

What in the world is missiology!?

March 7, 2012 by admin in Missiology as a Discipline 16 comments

I am a missiologist. For twenty-three years I have taught missiology. And for twelve years at [Trinity Evangelical Divinity School](#) I have helped mentor the next generation of missiologists pursuing their PhD's. I serve on the boards of the [American Society of Missiology](#) and the [Evangelical Missiological Society](#), and publish articles in the journal [Missiology: An International Review](#).

But what in the world is missiology?! Even my doctoral students are often at a loss to define it.

Here is my attempt at a definition, followed by explanatory comments.

Missiology is an interdisciplinary discipline which, through research, writing, and teaching, furthers the acquisition, development, and transmission of theologically-informed, contextually-grounded, and ministry-oriented knowledge and understanding, with the goal of helping and correcting Christians, and Christian institutions, involved in the doing of Christian mission.

The following are important observations to note about this definition:

1.) Missiology constitutes its **own discipline**. As a discipline, it has its own history. It has its own professional societies, such as [The American Society of Missiology](#), [The Evangelical Missiological Society](#), [The Association of Professors of Mission](#), [The International Association for Mission Studies](#), [The International Society of Frontier Missiology](#), [The International Association of Catholic Missiologists](#), [The Southern African Missiological Society](#), [The Asian Society of Missiology](#), or [The Lutheran Society for Missiology](#). It has its own journals, such as: [Missiology: An International Review](#), [The International Bulletin of Missionary Research](#), [Evangelical Missions Quarterly](#), [Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies](#), or [Mission Studies](#). Thousands of individuals with doctoral degrees in missiology (Caleb Kim, Roberta King, Charles Farhadian, Doug McConnell, Scott Moreau, David Ngaruiya, Craig Ott, Tite Tienou) teach missiology in colleges and seminaries across our world.

2.) But missiology is also, at a fundamental level, **interdisciplinary**. Historically those teaching missiology have often had doctorates in other disciplines — like anthropology (Miriam Adeney, Paul Hiebert, Louis Luzbetak, Enoch Wan, Darrell Whiteman, myself), communications (David Hesselgrave, Del Tarr), comparative religions/philosophy of religion (Robert Hunt, Terry Muck, Harold Netland, J. Dudley Woodberry), history (Jehu Hanciles, Dana Robert, Lamin Sanneh, Wilbert Shenk, Andrew Walls), Educational Studies (James Plueddemann, Duane Elmer, Robert Ferris), linguistics/linguistic anthropology (Eugene Nida, Charles Kraft, Dan Shaw), or theology (Frances Adeney, Robert Schreiter, Gary Simpson). But what differentiates these scholars from others with similar doctoral degrees, is that we connect our work self-consciously to the discipline of missiology and to the ends which it serves.

3.) Missiology is grounded in "**research**," not merely "reflection." A number of standard definitions of missiology define missiology as "reflection on the doing of mission."^[1] In my view this vocabulary invites us to imagine missiology as an arm-chair activity. Or perhaps I should say, it imagines missiology in the image of philosophy. Others define missiology in terms of "studying."^[2] While better than "reflection," this again seems to me too much the activity of students mastering knowledge already available, rather than of an academic enterprise pursuing the development and transmission of new knowledge. In my definition, missiology requires a research engagement with human realities related to Christian mission, where research is guided by specific research questions, is carried out by formally specified procedures designed to gather, measure, and interpret data, and has as its goal the

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production and transmission of new knowledge.

4.) While informed by **theology**, missiology is also strongly **anthropological**, on my definition. Some definitions make missiology a purely theological enterprise. For example, Johannes Verkuyl has defined missiology as “the study of the salvation activities of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit throughout the world geared towards bringing the kingdom of God into existence.” But in missiology, it is not merely God’s agency that we study, but human agency exercised on behalf of Christian mission in diverse cultural, religious, and linguistic contexts. This human agency needs contextually informed wisdom and knowledge to carry out its God-appointed task. Thus the human contexts of mission are themselves central to what we study. What differentiates missiology from the rest of the theological curriculum, historically, is its central focus on helping Christians understand diverse human contexts as a basis for wisely carrying out Christian mission in those contexts.

