

## CHAPTER 1

### RESEARCH CONCERN

The research concern is, Why are African Americans (AFAMs) under-represented among intercultural (IC) missionaries? Virtually anyone who knows the AFAM church and believes in the validity of the "Great Commission" would admit to the problem, although they differ as to the duration.

Joseph Washington, who is an AFAM, wrote in *Black Religion*:

It is this widespread absence of a sense of mission among [Black] religious societies which provides such a sharp contrast between them and their fellow Protestants. The very heart of the Christian faith is missing in these communities, be they segregated independent or dependent religious societies. The obvious absence of mission among [Black] religious organizations is a phenomenon which deserves more serious attention than it has received. (Hughley 1983, 34)

At *minimum* the problem has existed for over fifty years. Just before World War II a survey found that 8,000 White missionaries were in Africa, and 300 AFAM missionaries (Roesler 1953, 63), which is 3.7 percent of the African missionary population. For various reasons, some societies had curtailed AFAM missionary involvement in the 1920s (Jacobs 1988, 22; Gordon 1973, 267-68, 271). Most U.S. White missions

seemed willing to admit AFAM candidates in 1945. A study of foreign mission societies, most of which are members of the Foreign Missions Conference of North America, was done by Bodine Tenney Russell in 1945 to determine the policies of these organizations with regard to the sending of Negro missionaries. Of the fifty-five replies, forty-one boards reported that they had no established policy. Ten stated that their policy was favorable toward the appointing of Negro missionaries, and four stated that it was against their policy to appoint them (Roesler 1953, 36).

By 1953 twenty-seven of thirty-two Interdenominational Foreign Missions Association agencies responded, when asked if they accepted AFAM candidates. Twenty had no policy, one said they would, and six would not (Roesler 1953, 39).

One could plausibly argue that under-representation has existed since shortly after the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 and the fuller emergence of the indigenous AFAM church. In fact, the AFAM intercultural missionary enterprise has existed since the late 1700s with George Lisle (1782?), considered by some to be America's first missionary (Trulson 1977, 4), and one could argue less charitably, because of the institutional racism and impediment of slavery, that the

problem is that old. Scarce indeed are those who have addressed the problem in popular literature in the last thirty years, and more scarce are scholarly studies in the last fifty years. The principal ones are those of Wilbur Harr in 1945 (Harr 1945), Bodine Russell in 1945, Calvin Roesler in 1953 (Roesler 1953), Robert Gordon in 1973 (Gordon 1973), and Clyde Hughley (Hughley 1983).

Those Black Christians called and obedient to the Great Commission are probably most sensitive to the problem. A few who have contributed to this research have been most encouraging. One e-mailed the author:

I'm very interested in knowing the outcome of your project. Please keep me in touch . . . P.S. Being a CC missionary I may have had a attitude in answering some of the questions. I'm hoping and praying to see some more AFAMs ministering around the world. We need 100 more people like you and David Cornelius [Director of AFAM Church Relations, International Board, Southern Baptist Convention].

Another AFAM missionary wrote at the end of his survey,

Any questions that you might have or just need for clarity, please do not hesitate to contact me. [Wife's name] and I are very happy about this work you are doing and really see the need for it, we totally support it.

A female respondent, who contributed fifteen names and addresses of AFAM missionaries, added this note:

I was delighted to receive your important questionnaire. I have been aware of the tremendous shortage of AFAM

missionaries. I am very interested in the results of the research. Just recently, I have wondered if anyone has researched the contributions of AFAM missionaries to fulfilling the Great Commission. There are a quite a few unknown missionaries out there that need to be written about. Look forward to receiving your results.

The AFAM church has been termed a "sleeping giant." As will be argued, the various potentialities are in place. May new life and missionary zest invigorate mission organizations and the AFAM church to the task.

