

For All Nations . . . Panta ta Ethne

You want to know where God is at work? Get a dart. Get a map. Don't hit water.

He is rescuing people from *all nations* . . .
panta ta ethne.

There is no place on the planet in which God is not up to his business of redeeming mankind – from every tongue, tribe and nation. And by nation he does not mean geopolitical nation, he is speaking of distinct people groups. Russia alone has more than 300 - India more than 3,000.

History reveals the passionate love story of an infinitely creative God reaching into the hearts of a stubborn and rebellious creation. And God will not be held at bay. It has been his plan from the beginning.

He says to Abraham, “through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed.” The psalmist gives us His global purpose in Psalm 67, “that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations.”

Isaiah tells us in 55:5, “Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will hasten to you.” Even Haggai and Malachi get in on the action. Quoting our God they say, “I will shake the nations and the desired of that nations will come” (Hag 2:7) and “My name is to be feared among the nations.” (Mal 1:14)

When Jesus arrived on the scene it was D-day - part of His plan. God decided, at the fullness of time, to live as man and to die for the sins of the world. From there kingdom exploded. What started from one man to one nation moved as a blessing to all nations. When Jesus spoke in Matthew 28, he confirmed what God had put in motion since the dawn of time.

In 35 AD my ancestors were hanging out in northern Europe worshiping trees and howling at the moon . We had no clue of the kingdom. But God (the God of all nations) has rescued. We Gentiles call him Lord because of how he has worked. And he is not done.

Jesus describes the kingdom of God like a mustard seed. It started small, but it has grown to be huge. It is like a pea pushed off Everest. It starts small, but as it rolls and grows it envelopes all in its path. It is the ultimate sure thing. The future will reveal the culmination of his love for the nations.

When we stand together in Revelation 7:9, we will be

with men and women from every nation, tribe, people and language. God will bring it to pass and we will have the privilege of participation in his plan.

The question of our involvement in God's great plan is not a question of what we need to do. The question is how do we want to participate in what he is going to do. It is time to get on the bus. Our participation in the great commission is not an issue of obedience . . . it is an issue of sanity.

It is like a stock investment guaranteed to make you a fortune. Absolutely guaranteed. How much should you invest? Not \$100, \$1,000, or even \$100,000 - but all you have. You would be a fool if you didn't .

We can be secure in the fact that the fulfillment of the Great Commission is indeed a sure thing. In fact, the surest investment you can ever make. The most rock solid endeavor ever ventured upon.

Nonetheless, we are easily distracted from what is obvious to the Lord. We spend our passions and energy on less eternal things while actually believing them to be of greater significance. We can be sure that in the throne room of God people will not be excited because they had a killer job and a big house. When gold is synonymous with asphalt, no one is excited about their former possessions.

In the end, God wins. He will fulfill his Great Commission. He does not need me to participate, nor will he be slowed if I choose involvement in things less eternal. I can super glue myself to the chair and God would still accomplish what he desires. It is his business and he invites us to participate.

This is why we compiled these Letters for All Nations . . .
panta ta ethne. Articles that will help cultivate our passion for the God and his world.

We can be secure in the fact that the fulfillment of the Great Commission is indeed a sure thing.

God is going to all nations and he is inviting you along for the ride. It might not be the easiest ride in life, but surely it is of the greatest significance. He is going to all nations and he will lose none of his own. He has invited us to align our dreams with his reality - and take the ride of our life. There will be no regrets. There will be rejoicing in eternity looking at what God has done, but definitely no regrets.

It's time to saddle up and ride.

Let The Nations Be Glad!

Missions is not the ultimate goal of the Church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.

Worship, therefore, is the fuel and goal of missions. It's the goal of missions because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the white hot enjoyment of God's glory. The goal of missions is the gladness of the peoples in the greatness of God. "The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad!" (Ps 97:1). "Let the peoples praise thee, O God; let all the peoples praise thee! Let the nations be glad and sing for joy!" (Ps 67:3-4).

But worship is also the fuel of missions. Passion for God in worship precedes the offer of God in preaching. You can't commend what you don't cherish. Missionaries will never call out, "Let the nations be glad!" who cannot say from the heart, "I rejoice in the Lord...I will be glad and exult in thee, I will sing praise to thy name, O Most High" (Ps 104:34, 9:2). Missions begins and ends in worship.

If the pursuit of God's glory is not ordered above the pursuit of man's good in the affections of the heart and the priorities of the church, man will not be well served and God will not be duly honored. I am not pleading for a diminishing of missions but for a magnifying of God. When the flame of worship burns with the heat of God's true worth, the light of missions will shine to the darkest peoples on earth. And I long for that day to come!

Where passion for God is weak, zeal for missions will be weak. Churches that are not centered on the exaltation of the majesty and beauty of God will scarcely kindle a fervent desire to "declare his glory among the nations" (Ps 96:3).

The Second Greatest Activity in the World

The most crucial issue in missions is the centrality of God in the life of the Church. Where people are not stunned by the greatness of God, how can they be sent with the

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ringing message, "Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods!"? (96:4). Missions is not first and ultimate: God is. And these are not just words. This truth is the life blood of missionary inspiration and endurance. William Carey, the father of modern missions, who set sail for India from England in 1793, expressed the connection:

When I left England, my hope of India's conversion was very strong; but amongst so many obstacles, it would die, unless upheld by God. Well, I have God, and His Word is true. Though the superstitions of the heathen were a thousand times stronger than they are, and the example of the Europeans a thousand times worse; though I were deserted by all and persecuted by all, yet my faith, fixed on the sure Word, would rise above all obstructions and overcome every trial. God's cause will triumph.

Carey and thousands like him have been moved and carried by the vision of a great and triumphant God. That vision must come first. Savoring it in worship precedes spreading it in missions. All of history is moving toward one great goal, the white hot worship of God and his Son among all the peoples of the earth. Missions is not that goal. It is the means and for that reason it is the second greatest human activity in the world.

God's Passion for God - the Foundation for Ours

One of the things God uses to make this truth take hold of a person and a church is the stunning realization that it is also true for God himself. Missions is not God's ultimate goal, worship is. And when this sinks into a person's heart, everything changes. The world is often turned on its head. And everything looks different-including the missionary enterprise.

The ultimate foundation for our passion to see God glorified is his own passion to be glorified. God is central and supreme in his own affections. There are no rivals for the supremacy of God's glory in his own heart. God is not an idolater. He does not disobey the first and great commandment. With all his heart and soul and strength and mind he delights in the

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glory of his manifold perfections. The most passionate heart for God in all the universe is God's heart.

This truth, more than any other I know, seals the conviction

that worship is the fuel and goal of missions. The deepest reason why our passion for God should fuel missions is that God's passion for God fuels missions. Missions is the overflow of our delight in God because missions is the overflow of God's delight in being God.

And the deepest reason why worship is the goal in missions is that worship is God's goal. We are confirmed in this goal by the biblical record of God's relentless pursuit of praise among the nations. "Praise the Lord, all nations! Extol him all peoples!" (Ps 117:1). If it is God's goal it must be our goal.

The Power of Missions is Worship

God's supremacy in his own heart is not unloving. It is in fact the fountain of love. God's full delight in his own perfections overflows in his merciful will to share that delight with the nations. We may reaffirm then the earlier truth that worship is the fuel and goal that drives us in missions, because it is the fuel and goal that drives God in missions. Missions flows from the fullness of God's passion for God and it aims at the participation of the nations in the very passion that he has for himself (cf. John 15:11; 17:13,26; Matt 25:21,23). The power of the missionary enterprise is to be caught up into God's fuel and God's goal. And that means being caught up in worship.

Only One God Works for People Who Wait for Him

This remarkable vision of God as one who "exalts himself to show mercy" (Isa 30:18) impels world missions in more ways than one. One way we have not pondered is the sheer uniqueness of this God among all the gods of the nations. Isaiah realizes this and says, "From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides thee, who works for those who wait for him" (Isa 64:4). In other words Isaiah is stunned that the greatness of God has the paradoxical effect that he does not need people to work for him, but rather magnifies himself by working for them, if they will renounce self-reliance and "wait for him."

