History of World Missions in the Assemblies of God

In order to understand the early Pentecostal movement, we must understand the events that leading up to it.

1792-1910: The Great Century, so named by historian Kenneth Latourette.

This was a time of great geophysical expansion of Christianity, due to missionary movements of the period.

Factors: explorers opening up new regions of the world, commercial enterprises, and colonial conquests. The industrial revolution generated wealth among Christian nations that made missions ventures viable.

Question: what were the factors that led to the spread of Christianity in the first century?

Four types of missions developed in the middle of this period:

- Denominational, interdenominational, faith missions, and independent missions.

The first faith mission was formed by Hudson Taylor, the China Inland Mission, in 1865. This and other similar missions depended on faith for their support, rather than denominational backing. The missionaries were not guaranteed support urged to trust God. This was the stance of the early Pentecostal movement.

Near the end of the century there was a great missionary movement in the U.S. which grew out of revivals of the day.

Bible schools grew during this time, many teaching a premillennial eschatology along with Christ’s imminent return. This increased interest and motivation for foreign missions, which had a profound effect on the movement.

Question: Do you think this concern is still valid today? Why or why not?

In 1901 the great Pentecostal revival began, starting in Topeka, Kansas and spreading throughout the United States and abroad. Many new Pentecostal believers were put out of their home churches, such as the Christian and Missionary Alliance, but they carried with them the incentive for missions and were highly motivated by the power of the Spirit.

Historical note: Some went to the mission field believing that through the “tongues” experience God was supernaturally giving them the language of the people they were to reach. In reality, this did not happen, and many were disillusioned.

Three important characteristics of the missionary movement sprang from the Pentecostal revival:
1. Single women went to the foreign mission field on their own, believing God had called them and would help them. He did, and several women pioneered important works. Lillian Trasher founded the great orphanage in Egypt in 1911.

2. The early Pentecostals strongly felt that there should be a definite sense of call for one to become a missionary. Believers did not call themselves in scripture. This continues today: there must be a settled sense that God is behind it.

3. Early Pentecostals were committed to live by faith. While influenced by the faith mission movement, they also ascribed to Bible passages such as Matthew 10:5-10.

While the time was marked by much zeal, there was also much inadequacy:

1. Those who went abroad thinking the Holy Spirit had given them language training were in for a rude awakening.

2. Many went with meager financial support and suffered for it.

3. Many went without a Spirit-led strategy. A small village might have several missionary couples while a larger, more strategic site would be neglected.

4. False missionaries went out with the goal of taking advantage of the zeal among churches to support missionaries. They lined their pockets through false or exaggerated stories of great exploits.

The Early Years, 1901-1926

In 1914 the Assemblies of God was formed as a united fellowship. Under this new leadership the relationship between the General Council and the missionaries was defined, albeit not without some tension.

A second General Council was convened later in 1914, in Chicago, with special emphasis on the foreign missions program.

In 1919 J. Roswell Flower was elected as the first Missionary Secretary. Flower had two major impacts on the missionary program:

1. He sought to insure that the missionaries selected had a true call on their lives for missions;

2. He established a basic budget for the support of the individual missionaries.
The Maturing Years, 1927-1953

In 1927 the leadership of the foreign missions department was given to Noel Perkins. Two years earlier, in 1925, the mandate of the General Council was:

To extend the knowledge of Christ throughout the world, by utilizing the service of the church, with a view to establishing the self-supporting native churches in each field. To promote an interest in foreign missions by approved methods in the home churches.

This meant moving away from somewhat unrelated efforts of individual missionaries in favor of a concentrated effort on the part of a united Assemblies of God fellowship.

Other accomplishments under Noel Perkins:

1. Careful selection of missionary candidates;
2. Emphasis on prayer as the key to advance;
3. Recruiting more men and married couples as missionaries;
4. Greater emphasis on churches supporting missionaries;
6. A growing sense of the need for greater supervision over the overall missionary effort.

