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From the Editor's Desk



This issue is brimming with challenge and insight, but the lead article gives me special joy and excitement.

Bob Blincoe is the U. S. Director for Frontiers, which has hundreds of teams at work in the Islamic world. But his interests range much more widely. In this issue we present the first of three lectures he was invited to give at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

Blincoe's first part here not only sparkles with his gift for a turn of phrase, it presents in a highly digestible form a very basic theme in the history of mission outreach.

Is this a frontier? It is an unresolved question. As mainly Protestants we are most familiar with the local-community-of-believers type of congregational structure. But some of us (Plymouth Brethren, Churches of Christ, and many Baptists) believe that this is really the only divinely instituted organizational type. Taken to an extreme this means that if you are going to start a college, a Christian publishing house, or a mission to far off places, it must essentially be under the jurisdiction of a single congregation. That is, autonomous mission agencies are unbiblical.

Furthermore, many other Protestants are at least inclined to believe that the local congregation really is central and primary, and that mission agencies are somewhat unclassifiable if not illegitimate. As a result many mission agency leaders have midnight doubts about the status of their organization, maybe even its validity. In any case not very many would look to the Catholic orders for their justification.

Many years ago I recall perusing a book written by the saintly V. Raymond Edman, then president of Wheaton College (Illinois). His take on the Catholic orders down through history was almost totally negative.

More recently, in total contrast, at the same school one of their most highly regarded church historians, Mark Noll, reflects a totally different perspective:

The rise of monasticism [read Catholic orders] was, after Christ's commission to his disciples, the most important—and in many ways the most beneficial—institutional event in the history of Christianity. (Page 84 in his *Turning Points*)

Now, my hope is that Blincoe's series will cast helpful light on the basic necessity and essentiality of decentralized teamwork in the Christian cause, through separate structures that are not antagonistic to local church organ-

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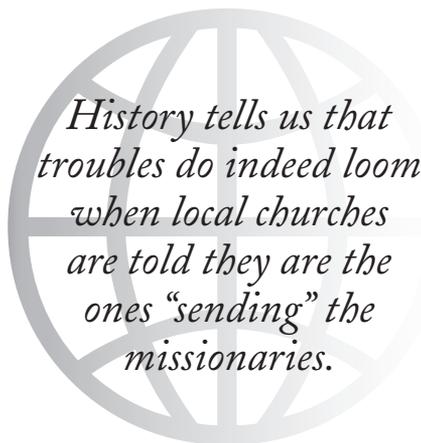
izations but truly serve them. And serve them just as vitally as, for example, private companies add to and augment municipal government services.

Stop and think: the dynamism of America, compared to a theoretical socialism, rests substantially on the existence of the regulated freedom of private enterprise structures operating under the watchful eye of municipal structures. It is when those private enterprises control the government or vice versa that trouble arises.

Yet some denominations act as if their own in-house mission structure is the only legitimate entity their members can support. This is like saying that citizens of Pasadena, California, cannot legitimately promote or patronize anything if it is not the direct initiative of the City. Properly, the business of the City is to create and direct a few universally needed functions. But, in general a city is to foster and protect its citizens in their productivity, not dampen their creativity much less micro-manage their energies. That is, citizens can walk in and secure a business license as long as their activity does not break the law. The city regulates but does not administrate the private enterprise. The denominations may administrate some supra-congregational structures but others they should regulate, not administrate.

The latter type of structure Latourette called sodalities, following Catholic practice. I have added the term modalities for entities such as the city, the denomination, or the congregation.

Note that in a modality the people, the members, ultimately choose the leaders. In a sodality the leaders choose the followers. The Army and the Navy, regulated but not administrated by the civil government,



choose their members. Their members do not choose their leaders.

Well, Blincoe will get to all this. This is just a preview of coming attractions.

Be aware that an earlier series in IJFM (Field-governed Mission Structures; 18:2, 18:3 and 18:4) relates powerfully to this one, as it contrasted the boards of directors of mission agencies being made up of the members of the mission rather than being composed mainly of non-members. That series described the field-directed—compared to home-directed—agency of mission. The issue involved can boil down to the same thing. The mega-congregations can ultimately choose to support, or not, a separate mission structure. But it is not wise when larger church structures seek to administrate a mission structure (whether that “larger church structure” is a congregation, a denomination, or donors in general).

History tells us that troubles do indeed loom when local churches are told that they are the ones “sending” the missionaries. What happens is that those congregations then select and direct the

missionaries they support rather than being satisfied with sending missionaries without micromanaging them once they become members of a mission agency. Such agencies are themselves managing structures on the field. Yes, the very legitimacy of mission structures hangs on this issue.

Many a local church has joyfully sent out a missionary family (by-passing all mission agencies) only to find years later that it is not best equipped to advise and guide the work of that lone family once it gets into the jungle of unanticipatable complexities of cross-cultural mission.

This is just one example of the potential for confusion between the important and legitimate (but different) roles of modality and sodality—“the two structures of God’s redemptive mission.”

These comments are not to end the subject but simply open it up. Volumes 19:2 and 19:3 will carry the rest of Blincoe’s material and further editorial comment. You will also find vibrant issues in the other articles here.

Please do give us feedback which we can print in successive issues.

In the pursuit of His frontiers,

Ralph D. Winter

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Editor

Editor’s Note: As before, the articles in this issue are presented in the form they were received. They have not received extensive editorial effort.

The IJFM is published in the name of the International Student Leaders Coalition for Frontier Missions, a fellowship of younger leaders committed to the purposes of the twin consultations of Edinburgh 1980: *The World Consultation on Frontier Missions* and the *International Student Consultation on Frontier Missions*. As an expression of the ongoing concerns of Edinburgh 1980, the IJFM seeks to:

- ☞ promote intergenerational dialogue between senior and junior mission leaders;
- ☞ cultivate an international fraternity of thought in the development of frontier missiology;
- ☞ highlight the need to maintain, renew, and create mission agencies as vehicles for frontier missions;
- ☞ encourage multidimensional and interdisciplinary studies;
- ☞ foster spiritual devotion as well as intellectual growth; and
- ☞ advocate “A Church for Every People.”

Mission frontiers, like other frontiers, represent boundaries or barriers beyond which we must go yet beyond which we may not be able to see clearly and boundaries which may even be disputed or denied. Their study involves the discovery and evaluation of the unknown or even the reevaluation of the known. But unlike other frontiers, mission frontiers is a subject specifically concerned to explore and exposit areas and ideas and insights related to the glorification of God in all the nations (peoples) of the world, to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God.

Subscribers and other readers of the IJFM (due to ongoing promotion) come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Mission professors, field missionaries, young adult mission mobilizers, college librarians, mission executives, and mission researchers all look to the IJFM for the latest thinking in frontier missiology.