#### Estimates of the Current AFAM IC Population

African American candidates do not join White or Black evangelical missions in significant numbers (Hughley 1983, 42, 48; Pelt 1989, 28). The major Black denominations support exceedingly few missionaries (Hughley 1983, 17). Hard data on current Black missions involvement is elusive. Crawford Loritts, National Director of Urban Ministries for Campus Crusade for Christ, estimated that there were "less than three hundred minority members involved in the major U.S. parachurch groups and mission agencies," as of 1987 (Sidey 1987, 61).

Approximately sixteen months of research related to this present study has uncovered at least 102 AFAMs who have served those primarily *not* AFAM for at least one cumulative

year.<sup>1</sup> If respondents were not serving fulltime in CC missions when they received the questionnaire, they were asked to explain (SQ 7). Financial reasons are anticipated as a primary theme, or possibly pressure to work with AFAMs.

#### Earlier Estimates of AFAM IC Missionaries

In March 1996 there were estimated to be 33.9 million African Americans (civilian, non-institutional population), or about 12.8 percent of all Americans (Bennett 1997). In 1973 Robert Gordon wrote,

My research shows that out of 30,000 U.S. missionaries, there are about 240 blacks serving in 30 foreign nations. This represents .8 of one percent of the total U.S. missionary force. These results, based on a *random sample* [italics mine] of known U.S. foreign missionary sending agencies, also indicate that 137 of 450 Protestant sending bodies have at least one black on their staffs. (Gordon 1973, 267-68)

Sylvia Jacobs estimated that between 1820 and 1980, 250,000 to 300,000 Americans served in Africa, which is the continent most likely to receive AFAMs, and that perhaps 600

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<sup>1</sup>Based upon the 13.6 percent ratio of surveys returned from those who were either not AFAM, or who had not served at least one year in IC service (sixteen), an estimated additional 140 persons for whom a mailing address could be determined (and to all but two of whom a survey was sent) are both AFAM and IC. Thirty-eight (thirty-eight percent) of the 101 qualifying to answer this question and, presumably, of the estimated 140, (or fifty-three) are *currently* serving primarily AFAMs (see Survey Question #3 [SQ 3]).

of these were African American (Murphy, Melton, and Ward 1993, 22). This is .2 percent of the total force. Of the 600, about half were sent by Black missions, about half were men, and about half went to Liberia (another twenty-five percent went to Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone). Most of the twenty destination countries in sub-Saharan Africa were English-speaking (Murphy, Melton, and Ward 1993, 22).

If these estimates are correct, there has *never* been a numerically strong African American mission movement, even to Africa, where most mission effort was invested. The observation of a decline in the 1900s draws a wider consensus, however. Robert Gordon wrote:

Though it is not yet possible to graph accurately the black involvement in foreign missions, it appears that there was a significant decline shortly after the beginning of the 20th Century. (Gordon 1973, 271)

Leslie Pelt, an AFAM missionary to Nigeria, who completed a survey for this current research, wrote, "Historically, blacks have been deeply involved in missions all over the world. But in this century the vision seemed to die and the missionary force dwindled" (Pelt 1989, 28).

Kenneth Scott Latourette concluded his chapter on "The Negroes" in the period of 1800-1914:

Nor did the Negroes reach out much beyond their own country and race in an attempt to spread their faith. In spite of the fact that by 1914 the proportion of Negroes possessing a church affiliation was about as high as that among the whites, practically the only organized efforts which the Negro churches made to propagate their religion beyond the members of their own race in the United States were missions to coloured peoples in the West Indies, Guiana, and Africa. Even these enterprises were small. . . . As yet this Negro Christianity was not looking much beyond its own borders. . . . Even though its foreign missions were not so extensive as those of the white churches, it initiated and maintained them, and by the gifts of a constituency from the lower income levels of the nation. This was more than was done by the Indians and Negroes of Latin America. (Latourette 1970, 364)

A more detailed history of AFAM IC missions appears in chapter 2. In general, and in harmony with the preceding synopsis, the significant contributions of AFAM missionaries seem to be located more with outstanding individuals than with large missionary populations or organizations, as some historical surveys illustrate (Seraile 1972; Hughley 1983; Martin 1982, 63-76).