After World War II, overseas missions fields were closed; the emphasis shifted to Latin America. Strategic planning now became a part of missions practice.

In the 1950’s, more centralized control of missionary assignments had produced rapid growth in the number of adherents.

By 1959, a Foreign Missions Board had been established, and the leader of foreign missions was equal with all other department heads. This gave the foreign missions leadership the authority and infrastructure to carry out established strategies.

Question: As you see these changes take place, what can you say about centralized missions organization versus independent, local church-based efforts?

The Hogan Years

In 1959 J. Philip Hogan was elected Executive Director of Foreign Missions. At the same time Thomas Zimmerman was elected General Superintendent.

There was a determined and consistent focus on three statements of purpose:

a. Evangelization of the spiritually lost;
b. Church planting
c. Training of church leadership to ensure sound doctrine and practice.
Hogan espoused three major principles:

a. The insistence on developing the indigenous church;
b. The elimination of the colonialist approach;
c. The establishment of a worldwide fellowship of autonomous national Pentecostal churches with which the foreign missions division would work in partnership.

Accomplishments:

a. Greater emphasis on the annual school of missions for veteran missionaries during their furlough (now called itineration);
b. Establishment of Bible schools abroad to train national leaders and pastors so that they would be well-grounded in Bible and theology;
c. Establishment of the International Correspondence Institute, to produce consistency in distance education curricula (this is now known ad Global University);
d. Establishment of area directors to oversee the work in several countries and to provide pastoral care to the missionaries.

The Decade Of Harvest (1990’s) to present

The decade of harvest (1990-2000) showed great fruit as the Assemblies of God dedicated itself to work and pray “until we witness the evangelization of the entire world.” Worldwide adherents nearly doubled during this time.

1989 – Loren Triplett succeeds Hogan as director of world missions.
The Berlin wall falls, opening up Eastern bloc countries to the gospel.
The phrase 10/40 window is coined to designate the region from West Africa through Asia between the 10th and 40th parallels. The Division of Foreign Missions doubles its efforts to reach these areas and others.

1997 – John Bueno succeeds Loren Triplett. Bueno was a missionary in El Salvador and established Latin America ChildCare. Name is changed to Assemblies of God World Missions (AGWM).

Home Missions

In 1919 the General Council established a missionary department to handle evangelism in the U.S. and abroad. By 1937 home mission was split off and the emphasis in the U.S was Bible schools and church planting. In ensuing years many specialized programs were started, such as Teen Challenge and witnessing programs to special people-groups in the U.S.

In 1971 the name was changed to Division of Home Missions, and later Assemblies of God U.S. Missions (AGUSM). Many urban Bible institutes were planted to serve those in inner-city ministry. Later, efforts began to reach concentrations of immigrants to the U.S.
Faith missions of the nineteenth century were so called because they
  a) Had limited denominational backing.
  b) Were only partially guaranteed their support.
  c) **Depended on faith for their support.**
  d) Were poorly organized.

One of J. Roswell Flower’s areas of impact was
  a) **Establishing individual budgets for missionaries.**
  b) Listing qualifications for missionary selection.
  c) Establishing educational requirements for missionaries.
  d) Emphasizing prayer.

Noel Perkins’ leadership encouraged
  a) Missionaries to work independently of the churches.
  b) **Greater supervision of missionary personnel.**
  c) Female missionaries to take the lead.
  d) Tension concerning doctrine and practice.

If the church was to grow, national leaders must
  a) Emphasize commitment to the local church.
  b) Hire qualified staff to assist them.
  c) **Be grounded in Bible and theology.**
  d) Receive continual support from founding missionaries.

The *10/40 window* is a phrase describing
  a) The region from Western Europe through the former Soviet Union.
  b) An area limited to Asia.
  c) **A region from West Africa through Asia.**
  d) Areas limited to Muslim population.