5.) Missiology, on this definition, is intended to be of value **both** for what it contributes to the academy, **and** for how it helps practitioners of Christian mission. Missiologists, at core, hope that the knowledge we produce would be of benefit to those who are deeply committed to carrying out the mission of God in the whole world. Exactly what Christian **mission** ought to entail, I leave for another day.

And so, my definition: *Missiology is an interdisciplinary discipline which, through research, writing, and teaching, furthers the acquisition, development, and transmission of theologically-informed, contextually-grounded, and ministry-oriented knowledge and understanding, with the goal of helping and correcting Christians, and Christian institutions, involved in the doing of Christian mission.*

I invite feedback. Feel free also to post your own definition of missiology in response. To respond, click on “comments” at the top of the page directly under the title of the entry.

Robert J. Priest, Professor of Mission and Anthropology, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

[1]For example, Alan Neeley: “Missiology is . . . **reflection** on the doing of mission.” Samuel Escobar: “Missiology is . . . **reflection** on praxis.” Jan Jongeneel: “Missiology is the discipline which . . . **reflects** upon the history, theory and practice of world mission.” [Emphasis added]

[2] For example, Johannes Verkuyl defines missiology as “the study of the salvation activities of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit throughout the world geared towards bringing the kingdom of God into existence.” Justice Anderson defined missiology as “the study of . . . what has happened and is happening when the church’s missions are at the service of God’s mission.” Edward Rommen defined missiology as “the study of all aspects of missions . . . ” Louis Luzbetak defined missiology as “a field that studies the expansion and growth of the mission of the Church in all its dimensions.” Alan Tippett defined missiology as “the study of man being brought to God in history.”



admin

16 Comments



admin

Thu 08th Mar 2012 at 11:46 pm

Chuck Kraft says:

March 8, 2012 at 5:06 am (Edit)

Good on ya, Bob (written from Brisbane, Australia). I think you’ve covered the

ground pretty well.

I think your listing of names and the fields in which they trained is a good idea, though you risk missing some important people from what might be called the Founding Generation (e.g. Chuck Van Engen, Alan Tippett [though you mention him later], Art Glasser, Wilber Shenk, Ralph Winter).

You might consider doing another piece with a longer list of contributors to the field, arranged generationally (e.g. Founding Generation, Second Generation), highlighting the kinds of contributions made to Missiology and the institutions they worked from.

Another comment: I and Dean Gilliland did our doctoral work at Hartford Seminary Foundation's Kennedy School of Missions, founded after the great 1910 missionary conference in Edinburgh, now defunct. That school, when I was there, took missionaries onto their faculty and brought in students to specialize in various areas (e.g. anthropology, linguistics, African studies, Islam) and sent them out with such titles on their diplomas and such areas listed as their specialties. There were no degrees in Missiology. At Fuller, Trinity, Asbury, Biola, Columbia, etc. our aim has been just the opposite: we take people in with the aim of training them to be Missiologists (not anthropologists, linguists, etc). We who have specialized in various areas have given ourselves and our specialties to create a new discipline. Hartford: come missionaries, go out Anthropologists, etc. Fuller: come missionaries, go out Missiologists.

Reply



Steve Bevans

Fri 09th Mar 2012 at 11:27 pm

Submitted on 2012/03/09 at 11:00 pm

Hi, Bob-

I think your definition is really helpful. I agree with you that missiology is an "interdisciplinary discipline." Sometimes, too, I think that missiology might also function as a "perspective" through which to see particularly theological disciplines. For example, I think that systematic theology should best be done "missiologically," as might church history (history of the world Christian movement), and even biblical interpretation. So the disciplines serve missiology, but I think that missiology can also serve the disciplines as well.

Thanks for a very clear and reflective presentation.

Steve Bevans

Reply



Craig Ott

Mon 12th Mar 2012 at 2:17 pm

Thanks Bob,

I appreciate your careful reflection (or should I say research?) This discussion is helpful in moving the discipline of missiology forward. The definition could perhaps use a bit of streamlining - it's too long for a bumper sticker.

