

Time and patience

The churches and missions are in the very early stages of preaching Christ within the remaining unreached peoples of the Sahel.

The missionaries that arrived among the frontier peoples of the Sahel in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s come in all colours, and from all continents: some from elsewhere in Africa, others from new centres like Brazil and Korea, still others from Western countries.

All of them are choosing the unglamorous end of the line in Christian ministry. Bright young workers disappear into the sands for a couple of decades, returning home mottled by the sun and out of touch, and with almost nothing to show for their years away.

It's a tough, unhealthy, lonely environment. One missionary told me, 'We spent the first couple of years here hoping we'd get some nasty disease so that we could return home with honour.'

They may feel they hardly ever seem to share the gospel in words, a frustrating experience for the zealous evangelicals who make up the missionary force. Many simply show love to all-comers in whatever ways open to them: running or organizing clinics; teaching in schools; working on various small-scale relief projects such as planting acacia trees or running an 'animal bank' for nomads who lost their wealth in a famine.

Yet unconditional love is surely the right 'strategy'. One YWAM missionary described their work as 'weaving a web of justice, love, righteousness, compassion.'

All of this deadly slow and humble activity, 'the plod of God', seems to be the only authentic way to bring the gospel with integrity across the cultural chasms; it will bear fruit in the end