



Maximum IMPACT

Short-Term Mission



Ralph D. Winter

Book Review and Commentary

The short-term mission movement has been around long enough for it to be almost inevitable that the dozens of short-term agencies would form some sort of an association, and that within this new sphere individuals would take the lead in drawing on years of experience to produce a mature handbook for short-term mission “practitioners.”

This is the book, and it is as good as it gets. Everyone having to do with short-terms needs to own and *use* this book, not just *read* it. It is much too concentrated to simply read; it is a valuable reference tool.

God’s Real Fools?

I am sorry to say, however, that from my “long-term mission” perspective this book embodies some deficiencies of good judgment. Presumably it is promoting what short-termers can do, but it begins with an introduction which constitutes a parody of highly structured long-term mission agencies—a fictional account of a group of fishermen who get so bureaucratized that none of them is left to go fishing.

Then, in the first chapter entitled “God’s Fools”, it glorifies those who without lengthy preparation go out and do mission work, as if there is special merit in not knowing what you are doing, even suggesting that “the more a missionary relies on academic head knowledge, the less opportunity the unexplainable wind of the Holy Spirit has to work.” The footnote for the latter statement is John 3:8 (“the wind blows wherever it pleases ...”) which is a reference quite irrelevant to the many young people who might aspire to be either an effective surgeon or long-term cross-cultural missionary. Accordingly, this first chapter complains that some agencies “obsessively” resist considering short-termers “real missionaries.”

In fact, there may be good reasons for that.

One point it makes is very well taken: that “pre-field” studies are far less important than “on-field” studies. It then gives examples of three of “God’s Real Fools,” Francis of Assisi, William Carey, and Gladys Aylward, who did little pre-field study. But none of these were short-termers. All of them stayed long enough for the dictum to come true—that field knowledge and experience outrank pre-field study. If they had not become long-term, we would have never heard of them. Thus, this insight about the superiority of on-field study hardly applies at all to the most common (two-to-three-week) short-terms.

The young man (Hudson Taylor) who founded the famous China Inland Mission (later called the Overseas Missionary Fellowship) might easily have been added to the Francis-Carey-Aylward trilogy. He went out under a new agency with limited experience, and with virtually no preparation beforehand. After several years in China (note, “years”) he came back to England to found a new mission that would do things differently.

Taylor now had considerable experience behind him, and yet his idea of mission strategy was, looking back in hindsight, quite ridiculous: for some years what he told his field missionaries to do was in accord with this book’s “short-term methodologies,” namely, “relentlessly moving about without planting themselves in one particular geographical locale” (p. 20). Taylor in the early years was determined to do nothing but evangelize. He is famous for praying for a thousand missionaries to reach all China by evangelizing fifty people a day for a thousand days! Fortunately, the CIM/OMF eventually developed superior missionary strategies. But think of the frustration, heartache and disappointment among his followers during those early years when so defective a strategy was pursued!

That the strategy sounded good back in England did not mean it would work in China.

Cheap Education, Expensive Mission

Let me give my honest, personal opinion. Short-term missions are a worthwhile activity. I would not have become a missionary had I not gone on a three-week short-term, visiting missionaries in southern Mexico. But our little group of about fifteen did not even try to *do* any worthwhile

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mission work. We were, by contrast, *exposed* to worthwhile mission work. That is what made the difference to me a few years later. Note well that most short-termers today never even see a missionary at a distance and have no idea what real mission

work is like. This is partly because they don't want to bother the long-term missionaries. This means there is an unfortunate limit to how many short-termers can be afforded the luxury of close contact with long-term missionaries.

This leads me to the observation that short-terms are eminently worth their (high) investment as long as they are seen as having the purpose of maturation and education for the goers, but that if they are considered a form of mission they certainly would have to be considered an astronomically expensive form of mission, if in many cases mission at all. That is, they represent cheap education, but expensive mission. I realize that this perspective is diametrically opposite to the strong claim of this book. Thus, to me it is painful that in order to get up enough donations to get all these high school

Short-Term Mission Trips

Maximizing the Benefits

Glenn J. Schwartz

A burgeoning interest in Christian missions has produced a new interest in short-term missions (STMs). This has resulted in thousands of short-termers going out across our world. (One recent report says that there will be one million going out from North America this year.) The results of these ministries vary. Some produce great personal benefit for those who go, but sometimes they leave behind less than desirable results where they have served. Some have actually created significant dependency in a very short period of time. It is to this situation that I wish to speak....