Isaiah anticipated the words of Paul in Acts 17:25, "God is not served by human hands as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything." The uniqueness at the heart of Christianity is the glory of God manifest in the freedom of grace. God is glorious because he does not need the nations to work for him. He is free to work for them. "The Son of man came

not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Missions is not a recruitment project for God's labor force. It is a liberation project from the heavy burdens and hard yokes of other gods (Matt 11:28-30).

The great sin of the world is not that the human race has failed to work for God so as to increase his glory, but that we have failed to delight in God so as to reflect his glory. For God's glory is most reflected in us when we are most delighted in him.

Isaiah says that such a God has not been seen or heard anywhere in the world. "From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides thee." What Isaiah sees everywhere

he looks are gods who have to be served rather than serve. For example, the Babylonian gods Bel and Nebo:

Bel bows down, Nebo stoops, their idols are on beasts and cattle; these things you carry are loaded as burdens on weary beasts. They stoop, they bow down together, they cannot save the burden, but themselves go into captivity. "Hearken to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am He, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save" (Isa 46:1-4; cf. Jer 10:5).

The difference between the true God and the gods of the nations is that the true God carries and the other gods must be carried. God serves, they must be served. God glorifies his might by showing mercy. They glorify theirs by gathering slaves. So the vision of God as one whose passion for his glory moves him to mercy impels missions because he is utterly unique among all the gods.

The Most Shareable Message In the World

There is yet another way that such a God motivates the missionary enterprise. The gospel demand that flows from such a God to the nations is an eminently shareable, doable demand, namely to rejoice and be glad in God. "The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad!" (Ps 97:1). "Let the peoples praise thee, O God; let all the peoples praise thee! Let the nations be glad and sing for joy!" (Ps 67:3-4). "Let the oppressed see it and be glad; you who seek God, let your hearts revive" (Ps 69:32). "Let all who seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee! May those who love thy salvation say evermore, God is great!" (Ps 70:4). What message would missionaries rather one great goal, take than the message: Be glad in God! Sing for joy in God! For God is most glorified in you when you are most satisfied in him! God loves to exalt himself by showing mercy to sinners.

The liberating fact is that the message we take to the frontiers is that people everywhere should seek their own best interest. We are summoning people to God. And those who come say, "In your presence is fullness of joy and at your right hand are pleasures for evermore" (Ps 16:11). God glorifies himself among the nations with the command, "Delight yourself in the Lord!" (Ps 37:4). His first and great requirement of all men everywhere is that they repent from seeking their joy in other things and begin to seek it only in him. A God who cannot be served" is a God who can only be enjoyed. The great sin of the world is not that the human race has failed to work for God so as to increase his glory, but that we have failed to delight in God so as to reflect his glory. For God's glory is most reflected in us when we are most delighted in him.

The most exhilarating thought in the world is that God's inexorable purpose to display his glory in the mission of the Church is virtually the same as his purpose to give his people infinite delight. God is committed to the holy joy of the redeemed, gathered from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, with the same zeal that moves him to seek his own glory in all that he does. The supremacy of God in the heart of God is the driving force of his mercy and the missionary movement of his Church.

Biblical Expressions of the Supremacy of God in Missions

Against the background we have developed so far we may now be able to feel the full force of those biblical texts that emphasize the supremacy of God in the missionary impulse of the Church. The motives we see will confirm the centrality of God in the missionary vision of the Bible.

We have seen some of the Old Testament texts which make the glory of God the centerpiece of missionary proclamation: "Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!" (Ps 96:3). "Proclaim that his name is exalted!" (Isa 12:4). There are many others. But we have not yet seen the straightforward statements of Jesus and Paul and John that say the same thing.

Leaving Family and Possessions for the Sake of the Name

When Jesus turned the rich young ruler away because he was not willing to leave his wealth to follow Jesus, the Lord said, "It will be hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 19:23). The apostles were amazed and said, "Who then can be saved?" (v. 25). Jesus answered, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

(v. 26). Then Peter, speaking as a kind of missionary who had left his home and business to follow Jesus, said, "Lo, we have left everything and followed you. What shall we have?" (v. 27). Jesus answered with a mild rebuke of Peter's sense of sacrifice: "Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundred fold and inherit eternal life" (v. 29).

The one point of focus for us here is the phrase, "for my name's sake." The motive that Jesus virtually takes for granted when a missionary leaves home and family and possessions is that it is for the sake of the name of Jesus. That means for the sake of Jesus' reputation. God's goal is that his Son's name be exalted and honored among all the peoples of the world. For when the Son is honored, the Father is honored (Mark 9:37). When every knee bows at the name of Jesus, it will be "to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:10-11). Therefore God-centered missions exists for the sake of the name of Jesus.

A Missionary Prayer for God's Name to be Hallowed

The first two petitions of the Lord's Prayer are perhaps the clearest statement of all in the teachings of Jesus that missions is driven by the passion of God to be glorified among the nations. "Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come" (Matt 6:9-10). Here Jesus teaches us to ask God to hallow his name and to make his kingdom come. This is a missionary prayer. Its aim is to engage the passion of God for his name among those who forget or revile the name of God (Ps 9:17; 74:18).

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primary concern-the very first petition of the prayer he teaches-is that more and more people, and more and more peoples, come to hallow God's name. This is the reason the universe exists. Missions exists because this hallowing doesn't.

How Much He Must Suffer for the Name

When Paul was converted on the Damascus road, Jesus Christ became the supreme treasure and joy of his life. "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil 3:8). It was a costly allegiance. What Paul learned there in Damascus was not only the joy of sins forgiven and fellowship with the King of the universe, but also how much he would have to suffer. Jesus sent Ananias to him with this message: "I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name" (Acts

9:16). Paul's missionary sufferings were "for the sake of the name." When he came near the end of his life and was warned not to go to Jerusalem, he answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13). For Paul the glory of the name of Jesus and his reputation in the world was more important than life.

For the Sake of His Name among All the Nations

Paul makes crystal clear in Romans 1:5 that his mission and calling are for the name of Christ among all the nations: "We have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations."

The apostle John described the motive of early Christian missionaries in the same way. He wrote to tell one of his churches that they should send out Christian brothers in a manner "worthy of God." And the reason he gives is that "they have gone out for the sake of the name, taking nothing from the Gentiles" (3 Jn 6-7).

John Stott comments on these two texts (Rom 1:5; 3 Jn 7)

They knew that God had superexalted Jesus, enthroning him at his right hand and bestowing upon him the highest rank, in order that every tongue should confess his lordship. They longed that Jesus should receive the honor due to his name.

This longing is not a dream but a certainty. At the bottom of all our hope, when everything else has given way, we stand on this great reality: the everlasting, all-sufficient God is infinitely, unwaveringly, and eternally committed to the glory of his great and holy name. For the sake of his fame among the nations he will act. His name will not be profaned forever. The mission of the church will be victorious. He will vindicate his people and his cause in all the earth.

The Power of Missions When Love for the Lost is Weak

Compassion for the lost is a high and beautiful motive for missionary labor. Without it we lose the sweet humility of sharing a treasure we have freely received. But we have seen that compassion for people must not be detached from passion for the glory of God. John Dawson, a leader in Youth With a Mission, gives an additional reason why this is so. He points out that a strong feeling of love for "the lost"

or "the world" is a very difficult experience to sustain and is not always recognizable when it comes.

Have you ever wondered what it feels like to have a love for the lost? This is a term we use as part of our Christian jargon. Many believers search their hearts in condemnation, looking for the arrival of some feeling of benevolence that will propel them into bold evangelism. It will never happen. It is impossible to love "the lost." You can't feel deeply for an abstraction or a concept. You would find it impossible to love deeply an unfamiliar individual portrayed in a photograph, let alone a nation or a race or something as vague as "all lost people."

