Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:

Buy me a coffee https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology

PATREON https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb

PayPal https://paypal.me/robbradshaw

---

A table of contents for *Caribbean Journal of Evangelical Theology* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_caribbean-journal-theology_01.php

# FOREIGN SUBSIDIES AND LOCAL CHURCH GROWTH: A CASE STUDY WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR A CARIBBEAN MISSIONARY FORCE

*Wayne W. Allen (D.Miss., Concordia Theological Seminary) holds the David Ho Chair of World Missions at the Caribbean Graduate School of Theology, Kingston, Jamaica. He served as a missionary in Indonesia from 1978 to 1990.*

The Caribbean church is beginning to emerge as a missionary force. Increasingly, the theme "From Mission Field to Mission Force" is being proclaimed. The launching of NEST (the Networking, Equipping and Sending Team) in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1997 as a Caribbean mission agency is but one example of how the needs of the unreached peoples in the 10/40 Window are being heard by the Caribbean church. It is anticipated that by the end of the millennium, Caribbean missionaries sent by NEST will have planted the church among at least one of the unreached people groups in the 10/40 Window.

As the Caribbean church emerges as a powerful missionary force it will be confronted with many challenges. In the providence of God, this emerging missionary force is able to learn from the experience of over 200 years of modern missionary activity. It is not necessary for the Caribbean missionary effort to reinvent the missiological wheel. Rather, it can avoid the serious mistakes of the past by studying the efforts of those who have gone before. As has been said, "Those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it."

One vital issue that the Caribbean missionary force must confront is that of funding national pastors. As God prospers the witness of NEST and other Caribbean mission agencies that will follow, there will be converts to the faith. These converts will be formed into local congregations in need of pastoral care. Initially, the Caribbean missionary will provide this care, but at some point it will be necessary to place the new church under its own indigenous leaders. The question will then arise of financing these national leaders. Eventually, the missionaries will have to face the issue of financing the new indigenous church. One popular approach has been to raise funding in the West to subsidize the salaries of indigenous evangelists and pastors. It is imperative that the Caribbean mission force prepare to act wisely when confronted with this issue.

The wisdom of supporting national pastors with mission funds has been debated for many years. Kenneth Donald challenged the validity of "the arguments for self-support and the indigenous church" as early as 1977 (Donald 19). The emergence of the Two-Third's World missionary movement raised the issue again in the 1980s. The churches of the West were urged to share their financial resources with the emerging Two-Third's World missionary force (Keyes 217-224). In 1992, Donna Downes urged that Two-Third's World mission dependence on Western financial aid be ended by teaching the Two-Third's World churches to give (Downes 142-150).

The question was hotly debated by my own mission team in West Kalimantan, Indonesia, but without a satisfactory conclusion. It was the source of tremendous tension for our team. When I entered my doctoral program, I determined to investigate this issue thoroughly, not to vindicate my own opinions, but to enable other mission teams to avoid the same problems. My findings revealed that the growth of the national church plateaued, halted, when the mission began to subsidize the national church workers. I believe my findings are worthy of consideration by the emerging missionary force of the Caribbean church. This essay summarizes my dissertation research.

This case study demonstrates that when the mission team introduced pastoral subsidy, church growth ceased. It describes the participants on the mission team, the procedures of the study, and the plan of subsidy as it was used in this case. It then presents the church growth data which demonstrates the halting of growth when subsidy was initiated in three areas, and also demonstrates that growth did not stop in the one district that did not receive subsidy. The study then reviews the possible problems, or causes, for this cessation of growth, presents important principles that can be drawn from the case study and concludes that the subsidy of pastoral salaries with mission funds hurts the growth of the church.

## The Players

The mission was strongly evangelical. It was also deeply committed to indigenous church principles, believing that strong churches committed to further evangelism was the best way to evangelize the world. The team members were deeply committed to the cause of Christ. They were godly people committed to the evangelization of the world.

