Introduction

Paul’s sea voyage from Troas in Asia Minor to Neapolis in Macedonia is sometimes described as the single most crucial moment in the missionary activity of the early Christian church. Thus it is said to mark a definitive transition of the gospel from one continent (Asia) to another (Europe).

Yet this interpretation needs several qualifications. One is that there is really no question of radical transition; the Roman province of Macedonia was an integral part of the great Roman empire same as Asia Minor. Therefore, Paul did not travel “abroad” in the modern sense of the word; he remained in the same country, although in another region.

The other consideration worth mentioning is that in traveling to Macedonia, or anywhere else for that matter, (at least) bi-lingual Paul could converse with most local inhabitants in Greek. He did not have to take expensive private language lessons in order to preach or engage in discussions.

Still another consideration deals with cultural milieu. Local and regional cultural peculiarities certainly existed, but the overarching and deep-seated influence of hellenization provided common ground for relatively easy communication and orientation in any part of the empire.

How was Paul’s mission financed? The New Testament record allows several answers. In some places Paul worked “with his own hands,” in others he received and accepted money from churches he had planted before. Further, Paul’s acceptance of hospitality “in the mission field” may also qualify as receiving support, although he was evidently disinclined to overuse this kind of help. Finally, a possibility that he was of higher social status with reasonable funds at his disposal, the opinion which has been increasingly prominent in recent times, suggests the view that he at least partly financed his endeavors himself.

However, in general, Christianity spread through the missionary work of indigenous people bringing the gospel to the areas where they resided. These local missionaries started congregations, such as in Antioch and probably
Rome. But even if Paul himself started a congregation, the locals themselves evangelized the vicinity, such as in and around Thessalonica.

Rather than dealing with missionary activity of earliest Christians, this essay will address several issues related to modern missions, those of culture, language and finances. In terms of mores of modern international missions, considerations of the following questions will be given more prominent space: What constitutes a missionary in the contemporary world? How are modern missionaries financed? And how acceptable to Western missionary-sending agencies are nationals/indigenous Christians as missionaries?

The essay has been written with Central and Eastern Europe in mind, but its discussion need not be limited to this area. Sentiments and criticisms similar to those expressed here have been voiced to me by fellow Christians from South America, Africa, and Western Europe. At the same time, I do not presume to be a spokesman for all of them. Further, and because of this, to relegate the discussion only to the period of the last five years, i.e. since the fall of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe, would be a serious misunderstanding.

The tone of the essay is admittedly personal and the tenor unflattering for the people discussed. I will apologize for neither. I believe that truth may be truthful despite being couched in subjective language and unpleasant to contemplate. It is simply a fact that this point of view is seldom heard in the Western world, especially in North America. Thus rather than seeing this as a deliberate assault on decades of missionary practice, I offer this reflection as a mirror for foreign missionaries and missionary-sending agencies. It is dedicated to my foreign missionary friends who have faithfully and effectively served in difficult circumstances.

*Foreign Missionaries at a Disadvantage*

The fundational proposition of this article is that modern Western missionaries are at a distinct disadvantage on the mission field, and that they often represent a liability rather than an asset. First, there is the *language problem*. Mastering any new language is difficult, particularly for those who have had no exposure to a language different from their own. North Americans are deservedly notorious for this. In many cases indigenous missionaries look on with sadness, resignation or anger as these cheerful and healthy missionaries from abroad spend a lot of good intentioned money to take years (or forever) to acquaint themselves with a foreign language. And the success rate is