He has an inexhaustible enthusiasm for the supremacy of his name among the nations. Therefore let us bring our affections into line with his, and, for the sake of his name, let us renounce the quest for worldly comforts, and join his global purpose.

Don't wait for a feeling of love in order to share Christ with a stranger. You already love your heavenly Father, and you know that this stranger is created by Him, but separated from Him, so take those first steps in evangelism because you love God. It is not primarily out of a compassion for humanity that we share our faith or pray for the lost; it is first of all, love for God. The Bible says in Ephesians 6:7-8: "With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free."

Humanity does not deserve the love of God any more than you or I do. We should never be Christian humanists, taking Jesus to poor sinful people, reducing Jesus to some kind of product that will better their lot. People deserve to be damned, but Jesus, the suffering Lamb of God, deserves the reward of his suffering.

The Miracle of Love That Weeps

Dawson's words are a wise and encouraging warning not to limit our mission engagement to the level of compassion we feel for people we do not know. However, I don't want to minimize what the Lord is able to do in giving people a supernatural burden of love for distant peoples. For example, Wesley Duewel of OMS International tells the story of his mother's remarkable burden for China and India:

My mother for years carried a hunger for the people of China and India. For many years practically every day as she prayed during family prayer for these two nations she would break down and weep before she finished praying. Her love was deep and constant, and she will be rewarded eternally for her years of love-burden for those lands. This is the love of Jesus reaching out and mediated through Christians by the Holy Spirit.

I emphasize again that the motive of compassion and motive of zeal for the glory of God are not separate. God-centered

compassion (which is the only kind that cares for people eternally) weeps over the the misery of people who reject God's glory and drink the cup of his wrath. But this weeping is not because of the loss of Christian joy. If that were true, unbelievers could blackmail the saints and hold their happiness hostage for eternity. No, the weeping of the saints at the loss of precious souls is, paradoxically, the weeping of joy in God. And the reason joy can weep is because it longs to be extended and expanded into the lives of others who are perishing. Therefore the weeping of compassion is the weeping of joy impeded in the extension of itself to another.

The Call of God

God is calling us above all else to be the kind of people whose theme and passion is the supremacy of God in all of life. No one will be able to rise to the magnificence of the missionary cause who does not feel the magnificence of Christ. There will be no big world vision without a big God. There will be no passion to draw others into our worship where there is no passion for worship.

God is pursuing with omnipotent passion a worldwide purpose of gathering joyful worshipers for himself from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. He has an inexhaustible enthusiasm for the supremacy of his name among the nations. Therefore let us bring our affections into line with his, and, for the sake of his name, let us renounce the quest for worldly comforts, and join his global purpose. If we do this, God's omnipotent commitment to his name will be over us like a banner, and we will not lose, in spite of many tribulations (Acts 9:16; Rom 8:35-39). Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. The Great Commission is first to delight yourself in the Lord (Ps 37:4). And then to declare, "Let the nations be glad and sing for joy!" (Ps 67:4). In this way God will be glorified from beginning to end and worship will empower the missionary enterprise till the coming of the Lord.

"Great and wonderful are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the ages! Who shall not fear and glorify your name, O Lord? For you alone are holy. All nations shall come and worship you, for your judgments have been revealed" (Rev 15:3-4).

The Living God is a Missionary God

Millions of people in today's world are extremely hostile to the Christian missionary enterprise. They regard it as politically disruptive (because it loosens the cement which binds the national culture) and religiously narrow-minded (because it makes exclusive claims for Jesus), while those who are involved in it are thought to suffer from an arrogant imperialism. And the attempt to convert people to Christ is rejected as an unpardonable interference in their private lives. "My religion is my own affair," they say. "Mind your own business, and leave me alone to mind mine."

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It is essential, therefore, for Christians to understand the grounds on which the Christian mission rests. Only then shall we be able to persevere in the missionary task, with courage and humility, in spite of the world's misunderstanding and opposition. More precisely, biblical Christians need biblical incentives. For we believe the Bible to be the revelation of God and of his will. So we ask: Has he revealed in Scripture that "mission" is his will for his people? Only then shall we be satisfied. For then it becomes a matter of obeying God, whatever others may think or say. Here we shall focus on the Old Testament, though the entire Bible is rich in evidence for the missionary purpose of God.

The Call of Abraham

Our story begins about four thousand years ago with a man called Abraham, or more accurately, Abram, as he was called at that time. Here is the account of God's call to Abraham.

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves." So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran (Gen 12:1-4).

God made a promise (a composite promise, as we shall see) to Abraham. And an understanding of that promise is indispensable to an understanding of the Bible and of the

Christian mission. These are perhaps the most unifying verses in the Bible; the whole of God's purpose is encapsulated here.

By way of introduction we shall need to consider the setting of God's promise, the context in which it came to be given. Then we shall divide the rest of our study into two. First, *the promise* (exactly what it was that God said he would do) and second-at greater length-its fulfillment (how God has kept and will keep his promise). We start, however, with the setting.

Genesis 12 begins: "Now the LORD said to Abram." It sounds abrupt for an opening of a new chapter. We are prompted to ask: "Who is this 'Lord' who spoke to Abraham?" and "Who is this 'Abraham' to whom he spoke?" They are not introduced into the text out of the blue. A great deal lies behind these words. They are a key which opens up the whole of Scripture. The previous eleven chapters lead up to them; the rest of the Bible follows and fulfills them.

What, then, is the background to this text? It is this. "The Lord" who chose and called Abraham is the same Lord who, in the beginning, created the heavens and the earth and who climaxed his creative work by making man and woman unique creatures in his own likeness. In other words, we should never allow ourselves to forget that the Bible begins with the universe, not with the planet earth; then with the earth, not with Palestine; then with Adam the father of the human race, not with Abraham the father of the chosen race. Since, then, God is the Creator of the universe, the earth and all mankind, we must never demote him to the status of a tribal deity or petty godling like Chemosh the god of the Moabites, or Milcom (or Molech) the god of the Ammonites, or Baal the male deity, or Ashtoreth the female deity, of the Canaanites. Nor must we suppose that God chose Abraham and his descendants because he had lost

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interest in other peoples or given them up. Election is not a synonym for elitism. On the contrary, as we shall soon see, God chose one man and his family in order, through them, to bless all the families of the earth.

We are bound, therefore to be deeply offended when Christianity is relegated to one chapter in a book on the world's religions as if it were one option among many, or

when people speak of "the Christian God" as if there were others! No, there is only one living and true God, who has revealed himself fully and finally in his only Son Jesus Christ. Monotheism lies at the basis of mission. As Paul wrote to Timothy, "There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5).

The Genesis record moves on from the creation of all things by the one God and of human beings in his likeness, to our rebellion against our own Creator and to God's judgment upon his rebel creatures—a judgment which is relieved, however, by his first gospel promise that one day the woman's seed would "bruise," indeed "crush," the serpent's head (3:15).

The following eight chapters (Genesis 4-11) describe the devastating results of the Fall in terms of the progressive alienation of human beings from God and from our fellow human beings. This was the setting in which God's call and promise came to Abraham. All around was moral deterioration, darkness and dispersal. Society was steadily disintegrating. Yet God the Creator did not abandon the human beings he had made in his own likeness (Gen 9:6). Out of the prevailing godlessness he called one man and his family, and promised to bless not only them but through them the whole world. The scattering would not proceed unchecked; a grand process of ingathering would now begin.

The Promise

What then was the promise which God made to Abraham? It was a composite promise consisting of several parts.

First, it was the promise of a *posterity*. He was to go from his kindred and his father's house, and in exchange for the loss of his family God would make of him "a great nation." Later in order to indicate this, God changed his name from "Abram" ("exalted father") to "Abraham" ("father of a multitude") because, he said to him, "I have made you the father of a multitude of nations" (17:5).

Second, it was the promise of a *land*. God's call seems to have come to him in two stages, first in Ur of the Chaldees while his father was still alive (11:31; 15:7) and then in Haran after his father had died (11:32; 12:1). At all events he was to leave his own land and, in return, God would show him another country.