#### Research Purposes

The research aim is to probe into aspects of history, theology, religious social structure, missionary motivations, demographics, social psychology and issues raised by an AFAM expert panel that may help to explain the dearth of AFAM IC missionaries.

### Major Research Question

The major research question guiding this research is, Why are African Americans under-represented among inter-cultural missionaries? The operational question is, What reasons do AFAM mission executives and AFAM IC missionaries give for this problem?

### Definition of Terms

African Americans: Racial definitions are fast losing significance, due to the mingling of the international gene pool (Subramanian 1995, 54). By this term is meant the ethnic group of dark-skinned (brown, black) people living in America, which has its origin in Africa. The terms "African American," "AFAM," and "Black" are used interchangeably. Since "Black" is capitalized, so also "White" is capitalized to avoid discrimination. This definition does not include people of African origin born outside the U.S., unless to AFAM parents. Those excluded from this definition would include naturalized citizens of West Indian origin living in the U.S., for example. The object is to locate those who have the worldview, as much as possible, of African Americans. If persons represent themselves to be African American by returning a survey, this description is accepted, unless they



report conflicting origins. For instance, one person wrote parenthetically, "I'm originally from Jamaica." An e-mail was sent to confirm whether or not this person was raised by AFAM parents, and the answer, regrettably, disqualified the survey submitted. Another was born in the former Belgium Congo, but not of AFAM parents, according to an e-mail response. A seemingly obvious descriptor becomes complicated. The survey is titled, "QUESTIONNAIRE FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN CROSS CULTURAL MISSIONARIES."

Intercultural missionaries: This group proclaims the Christian Gospel, as defined in the Christian Bible in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. . . ." (NIV). Further, these messengers aim this gospel message toward people groups (ethnic groups) the majority of whom are not their own, making the messengers intercultural. A person qualifies for this research as an IC missionary who has spent a cumulative total of at least one year serving *primarily*, if not *exclusively*, those *not* AFAM. In the survey instrument, the word "cross cultural" (CC) is used for intercultural, as providing greater contrast and clarity for respondents.

AFAM Mission executives: For the purpose of this study, these are AFAM individuals who are chief executive officers of autonomous Christian missionary organizations, or the chief executives of a ministry division within a denomination or parachurch ministry. Presumably, they have enough contact with prospective and actual AFAM missionaries so as to offer expert opinion.

Worldview: The deepest level at which a person organizes reality is the worldview level. A cognitive grid or "mindscape," a worldview is informed by beliefs through which all of life is interpreted, and is usually not consciously identified, much as glasses are not "seen" when worn (Hiebert 1992).

#### Assumptions

A major assumption is that AFAM missionaries provide an insider's, or "emic" (Hiebert 1985, 94) insight and firsthand knowledge of the challenges both preparatory and subsequent to ministry in a target culture. Because they have succeeded in becoming an IC missionary, they would understand junctures at which they might have failed, and perhaps know of those who did at that point. Very probably they have had to explain their slim ranks to some of their target people group,

have discussed it among themselves or perhaps with White colleagues.

Missionaries were asked for their perceptions of the reasons for a lack of other AFAM IC missionaries. These perceptions may or may not correspond with actual reasons, but by virtue of living, or having lived that life a median of six years, the assumption is that they are in a position to give a judgment with deep understanding.

#### Issues of Validity

Since a "protective bias"--a desire to protect one's own ethnic group--*might* have been present, answers to both the personal interview and to the survey questions may not have been completely objective (see Weber 1994). When responding to a stranger, we probably tend to portray our own group in a favorable light. This is not to impugn respondents with dishonesty or deception. Complete objectivity in any event is probably hypothetical. Questions were formed to minimize bias. Individual perceptions of the problem were the substance of the research, carrying with them all the limitations of qualitative social science research. Statistical procedures to measure reliability were used on some quantitative responses.