Also, in defense of Verhuyl, he goes on to write, "Missiology's task in every age is to investigate scientifically and critically the presuppositions, motives, structures, methods, patterns of cooperation and leadership which the churches bring to their mandate" (p. 5). This does address some of your points.

Reply



Enoch Wan

Tue 13th Mar 2012 at 3:42 pm

Similar to yours, Bob, with the emphasis on the interdisciplinary nature and mine is as follows:

"Missiology" is the "interdisciplinary study as to the why & how of practicing mission;" whereas, "mission is the Christian (individual) and the church

(institutional) continuing on and carrying out the missio dei of the triune God at both individual and institutional levels, spiritually (saving souls) and socially (ushering in shalom), for redemption, reconciliation and transformation.”

(See “Mission” and Missio Dei: Response to Charles Van Engen’s “Mission’ Defined and Described” by Enoch Wan, Published in “Featured Article”

<http://www.GlobalMissiology.org> April 2011.

Originally published as “CHAPTER 4 In MissionShift: Global Mission Issues in the Third Millennium, Ed Stetzer and David Hesselgrave, eds..)

Reply



Brian Howell

Wed 14th Mar 2012 at 9:48 am

Bob, you know I love you, but I’ve never loved the idea of missiology as a “discipline.” I think it’s an area of study/research – a topical focus – rather than a discipline. For me, the existence of professional organizations and journals doesn’t define a discipline. Education has had all these things, but is “Education” a “discipline?” What about Christian Spirituality? People get Ph.D.s in that, but I don’t believe it helps to call Christian Spirituality a “discipline.”

When you name the people who have been most influential in the field of missiology, you invariably come up with people who do not have Ph.D.s in “Intercultural Studies” (i.e., missiology), but you have, as you point out, the people with degrees from traditional university/liberal arts disciplines.

I am not denigrating the work people have done, nor am I suggesting there’s anything wrong with interdisciplinary programs of research institutionalized as they are. (Schools of business, for example. Is “Business” a discipline?) But for knowledge to move forward, I think there needs to be a theoretical literature and methodological identity. I don’t see that missiology has either of those.

Historians, anthropologists, linguists, philosophers, and theologians have methodologies and theoretical orientations particular to their fields. They bring these to bear on the research and understandings present in missiology, but it is because they have training in disciplinary homes that they are able to move the field forward. I realize it’s risky, and Prof. Kraft may take exception since his work in *Christianity and Culture* was significant and influential, but I would see his work as coming out of anthropological linguistics, even if he got his degree at a school of missiology.

I think it’s better to go with a definition of missiology as “an interdisciplinary area of research and scholarship focused on the practice, theology, history, and philosophy of Christian mission.”

Reply



Bob Priest

Thu 15th Mar 2012 at 2:23 pm

Dear Brian,

Thanks for raising provocative questions. You question whether missiology constitutes a discipline, and not merely an “area of research.” I would argue that even the notable book by Kraft which you mention is a missiology book, not an anthropology book about an area of research. Since a majority of missiologists received doctorates in missiology, your proposal would seem a denial at a fundamental level that they have any disciplinary home or identity.

By normal convention, an academic discipline exists when departments in many academic institutions are devoted to that discipline, when professional societies and journals are devoted to that discipline, when there is a shared history of debates and discussions and of seminal leaders in the field, and when scholars themselves identify as part of such a discipline. By all of these criteria, I argue, missiology constitutes a discipline. It is not a sub-set of some other discipline.

For an anthropologist to tell a tribe of people that they don’t exist,

when they insist they do, seems to me a somewhat unusual thing for an anthropologist to do. And although I've never suspected you of being a modernist, it also seems rather modernist to argue for some essentialized definition by which to define missiology out of existence as a discipline.

This is not to say that such a discussion is not helpful. Even for anthropology, one finds members of the guild who do nothing but study nonhuman primates, others who excavate dirt looking for evidence of past civilizations, others who examine language, others who focus on genetics, others with a focus on skulls or the structure of the pelvis, others focusing on kinship or on economic, religious, political or racial realities. Clyde Kluckhohn called anthropology an "intellectual poaching license," whereby anthropologists ignore normal disciplinary boundaries and range wherever they wish. Do all these anthropologists share a common method? No. Common theory? Not at all. Do members of other disciplines always respect their authority? No. My point is not really to question that anthropology constitutes a discipline, but simply to note that every discipline has been vulnerable to criticism by people of other disciplines who hold essentialized notions of what ought to constitute a discipline.