Third, it was the promise of a *blessing*. Five times the words *bless* and *blessing* occur in 12:2-3. The blessing God promised Abraham would spill over upon all mankind.

A posterity, a land and a blessing. Each of these promises is

elaborated in the chapters that follow Abraham's call.

First, *the land*. After Abraham had generously allowed his nephew Lot to choose where he wanted to settle (he selected the fertile Jordan valley), God said to Abraham: "Lift up your eyes, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see I will give to you and to your descendants

forever" (13:14-15).

Second, *the posterity*.

Sometime later God gave Abraham another visual

aid, telling him to look now not to the earth but to the sky. On a clear, dark night he took him outside his tent and said to him, "Look toward heaven and number the stars." What a ludicrous command! Perhaps Abraham started, "1, 2, 3, 5, 10, 20, 30..." but he must soon have given up. It was an impossible task. Then God said to him: "So shall your descendants be." And we read: "He believed the Lord." Although he was probably by now in his eighties, and although he and Sarah were still childless, he yet believed God's promise and God "reckoned it to him as righteousness." That is, because he trusted God, God accepted him as righteousness in his sight (15:5-6).

Third, *the blessing*. "I will bless you." Already God has accepted Abraham as righteous or (to borrow the New Testament expression) has "justified him by faith." Now greater blessing is conceivable. It is the foundation blessing of the covenant of grace, which a few years later God went on to elaborate to Abraham: "I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you ... for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you and I will be their God" (17:78). And he gave them circumcision as the outward and visible sign of his gracious covenant or pledge to be their God. It is the first time in Scripture that we hear the covenant formula which is repeated many times later: "I will be their God and they shall be my people."

A land, a posterity, a blessing, but what has all that to do with mission? For that, let us turn now from the promise to the fulfillment.

The Fulfillment

The whole question of the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy is a difficult one in which there is often misunderstanding and much disagreement. Of particular importance is the principle, with which I think all of us will agree, that the New Testament writers themselves understood Old Testament prophecy to have not a *single* but usually a *triple* fulfillment—past, present and future. The past fulfillment was an immediate or historical fulfillment in the life of the nation of Israel. The present is an intermediate or gospel fulfillment

in Christ and his Church. The future will be an ultimate or eschatological fulfillment in the the new heaven and the new earth.

God's promise to Abraham received an immediate historical fulfillment in his physical descendants, the people of Israel.

God's promise to Abraham of a numerous, indeed of an innumerable, posterity was confirmed to his son, Isaac (26:4, "as the stars of heaven"), and his grandson, Jacob (32:12, "as the sand of the sea"). Gradually the promise began to come literally true. Perhaps we could pick out some of the stages in this development.

The first stage concerns the years of slavery in Egypt, of which it is written, "The descendants of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong; so that the land was filled with them" (Ex 1:7; cf. Acts 7:17). The next stage I will mention came several hundred years later when King Solomon called Israel "a great people that cannot be numbered or counted for multitude" (I Kings 3:8). A third stage was some three hundred fifty years after Solomon; Jeremiah warned Israel of impending judgment and captivity, and then added this divine promise of restoration: "As the host of heaven cannot be numbered and the sands of the sea cannot be measured so I will multiply the descendants of David my servant" (Jer 33:22).

So much for Abraham's posterity; what about the land? Again we note with worship and gratitude God's faithfulness to his promise. For it was in remembrance of his promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that he first rescued his people from their Egyptian slavery and gave them the territory which came on that account to be called "the promised land" (Ex 2:24; 3:6; 32:13), and then restored them to it some seven hundred years later after their captivity in Babylon. Nevertheless, neither Abraham nor his physical descendants fully inherited the land. As Hebrews 11 puts it, they "died in faith *not* having received what was promised." Instead, as "strangers and exiles on the earth" they "looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb 11:8-16,39-40).

God kept his promises about the posterity and the land, at least in part. Now what about the blessing? Well, at Sinai God confirmed and clarified his covenant with Abraham, and pledged himself to be Israel's God (e.g., Ex 19:3-6). And throughout the rest of the Old Testament God continued to bless the obedient while the disobedient fell under his judgment.

Perhaps the most dramatic example comes at the beginning of Hosea's prophecy, in which Hosea is told to give his three children names which describe God's awful and progressive judgment on Israel. His firstborn (a boy) he called "Jezreel," meaning "God will scatter." Next came a daughter "Lo-ruhamah," meaning "not pitied," for God said he would no longer pity or forgive his people. Lastly he had another son "Lo-ammi," meaning "not my people," for God said they were not now his people. What terrible names for the chosen people of God! They sound like a devastating contradiction of God's eternal promise to Abraham.

But God does not stop there. For beyond the coming judgment there would be a restoration, which is described in words which once more echo the promise to Abraham: "Yet

History is not a random flow of events. For God is working out in time a plan which he conceived in a past eternity and will consummate in a future eternity. In this historical process, Jesus Christ . . . is the key figure.

the number of the people of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which can be neither measured nor numbered" (Hos 1:10). And then the judgments implicit in the names of Hosea's children would be reversed. There would be a gathering instead of a scattering ("Jezreel" is ambiguous and can imply either), "not pitied" would be pitied, and "not my people" would become "sons of the living God" (1:10-2:1).

The wonderful thing is that the apostles Paul and Peter both quote these verses from Hosea. They see their fulfillment not just in a further multiplication of Israel but in the inclusion of the Gentiles in the community of Jesus: "Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy" (1 Pet 2:9-10; cf. Rom 9:25-26).

This New Testament perspective is essential as we read the Old Testament prophecies. For what we miss in the Old Testament is any clear explanation of just how God's promised blessing would overflow from Abraham and his descendants to "all families of the earth." Although Israel is described as "a light to lighten the nations," and has a mission to "bring forth justice to the nations" (Isa 42:1-4, 6; 49:6), we do not actually see this happening. It is only in the Lord Jesus himself that these prophecies are fulfilled, for only in his day are the nations actually included in the redeemed community. To this we now turn.

God's promise to Abraham receives an intermediate or gospel fulfillment in Christ and his Church.

Almost the first word of the whole New Testament is the word Abraham. For Matthew's Gospel begins, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac...." So it is right back to Abraham that Matthew traces the beginning not just of the genealogy but of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He knows that what he is recording is the fulfillment of God's ancient promises to Abraham made some two thousand years previously. (See also Luke 1:45-55, 67-75.)

Yet from the start Matthew recognizes that it isn't just *physical* descent from Abraham which qualifies people to inherit the promises, but a kind of *spiritual* descent, namely, repentance and faith in the coming Messiah. This was John the Baptist's message to crowds who flocked to hear him: "Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham" (Matt 3:9; Luke 3:8; cf. John 8:33-40). The implications of his words would have shocked his hearers since "it was the current belief that no descendant of Abraham could be lost."

And God has raised up children to Abraham, if not from stones, then from an equally unlikely source, namely, the Gentiles! So Matthew, although the most Jewish of all the four Gospel writers, later records Jesus as having said, "I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness" (8:11-12; cf. Luke 13:28-29).

It is hard for us to grasp how shocking, how completely topsy-turvy, these words would have sounded to the Jewish hearers of John the Baptist and Jesus. *They* were the descendants of

Abraham; so *they* had a title to the promises which God made to Abraham. Who then were these outsiders who were to share in the promises, even apparently usurp them, while they themselves would be disqualified? They were indignant. They had quite forgotten that part of God's covenant with Abraham promised an overflow of blessing to *all* the nations of the earth. Now the Jews had to learn that it was in relation to Jesus the Messiah, who was himself Seed of Abraham, that all the nations would be blessed.