I have often told the story of a missionary who took a group of young people from North America to Guyana, where they built a church in the three weeks they were there. They joyfully presented the church to the people and returned home. Two years later this message was sent from Guyana to the people in North America: "The roof on your church building is leaking. Please come and fix it." In this case those in the short-term group would have done well to become familiar with the concept of "psychological ownership" in cross-cultural ministry....

If short-termers can learn the importance of "being" rather than "doing", great good can be accomplished. For example, one young woman went to Kenya on a short-term mission and was assigned to

work in the home of a church leader whose wife was ill. As she cared for the children, did the laundry and prepared meals, she wondered if she was doing anything of value. She especially worried about what to tell the people at home who had helped her financially. When the time came for her to return home, however, there were many heartfelt expressions of gratitude on the part of the local people. Local people said they had discovered a different kind of short-termer—one for whom doing something spectacular was not the most important thing.

Before sending out His disciples on a short-term ministry assignment, Jesus told them, "Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10: 16b). Short-termers and all missionaries would do well to remember these words when venturing into a cross-cultural situation. They will find that listening, learning and "being" are essential to an effective ministry. 🌐

Glenn Schwartz is Executive Director of World Mission Associates (WMA). This excerpt is from a larger article available at the WMA Website (wmausa.org). The full article is also due to appear in the January-March 2004 issue of the International Journal of Frontier Missions (www.ijfm.org).

and college young people out there for a few days, it seems necessary to sell the enterprise as a missionary activity instead of a very high-quality educational activity.

Good Cause, Bad Parody

Thus, in my opinion, to conduct and promote short-term missions is a good, significant and important activity (and this book is invaluable in the conduct of that activity). I must believe, however, that in order to promote that good cause it is not necessary in this otherwise excellent book to parody long-term agencies in the very introduction, or in the very first chapter decry every minute spent acquiring “head knowledge.”

History tells us there are more wrong ways to do mission than right. History reveals centuries of failure due to crucial misunderstandings. What it has taken keen, godly, long-term missionaries decades and centuries to figure out is not automatically understood by either short-termers or their many avid sponsors. It took Paul years to figure out that the knee-jerk assumptions of the people

back home—that Greeks had to become Jews to get to heaven—was dead wrong.

We can heartily rejoice in the amazing blessings short-termers receive due to their experiences.

As I have mentioned, I myself was blessed years ago. We can hope and pray that in most cases they do not do the cause of field missions a disservice. Even if they don't interfere with field activities already going on, these earnest young people sometimes return with a subconscious conviction that “this is not for me,” since realistically what they accomplished may not seem significant or reasonable in the clear light of dawn. They may simply be exposed to relatively hopeless situations. 🌐

*See page 21 to learn how you can order a copy of **Maximum Impact Short-Term Mission**.*

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U.S. Standards of Excellence

in Short-Term Mission

Roger Peterson

Current research indicates the United States is sending at least 1,000,000 short-term mission volunteers every year. These short-term volunteers are sent by 40,000 “sending entities” consisting of 35,000 churches, 3,700 agencies, and more than 1,000 schools. Yet the missiological validity of short-term mission has been rightly questioned on countless occasions—especially when it pertains to frontier mission work among unengaged and unreached peoples. The anecdotal evidence abounds on both sides of the fence: there are stories of scandal and selfishness; there are stories of success and indelibly changed lives. But until now, no “standards,” no “best practices” have existed to help mission strategists separate the wheat from the chaff.

Developed over the course of two years by more than 400 people from across the United States, the Standards of Excellence is a product of thousands of hours of work, discussion, and prayer. For the first time in U.S. history, a national code of ethics exists for short-term mission practitioners with a

universal Seal of Approval that the public can use to identify programs striving for excellence.

The Seven Standards of Excellence in Short-Term Mission formalize the ethical and operating procedures many sending entities (churches, schools, and agencies) want to see standardized. By adopting and practicing these Standards, short-term practitioners earn the right to display the SOE Seal of Approval

For the complete commentary explaining the heart of each Standard, visit the SOE website www.STMstandards.org to read the comprehensive explanations and member pledges for each of the Seven Standards. 🌐

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