

# Short-Term Mission: A Great Opportunity

Ulrike Sallandt

## Introduction

I recently had the opportunity to participate in a four-month long course on the subject of short-term missions. During this time, the participants, including myself, carried out fieldwork, particularly interviews and gathering the observations from STM participants. Through this experience, linked with the importance of the subject of missions, I was able to deepen my own first jottings and observations, which I will share herein.

As I am clearly not Peruvian, I owe you an explanation: Why am I here at this conference? And what do I think I can offer (apart from learning) in a gathering on this subject?



---

Ulrike Sallandt (PhD, theology, University of Bochum, Germany; MA, theology, University of Leipzig, Germany) is a candidate for an MA in missiology at the Orlando E. Costas Graduate School of Mission in Lima, Peru. She is also a professor of biblical theology and hermeneutics there. She pastors the Villa María del Triunfo Lutheran Church in Lima, Peru. Her doctoral dissertation on the Assemblies of God churches in southern Peru was published in German.

I would like to mention two things in this regard:

1. **I am a theologian** and have (admittedly limited so far) ecclesiastical-missiological experience in Peru due to doctoral research in the field. I am not a short-term missionary but an assistant pastor in the Lutheran church (I would say a “renewed” congregation), a resident, married to a Peruvian, living in Lima, and, most importantly, I feel a part of this country.

2. **I am a woman** and (as you may have realized) most reflection in the Peruvian context is still in the hands of men.

I will begin from a theological-hermeneutical framework and lead to applications for short-term missions (STMs), uncovering opportunities in women’s favor (applied to neglected groups). The fundamental idea is to compare the exegetical work of an exegete with the missionary work of a missionary and thus enrich the praxis of STMs. The heart of the work is based on the results from the class in which I participated and the reflections that have arisen thence.

## Missionary Encounter and Missionary Communication: The Theoretical Framework

### What is Missionary Communication?

I find that a missionary encounter, an inter-cultural meeting, a meeting between two or more strangers, has a



Ulrike Sallandt and Samuel Escobar present at the International Conference on Short-Term Mission in Peru, August 2-4, 2006.

lot to do with the task an exegete should carry out in interpreting the Bible. Allow me to explain:

Just as the exegete has to be open to the Bible text speaking to him or her, similarly, the missionary and the recipient (in my context, the local congregation in Peru) have to be open to receiving from one another.

---

*Missionaries should at a given moment be willing to leave their mission concept in order to allow the Bible or the unknown culture to speak to them.*

---

My hermeneutical stance is based on Martín Ocaña (2003), Bernardo Campos (1989), Luis Alonso Schökel (1994), Klaus Berger (1999), and Dohmen and Steinberger (1996). Schökel in particular deals with the open creative productive momentum of the hermeneutical process.

Both exegetical work with the Bible and missionary work around the world require open doors from all the participants: those who come (in this case from the United States) and those who receive (in this case the Peruvian churches).

My hypothesis is that both the exegete and the missionary should at a given moment be willing to leave their exegetical method or mission concept in order to allow the Bible or the unknown culture to speak to them.

That is, they must leave the known ground in order to allow the Spirit to guide them through unknown lands by faith (spiritual momentum). Theologically one could speak here of an Exodus experience.

What is a “true” open meeting in the sense of dynamic dialog that includes open communication? Is it possible to have this kind of communication in STM conditions, i.e. in a very brief time span? If so, how can it be done?

Let us look first from the perspective of Bible exegesis: Admittedly, we all approach the Holy Scriptures with our own pre-comprehension. Each and every one of us has pre-comprehensions, that is, marked comprehension, blinkered views, opinions influenced by prejudices, and so on. We are all products of our first socialization. (For information on the concept of second socialization and its challenges, see Berger and Luckmann 1970, 152ff.) We grew up in a particular context, with people who educated us according to certain values, established principles, etc. We are the product of that most important of times in the life of a human being: childhood and adolescence.

For example, I teach in a seminary. One day we were talking about the ministry of women in the evangelical churches in Peru. We read Paul's text in 1 Corinthians 11 on women. The Christian women present did not protest against Paul's words; they did not seem to sense that women had an inferior position in the Pauline perspective.

I ask: What values were taught to these women pupils during their early years? What ideal of womanhood was transmitted? What ideal of womanhood was behind their education at home?

Education evidently marked and created a pre-comprehension in those women that defines their Bible reading today. This pre-comprehension is a product of their first socialization and is deeply rooted.

