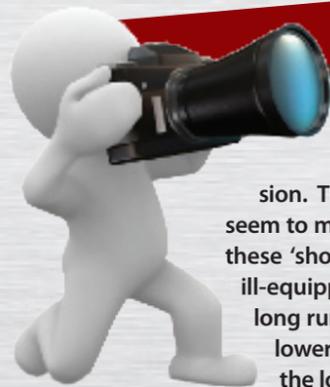


THE AMATEURISATION

OF MISSIONS

—by Peter Hammond

Many Christians with good intentions, are pouring into the mission fields, but for short periods of time and often without adequate training.



ONE MUST BE TRAINED

I have been dismayed to come across large tour groups who travel across the world just to spend four of five days 'in the field' on a mission. The high costs of international air travel would seem to make such short visits cost-ineffective. Most of these 'short termers' have received no training and are ill-equipped to really benefit the local believers in the long run. Worryingly, many of these believers have a lower grasp of Scripture and a spiritual maturity than the local believers to whom they come to minister to.

The need for training

Doctors and engineers, and in fact every other profession, need proper training to be able to do their work. Yet many Christians seem to think that any churchgoer can be a missionary. The flood of untrained, and unaccountable lone ranger missionaries into Third World countries is often disastrous. Many don't 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. Possibly they do not realise how offensive their dress is to their hosts. Once, a team of six American medical missionaries flew out to work with us in Mozambique. As

they arrived in Malawi, two of the women were detained by police for wearing trousers. They didn't even have a single skirt between them in their luggage. We had to rush into town to buy some dresses for the ladies before the police would release them!

When politeness conceals offence
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.

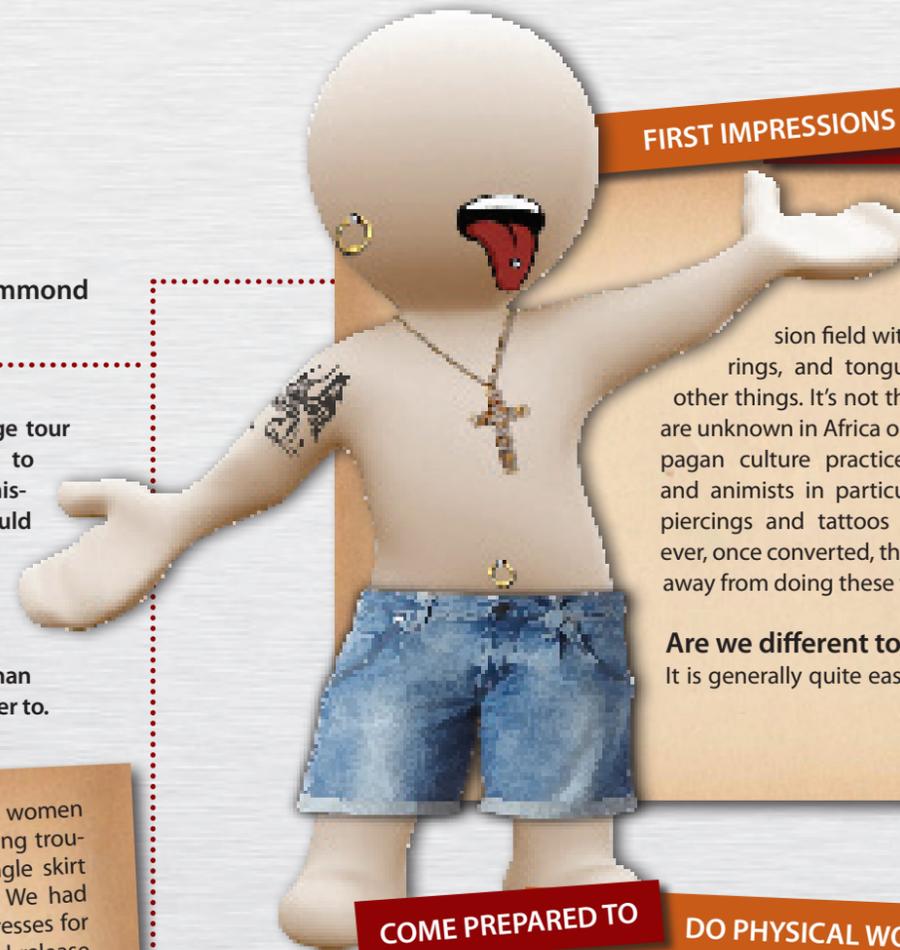
In Africa, it is generally considered a disgrace for a man to have long hair. Yet you will see many long haired men heading out "to evangelise Africa" oblivious to what a stumbling block their appearance may be.

THE NEED FOR MINISTRY

EXPERIENCE

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

"Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ." Phil 1:27



FIRST IMPRESSIONS

COUNT

I have met some Christians heading out to the mission field with nose rings, belly rings, and tongue studs amongst other things. 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 doing these things.

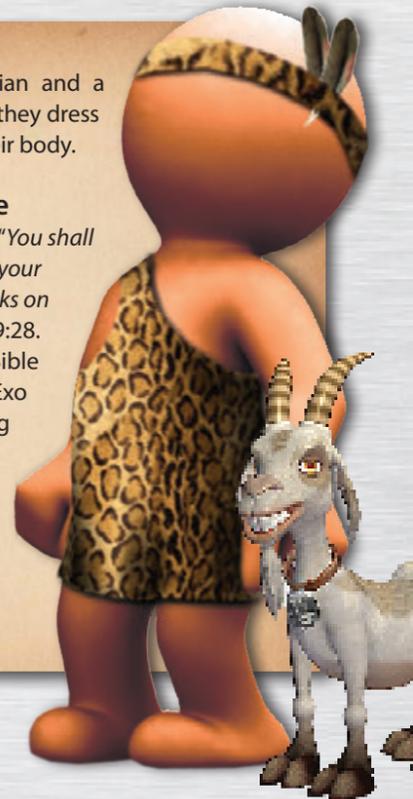
Are we different to the world?