The mission team formed a strong national church. The field was opened in earnest in 1948. The national church, formally organized in

1960, has endeavoured to do its part in the evangelization of the world. The church is a Land Dayak church. The traditional Dayak life is based on slash-and-burn rice cultivation. Their classic animism was designed to gain the blessing of Jubata, the rice god.

## The Procedure of the Study

My purpose in the study was to determine the impact of the use of mission funds to subsidize national church workers. My procedure, or methodology, was to compare the rates of growth in four districts of the national church. Area 1 never received subsidy from the mission for its pastors and evangelists because the missionaries who served in the district were convinced that the practice was unwise. Two missionary couples resigned from the team rather than participate in it. Areas 2, 3, and 4 received extensive subsidy. A comparison of the growth rates indicates the impact of subsidy.

The similarities of the four districts reduced the variables to manageable proportions. The four districts were adjacent to each other. All four districts experienced the same historical, social, political, and cultural changes. The church in all four districts was a Dayak church. While there were several dialects in use in the districts, all church activity was done in the national language. Further, the Dayaks themselves considered their evangelistic work in all four areas to be E-1 evangelism, even if they used different dialects.[1]

There were some differences in the areas. Areas 2 and 3 were on the main road with more and easier contact with national events. Different missionaries ministered in each area. There was a higher missionary turn-over rate in Area 1 than the other areas. These differences are significant. However, the similarities of the districts are sufficient so that differences in growth rates can be attributed in large part to the impact of subsidy.

## The Plan

The subsidy plan was to use mission funds to provide a salary to national church workers so that these workers could leave their secular activities and devote themselves full-time to the work of the ministry. The mission team conceived the plan as a means of redeeming the tremendous evangelistic opportunities on the field in the early 1970s. Opportunities for evangelism far exceeded the ability of the missionary

[1]This term was confirmed by discussions with students in the mission Bible school, and in conversations with village pastors and elders.

staff. National workers were being trained at the mission's Bible school, but they were not being financed by the national church.[2] The mission team believed that the subsidy would enable more workers to enter the field of ministry.

The funding was raised by the individual missionaries for use in their own districts of ministry. Each missionary was to use the funds he raised to support workers in his district. No funds were pooled or shared among districts. Only those team members who were convinced of the wisdom of this approach solicited funds. The amount of funding available for each district was dependent on the skill of the missionary in raising the funds. When team members left the field, or were transferred to other ministries on the field, the funding they provided to national workers ceased. The mission team did not continue to provide funding from other sources.

The role of the church workers subsidized was not precisely determined at the beginning of the programme. One missionary participant, in District 2, asserted that the subsidy was only for evangelists. The missionary in District 3 asserted that the worker was to pastor the local church and evangelize the neighbouring villages. Over time, the subsidized workers became pastors. [3]

## The Product

The following chart is a summary of district church growth, measured by the number of local churches in the districts, compared to the amount of subsidy provided.

A comparison of the Decadal Growth Rates (DGR) of the four districts with the amount of subsidy received reveals that church growth ceased in Districts 2, 3, and 4 when the subsidy was initiated.[4] However, growth continued at a strong rate in District 1. The research focused on the years 1972-1990 because subsidy was initiated in 1972, and I left the field in 1990.

---

[2]This was understandable as the churches were only first generation Christians. They had yet to learn the art of tithing. They were also subsistence level farmers. The mission was making efforts to teach tithing.

[3]For a discussion of the difference between pastor and evangelist see Harold Cook, *Missionary Life and Work: A Discussion of Principles and Practices of Missions* (Chicago: Moody, 1959), 184.

[4]For a detailed explanation of the meaning and computation of Decadal Growth Rate see Bob Waymire and C. Peter Wagner, *The Church Growth Survey Handbook*, 3rd ed. revised, (Milpitas: Global Church Growth, 1984), 15-17.