In contrast, I studied theology in Germany, in secular universities where there is every kind of intercultural, political, and ideological influence of post-modern, modern, and "extra-modern" life (González 2001, 79-82). From my very first steps in this university environment, I remember that the debate on the Christian woman was decided even before I could get involved: woman is equal to man, and

Paul's Bible texts must be read in their historical cultural context, or better still, filed away.

I ask: How did those colleagues of mine receive this teaching by Paul? Would their answers about the ideal of a Christian woman be different than those of my believing sisters here in Peru? What values were transmitted to them in their childhood? What was their experience of approaching the Bible?

This brief comparison serves to demonstrate the world of pre-comprehensions as not merely a certain way of understanding things. No, it is about values, perspectives, opinions, attitudes, etc. that grew from the very first moments of life. Understandably, they do not easily go away or change. They form a person's identity, and nobody wants to lose the very basis of his or her life or identity; is that not so?

This comparison sheds light on cultural diversity and the consequences of education (whether secular or Christian). Each context generates its own values and ideal principles that guide and orient people in their lives.

We can summarize, then, that pre-comprehension is related to the various perspectives that the reader/exegete has on approaching the Bible text.

From these perspectives the Bible is read. The canon of Scripture draws together the various cultural backgrounds that the writers took and/or imposed: "The New Testament canon does not show the unity of the Church...but rather the numerous varieties of confessions" (Käsemann 1964, 221).

The authors of the Bible are also products of their education, era, and context. So are their writings, because the work of an author is not separate from his or her

personhood but undoubtedly reflects his or her identity and cultural origin. I would like to raise a question I will reflect on at the end of the paper: What perspective on women is found in the Bible? How are these observations useful in relation to STMs?

In summary: The world of pre-comprehensions and the world of cultural-contextual diversity is found both in the readers of the Bible (ourselves) and in the authors of the Bible. We will now look at missionary work starting from this hermeneutical challenge. What should be said in this regard?

### **The Mission Encounter**

The mission encounter has the same conditions and circumstances as the encounter between the exegete and the Bible. It is carried out through a hermeneutic process of comprehension and characterized by pre-comprehensions and cultural diversity.

Can it happen in a short time? If so, how can it be done?

Pre-comprehension and cultural and/or temporal diversity create a difficulty in seeking closer understanding in a short time.

The exegete faces the same challenge as he or she studies, learns certain exegetical-hermeneutical tools, then continually applies his or her studies in practice; Bible study never comes to an end. The situation of the missionary and the receiving church is similar.

Yes, open encounters, including open communication, are possible in a short time, but if and only if the participants have undergone a phase of profound missionary preparation which continues when they return home. In other words, the short time in the field requires an increase in intense

concentration in the time before and after the action on the field, oriented to ongoing mission work.

In summary, STM is a three-part process which focuses on the first and third parts.

#### Preparation – Guidance – Reflection

---

*The short time in the field requires an increase in intense concentration in the time before and after the action on the field, oriented to ongoing mission work.*

---

The brevity of an STM requires an emphasis on the pre- and post- periods. The *preparation stage* aims to pre-create an open attitude. The participants must want to leave their world in order to know the other world. This must be brought about *before* embarking on the trip: an interest in the culture, customs, language, religion, and so on of the destination.

In the subsequent stage of *reflection*, the aim is a post-creation to conserve the new boost (second socialization) for daily life. This second socialization is about linking the new experience(s) with daily life so that mission continues after the brief trip. It could occur through weekly or monthly meetings to share and/or develop ways to apply the lessons learned to daily reality.

During the time of action, the actual STM trip, a *guide* is required to provide orientation not only in the aspects prepared (concepts, strategies, planning) but also in faith and trust in the Spirit so that doors will open.

#### Results with those Interviewed: Contact – Coordination – Study

Those interviewed talked about an intense concentration during the time of preparation. It is possible to distinguish three important areas in what they mentioned:

1. The ideal contact between the mission group and the receiving local church through personal relationships and/or homogenous groups.
2. Coordination and organization of the program with a long-term vision directed by the agenda of the receiving church.
3. The study of the target culture of the mission trip.