The Apostle Peter seems at least to have begun to grasp this in his second sermon, just after Pentecost. In it he addressed a Jewish crowd with the words: "You are the sons ... of the

covenant which God gave to your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your posterity shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' God, having raised up his servant Jesus], sent him to you first, to bless you in turning every one of you from your wickedness" (Acts 3:25-26). It is a very notable statement because he interprets the blessing in the moral terms of repentance and righteousness and because, if Jesus was sent "first" to the Jews, he was presumably sent next to the Gentiles, whose "families of the earth" had been "far off" (cf. Acts 2:39) but were now to share in the blessing.

It was given to the apostle Paul, however, to bring this wonderful theme to its full development. For he was called and appointed to be the apostle to the Gentiles, and to him was revealed God's eternal but hitherto secret purpose to make Jews and Gentiles "fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (Eph 3:6).

Negatively, Paul declares with great boldness, "Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his descendants" (Rom 9:6-7).

Who then are the true descendants of Abraham, the true beneficiaries of God's promises to him? Paul does not leave us in any doubt. They are believers in Christ of whatever race. In Romans 4 he points out that Abraham not only received justification by faith but also received this blessing *before he had been circumcised*. Therefore Abraham is the father of all those who, whether circumcised or uncircumcised (that is, Jews or Gentiles), "follow the example of [his] faith" (Rom 4:9-12). If we "share the faith

Who then are the true descendants of Abraham, the true beneficiaries of God's promises to him? Paul does not leave us in any doubt. They are believers in Christ of whatever race.

of Abraham," then "he is the father of us all, as it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations'" (vv. 16-17). Thus neither physical descent from Abraham nor physical circumcision as a Jew makes a person a true

child of Abraham, but rather faith. Abraham's real descendants are believers in Jesus Christ, whether racially they happen to be Jews or Gentiles.

What then is the "land" which Abraham's descendants inherit? The letter to the Hebrews refers to a "rest" which God's people enter now by faith (Heb 4:3). And in a most remarkable expression Paul refers to "the promise to Abraham and his descendants, that they should *inherit the world*" (Rom 4:13). One can only assume he means the same thing as when to the Corinthians he writes that in Christ "all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the

world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours" (I Cor 3:21-23). Christians, by God's wonderful grace, are joint heirs with Christ of the universe.

Somewhat similar teaching, both about the nature of the promised blessing and about its beneficiaries, is given by Paul in Galatians 3. He first repeats how Abraham was justified by faith, and then continues: "So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham" and who therefore "are blessed with Abraham who had faith" (vv. 6-9). What then is the blessing with which all the nations were to be blessed (v. 8)? In a word, it is the blessing of salvation. We were under the curse of the law, but Christ has redeemed us from it by becoming a curse in our place, in order "that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (vv. 10-14). Christ bore our curse that we might inherit Abraham's blessing, the blessing of justification (v. 8) and of the indwelling Holy Spirit (v. 14). Paul sums it up in the last verse of the chapter (v. 29): "If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."

But we have not quite finished yet. There is a third stage of fulfillment still to come.

God's promise to Abraham will receive an ultimate or eschatological fulfillment in the final destiny of all the redeemed.

In the book of Revelation there is one more reference to God's promise to Abraham (7:9ff.). John sees in a vision "a great multitude which no man could number." It is an international throng, drawn "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues." And they are "standing before the throne," the symbol of God's kingly reign. That is, his kingdom has finally come, and they are enjoying all the blessings of his gracious rule. He shelters them with his presence. Their wilderness days of hunger, thirst and scorching heat are over. They have entered the promised land at last, described now not as "a land flowing with milk and honey" but as a land irrigated from "springs of living water" which never dry up. But how did they come to inherit these blessings? Partly because they have "come out of great tribulation," but mostly because "they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," that is, they have been cleansed from sin and clothed with righteousness through the merits of the death of Jesus Christ alone. "Therefore are they before the throne of God."

Speaking personally, I find it extremely moving to glimpse this final fulfillment in a future eternity of that ancient

promise of God to Abraham. All the essential elements of the promise may be detected. For here are the spiritual descendants of Abraham, a "great multitude which no man could number," as countless as the sand on the seashore and

Now we are Abraham's seed by faith, and the earth's families will be blessed only if we go to them with the gospel.

as the stars in the night sky. Here too are "all the families of the

earth" being blessed, for the numberless multitude is composed of people from every nation. Here also is the promised land, namely, all the rich blessings which flow from God's gracious rule. And here above all is Jesus Christ, the Seed of Abraham, who shed his blood for our redemption and who bestows his blessings on all those who call on him to be saved.

Conclusion

Let me try to summarize what we learn about God from his promise to Abraham and its fulfillment.

First, he is the God of history.

History is not a random flow of events. For God is working out in time a plan which he conceived in a past eternity and will consummate in a future eternity. In this historical process, Jesus Christ as the Seed of Abraham is the key figure. Let's rejoice that if we are Christ's disciples we are Abraham's descendants. We belong to his spiritual lineage.

Christians, by God's wonderful grace, are joint heirs with Christ of the universe.

If we have received the blessings of justification by faith, acceptance with God, and of the indwelling Spirit, then we are beneficiaries today of a promises made to Abraham

four thousand years ago.

Second, he is the God of the covenant.

That is, God is gracious enough to make promises, and he always keeps the promise he makes. He is a God of steadfast love and faithfulness. Not that he always fulfills his promises immediately. Abraham and Sarah "died in faith not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar" (Heb 11:13). That is, although Isaac was born to them in fulfillment of the promise, their seed was not yet numerous, nor was the land given to them, nor were the nations blessed. All God's promises come true, but they are inherited "through faith *and patience*" (Heb 6:12). We have to be content to wait for God's time.

Third, he is the God of blessing.

"I will bless you," he said to Abraham (Gen 12:2). "God ...

sent him [Jesus] to you first, to bless you," echoed Peter (Acts 3:26). God's attitude to his people is positive, constructive, enriching. Judgment is his "strange work" (Isa 28:21). His principal and characteristic work is to bless people with salvation.

Fourth, he is the God of mercy.

I have always derived much comfort from the statement of Revelation 7:9 that the company of the redeemed in heaven will be "a great multitude which no man could number." I do not profess to know how this can be, since Christians have always seemed to be a rather small minority. But Scripture states it for our comfort. Although no biblical Christian can be a universalist (believing that all mankind will ultimately be saved), since Scripture teaches the awful reality and eternity of hell, yet a biblical Christian can-even must-assert that the redeemed will somehow be an international throng so immense as to be countless. For God's promise is going to be fulfilled, and Abraham's seed is going to be as innumerable as the dust of the earth, the stars of the sky and the sand on the seashore.

Fifth, he is the God of mission.

The nations are not gathered in automatically. If God has promised to bless "all the families of the earth," he has promised to do so "through Abraham's seed" (Gen 12:3; 22:18). Now we are Abraham's seed by faith, and the earth's families will be blessed only if we go to them with the gospel. That is God's plain purpose.

I pray that these words, "all the families of the earth," may be written on our hearts. It is this expression more than any other which reveals the living God of the Bible to be a missionary God. It is this expression too which condemns all our petty parochialism and narrow nationalism, our racial pride (whether white or black), our condescending paternalism and arrogant imperialism. How dare we adopt a hostile or scornful or even indifferent attitude to any person of another color or culture if our God is the God of "all the families of the earth?" We need to become global Christians with a global vision, for we have a global God.

So may God help us never to forget his four-thousand year-old promise to Abraham: "By you and your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed."

A Church for All Peoples

Although intensely personal, the Christian faith is not individualistic. Jesus came not only to save sinners, but also to build His church (Matt 16:18). He came to establish communities of His followers among every people group on the face of the earth - communities that would reach out to others cross-culturally to share the good news of salvation.

When Peter ended his Pentecost message, he appealed not just for individual conversion, but also for a public identification with other believers (Acts 2:38). When people came to Christ, they were incorporated into a new and caring community which is both universal and local by the very fact that it includes all God's people in all places and in all times. Yet, while it transcends both space and time, it is also a community which expresses itself visibly and locally through groups of believers gathered into congregations.

