the annual meeting as well, so that all of us would be able to come

to closure.

And when we speak of closure, we're not speaking of the Lord's coming. Only He knows when that's going to be. The year 2000 is a handle, and the task is "do-able" if we Christians in North America would cooperate with those who are involved and are excited

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and are doing the job to see it completed. But we Christians here in North America, outside of a few known voices (and I read as many magazines and journals as I can), like AD 2000, DAWN, U.S. Center for World Mission and one or two others, are really stressing frontier missions. So we need to be reminded.

And so I am stating this final appeal to you my colleagues, namely, to finish the task, to move on and to follow up our declaration with action, and praise God for all that has occurred in the past and is going on today. We look at the enormity of the task that still remains. For example, just the task in the CIS right now is something that blows our minds but also gives us an opportunity to trust God in a way that we haven't been doing in many years.

Conclusion

The founders of the first seven member missions of IFMA emphasized pioneer evangelism to penetrate the frontiers of unreached people groups. The founders and leaders of most current IFMA member missions stress the same. Penetrating frontiers of unreached people groups has remained a major focus.

IFMA missions have been innovative in their efforts to evangelize unreached

hidden people of the world, pioneering in such ministries as education, medicine and health care, missionary radio and TV, gospel recording, Bible translation, and missionary aviation.

The two and half billion plus hidden and unreached people compel evangelicals to act. It would be incomprehensible at this hour not to

make a concerted effort of thoughtful, prayerful commitment to a fresh thrust of evangelistic outreach. The billions who still are lost without Christ demand aggressive, purposeful, immediate action.

New ways must be sought to take the good news of God's saving grace through Jesus Christ to the

billions who are inaccessible to the gospel by traditional means or personal witness. Bold, new steps must be taken for reaching the unreached billions. Evangelism must be at the heart of all ministry.

I am convinced that the greatest challenge facing mission is the challenge of the unachieved. The challenge of the unfinished task of world evangelization demands that past performance be honestly and thoroughly examined. Every facet of past mission activity should be thoroughly and objectively evaluated. The lateness of the hour compels evangelicals to move forward with clear, aggressive, purposeful, God-given direction. If evangelicals are serious about evangelizing the world in this generation, there must be thorough preparation and absolute commitment to that end. ■

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