### *Contact*

Contact through the referral of a third party or group, that informs the receiving church of the group of missionaries, their program, their mission, and particularly their ecclesiastical, theological, and cultural worldview was mentioned. What follows is a sample of direct quotes from interviewees:

So basically, the references we are given are what enable us to say, "Yes, it will be great if they come". (Castillo Cueva)

In the church of this leader there is an international relationship through a Peruvian pastor who works outside the country. This contact is internal, so to speak; it allows contact through referral on the basis of a shared worldview. These are the words of another member of the same congregation:

It was a great help that the pastor in charge of the church in London is from Huancayo. So he knows our worldview, knows the sense of church in Peru, and they were prepared before they came. (Oscate y Perez)

One Lutheran pastor suggests the idea, if there is no internal contact, of making first contact through a web page



or by sending a video or other recording of the mission program in advance. He adds,

It would be good if they could send some biographical information of those who are coming, what churches they belong to, their theological thoughts, their form of spirituality, and exactly what they plan to come for. (de la Torre)

Another pastor from the same church talks of the importance of dialog and exchange before action in the field. Said dialogue

begins one year beforehand, through direct communication with the pastor and/or the central office [of the church]... It is necessary to talk of the customs in the community and, from the outset, to discuss the reason for the trip, the duration of the stay, and to talk about food. (Lescano)

In summary, the ideal contact is through an *a priori* link or through descriptions through a process of exchange/getting to know each other and analyzing whether the mission group (be it offered or requested) harmonizes with the receiving church; that is, whether it is coherent with the worldview, theological beliefs, spirituality, etc. The issue is intensifying the preparation time with a view to pre-creating an attitude of openness.

#### *Coordination and Organization Towards Collaboration*

The thematic reference shows the skills and gifts of the missionaries who will come. This information allows for better coordination of the mission work in collaboration with the receiving church. The following quotes provide first-hand expressions on the subject:

We reviewed [the mission group's] web page and they told us that [the pastor] would be able to give worship seminars and concerts, so they direct us, and according to that, we organize the program here. (Castillo Cueva)

This statement raises a further detail: direction. The coordination and organization need direction, otherwise they become meaningless “order”. Direction includes the question: “Where would we like to get to?” Not only where would *I* like to get to but *we*. This direction shows up clearly in the shared opinion of the interviewees that STMs should have a long-term vision that fits in with the agenda of the receiving churches:

My advice would be that they should continually coordinate with the church authorities to work out the agenda, rather than directly with individuals or local congregations, as can happen on occasion... It is very important not to lose the vision of the Church [the body of Christ] as a whole. (Lescano)

Another leader describes the process of coordination. In his church, delegates of the sending church arrive long before the mission action in order to evaluate the situation there:

They came for a week to see the work of the local church, the needs, the outlook of the church, and to talk with local pastors. We coordinated activities together. (Solari Jiménez)

This last statement clearly points to an intensification in the preparation stage. It facilitates really knowing the need of the receiving church so that the program of the missionaries can fit in with the local ecclesiastical agenda for the good of the church.

In summary: The stage of joint coordination and organization between those sent and those who receive is summarized in those who travel having cultural knowledge (societal, theological, and spiritual) of the place to which they will travel, and those who receive knowing the mission proposed. The process of drawing up a final proposal may go through several stages of exchanging work proposals. This way both parties participate in the preparation of the program, and imposition and/or destruction are avoided.

---

*The issue is intensifying the preparation time with a view to pre-creating an attitude of openness.*

---

*Studying the Specific Culture of the Place Being Visited*

All of the interviewees mention the importance of cultural preparation. It should be a requirement for traveling on a mission trip, particularly a short-term one, to obtain information about the place being visited before going. Apparently trivial aspects (that are really highly important) could, due to carelessness (that is, lack of information), become a larger conflict. Here are some recommendations from the interviewees:

I think the first thing is that they should learn the language, because that is very limiting. You may have all the will in the world to help, offer support, do one thing or another...but if you don't know the language, that severely limits you. (Oscate y Perez)

**Language:** Most of the interviewees felt that mission is often complicated by the lack of fluency in language and/or the need for translation. I recall that every translation is an interpretation. That is why, in the exegetical process, an

exegete draws near to the original text, and the missionary should imitate this attitude in learning the new language.

...problems, well, the timetables. For example, the programs we have sometimes do not run on schedule but run an hour or two late, but I think that in the minds of the English or the foreigners, if the time is written there, that's the time it should be... (Castillo Cueva)

**Punctuality or unpunctuality:** I recall that that exegetes should study the historical context of the Bible story they are examining; if they do not, then their contemporary application ignores the temporal-cultural gap between the Bible and the present. G. E. Lessing refers to this gap as the “*Garstigen Graben*”, which could be translated as “nasty pit”.