In his masterful commentary on the book of Acts, John R. W. Stott describes the marks of the first Spirit-filled community that emerged following the Day of Pentecost:

First, they were related to the apostles (in submission). They were eager to receive the apostles' instructions. A Spirit-filled church is an apostolic church, a New Testament church, anxious to believe and obey what Jesus and His apostles taught. Secondly, they were related to each other (in love). They persevered in the fellowship, supporting each other and relieving the needs of the poor. A Spirit-filled church is a loving, caring, sharing church. Thirdly, they were related to God (in worship). They worshipped Him in the temple and in the home, in the Lord's supper and in the prayers, with joy and with reverence. A Spirit-filled church is a worshipping church. Fourthly, they were related to the world (in outreach). No self-centered, self-contained church (absorbed in its own parochial affairs) can claim to be filled with the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a missionary Spirit. So a Spirit-filled church is a missionary church.

The New Testament letters, which are replete with references to "one another," bear witness to the mutual interdependence meant to characterize the life of these early Christian communities. In fact, these letters, most of which are addressed to Christian churches located in the principal cities of the Roman Empire, deal with matters of Christian

faith and practice related to the nurture and development of congregational life.

A variety of metaphors illumine not only the relationship between God and His people, but also the mutual interdependence that characterizes God's people. Christians are branches of the same vine, living stones in the same building, sheep in the same flock, children in the same family, organs in the same body.

These congregations are meant to be kingdom communities. Jesus taught His disciples to pray that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. The Church is a colony of heaven. It is a segment of humanity in which the ground rules are defined by God's will. In a sense, the Church is meant to be a pilot project of the kingdom of God, a kingdom outpost, an anticipation of Christ's reign on earth. Thus, the Church glorifies God, that is, makes God "look good," by continuing in the world the works of the kingdom which Jesus began. Although the Church cannot avoid entirely the organizational and institutional forms of the culture in which it exists, essentially the Church is the community of the King.

This means that the goal of Christian missions is not limited to mere physical presence among unbelievers nor to the verbal proclamation of the gospel among those who have never heard it. It is not limited to establishing a network of mission stations across a defined geographical area. Neither is it confined to dotting the countryside of a given nation with a series of preaching points or developing Bible study groups in scattered urban neighborhoods. Nor is it restricted to the conversion of individual persons. The goal of missions is to establish within every people group in the world, within every piece of the human mosaic, indigenous church movements which are capable of so multiplying congregations that the entire people group is both evangelized and incorporated into the fellowship of the church.

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However, the goal of planting new congregations which are capable of paying their own bills, making their own decisions, and evangelizing their own kind of people is not sufficient. For many years, missionaries believed that when these objectives had been accomplished, the missionary task

was complete. Behind this conviction lay the assumption that only affluent, well-educated Christians were capable of establishing church movements in new cultural and linguistic spheres. The newly established churches in Africa, Asia, and Latin America were too deprived economically and educationally to engage in cross-cultural mission. We now realize that for mission to go full circle, it is necessary for the churches established by missionaries to become sending churches in order to gather the momentum necessary to penetrate each of the world's remaining unreached people groups. Thus, today's existing mission societies relate increasingly not just to the churches which they have brought into being, but to the mission structures which have emerged and are emerging from those churches.

Where there are no churches, there shall be churches. The Apostle Paul captured this central thrust of biblical missions when he testified to the Christians living in Rome: "And I have so made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation" (Rom 15:20). Cultural boundaries must be crossed. Social barriers must be penetrated. Linguistic obstacles must be bridged. Religious resistance must be overcome. A church movement must be brought into being within each people group. Churches that feel a responsibility themselves to work cross-culturally must be planted. That is the purpose of missions.

Strategic Prayer

A giant tree stood on the banks of the Awash River in an arid valley about a two hour drive from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. It had been there for generations and seemed eternal. Unable to bring the water in the river to the higher level of the land, the people who lived in the surrounding district had suffered through famines over the years. In their suffering, the people looked to the tree for help. They worshiped the towering giant, believing a spirit had given it divine powers. Adults would kiss its great trunk as they passed by. They spoke of the tree in hushed, reverential tones and the children said, "This tree saved us."

When World Vision began a development project in 1989, including an irrigation system to make the valley's parched earth bloom for the first time, the great tree stood like a forbidding sentinel of an old order. It presided over the community of people, enslaving them through fear. The people were convinced that the spirits must be propitiated with animal sacrifices and the strict observance of taboos. The World Vision workers saw how the villagers worshiped the tree and recognized that it was an idolatrous barrier to the entrance of Christ's kingdom and the transformation of the entire community.

When we see people coming to Christ, health improving, economic opportunity increasing, and kingdom values growing, we find that believers have been praying

menacing Goliath. Soon, the whole community knew that the Christians were praying about the tree. Six months later, the tree began to dry up. Its leafy foliage disappeared, and finally it collapsed like a stricken giant into the river. The people were astonished. "Your God has done this!" they said. "Your God has dried up the tree!" Within a few weeks, about a hundred villagers received Jesus Christ because they had seen His power displayed in the spectacular answer to the Christians' prayers.

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One morning as the World Vision staff prayed together, one of Jesus' promises struck them as particularly relevant. It said, "If you have faith, you can say to this tree, 'Be taken up and removed' and it will obey you" (Matt 21:21). With this reminder, they began to pray in faith that God would bring down the

The Spiritual Nature of Social Problems

Christians have been divided for years over the most effective means of transforming our world. Is it through verbal proclamation of the gospel or with social action? In truth, the two cannot be separated. Without both, there simply is no good news. One thing ties them together - prayer. When prayer to our God of temporal justice and eternal salvation is emphasized, evangelism and social action are linked in the most essential way. The God who inspires prayer for the world stirs the hearts of His people both to share His good news and to dispense love and mercy. When we see people coming to Christ, health improving, economic opportunity increasing, and kingdom values growing, we find that believers have been praying. Because of the nature of evil in the world, prayer is essential.

As we seek to help the poor and to stand against injustice, Christians sometimes forget that we are also fighting against principalities and powers. Since the Garden of Eden, human beings have gained control over other individuals and whole societies by cooperating with Satan and his evil spirits. This has led to wide-scale famine, disease, poverty, slavery, injustice and suffering. Whenever we try to help the victims of these tragedies, we enter a fray that involves the great socio-spiritual forces that rule the world's massive institutions, social structures and systems. Both Satan and his powers are dedicated to destroying the human beings who are made in the image of God. Satan is the master deceiver, the author of idolatry, who seeks to dominate the world by undermining faith in God, twisting values and promoting false ideologies. He infiltrates institutions, governments, communications media, educational systems and religious bodies, using them to seduce humankind over to the worship of money, fame, success, power, pleasure, science, art, politics and religious idols.

Socio-spiritual forces of evil clench societies in a dark, destructive grip in two related ways. The first is by openly idolatrous and cultic covenants and the second through false patterns of thinking which blind people to the reality of God and the hope He brings.

The Devastation of Idolatry

Throughout much of the Old Testament, Satan induced Israel to drift from their allegiance to God and dally with the false gods of the Egyptians, Amorites, Canaanites and Edomites. The Israelites suffered the consequences God had assured them would come about if they did so - oppression, slavery, foreign invasion and poverty (Judges 6:6; 10:16; Deut 28). The same sin, and its consequences, afflict the world today.

Northern India is one of the world's darkest regions. Indians estimate there may be more than three hundred million gods in that region. Kali, the goddess of destruction, is a regional deity worshipped in Calcutta, West Bengal. Anyone who has been to Calcutta knows the devastating impact she and her worship have had on the people of that city. Elsewhere in the world, the occult is behind some of the most brutal injustices of the century. In Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge - who killed as many as two million people in the 1970's - were based in two occult strongholds. Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction and regeneration, and Naga, the serpent god, are worshipped in these northern locations. During Liberia's civil war, SIM missionaries reported that many of the combatants practiced *juju*, a kind of African magic or witchcraft, to gain power. They wore fetishes, called spirits to come into them, got drunk and murdered whole villages of innocent people.