The author was also biased. He grew through the teen years in a peer environment where racism was accepted. He was influenced by his own worldview, including maturing through age twenty in a primarily White middle class American culture. To compensate for this, open-ended questions were included in the initial and the revised AFAM mission executive instruments, as well as in the instrument sent to AFAM IC missionaries. Also, an African American, Crawford Loritts, was sought to critique the manuscript and to be a part of the dissertation defense committee. Finally, the logical deduction was made that reasons exist for the lack of AFAM missionaries which can, at least in part, be known and remedied, since God's will is for every ethnic group to go even into the uttermost parts of the world (Matthew 28:18-20). Having been so commanded, it must be feasible.

At least 281 surveys were sent to potentially qualified respondents. A total of 118 surveys were returned. No interviews were attempted with a sample of the non-respondents to determine possible reasons for non-response. Such a procedure would not have been comfortable with the desire not to in any way appear to harass people to return the survey. In only one case was an individual asked the

questions twice, since there was a question as to which answers were his and which were his wife's.

In terms of the historical validity of this study, nothing is known to have occurred between April 21, 1997 and October 10, 1997, during which the surveys were returned, to have fostered a bias that would have invalidated the data. Some matters of the internal validity of subject groupings of survey questions are addressed in chapter 3.

The African American Population:  
Research Limitations

Ethnocentrism predicts a more positive attribution to in-group behaviors than to out-group behaviors (Weber 1994, 482). Weber's table summarizes the attribution of group behavior bias (Weber 1994, 483):

Table 1. "Schematic Diagram of Ethnocentric Attribution Bias"

	Ingroup + Behavior -		Outgroup + Behavior -	
Internal attribution	Hi	Lo	Lo	Hi
External attribution	Lo	Hi	Hi	Lo

(Weber 1994, 483)

The above patterns protect group identity more than enhancing that identity. However, self-attribution

literature, when individuals describe self-behaviors rather than group behaviors, shows that individuals are less self-protective, but more self-enhancing in bias (Weber 1994, 484). For the current research topic, this means that respondents judging their own group's behaviors will likely select reasons which will protect the group from blame--namely that negative behaviors are generated by external forces.

Considerable evidence suggests that group members, unlike individuals, are primarily motivated to protect the ingroup from damaging self-evaluation stemming from the commission of negative ingroup and positive outgroup behavior (i.e., columns 2 and 3)[Table 1, above] by attributing such behavior to external/situational causes. (Weber 1994, 484)

Further, if a long history of intense conflict exists between the two groups, biases will be even stronger (Weber 1994, 486). This describes relations between Whites and Blacks in America.

Weber found in two experiments that groups tend to protect identity, rather than to enhance it at the expense of out-groups, unless a history of intense conflict exists between the groups (Weber 1994, 502). Weber suggested that personal ego is not as involved in evaluating group behaviors as in evaluating one's own behaviors, so that enhancement is not as much an issue (Weber 1994, 503). This is another

reason why it is important to discover personal beliefs, not simply ideologies.

Being White is a hindrance to the author of this research because of the need for the respondent to trust a White researcher that the great majority of respondents had never met. How accurate and fair would he be? What would he do with the data? On the other hand, being Black has an equal potential for liability. There would be the temptation to view AFAMs subjectively, with a subtle, even unconscious, desire to protect the author's in-group. In sum, Iain Couchman, who has written of being a White researcher of AFAMs, advocated tailoring research instruments to the specific research context (Couchman 1973, 52). The willing assistance of Black "gatekeepers" to AFAM respondents is crucial.

Johnson, currently president of the Urban Minister's Network in Chattanooga, Tenn. has candidly stated the difficulty in AFAM/White relations. His first response to a White person is, "I hear what he is saying, but what does he really want?" In particular, he believes that Black churches will be suspicious of Whites coming to them without a reference--someone already trusted (Johnson 1996). Johnson,

incidentally, has outstanding relations with many in the evangelical White community in the Chattanooga area. Whereas formerly more overt racism hindered Black/White cooperation, today as subtle and simple a factor as mistrust can derail the partnership between the AFAM community and White mission organizations.