[Here we] did everything possible to prepare a delicious dish and when the guests arrived, they said “No, thank you”; so that was difficult because we [here in Peru] didn't understand their culture as regards food. (Oscate y Perez)

**Food:** I recall that Jesus as missionary par excellence applied certain cultural forms, in his greeting and behavior in general, that the exegete will only understand if he or she researches the cultures of Jesus' time.

a little knowledge of our culture, ...the economic situation we live in and our reality... (Pacheco)

**The economic situation** of the place and its variations (knowing the difference between the capital and the rest of the country) is extremely important.

Language – Food – Time – Money

These aspects may seem trivial, but recognizing or failing to recognize them profoundly influences mission work, particularly in short-term missions when there is little time on the field. The brevity highlights the need for an intense preparation in learning the culture with a view to an Exodus mission work.

### **Towards a "Hermeneutics of the Unknown"**

Questions that set the baseline include: As a product of our first socialization, how do we approach other people with other socializations? How can we achieve an open attitude to learning? Is it possible to change the products/convictions/religious beliefs learned in the first socialization? Does one only learn new things, or is it possible to change old things?

In view of all this cultural background, how do we carry out the principal purpose of our mission: to preach the message of Jesus Christ? (i.e., what is the relationship between dialog and mission?)

With this baseline, we shall see an example for women.

### *The Mission Opportunity*

I will finish my presentation with a personal view as a woman. Through it, I aim to show the great opportunity of STMs through Bible reading.

Many say that the great blessing of STMs is in the richness of cultural exchange. Yet is that sufficient for Christian mission? Is there not an important detail lacking?

If the mission encounter aims, in the diversity of participants, at the unity of the message in Jesus Christ, should not the Bible, the sharing of Bible readings, be at the center of the encounter? Is there not a great opportunity in this tool, the Bible, that is at the center of our faith?

The comparison of women helped us previously to understand the world of pre-comprehension that forms the identity of a person and that no one wants to lose.

Reading the Bible in the mission group can help us to approach our differing cultural identities as well as learn in our identities as Christians. As we have seen, the differing comprehension the women had of the Bible passage in the first letter to the Corinthians depended on the homes in which they were socialized and the educational influences they received in the early years of their lives. If they meet in a mission encounter, they face a great challenge that is also a great opportunity: They can read the passage together!

Each of them can give her own comments, doubts, and personal experiences. Each can give the reasons for her way of thinking. There can be mutual positive and negative feedback; the aim is constructive criticism in order to get to know each other better.

This is first of all a step in the exchange process, but not merely cultural; it is cultural linked to our faith in Christ Jesus, to our Christian commitment in the presence of the Spirit who unites us.

It is a moment of facing each other, of deep feeling, but also a great opportunity to broaden one's own Christian perspective.

The Peruvian believer who for many years knew of no other way to be a woman sees that there are other Christian forms for women as well. The foreign woman (from Germany, or in this case, the U.S.) can experience the same, reflecting critically on the way she is, which may (consciously or unconsciously) be based on western hegemony. Perhaps the Peruvian woman will receive a boost to fight for women's rights in her church; she receives encouragement and the

conviction she had perhaps been seeking for a long time. The foreign woman experiences and learns from her sisters a deep faith, a witness; she learns that her conviction was founded more on her context than on truly facing the Bible.

---

*The great opportunity of mission work is through trans-cultural Bible studies to reach an understanding and experience of the variability and diversity of the message of Jesus Christ.*

---

Perhaps, together, the sisters in Christ find in STMs an area of encouragement and strength, freedom and activity that their own churches or socio-cultural context do not allow.

A space for a new identity.

A space for mutual enrichment in Bible reading, overcoming cultural differences.

This space is, from my point of view, the great opportunity of mission work: through trans-cultural Bible studies to reach an understanding and experience of the variability and diversity of the message of Jesus Christ.

This process of comprehension (a “hermeneutic circle”) leads from “my” conviction (due to ethnocentrism) to “our” contextual conviction that demonstrates the a priori nature of the gospel.

What should be the purpose of intercultural Bible studies?

We begin with what they are *not*:

- ◆ uniformity in understanding of the Bible
- ◆ assessment with a view to dualist categorization: good - bad
- ◆ the determination to reach a single comprehension with all those present.

