

The Amaturisation of Missions

by Peter Hammond

The amaturisation of missions is a problem that arises when Christians with little training or preparation attempt to serve in the mission field, often causing more harm than good.

Scripture: Leviticus 19:28

Topics: "Missions Training", "Cross Cultural Ministry"

Description

Peter Hammond addresses the concerning trend of the amateurization of missions, highlighting the influx of untrained, ill-equipped, and short-term 'missionaries' who often hinder rather than help the local believers due to their lack of preparation, cultural awareness, and spiritual maturity. He emphasizes the importance of proper training, selection procedures, and ongoing learning for missionaries, pointing out the need for emotional stability, self-discipline, and extensive ministry experience before venturing into cross-cultural missions. Hammond also discusses the detrimental impact of religious tourism on mission fields, where large groups of unprepared individuals engage in superficial activities without understanding the local culture, language, or needs, ultimately failing to make a meaningful impact.

Transcript

Despite the hard realities and desperate needs of the mission fields, we are increasingly seeing the amaturisation of missions. More and more Christians are pouring into the mission fields - but for very short periods of time and for very superficial goals.

I have been astounded to come across large tour groups (calling themselves "missionaries") travelling across the world just to spend four or five days "in the field"! The high costs of international air travel would seem to make such short visits cost-ineffective. Even more incredible is how most of these short termers have undergone no selection procedure, received no training and are ill-equipped to benefit the local believers. In most cases these religious tourists have a lower grasp of Scripture and a spiritual maturity that is dwarfed by the local believers to whom they presume to come to minister.

Most people understand that doctors and engineers, in fact every other profession, need proper training to be able to do their work. Yet for some obscure reason many Christians seem to think that any churchgoer can be a missionary! The flood of untrained, ill disciplined and unaccountable lone ranger supposed "missionaries" into Third World countries is disastrous. Many don't even know enough of the local culture, to realise how much damage they are doing to the Christian cause.

Cross Cultural Challenges

I have seen many female missionaries in trousers, or even shorts, ministering in rural Africa. They seem oblivious to the fact that all the local Christian women only wear dresses. Nor could they possibly realise how offensive their dress (or lack of it) is to their hosts. Once a team of 6 American medical missionaries flew out to work with us in Mozambique. As they arrived in Malawi, the two women were detained by Police for wearing trousers! They didn't even have a single skirt between them in their luggage. We had to go into town to buy some dresses for the ladies before the police would release them!

African cultures value politeness and hospitality highly. So unless you probe and ask lots of penetrating questions you will never know that you have offended your hosts. They will continue to smile and be friendly even as the door slams firmly shut to further ministry. For example, in Africa, it is generally considered a disgrace for a man to have long hair. This is not only cultural, but Biblical: "Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonour to him." (1 Corinthians 11:14). Yet you will see many long haired and pony tailed men heading out "to evangelise the pagans in Africa" oblivious to what a "stumbling block" they are.

The present fad of body piercing seems to have invaded the church as well. I have met Christians heading out to the mission field with nose rings, belly rings, tongue studs and who knows what other body mutilations. It's not that these piercings are unknown in Africa or Asia. In fact every pagan culture practises it. The Hindus and animists in particular practise body piercings and tattoos extensively. However, once converted they repent and turn away from such abominations.

It is generally quite easy to tell the difference between a Christian and a pagan in Africa: by how they dress and by how they treat (or mistreat) their body. The Scriptures are clear: "You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh . . . nor tattoo any marks on you: I am the Lord" Leviticus 19:28. Earrings on men in the Bible were a mark of slavery (Exodus 21:6; Deut 15:17). Cutting of ones own flesh was seen as an act of worship to demon idols by the pagans (1 Kings 18:28). For a Christian who recognises that his body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthian 3:16-17) to defile himself with the pagan practise of body piercing is not only tragic but blatant rebellion against God. How then can you expect African Christians to respect long haired men with pony tails and earrings - who presumed to come and teach them?

Helping or Hindering?

Often the message we bring is undermined by our appearance or actions. One "mission team" that came to assist some good friends of ours started arguing with the established missionaries over divisive doctrines, then they asserted "a woman's right" to have an abortion! Finally, they complained about being given physical work.

"We came here to minister" protested the pony-tailed team leader. "Physical work is part of our ministry," answered the mission leader. Before the whole congregation the young team leader stood up on Sunday morning and protested the way his team of volunteers had been forced to help with the building extension of the mission station. "We came here to preach the Gospel, not to lay bricks. Look at my hands," he pleaded. "My hands are like that of a little girl. God didn't make my hands to handle bricks!"

