THE IMPERATIVE OF COOPERATION

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There are lots of good, practical reasons why mission agencies might want to think about cooperating with each other. However, John's Gospel gives us an imperative for cooperation which is much more telling than any mere gains in efficiency or financial savings.
Category: Observations

It's probably not everyone's idea of fun, but I spent today with a group of mission leaders talking about mobilisation and had a whale of a time. I'm easily amused.

Inevitably in these settings the conversation turned to how and why different agencies could cooperate. Missionaries tend to be a pragmatic bunch and so the group quickly got down to talking about ways in which they could cooperate, making lots of good suggestions. Less time was given to unpacking the reasons why we should work together, but a variety of reasons were mentioned in passing. Working together saves on costs and manpower, working together gives a good impression of the agencies and reflects the reality of the close cooperation which often exists on the field, if not in the home countries.

Generally, we thought that cooperation between agencies was a good thing and that we should encourage it wherever possible. It was just as the meeting was closing that my thoughts were drawn to John 17:20-24.

> *â€œI am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. Â I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are oneâ€"as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.*
>
> *â€œI have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me. Father, I want these whom you have given me to be with me where I am. Then they can see all the glory you gave me because you loved me even before the world began!*

This is Jesus praying for his disciples and for those who would follow in their footsteps. One phrase in particular sticksÂ out of this passage.

> *May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me*

In other words, the unity of Jesus' disciples is a demonstration of the truth of Jesus' mission. In this framework, cooperation between mission agencies is not desirable, worthwhile or interesting, it is absolutely vital. Perhaps we need to stop thinking about the pragmatics of the question; what is gained, what is lost, how can we be more efficient and just start from the basic assumption that cooperation is a vital demonstration of the reality of the gospel. If we can commit to that thought, perhaps the details will work themselves out.

Just a thought.