It is generally quite easy to tell the differ-

ence between a Christian and a pagan in Africa: by how they dress and by how they treat their body.

Looking at Scripture

The Scriptures are clear: "You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh...nor tattoo any marks on you: I am the Lord." Lev 19:28. Earrings on men in the Bible were a mark of slavery (Exo 21:6, Deut 15:17). Cutting one's flesh was seen as an act of worship to demon idols by the pagans (1 Kings 18:28).



COME PREPARED TO

DO PHYSICAL WORK

"We came here to minister" protested the team leader. "Physical work is part of our ministry," answered the Mission Supervisor. Before the whole congregation, the young team leader stood up on Sunday morning and protested about the way his team of volunteers had been expected to help with the building extension of the mission station. "We came here to preach the Gospel, not to lay bricks!" he pleaded.

We have to embrace an attitude of servanthood if we want God to use us.



RELIEF AID VISITS

There have been groups of up to 29 Westerners flying in, on a single aircraft, to a location in Sudan. When I asked how long they were going in for, they proudly announced "two or three days - maybe even four!" Sadly I could only stand amazed at their superficial understanding of what is needed in missions. A long-term approach is critical to lasting impact.

PERSEVERANCE

TO OVERCOME OBSTACLES

Frustrations, disappointments and discouragements are occupational hazards and part of a missionary's job description. Missionaries need endurance, as well as willingness and capacity to suffer hardships, discomfort and opposition. Sacrificial service is more eloquent than many sermons.

THE AMATEURISATION OF MISSIONS



RELIGIOUS

TOURISM

I first came across the term 'religious tourists' in Romania. A pastor was relating to me the story of 89 Californian Christians who had flown in to minister in Romania. 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.

One Sunday morning they all wanted to speak at the main service. Each was given two minutes to bring greetings.

So began a 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!"

INTER-DEPENDENT TEAM PLAYERS ARE VITAL

There are usually two major challenges with mission teams: dependent people who need constant support and direction; and independent people who tend to divert the team's energy as they pull one way and another to pursue their own agendas. Missionaries need to be inter-dependent (team players) relinquishing their own interests for the good of the team; self-starters, self-reliant and self-sacrificing.

TRAINING AND DISCIPLESHIP

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

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.

An age of superficiality

A mission worker's training should not stop when they reach the field - in fact it must never stop. It takes an average of two years or more for a trainee field worker to qualify as a Field

Worker at Frontline Fellowship. 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.

An age of superficiality

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 resistant or neglected countries.

Missions need a selection and training procedure which blends intensive Biblical instruction and practical outreach within an apprenticeship programme. ■

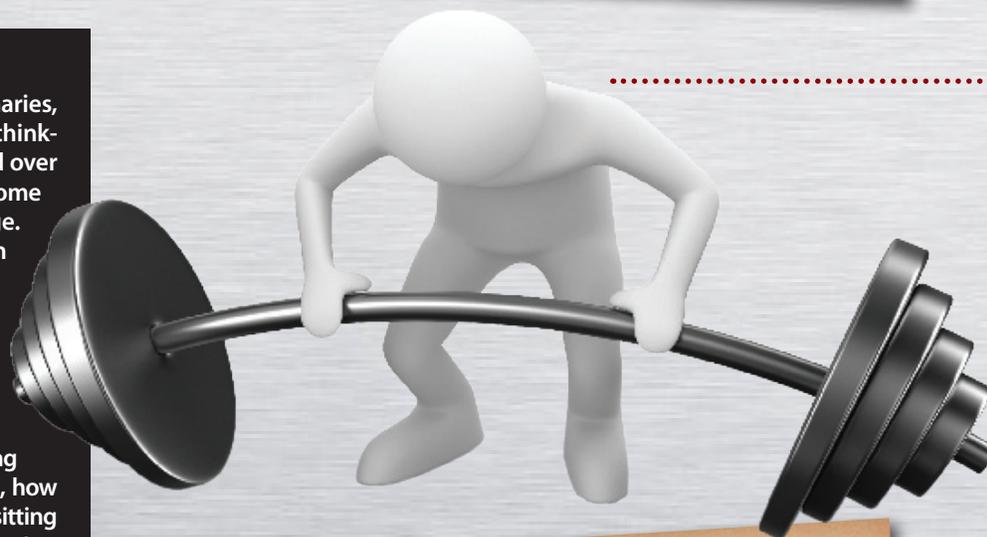
An age of superficiality

If people want to become effective missionaries, they must avoid superficial behaviour and thinking. Flying half way across the world to hand over relief aid, say a few nice words and offer some literature is not going to leave lasting change. It is vital that when ministering in a foreign land, one has a real grasp of the people, the culture, the history of the nation and an understanding of the religious worldview of the people they are evangelising.

Adopting a holistic approach

Without knowing the local language or staying long enough to know what is really going on, how can the missionaries be sure that the 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 untrained believers to just breeze through.



PHYSICAL FITNESS IS IMPORTANT FOR MISSIONS

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