Having said all this, I do think issues you raise merit attention. In the weeks ahead I will include in my posts a focus on "missiology and the disciplines," and will also take up the important question which you raise as to whether missiologists are as consistently producing high quality and research based writings as one would normally expect in an academic discipline. On that point, as you already know, I do believe missiology ought to do better, and I would like to reflect on ways in which we can improve this part of what we do.

Thanks for your stimulating set of comments.

Reply



Brian Howell

Thu 15th Mar 2012 at 7:58 pm

Ah, you go to the four-field anthropology conundrum, I see. The "sacred bundle" as George Stocking called it. Indeed, physical anthropology, archaeology, sociocultural anthropology, and linguistics do not have a common methodology or theoretical orientation (anymore). And, as a result, they are coming apart. Who teaches four-field anthropology at the graduate level anymore? Who comes out of a cultural anthropology Ph.D. prepared to teach biological anthropology, or even archaeology? I do know some archaeologists who move to sociocultural anthropology post Ph.D., and vice versa, but they are unusual, and generally see this as a move from one discipline to another. Though we keep them in the same department, is that helpful, desirable, or even possible in perpetuity? Linguistics and anthropology have maintained some greater coherence, but even there we are seeing sociolinguistics pulling away from linguistics, joining the sociocultural anthropological family. I'm quite happy to let go of the idea of "anthropology" as a discipline, and see it become the four disciplines of human biology, archaeology, linguistics, and cultural anthropology.

I believe it is to the detriment of missiology to define itself as a discipline, because in order to maintain itself and not pull apart into the disciplinary homes from which people come, it has the effect of cutting people off from their disciplinary homes and growing insular. You are an anthropologist. You have remained connected to anthropology. You use the theory and methods of anthropology. This is why, I would argue, you are an influential missiologist. You are also a very smart guy who

has learned a lot of theology, sociology, and history, which makes a lot of sense when you're studying something as complex as Christian missions, but I would argue that a great deal of your efficacy as a scholar has been because of your exceptional training and commitment to your disciplinary home in anthropology. If I were to ever move into a school of intercultural studies, I would do so as an anthropologist teaching with historians, theologians, philosophers, and sociologists, although maybe after this, no one would have me.

I'm aware that my comments might seem to be lacking in the kind of cultural relativism for which we anthros are usually known. But a "discipline" implies the act of "disciplining." The boundaries are maintained through acts of disciplining. I have no illusions that I will single-handedly move missiology into new ground, but I kind of want to keep the anthropologists in the anthropology camp, and not lose them, so I'm willing to stand my ground to say that while I believe the study of missions is crucial, vital, critical, and central to the intellectual life of the church, it does not rest on a singular disciplinary ground. (And I don't really get the "interdisciplinary discipline" thing. I think you're either a single discipline, or you're interdisciplinary. Can't be both.)

I do look forward to the next installments! I think this'll be a fun conversation.

Reply



Bob Priest

Sat 17th Mar 2012 at 11:04 am

As you note, a discipline implies the act of maintaining boundaries through disciplining. You may or may not remember that this is the issue James Clifford raised in response to my article on the "Missionary Position," where he wrote "Priest's appeal for more inclusiveness in anthropology raises questions about the social process I have called 'disciplining.' How does an institutionalized intellectual community recognize its own, negotiate its borders?" (p 48). Clearly he and other anthropological respondents recognized that explicitly Christian voices within anthropology were historically to be disciplined, excluded as beyond the borders of the discipline. And of course your own important article "The Repugnant Cultural Other Speaks Back" also recognized that historically the discipline has excluded and silenced Christian voices.

Anthropologists historically defined themselves against theology, and also against the missionary enterprise, with the missionary seen as the anti-type of the anthropologist.