The Despair of Strongholds

When Satan is not influencing people through open idolatry or fear of spirits, we still find that people are controlled by false ways of thinking which lock them in spiritual darkness. The Apostle Paul mentions this kind of bondage in 2 Corinthians 10:4. He talks about "arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God." George Otis, Jr., writes that, from the context of this passage,

"these strongholds are not demons or geographical locations, but psychic habitats. The word *argument*, often translated *imagination*, is an interesting one, taken from the Greek word *logismos*; it is defined more precisely as calculative reasonings over time (as opposed to random, occasional thoughts). This definition makes these arguments or imaginations look more like what they almost certainly are - religious or philosophical systems."

In the above passage, Paul uses the Greek word *hupsoma* which is translated as "pretension" or "high thing." It was an astrological term meaning "the sphere in which astrological powers hold sway." This indicates that Paul considered the patterns of thinking of those who opposed the gospel to be influenced by such powers.

Francis Frangipane also identifies these strongholds as within the mind, "the spiritual fortresses wherein Satan and his legions hide and are protected." He says that "these fortresses exist in the thought-patterns and ideas that govern

individuals and churches as well as communities and nations."

For example, the idea of fate in Hinduism imprisons millions of people in spiritual and economic poverty. This insurmountable force of fate supposedly determines the caste you were born into, and if you were born into a poor caste, there is little chance you can better your life by becoming an attorney or an accountant. This thinking is a satanic stronghold, a deception that keeps people in bondage to poverty. Development efforts among people who are imprisoned by fatalistic world views are limited in their impact because these people are convinced that nothing will ever change.

Evil spirits cannot be reformed or negotiated with. They can only be expelled in a forceful way that has to be considered an act of spiritual violence.

Besides hindering people from achieving their God-given potential, strongholds in the mind can be used by the evil one to unleash horrific destruction. When Hutu extremists took over the government of

Rwanda in 1994, they used dehumanizing ethnic stereotypes by speaking of the Tutsi people as "cockroaches" that needed to be exterminated. In only three months, up to a million Tutsis, along with moderate Hutus who refused to take up arms against their Tutsi neighbors, were murdered by bands of roving killers.

What shall we do in the face of socio-spiritual evil? Undoubtedly, we must share the truth of God's word to offset such deception, but we must also be aggressive in prayer.

Dealing with Supernatural Evil Forcefully

Evil spirits cannot be reformed or negotiated with. They can only be expelled in a forceful way that has to be considered an act of spiritual violence. We think of Jesus as the standard for a peace-loving, non-violent approach to one's enemies, but he taught it was to *human* enemies only that we are to turn the other cheek, not to demonic foes. He never allowed Satan and the demons to have their way. Instead he took a

Our prayers are the necessary opening that allows God to act without violating our freedom. Prayer is the ultimate act of partnership with God.

forceful, authoritative, even violent posture, at every turn rebuking, resisting and casting out these evil forces.

He also spoke of the violent struggle and counterattack that would attend the coming of the kingdom. He said, "The kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by force" (Matt 11:12). Many biblical scholars agree this means that the kingdom has been under attack from violent foes.

Human beings and their institutions captured and killed John the Baptist. Religious leaders in league with the Roman authorities opposed Jesus and had him executed. Behind these human forces, however, Jesus saw the one He often called the "prince of this world." He speaks of Satan in Mark 3:27 and says this strong man must be bound if his captives are to be liberated. Binding a strong man involves violent combat, yet it is a battle the Church can win through the power of God. Jesus Himself promised that "the gates of hell will not prevail against my Church."

The Apostle Paul, too, emphasized that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph 6:12). Prayer is the decisive weapon in this struggle and is often aggressive and violent. The structures and forces of injustice, oppression and war are so overwhelming that all our efforts to help will fail unless we first invite God into the fray. Until we have achieved victory in prayer, it is hopeless to engage the outer world in combat.

I am not saying that prayer is all that is necessary to change the world. Many evangelical Christians have used prayer for too long as a substitute for action - dumping back on God the responsibility for doing what He has already commanded us to do throughout Scripture. Yet neither is social action a substitute for prayer. There is still a profound air of mystery surrounding prayer and how God uses our praying to transform the world. Theologian Walter Wink writes that

"prayer is not magic; it does not always work; it is not something we do, but a response to what God is already doing within us and the world. Our prayers are the necessary opening that allows God to act without violating our freedom. Prayer is the ultimate act of partnership with God."

Paradoxically, the most aggressive and powerful spiritual warfare must be waged out of great personal brokenness and weakness. Jesus' triumph over the forces of darkness through the utter humiliation and powerlessness of the cross is the primary example. Similarly, we are strongest against evil when we come to the cross with Jesus confessing and renouncing our own complicity with the powers of darkness.

Lessons in Prayer

In 1994 a group of Cambodian Christian leaders told me about the intensity of their spiritual battle and requested support from a team of outside prayer leaders. The following March, I took a team to assist sixty Cambodian pastors and evangelists in prayer for their nation. We quickly encountered the influence of the spirit of murder, exemplified in the worship of Shiva, god of destruction, and Naga, the serpent god who was said to be the guiding spirit of the

Cambodian people. On the second day of the conference, the Spirit of God spoke through one of the members of the team saying, "Some of you have blood on your hands." In the room, were former Khmer Rouge killers who had executed hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people. Great weeping followed, with confession of heinous acts in the killing fields.

This self-humbling and open confession led to a time in

Paradoxically, the most aggressive and powerful spiritual warfare must be waged out of great personal brokenness and weakness.

which the Cambodian Christians renounced the ancient covenants that were made by the Cambodian kings with the powers of darkness in the temples at Angkor, in the northern part of the country. This deep outpouring of emotion and confession of sin began a process of reconciliation that led, in turn, to the formation of a national Christian fellowship. At this writing, the number of churches has grown from about 100 to over 500. In addition, the Khmer Rouge have been badly weakened, if not destroyed, as a terrorist movement.

There were several features of this prayer initiative which can be a valuable lesson for other prayer efforts:

1. *There was much prayer preceding and accompanying this effort.* Our team and the Cambodian Christians were not praying alone. We were supported by thousands of people who interceded for us around the world. United prayer - joining the prayers of God's people around the world in a special focus for particular places and people is a powerful combination.
2. *Local leadership carried out the dramatic acts of identificational repentance.* Our team sought to be servants and catalysts, recognizing that God had given the local leaders the primary authority to break the pacts of spiritual darkness.
3. *Humility and brokenness were essential for all who took part.* There was no smug triumphalism on the part of either our team members or the Cambodian Christians.
4. *We depended on God's leading at every point.* Everyone involved in our prayer effort sought to be led by God's Spirit. We prepared ourselves with objective information about the present situation in the country, as well as its history, then waited for the subjective direction of the Holy Spirit.
5. *We prayed in a holistic manner.* We prayed for the government, the various people groups - many still unreached - and the social needs of the nation, as well as for the unity and vitality of the church. We prayed for God's

shalom to come upon Cambodia with a lasting spiritual and social transformation.

6. *Effective prayer is persistent prayer.* Long after our team's visit to Cambodia, those who took part continued to pray. Recent disunity and outright conflict among different factions in the government have made it clear that intercessors must never let down their guard. They must watch over their nation like sentinels upon the wall; otherwise, the evil one will come in the back door, creating division and destruction when least expected.

Can Anything Good Come Out of Cali?

In answer to the prayers of intercessors, God's *shalom* and transformation has also been at work in Cali, Colombia.' Until recently, this Latin American city was in the grip of the infamous Cali drug cartel. It has been called the largest, richest and best organized criminal group in history - controlling most forms of government and huge amounts of money and perpetrating the most obscene violence. Anyone who opposed them was simply liquidated. In sheer desperation, the pastors of Cali agreed to meet every week to pray for the city, beginning in January 1995.