The incredible thing is that every year thousands of such undisciplined and unteachable selfish individuals jet into mission fields around the world . . . to help!

Religious Tourism

I first came across the term religious tourists in Romania. A pastor was relating to me the bizarre story of 89 Californian Christians who had flown in to "minister" in Romania! Naturally, none of them spoke Romanian. Neither did they have transport. They were totally dependent upon their local hosts, whom they presumed they were coming to help. On Sunday morning they all wanted to speak at the main service. Each was given two minutes to bring greetings! So began a seemingly never-ending procession of 89 religious tourists delivering their greetings through an interpreter - with successive camera flashes accompanying! These visitors never seemed to consider just how much their large tour group had imposed upon their Romanian hosts for transport, accommodation, food and interpreters. "We never saw these people in the dark days of persecution." declared one pastor. "They're not missionaries - they're religious tourists!"

There have recently been groups of up to 29 Americans and Europeans flying in, on a single aircraft, to one location in Sudan. When I asked how long they were going in for they proudly announced "two or three days - maybe even four!" I could only stand in amazement at their superficial understanding of what is needed in Missions. "What do you plan to accomplish?" I

asked. "Oh!" the man answered, "We plan to hand over some relief aid and buy some slaves!"

So this is now what missions are coming to: large groups of people flying half way across the world to hand over some relief aid, say a few nice words and set some slaves free! And in just a few days they fly back home thinking that they are now missionaries! They have no real grasp of the people to whom they are going, they have no understanding of the religious worldview of the people they are evangelising and they have never bothered to study the history of the nation they say they are sent to. Untrained, unprepared, unaccountable, and even unaware of the way the local people perceive them.

Without knowing the local language or staying there long enough to know what is really going on, how can they be sure that those people sitting under the tree really are slaves? Do they know what the correct price and exchange rates are? Once they set the slaves free how can they be sure that they will not be re-enslaved again? Would they even know if they were being deceived in an elaborate plot to enrich certain slave traders? Those who only fly in for the day cannot be certain of the answers to any of these questions. The mission fields are too complex for amateurs.

What Makes a Missionary?

Of course a mission worker's training should not stop when they reach the field - in fact it must never stop. It takes an average of 2 years or more for a trainee field worker in Frontline Fellowship to qualify as a Field Worker. This training will include many courses such as: the Great Commission Course, Discipleship Training Course, Biblical Worldview Seminar, Muslim Evangelism Workshop, Evangelism Explosion III, First Aid courses, and participation in many outreaches including street evangelism, Muslim evangelism and Bible smuggling into restricted access countries. There are required reading lists, written assignments and practical tests. All of these are important components of a comprehensive programme to prepare effective missionaries for ministry in war torn, Muslim or Communist countries.

Frontline's selection and training procedure is fairly unique in its blend of intensive Biblical instruction and practical outreach within an apprenticeship programme.

Those who are easily upset by irritations, loss of sleep or unfair treatment and those who are moody and easily discouraged and depressed are not suitable for missions. Missionaries must be emotionally stable, and self disciplined.

In the mission field, relationship difficulties are often aggravated by high levels of stress, heat and cross-cultural frustration. The closeness of living, travelling and working conditions intensifies interpersonal conflicts. Missionaries tend to be strong-willed people, so potential clashes can undermine the mission team and projects. There are two major problems here: dependant people who need constant support and direction and sap the energy from a team; and independent people who divert the team's energy as they pull one way and another to pursue their own agendas. Missionaries need to be inter-dependant (team players) relinquishing their own interests for the good of the team: Self-starters, self-reliant and self-sacrificing.

The harsh terrains, hot climates and primitive conditions of most mission fields require healthy and fit missionaries who can endure and be effective in adverse conditions. And who can cope with and recover from debilitating sicknesses

It is amazing how many people volunteer for missions who have never done any ministry at home! It is essential for all missionaries to have extensive ministry experience at the home front before venturing into cross-cultural missions overseas.

Obstacles abound. Frustrations, disappointments and discouragement's are occupational hazards and part of our job description. Missionaries need endurance - a willingness and capacity to suffer hardships, discomfort, opposition and worse. Sacrificial service is more eloquent than many sermons.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/peter-hammond/the-amaturisation-of-missions/>

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