Of course anthropology as a discipline has been undergoing changes. One of the most exciting changes is the explosion of a new field of study, the anthropology of Christianity, as evident in the new University of California Press series in the anthropology of Christianity, or again in the new Anthropology of Christianity bibliographic blog (<http://anthrocybib.wordpress.com/>). This emerging field ought to be of interest to missiologists and Christian anthropologists — and clearly provides new possibilities for Christian scholarship that is

directly focused on the expansion and growth of Christianity around the world.

Joel Robbins is the first prominent anthropologist I have heard explicitly calling for a dialogue with Christians in anthropology, and for a dialogue with theology, such as in his important theme issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly* (<http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2010/10/21/global-christianity/>).

Interestingly, when Joel Robbins organizes such a dialogue with Christians, it turns out to be a dialogue with theologians of an anti-social science bias. Few would be surprised at the idea that anthropologists historically have been reluctant to dialogue with theologians. But the reluctance of many theologians to engage the human sciences constructively has been less commented on. In my own seminary, students read the theologian Alister McGrath, who in his *Scientific Theology* (2001), points out that historically theologians made philosophy their dialogue partner (their *ancilla theologiae*). McGrath then calls for theologians to make the physical sciences their new dialogue partner (their *ancilla theologiae nova*). But he spends several pages (15-18) stressing that the social sciences must not be allowed to play such a dialogue partner role. Following the lead of radical orthodoxy theologian John Milbank, McGrath conceives of theology and the human sciences as competing alternatives, and thus fosters within Christian theological circles an opposition to positive and constructive engagement with anthropology.

Missiology, then, institutionalizes a space for theology and anthropology to be brought into engagement with each other while in service of Christian mission. By creating academic departments, professional societies, and publishing venues focused on missiology, this created in practical terms support structures and spaces for the pursuit of an enterprise which attempted to explicitly bring the theological and the anthropological into integration with each other, and to do this in a way that was explicitly intended as supportive of Christian mission (see my definition above). It was historically simply not possible to do this within the disciplinary power structures of anthropology — or even within theology proper. Nor is it fully possible today.

Brian, you see weaknesses in missiological scholarship, and think a return to the “discipline” of anthropology is what we need. I do not deny that missiological scholarship ought to be stronger, and I agree that there are new opportunities in anthropology that have never been there before, and that a strong presence of Christians within the discipline of anthropology is a high priority. Yes, having more Christians within the discipline of anthropology is something I also wish for. Yes, your call for people like myself to keep our ties strong to anthropology is helpful. But I remain convinced that the institutionalized space of a discipline of missiology—with academic departments, professional

societies and meetings, academic journals, and a community of scholars who consider themselves missiologists accomplishes positive scholarly goods not otherwise likely to be achieved. And my commitment is to help this community become stronger in its anthropological underpinnings, which I think is consistent with your goal of a stronger Christian presence in anthropology itself.

Reply



hendo

Wed 14th Mar 2012 at 11:13 am

Thanks for your thoughtful engagement with an important question Bob! I appreciate your insights and reflections grounded in your experience in and knowledge of the field. I agree wholeheartedly with your core points outlined above with the exception of one omission. Perhaps due to my own bias that has been shaped by my immersion in the discussion surrounding missional ecclesiology, I find it problematic to place the emphasis on Christian mission as you do in your definition, rather than on the church's participation with the Triune God in HIS mission. I believe that when we focus our definitions on the church's activities rather than on her participation in God's activities, we run the risk of developing an ecclesio-centric focus rather than a theocentric one, which opens us up to the view that the church is the locus of God's mission rather than the world. In other words, it is important, from my perspective, to highlight the church's role as God's agent in his missional activities, rather than as the subject of mission. This helps to ensure that we keep our focus in missiology and in the local church where it needs to be—discerning and participating with God in his redemptive initiatives in local contexts around the globe.

Again, thanks for your well thought out presentation. It has stimulated some good reflection in my own mind as I continue to explore what it means to equip the next generation of leaders for the local church in the North American mission context.