#### Research Limitations, Addendum

Studying a problem issue in the AFAM community, or any other minority community, is akin to studying a porcupine. Just about anywhere you pick it up is not a good place. So the author acknowledges that there is much more to this "porcupine" than the portion selected for analysis. Almost any solution may be faulted as an incomplete solution--legitimately faulted. Such is the remarkably complex predicament in which we find ourselves. Apart from the liberating potential for healing which Christ offers, ethnic and class antagonisms will probably multiply. Such is the current worldwide tendency for people to fall back upon ethnic identity above political identity, as seen with the breakup of the former U.S.S.R. and satellite states, such as Albania and Czechoslovakia. Then, with economic prosperity, ethnic groups are further divided along economic classes. While sin



remains, no culture and no system within a culture will operate flawlessly, including the system of missions, even among the redeemed.

This study does not, and does not purport to do justice to important general factors of AFAM history such as slavery, racism and discrimination. The larger solutions of minority problems almost invariably implicate the dominant culture, and in the AFAM case, we obviously begin with the morally indefensible enslavement of Africans, later enfranchised as African Americans. A worse start to intercultural relations cannot be imagined. We live with the consequences.

As late as 1983, William L. Banks, who had been a Black Baptist pastor for thirteen years, and who taught at Moody Bible Institute for two and a half years, wrote: "Without doubt slavery helped to produce shiftlessness, lack of reliability, and the attitude of give the least and get the most in the slaves." (Banks 1983, 28). He then cited the analysis of AFAM sociologist W. E. B. DuBois (1868-1963):

Under the lax moral life of the plantation, where marriage was a farce, laziness a virtue, and property a theft, a religion of resignation and submission degenerated easily, in less strenuous minds, into a philosophy of indulgence and crime. Many of the worst characteristics of the Negro masses of today had their

seed in this period of the slave's ethical growth. Here it was that the Home was ruined under the very shadows of the church, white and black; here habits of shiftlessness took root, and sullen hopelessness replaced hopeful strife. (Banks 1983, 28-29)

Thomas Sowell compared slavery between Africans enslaved in the West Indies, who have since achieved out of proportion to their numbers, and Africans who came via the West Indies to be enslaved in the U.S.

The West Indian setting permitted and fostered more self-reliance, more economic experience, and more defiance of whites. As a preparation for life as free men, these characteristics apparently outweighed the greater suffering, sexual exploitation, and enforced ignorance of the West Indian slaves. (Sowell 1975, 100)

Sowell also attests to the lingering legacy of American slavery:

The example of the West Indians suggests that it is not slavery alone, or even brutal treatment during slavery, that serves as a crippling handicap for generations after emancipation, but rather the occupationally and psychologically constricting world in which the American Negro developed in the United States. Their example also suggests that the current disabilities of black Americans are due not only to current discrimination but also to past deprivation and disorganization that continue to take their toll. (Sowell 1975, 102)

This study does not do justice to the factor of economic marginalization of AFAMs historically, largely due to the effects of racism, nor to the impact of liberal U.S. political social policy, although dealt with in some measure.

Williams cites numerous examples of institutional job discrimination in labor unions (Williams 1982b, 99-108), as well as of misguided government economic policy.

This study does not deal fully with the issue of international discrimination against those with Black skin. Nor does it attempt to assess the impact of the current divisions between the White and the Black American church.

The above are, nevertheless, all factors in the equation, to be remembered as problems are analyzed and solutions sought.