## District 1

A clear pattern of consistent growth is seen in the district from the opening of the first church in 1951 through 1990. This growth was achieved totally without subsidy for its national workers. At the same time, two of its missionaries resigned from the field in protest over the initiation of subsidy. The key to its growth was strong evangelistic work by its lay leaders, especially witnessing along family lines (Allen 1988. 5-6). This demonstrates that church growth was possible among the Land Dayaks without the use of subsidy.

**District 1**

| Year | # Churches | DGR | Total Subsidy to Date |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1960 | 7 | | US$ 0 |
| 1970 | 11 | 57% | 0 |
| 1980 | 14 | 27% | 0 |
| 1990 | 23 | 64% | 0 |

**District 2**

| Year | # Churches | DGR | Total Subsidy to Date |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1960 | 1 | | US$ 0 |
| 1970 | 20 | 1900% | 0 |
| 1980 | 11 | -45% | 4,804.00 |
| 1990 | 30 | 173% | 61,961.35 |

**District 3**

| Year | # Churches | DGR | Total Subsidy to Date |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1970 | 12 | | US$ 97.90 |
| 1980 | 15 | 25% | 20,820.46 |
| 1990 | 14 | -7% | 41,513.66 |

**District 4**

| Year | # Churches | DGR | Total Subsidy to Date |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1975 | 18 | | US$ 4,075.95 |
| 1985 | 18 | 0% | 11,322.66 |
| 1990 | 18 | 0% | 11,322.66 |

## District 2

The record of growth in the District 2 was not as consistent as that of District 1, and it was achieved at a far greater financial cost. From 1960 to 1970, the District grew from one church to nineteen, a DGR of 1,900%. This phenomenal rate of growth was achieved *without* subsidy. However, from 1970 to 1980, the number of churches dropped to eleven, a DGR of -45%! Probably the number of churches remained the same throughout the period, and the negative growth was the result of faulty record keeping. Nonetheless, subsidy was initiated in 1972. If subsidy was a positive action, the growth rate should have improved. However, the evidence clearly shows that subsidy did not improve the rate of growth.

While the DGR returned to the credible range of 173% from 1980 to 1990, this was merely regaining what was lost in the previous decade. The growth was the result of improved record keeping, not new congregations. However, the fact remains that from 1969 to 1989 the district added only one new church despite the investment of US$61,961.35. In 1990, ten new churches were added, bringing the total to 30 (cf. Allen 1996, 443-444).[5] What happened?

In the mid-1970s the strong lay involvement in evangelism that was a key part of the initial growth in the area declined significantly. This occurred as the subsidy programme expanded. In the mid-1980s, sensing the need to reinvigorate the laity, strong theological education by extension programmes were launched in the district. The ten new churches in 1990 were the result of the renewed lay involvement.

## District 3

District 3 has a record of uneven growth from its opening in 1967 through 1990. The district grew from three churches in 1967 to twelve in 1970 (cf. Allen 1996, 467). The DGR for the period 1970-1980 was only 25%. But in the next decade the DGR dropped to -7%. Thus, from the twelve churches planted without subsidy by 1970, the district grew to fourteen churches in 1990 by investing US$41,513.66 in national worker subsidy. Again, the record does not indicate that subsidy had a positive impact on church growth.

## District 4

District 4 began with a strong base when a number of churches from another mission joined with my mission team's new work in 1973. By 1975 District 4 consisted of eighteen churches and twenty preaching points. The district was subsidized heavily from its opening in 1973. In 1983, mission funding for the national workers ceased abruptly when the

[5]For detailed annual records of all four districts see Allen 1996, 418-489.

district missionary was reassigned to a new ministry. The churches were forced to provide for their own pastor. There was no more mission money available. From 1973 to 1990, the district received US$11,322.66 to support its national personnel. The investment did not bring about the desired results. In a time and place where people movements were happening, where the church was growing, substantial sums of money were invested to expand the Kingdom of God, but no growth was realized.