Reply



Dana L Robert

Sat 17th Mar 2012 at 10:42 pm

I consider myself a missiologist by vocation, and an historian by discipline. Thus I suppose I basically agree with Brian that missiology is interdisciplinary. It is concerned with scholarly approaches toward witnessing across multiple boundaries to God's self-revelation through Jesus Christ. The study of witness can be approached from different scholarly disciplines, and in fact needs theology, anthropology, history etc both for undertaking the boundary-crossing witness itself, and for analyzing/studying it. But Bob raises a valid issue whether the existence of the "tribe" itself actually creates an interdisciplinary discipline. Can we have our cake and eat it too?

My husband Inus Daneel trained at the Vrij Universiteit in Amsterdam. He studied dogmatics with Berkouwer, mission theology with J H Bavinck (and also Kraemer and Hoekendijk), and theories of religions and more. Because I am an historian more than a theologian, at some level he does not consider me a "real" missiologist. In other words, because in the Reformed tradition missiology is primarily a theological discipline (dealing as it does with God's plan for the world), then missiology is theology. I was trained in the Latourette tradition at Yale. And as a Methodist with essentially a narrative-oriented, Wesleyan theology, I see history (the story of believers' responses to God's action) as essential to missiology. So he and I disagree about whether history is "core" to missiology. Yet we are united in our commitment to God's mission in the world! So somehow the missiological "tribe" exists despite different disciplines. But isn't it somehow the theological that makes missiology what it is? Isn't belief in Jesus Christ prior to all the other disciplines that cohere in the interdisciplinary matrix? If we are an "academic" discipline in the secular sense, then the social sciences will have to lead the way, and must include Islamic,

Buddhist and interreligious perspectives on their own expansion. But since we are Christians, isn't missiology essentially theological at its core, and thus more a vocation than an academic discipline in the secular sense?

At the end of the day, however, I do agree with Bob Priest that we need to adhere to the highest intellectual and academic standards possible. In secular universities, this will mean being the best historians, anthropologists and religion scholars we can be. For the faith basis of missiology means that the "outsider" perspective of religious studies rejects it as a proper discipline, even as the "insider" perspective of theological studies accepts it. To fight for missiology as a discipline means pushing the envelope of secular definitions of academic disciplines. Thus perhaps we are interdisciplinary to outsiders, and a discipline to insiders?

I won't end this post by admitting that my husband is right about the second class status of history, because I believe that Reformed theology is only one of a number of creative ways to define theology! But we do agree that without theology/faith/belief, then missiology would not exist.

Reply



Ron George

Mon 02nd Apr 2012 at 5:04 am

Kang San Tan's paper "What is Theological about Contextual Missions Training?" is an excellent commentary on our problem of integrating theological insights into Biblical understanding into the churches in the West. He highlights the fragmentation of Theology in the West. This helps us see the resistance of church leaders to deeper thinking in mission matters, this leads to a paucity in the lives of candidates.

Reply



steve rasmussen

Thu 19th Apr 2012 at 5:12 am

In February, I presented at a Christian Medical and Dental Association meeting. I have almost no medical or biology training and yet I had perspectives and research that they found helpful. I encouraged the need to use what Hiebert called a "system of systems" approach for causes and cures of illness. Hiebert argued that the specialties which investigate bio-physical, personal, social, cultural, and spiritual systems cannot research or explain by themselves because these systems are always interacting. The reason I chose to do a PhD in missiology/intercultural studies rather anthropology was the interdisciplinary nature including the freedom/encouragement to include God, the spiritual, and the Bible (a bigger poaching license that includes all the systems of systems).

So for example, witches (as one frequent explanation of illness here in Africa that I discussed with them) need to be investigated from a system of systems approach. Anthropologists have done great work investigating this, but have normally excluded any spiritual connection or ministry that would help those accused as witches or afraid of witches. This also results in most local people rejecting their contribution because their rejection of spiritual causation makes these PhDs seem blind and foolish.

At the CMDA meeting, an earlier presentation talked about how as MDs focused more on specializations, health outcomes became worse. Finally they developed a specialty in "family medicine" so that someone could specialize in everything (bio-physical – still limited primarily to one system) and then refer people to more specific specialists. This has grown rapidly and produced better health outcomes. I think missiology is something like family medicine. We still need specialists within and outside the discipline to answer the questions within one system, but someone needs to bring the answers together.