And we make a contrast with what they are:

- ♦ joining in a “living hermeneutic circle” (here I once again recall the task of the exegete who must always re-enter the cultural context of the Bible text from his or her “living situation” in order to receive the horizon of understanding, receiving from the text instead of imposing on it)
- ♦ avoiding evaluations in order to maintain the continuity of the hermeneutical process
- ♦ the conviction that the aim is in sharing and learning together, in tolerance and respect for one another.

This praxis is the great opportunity facilitated by the mission encounter, because it is the only way that trans-cultural hermeneutic fields are created, allowing participants to learn by the experience of an Exodus road.

---

*Life in homogenous groups no longer exists in many parts of the world. It is possible to criticize this situation, but in the end there is no option but to live it.*

---

### Conclusion:

#### The Challenge and the Opportunity of STMs in Modern Times

As a result of the development of globalization, we constantly live in a multicultural situation. Every country must face the fruits (be they positive or negative) of this fact. It is no longer strange that our next door neighbor is from Europe, our local bakery was started by Ecuadorians, our favorite restaurant is Japanese, our brothers and sisters in Christ are from a church in the U.S., etc. Life in homogenous groups no longer exists in many parts of the



world. It is possible to criticize this situation, but in the end there is no option but to live it.

The short-term mission encounter is both a great challenge and a great opportunity to give space to new post-modern identities such as, for example, the women who find their exodus from their limitations, the prejudices and/or pressures of church and/or the socio-cultural environment

Through a good preparation and good post-reflection, these new identities can be fed from the brief time of missionary action

The pre-creation towards and the post-conservation of an encounter with "the unknown" in cultural variation but in the unity of God's Word defines whether on returning home the *exodus* mission continues or the *exile* mission vacations end.



The visiting STM participant has two options on returning home, the *exodus* mission can continue or the *exile* mission vacation can come to an end

## REFERENCES

- Berger, Klaus. 1999. *Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments*. Tübingen.
- Berger, Peter and Thomas Luckmann. 1970. *Die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit Eine Theorie der Wissenssoziología*. Trad. d. Monika Plessner. Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Verlag.
- Campos, Bernardo. 1989. *La tarea hermenéutica*. Lima: CEPS.
- Dohmen, Christopher and Günther Steinberger. 1996. *Hermeneutik der Jüdischen Bibel des Alten Testaments*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- Gonzáles, Justo L. 2001. *Mapas para la historia futura de la iglesia*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Kairós.
- Käsemann, Ernst. 1964. Begründet der neutestamentlich Kanon die Einheit der Kirche? In *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen I*; S. 214 ff, hier S. 221. Göttingen.
- Ocaña, Martin. 2003. Resumen de curso de hermenéutica en el Seminario Evangélico de Tacna.
- Schökel, Luis Alonso. 1994. *Apuntes de hermenéutica*. Madrid: Trotta, S.A.

## RECORDED SOURCES

- Adita Torre Lescano (Former president, ILEP)
- Jocabeth Oscate y Perez (Children's leader, IME)
- Jorge Enrique Castillo Cueva (In charge of IME, Lima)
- José Luis la Torre (Pastor, ILEP)
- Michell Bruno Solari Jiménez (Former youth leader, Iglesia Iberoamericana)
- Ruth Pacheco (Student, Lima Evangelical Seminary)



#### Copyright and Use:

**As an ATLAS user, you may print, download, or send articles for individual use according to fair use as defined by U.S. and international copyright law and as otherwise authorized under your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement.**

**No content may be copied or emailed to multiple sites or publicly posted without the copyright holder(s)' express written permission. Any use, decompiling, reproduction, or distribution of this journal in excess of fair use provisions may be a violation of copyright law.**

This journal is made available to you through the ATLAS collection with permission from the copyright holder(s). The copyright holder for an entire issue of a journal typically is the journal owner, who also may own the copyright in each article. However, for certain articles, the author of the article may maintain the copyright in the article. Please contact the copyright holder(s) to request permission to use an article or specific work for any use not covered by the fair use provisions of the copyright laws or covered by your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement. For information regarding the copyright holder(s), please refer to the copyright information in the journal, if available, or contact ATLA to request contact information for the copyright holder(s).

#### About ATLAS:

The ATLA Serials (ATLAS®) collection contains electronic versions of previously published religion and theology journals reproduced with permission. The ATLAS collection is owned and managed by the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) and received initial funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.

The design and final form of this electronic document is the property of the American Theological Library Association.