#### Overview of Procedures

The population studied was AFAM IC mission executives and AFAM IC missionaries, the latter with at least one cumulative year of IC ministry experience. The survey that was given to the IC missionaries was designed primarily through a background literature search for factors that would hinder AFAMs from getting to an IC mission field. Experienced AFAM IC mission executives critiqued the resulting preliminary survey, and from that input, the final survey instrument was created. Likert-type questions comprised most of the questionnaire, but open-ended questions were included to throw a wide net for possible factors.

A concurrent and lengthy process was locating names and addresses of AFAMs who had served interculturally. This information was gained through mission leaders and organizations, the Brigada Internet newsgroup, AFAM friends, AFAM churches and, primarily, through AFAMs in IC ministry.

The survey instrument was mailed to potential respondents, with an enclosed postage-paid return envelope. Some chose to e-mail their response. One follow-up contact was made, in almost every case, to those who did not respond. This phase ended approximately six months after the first survey was sent, when 100 qualifying surveys were received. The qualitative and quantitative data were then analyzed.

#### Significance of the Study

The lack of IC AFAM missionaries is at least an embarrassment to the AFAM church, and is at worst the sin of disobedience to the Great Commission. The dearth is also a stain on the wedding dress of those White American churches, schools and mission societies that have historically discouraged AFAMs from participation, and so have precluded exposure to their IC mission programs. Some mission agencies and Christian educational institutions, for example in the

1950s and 60s, for various reasons refused AFAM candidates and failed to recruit such persons.

In 1953 Roesler surveyed independent, interdenominational Bible institutes, Christian colleges and seminaries. Fifty-six of seventy-five schools responded to his instrument. Forty-one of those schools, some in the South, did accept AFAMs and nine did not (Roesler 1953, 52-56). However, some large schools--Bob Jones University, Columbia Bible College and Dallas Theological Seminary--were among those that did not.

Bob Jones accepted AFAMs after civil rights legislation in the late sixties, according to an e-mail from the school's Information Officer on November 14, 1997.

Columbia Bible College integrated in 1963:

The single strongest source of pressure came from CBC alumni who were now missionaries in places like Haiti or Africa. When dark-skinned brothers and sisters in Christ expressed a desire to study God's Word in the same place they had--they found themselves thrown into an inarticulate state of confusion, embarrassment, and even fear that if people knew that CBC would deny them based on race this would be seen as discrediting the gospel they'd preached. A consistent and steady stream of concern came from missionaries wishing CBC would accept Haitian or African pastors. (Priest 1996)

Dallas Theological Seminary currently does not consider race in admissions, and giving one's race is optional, according to

the Associate Director of Admissions by e-mail on November 17, 1997. Embarrassing institutions that have already corrected the past is not the point, but past practices elucidate why, in all likelihood, more AFAM missionaries have not been on the field. Responses from mission organizations to Roesler were cited above. The result is a stunted AFAM IC mission program, although this is only one factor of the full explanation. One goal of this study is to point to ways by which the legacy of this regrettable history can be corrected.

To date no systematic representation of AFAM expert opinion on the subject from more than a very few subjects is known to exist. Almost all known studies concerning this issue have focused upon White respondents and organizations, with the exception of Roesler's data from Black schools and a few Black churches around 1953. This research provides an insider's perspective on both the origins and solutions to the problem.

The assumption is made that an AFAM career IC missionary is more likely to be effective, and is a more-desired outcome, than one who serves for shorter periods of time. If strong relationships are key to ministry both to

those inside and outside the church, then longevity gives the opportunity for those stronger relationships.

Further, an important objective of this study is to promote AFAM IC missions by providing mission recruiters, both AFAM and White, with specific recommendations for effective recruiting. Such information includes a profile of an AFAM missionary from the current research population, and suggestions from AFAM IC missionaries themselves. Four open-ended questions in the final survey instrument address ways for both Black and Whites to improve recruitment (SQ 5, 9, 11-12). Representatives from eight mission organizations and one school of missions have requested a copy of the summary of research findings. The Brigada Internet newsgroup, which focuses upon unreached people groups, also would like a summary of findings. Currently that newsgroup has over 7,000 participants.