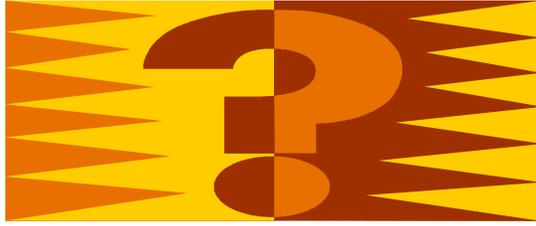


Cross-Cultural Perspectives from the Director



Are you Centripetal, Centrifugal, or Both?

How do people come up with some of these missions' terms? I picture a committee that has worked all day; their brains are fried, empty stomachs are rumbling, and watches are consulted. They are wishing (and maybe even interceding) for the meeting to close. One bright guy says, "Why not call our diversified approaches to missions either centripetal or centrifugal?" The finance guy thinks he said, "central frugal," knows that sounds good for budget control and votes, "Yes!" Others follow suit. Words I'm not sure how to pronounce are born. My question is, "Why not something simple; maybe centipedes or caterpillars?" Oh, right! Those words are already taken by creeping critters. And, besides it might bring our missions work to a crawl. Let's stick with centripetal and centrifugal with footnotes.

Isaiah prophesied, "I will make you a light to the Gentiles, and you will bring my salvation to the ends of the earth." (Isaiah 49:6, *NLT*). Light shining in the darkness draws people to it (that's centripetal). Yet, at the same time the light casts its rays outward (that's centrifugal).

You've probably guessed by now that we are dealing with two Latin terms (and scientific concepts to boot). Centripetal missions, evangelism, or churches are "center-seeking." They push toward the center, revolve around the middle, and are passive. This type of missions was predominant in the Old Testament where Jerusalem, the tabernacle, and the temple all gathered people in. The message was, "Come to the blessing!" On a personal level, godly character attracts since people notice the way we look, dress, talk, and act.

In some nations things seem to center around the national headquarters. However, it is through strong local churches that we have strong national organizations and ensure greater growth. Every effort should be made to solidify our churches at the grassroots. Even with our Bible school programs, some tend to be centripetal in their thinking. This is seen with the mentality that all students

in a country must attend a centralized Bible school. Don't get me wrong. There is surely a place for that. But, what can be done to take training program to the people; instead of always bringing people to the training program? In some cases, such programs could be conducted at the local church level, with the central Bible school serving in a consultancy role. Biblical education opportunities are endless.

When we start to push away from the center, instead of pulling toward it, we are centrifugal in our mission's approach. The Latin word is translated "to flee from the center." This is where the Great Commission enters center stage. We go to the nations, invite people into a saving relationship with God, and win them through proclamation and persuasion. Our witness must be active, and requires us to cross borders, and enter new frontiers.



A Christian, church, national organization, or Bible school that combines both of these concepts is better off. And that gives us an even bigger word: centripetal-centrifugal. Our godly character and congregations; full of the power and blessings of God attract the lost. At the same time, we must persist in taking the gospel to where the people are.

Next time you're in a group, and someone asks about your church, and you really want to wow them, just say, "I'm with the United Pentecostal Church International. We're a centripetal-centrifugal church." Stand back and watch their eyes cross, and wait for them to say, "Huh?" It's guaranteed to be a great conversation starter.