

“Technology & Trends in Missions: An Editorial Introduction”

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Published at www.GlobalMissiology.org, October 2013

Twenty centuries have come and gone since the inception of the Church at Pentecost and the subsequent mission to which she was commissioned. Though at times the Church has experienced what Hesselgrave and Stetzer refer to as “Mission Shift”, the core mission of making disciples among the nations has survived to the present.¹ Trends, for better or worse, have certainly contributed changes both in defining and in executing mission. One stream of trend that has helped advance and shape the Church is its use of technological advances. Our modern understanding of technology turns our thoughts to computers, cell phones, apps, and transportation. Yet technology, when understood as “the practical application of knowledge” to make tasks either easier or more attainable, goes back to the very ministry of Jesus.² From Jesus use of boats to navigate the Sea of Galilee to Paul’s use of ink and paper to send letters, technology has been embraced as a means for advancing the mission of God. At times trends have been embraced by the Church; and at other times they have been resisted or even outright rejected. Some trends that were embraced widely embraced have proven to be counterproductive (think Crusades); while other trends that were resisted by the Church, at least in part, have led to an explosive gospel advance (think Gutenberg Bible). One thing is certain: a certain degree of innovation will be necessary if we are to get the gospel to the ends of the earth.

¹ Hesselgrave, David J. and Ed Stetzer eds., *MissionShift: Global Issues in the Third Millenium*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010.

² <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/technology>

So how then should missionaries think regarding cultural trends and technological advances? That question forms the backdrop for the current edition of *Global Missiology*. In this edition the reader will learn how some missiologists and practitioners are thinking concerning the pros and cons of several trends as they relate to missions in what one contributor refers to as a “digi-modern” context. Oftentimes mainstream technological advances result in missiological trends. Consider the fact that non-residential missions of the “facilitator” variety, as well as short-term international missions opportunities, were unheard of prior to advances in air travel. Or how the fact that much of the world’s population now carries a camera everywhere they go – on their cell phone! This trend means that missionaries have the possibility of using instant photography to help tell the story of what it is they are doing. One article in this edition is written by a professional missionary photojournalist who articulates how his ministry behind the lens may serve to change the world that he’s busy capturing. And in our section on contextualization we hear from a missionary theologian who is working to communicate the gospel in a rapidly changing Chinese context.

We hope you enjoy the issue, and as always, we’d love for you to share our site with those in your ministry network. Help us get the word out about GM so that more missionaries can grow in their effectiveness to get the word out about Jesus!