How this all works out in terms of academic departments, degrees, territory, respect, hiring and listening in is another question, even here, which I won't go into.

Of course, Bob as you said, your definition still didn't answer what seems to be the bigger question: what is mission?

Reply



Karl Franklin

Mon 14th May 2012 at 5:18 pm

My training is in linguistics and anthropology, but I have read a lot of missiological materials, especially the implications and assumptions that lie behind them. Often, it seems to me, the field is very "in-house", with a limited interest or reading by secular anthropologists (or linguists) who probably would have reservations about granting it the status of a "discipline". Many of the missiology dissertations I have seen relate to church history and church movements but not to the cognitive aspects of how those who have been "missionized" feel about what took place in their cultures. I am reading a book "Creating Christian Indians: Native Clergy in the Presbyterian Church" by Bonnie Sue Lewis (U. of Okla Press, 2003). Lewis documents the success of the Presbyterian missions at the time because they, among other things, did not demand that "Indians no longer be Indians" and allowed the Indians to determine certain aspects of their cultures that could be integrated with Christian beliefs and worship. The mission also ordained pastors who had a minimum of theological training—but lots of tribal wisdom. Lewis seems to me to embody what a missiologist should do: research, writing, reflection and application, but not solely from the Western point of view. Incidentally, a Word spell checker does not recognize missiologist or missiology, perhaps indicating that its secular status is not yet widely recognized.

Reply



Bonnie Sue Lewis

Fri 18th May 2012 at 10:35 am

Bob and friends,
I'm not sure I have much more to contribute to this great conversation about our common calling that has not already been written. But having found myself drawn into it by way of Karl Franklin's kind remarks about my book, I will add this. *Creating Christian Indians* came out of my doctoral dissertation in U.S. Western History at the U. of Washington. I chose the topic because of research done on my MA at Fuller on Christian mission in Alaska. I learned that I was considered a missiologist in 1998 when I first attended the ASM after coming to Dubuque to teach mission! Until then, I simply believed that I was somewhat of a "mutt" – one who used the historical (or ethnohistorical) method to discover what God was up to in the transmission of the Gospel across cultures and time. While I had excellent training and support at the UW, neither of my key professors viewed my work in quite the same way I did. They were thrilled to see the uncovering of Native voices in my research, and agreed with the conclusion that they expressed human agency in the response to Christian mission. However, I saw, as well, a revelation of Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, according to the will of God (the "missio Dei," though I did not know to call it that at the time) at work in the Native communities I studied. This, I believe, is what makes me a missiologist while my esteemed faculty advisors remain western historians. It was, as several of you have noted, the combination of theological reflection (and conviction, or faith) and historical methodology that has shaped my vocation.

Thank you, Bob, for allowing a space for us to reflect together on what it means to do what we do!

Reply



Fohle Lygunda

Tue 17th Sep 2013 at 3:04 pm

Writing from the African Francophone context of Central African region, I could not hesitate to join my voice to yours. Already in my book entitled *Missiologie: Identite, Formation et Recherche dans le contexte africain* prefaced by prof Jan Jongeneel in June 2011, I tried to bring this discussion on "What in the world is missiology?" to my direct context.

To make things clear, as I wished, the following definition was provided:

"Missiology is a scientific and an applied study based on the word of God and on other disciplines of social sciences in order to understand and to orientate the global and holistic mission of the church in contexts." Mission action without mission reflection leads to a superficial mission practice. Mission reflection without mission action leads to a mere speculative mission theory.

Therefore, our department of missiology is an inclusive place to fill the gap, an effort to correct the "superficial mission action" which has characterized many African churches. It is also an effort to correct the "speculative mission reflection" which has characterized some influential African theological institutions. Courses, researches, reflections and exchanges are done in order to correct the paradigms of the superficial mission action and the speculative mission reflection.

In African Francophone context, we need to make this insightful discussion clear. Thank you Bob and others for your initiatives!

Dr Fohle Lygunda li-M, International Leadership University, Burundi

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