When this result is considered together with the results in Districts 2 and 3, one conclusion is driven forcefully home: Subsidy did not have a positive impact on the growth of the national church. In fact, the growth of the church ceased when the subsidy was formally initiated.

## The Problems

Why did the initiation of subsidy coincide with the cessation of growth? Interviews with village leaders and personal observations suggest the following possible causes.

First, a loss of lay involvement. The initiation of subsidy signaled a move from reliance on lay leadership to reliance on a professional clergy. Lay leadership was the primary factor in the growth of District 1. In Districts 2, 3, and 4, lay involvement declined as the subsidy increased (Allen 1996, 418-489). The lay leadership increasingly came to feel that the work of the church was the responsibility of the paid clergy.

Second, loss of focus. The paid workers began to focus more on pleasing the missionary, who paid their salary, than on meeting the needs of their churches. Further, the paid workers lost the vision for evangelism. They increasingly gave their attention to ministering to the needs of the congregation, neglecting to visit the neighboring villages to preach the gospel. Finally, over time the paid workers became increasingly aware of how little they were being paid. This resulted in increased attention on how to increase their level of remuneration, and less attention on the work of the ministry.

Third, loss of devotion. When the churches realized that the missionary was paying the salary of the pastor, they lost their sense of ownership of the pastor. They increasingly came to see the pastor as the missionary's hired worker. They increasingly felt no obligation to give toward the pastor's support. When the pastor saw that the congregation was not concerned with providing for his support and well-being, he devoted himself even more to pleasing the missionary who paid his salary. The pastor also increased his efforts to persuade the missionary to increase his salary.

## The Principles

The research has led to the following conclusions: First, the unwise use of financial resources can stymie the expansion of the Kingdom of God. While it cannot be conclusively demonstrated that the initiation of subsidy was the cause of the halt in growth, it is significant that in every district where subsidy was initiated *church growth ceased.* At the same time, growth in the unsubsidized district continued at a strong rate, and that despite the loss of two effective missionaries due to disagreement over the practice of subsidy.

Second, the financial subsidization of national workers must be limited to missionaries and evangelists. As the congregation grows, it requires more attention from its spiritual leader. The evangelist must transform his ministry from evangelist to pastor. The pastor must be supported by his congregation. The introduction of subsidy for the pastor interferes with the symbiotic relationship between the shepherd and the sheep.

Third, indigenous church congregations must assume responsibility for the support of their pastor as soon as possible. The pastor must see himself as the servant leader of the congregation. The congregation must recognize their responsibility to their pastor, and fulfill it.

Finally, indigenous church missionaries must be empowered to release their new congregations to pastoral care within a definite time period. This enables the indigenous missionary to continue using his/her spiritual gift of evangelism and church planting in unevangelized areas. This also avoids the problems cited above.

## Conclusion

The use of subsidy in this instance did not further the cause of Christ. In all three districts where it was used, church growth ceased. In the district where it was not used, growth continued. Clearly, there is something wrong with providing foreign money for national pastors. Further research needs to be done to establish if this is an isolated case or if it is a common experience. In the meantime, wisdom suggests that the Caribbean church limit its financial subsidy to areas other than pastoral support.

## WORKS CITED

Allen, Wayne W. 1996. The impact of financial subsidy of national pastors with mission funds: A case study. D.Miss. dissertation. Ft. Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary.

________. 1988. An accurate picture of the Anik church. Unpublished research paper. Pasadena: School of World Mission, Fuller Theological Seminary.

Donald, Kenneth G. 1977. What's wrong with foreign money for national pastors? *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*. 13 (January): 19-25.

Downes, Donna R. 1992. The cure for dependency: Teach your churches to give. *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*. 28 (April): 142-150.

Keyes, Lawrence E. 1982. Third world missionaries: More and better. *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*. 18 (October): 217-224.