

Review of
Planning Strategies for World Evangelism¹

by E. Dayton and D. Fraser

The authors are both associated with the Missions Advanced Research and Communication Center (MARC), the parent organization of which is World Vision International. They place both their organization and their book squarely within the tradition of evangelical missiology identified with the Church Growth movement. This book bears all the marks of that movement, both strengths and weaknesses, though more of the former than the latter. Dayton, I am told by an acquaintance, is a former computer engineer who, after some missiological studies, has devoted his practical computer experience to the advance of mission studies. His co-author, Fraser, contributed to the more theological aspects of the work. The result is a fascinating book on mission with a strong practical thrust.

As to the purpose of this book, one can hardly improve upon the authors' own statement that the book intends

to give the cross-cultural missionary the understanding needed to discover, describe, and reach an unreached people, and to see Christ's Church planted among them. It is both a working text and a reference book. It attempts to lead the reader through steps to *planning* and evaluating what has been done.

At the same time this book is an attempt to bring the task of cross-cultural mission into a comprehensive whole. It is the confluence of a number of different streams. There is the stream of church growth promulgated by Dr. Donald McGavran and the School of World Mission. There is the stream of communication theory from places such as the Wheaton Graduate School. There is the stream of social anthropology exemplified by the "Willowbank Report" of 1978. There is the stream of the work of MARC, which has been attempting to classify and identify people groups since ... 1966. Finally,

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there is the stream of modern systems analysis and the adaptation of new psychological and sociological insights into the management of the human enterprise.

We emphasize that it is pre-eminently a “how-to-do” book, but a more solid one than most such books that have come out of the evangelical community. It challenges the professional missionary at every step as the plan unfolds.

The authors present a ten-step planning model that begins with defining the mission anticipated and ends up with merciless evaluation that itself should result in a renewed definition of the mission once again. The main body of the book consists of a lengthy explanation of these ten steps. As the plan unfolds, all the topics currently on the missionary agenda come in for debate and, though the authors remain well within the evangelical camp, it cannot be said that their opinions are always predictable. They have made a serious attempt to overcome some of the most blatant limitations of evangelicalism, especially in their effort to bridge the gap between themselves and so-called ecumenicals. They will have no truck with the polarity of evangelism vs social concern and insist that both are needed in the mission of God. However, their evangelicalism inserts itself in that, after insisting that both elements are legitimate components of mission, evangelism is defined as only part of that larger mission and they end up separating evangelism and social concern after all. Social concern is put on the backburner, even though granted a legitimate place.

In the Reformed missiological tradition we are accustomed to a heavy dose of theoretical discussion, particularly theological. But even Reformed missionaries have to *do* mission and in doing it, one either works according to carefully established plans, poorly-conceived plans, or no plans at all. Reformed *missionaries* have received little practical guidance from their missiologists as to *how to do* their work. Being good theorists, we tend to look down our noses on American pragmatists, including those associated with the Church Growth movement. There are some reasons for our disdain perhaps, but there *are* some things we can learn from them. I have myself been posted twice to different areas in Nigeria without any *specific* assignment or instructions or plans. The

consequence is that a missionary does his own thing, hopefully guided by the Spirit. A missionary ends up wasting a lot of time trying to determine for himself what he should do. Whether or not he made the right decision is seldom asked, let alone whether or not he is actually implementing the decision.

This book aims to help mission boards plan very concretely from beginning to end in a mission endeavour. It insists that we must have an idea of the end product and that we can, and must, map out the stages in which one can measure the receptivity of various ethnic groups. It emphasized the need for evaluation. It asks whether a certain mission has the necessary qualifications or experience to work with this or that people and, again, provides suggestions as to how this can be measured. It is a book about planning all the way, but *open* planning, planning that can and must be reviewed time and again.

Though the book pretends to give a universal recipe for making concrete plans for a concrete mission effort among a specific people, it paradoxically insists that there are no universally valid methods for missionary work. Every ethnic group requires its own peculiar approach, and so does every class or sub-culture. The recipe they present is the result of interdisciplinary data, including management studies and cultural anthropology.

There is a running dialogue between the authors and their supposed readership, mostly evangelicals who have been burdened with a strangely ambivalent attitude to the relationship between special and general revelation. While in the pursuit of their occupations, evangelicals have tended to ignore many Scriptural teachings, in the “area of religion” they have tended to shy away from the input derived from general revelation. The authors consequently find it necessary to defend time and again their use of so-called “secular” data (especially management studies) to the “sacred” task of mission.

There is also the dialogue with so-called Calvinists who so emphasize the sovereignty of God that they consider it an affront to make concrete plans for their evangelism. Even though such people, like others, are always making plans in other areas of life, they want to leave the planning of evangelism to God. Should we not simply follow the leading of the Holy Spirit? I rather think the

authors are tackling straw Calvinists. However, in the process of this dialogue, the authors come up with a theory of the relationship between God's sovereignty and human responsibility that has some affinity with Berkouwer's theory of correlation.

I have sought primarily to indicate in a positive way the basic intent of this study. Though one can point to a number of shortcomings, some very serious, I regard this study a healthy and radical alternative to our traditionally mostly "planless" – or badly planned? – missionary efforts, including my own. It is encouraging to note that also in the missionary organization of the Christian Reformed Church, increasing attention is being paid to careful planning. A report written by Lou Haveman on the program in Sierra Leone is a gem for careful, long-range stage-by-stage planning.

The authors themselves regard this work as a working document and reference book. It is just that: very useful, if not a "must," for missionaries and mission executives. However, I cannot recommend it for the general public, for it is far too technical and professional for that purpose.