In May of that year, the pastors' association hosted an all-night prayer vigil at the civic auditorium which seats about 27,000. They had hoped a few thousand people would turn out and fill the bottom section. Instead, 30,000 showed up to pray throughout the night! In the words of one organizer, "The primary purpose of the vigil was to take a stand against the cartels and their unseen spiritual masters. Both have been ruling our city and nation for too long. After humbling ourselves before God and one another, we symbolically extended Christ's scepter of authority over Cali - including its bondage over cocaine, violence and corruption."

The first result of the prayer meeting was that immediately after it the city went an entire day without murder. This was a newsworthy event in that the average had been multiple homicides per day. (There were fifteen thousand murders in Colombia during the first six months of 1993 giving it the highest homicide rate in the world, eight times that of the United States.) During the next four months, 900 cartel-linked officers were fired from the police force. Then, several intercessors reported dreams in which they saw angels apprehending the leaders of the drug cartel. Within six weeks of these visions, the Colombian government declared all-out war on the drug cartel bosses. By August of that year - only three months after God's revelation to the intercessors - Colombian authorities

had captured all seven cartel leaders.

The believers in Cali decided to hold a second all-night prayer rally. In preparation, they surveyed the political, social and spiritual needs in 22 administrative sections of the city. Then they prayed in specific terms about what they had learned. Again, dramatic changes followed. Colombian authorities launched an anti-corruption investigation - not only within the city government of Cali, but even up to the office of the nation's president.

Since that time, the city of Cali has grown economically with more than 25 percent improvement. Upon seeing the impact of the believers' prayers, the mayor of Cali announced, "This city needs Jesus Christ to bring peace." The city authorities have provided sound systems and platforms for 22 concurrent evangelism crusades with 40 national and international evangelists. Crime statistics have dropped. And the incidence of AIDS, which had been the highest in the Latin American continent, has been lowered.

The churches in Cali have grown tremendously in a "spiritual explosion." According to church growth specialists, Peter Wagner, Cali has become a cutting edge city, since its spiritual awakening is spreading to other cities. But a price for this has been paid in spiritual backlash. In the past two years, over 200 pastors in Colombia have been killed by guerrillas or paramilitary forces.

Reaching Unreached Peoples

Aggressive, strategic prayer is an essential component in reaching unreached people groups for two reasons. First, unreached peoples are, by definition "churchless" people. However they may be delineated by ethnic, linguistic, or

If God is the true initiator of prayer, and we see people praying in such abundant ways, we should not be surprised to see some of the greatest moves of His hand reaching nations and transforming societies.

social features, unreached peoples are those which do not yet have a flourishing church planting movement announcing and demonstrating the gospel of the Kingdom. God intends for churches to be an open display of obedience to

Christ. Satan works to deny that obedience by trapping a people in society-wide presumptions about reality. We're not sure how these strongholds get their start; probably by trapping people in their own high-minded speculations as they pursue self-sufficiency. But we can see that in settings in which Christ is not obeyed - where there is no church - such strongholds go unchallenged, sometimes for centuries, gaining strength with every passing generation. Bold, determined spiritual warfare is required to weaken and dislodge these fortresses of presumption which are blockading "the knowledge of God" and denying "the

obedience of Christ" (2 Cor 10:3-5). No amount of human persuasion can liberate an entire people from such darkness. Prayer is utterly essential. Only God can move by His mercy to open such society-wide blindness to the light of Christ.

The second reason prayer is paramount for unreached peoples is for God to send laborers. Usually unreached peoples have been neglected or resistant so there are few, if any, missionaries working to reach them. Christ ordered His first followers to examine the places where the harvest was great but the laborers were few and then to boldly entreat the Lord of the harvest to do what only God can do: Raise up and send effective laborers. It is thrilling to see wonderful breakthroughs among unreached people groups. In every case, we can find sustained strategic prayer on behalf of the people group preceding the breakthroughs. Mission history is replete with astounding stories of God summoning laborers from all over the world, opening doors of access, thwarting the threats of enemies, and demonstrating the gospel in power with precise timing. As we act in coordinated, strategic, united prayer, we are more able than ever to see that such moves of God are matched by prayers that have asked God to do these things. We can only conclude that the Lord of the harvest intends to send laborers among each of the peoples of the world.

In our day we see immense cooperative efforts to pray for unreached peoples. The "Pray Through The Window" efforts of 1993-1999 linked the prayers of tens of millions for specific unreached people groups. Hundreds of teams traveled to prayerwalk among these peoples, like the aforementioned venture to Cambodia. Such prayer journeys simply help people pray in the very places they expect God to bring forth His answers. If God is the true initiator of prayer, and we see people praying in such abundant ways, we should not be surprised to see some of the greatest moves of His hand - reaching nations and transforming societies - in the near future.

God Listens and the World Changes

In the Book of Revelation, the Apostle John describes a God-given vision of humankind's history. It is filled with images of God and celestial beings interacting with one another and with our world. In these verses, the Lamb of God opens seven seals each affecting the history of this planet. By the end of chapter seven, all of heaven is singing and worshiping God, wondering what will happen next in human history. However, at the beginning of chapter eight, all fall silent. Seven angels with seven trumpets stand before God ready to announce the unfolding fate of the world, but they must wait until the eighth angel offers God incense which includes all the prayers of the saints - prayers for justice and victory. Nothing can happen until the fragrance of these prayers rises

before God.

Prayer is the most powerful form of social action because God responds directly to prayer. Prayer is the most powerful part of mission to unreached peoples, because God does what only He can do. Even in the most hopeless of situations, He breaks through the false dominion of the enemy, bringing spiritual light and breathing life for lasting social transformation.

God uses the act of praying both to change us and to change the future. As Walter Wink puts it,

History belongs to the intercessors who believe the future into being Even a small number of people totally committed to the new inevitability in which they affix their imaginations can decisively affect the shape the future takes. These shapers of the future are the intercessors who call out the future, the longed-for new present; they believe the future into being.

Four Men, Three Eras, Two Transitions: Modern Missions

College students around the world used to be bowled over by Marxist thought. One powerful reason was that Communism had a "long look." Communists claimed to know where history was heading, and that they were merely following inevitable trends.

Recently, evangelicals, too, have thought a lot about trends in history and their relationship to events to come. The massive response a while back to Hal Lindsey's books and films about possible events in the future has shown us that people are responsive to a "where are we going?" approach to life.

In comparison to the Communists, Christians actually have the longest look, backed up by a mass of hard facts and heroic deeds. Yet for some reason, Christians often make little connection between discussion of prophecy and future events, and discussion of missions. They see the Bible as a book of prophecy, both in the past and for the future. Yet, as Bruce Ker has said so well, "The Bible is a missionary book throughout.... The main line of argument that binds all of it together is the unfolding and gradual execution of a missionary purpose."

Did I ever hear Ker's thought in Sunday School? Maybe. But only in later years have I come to a new appreciation of the fact that the story of missions begins long before the Great Commission. The Bible is very clear: God told Abraham he was to be blessed and to be a blessing to all the families of the earth (Gen 12:1-3). Peter quoted this on the day he spoke in the temple (Acts 3:25). Paul quoted the same mandate in his letter to the Galatians (3:8).

Yet some Bible commentators imply that only the first part of that verse could have happened right away. They agree that Abraham was to begin to be blessed right away, but somehow they reason that two thousand years would have to pass before either Abraham or his descendants could begin "to be a blessing to all the families on earth." They suggest that Christ needed to come first and institute his Great Commission—that Abraham's lineage needed to wait around

*After serving ten years as a missionary among Mayan Indians in the highlands of Guatemala, **Ralph D. Winter** was called to be a Professor of Missions at the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary. Years later he and his wife, Roberta, founded the U.S. Center for World Mission and the William Carey International University, both of which serve other missions working at the frontiers of mission. He is the General Director and founder of the Frontier Mission Fellowship.*

for 2,000 years before they would be called upon to go the ends of the earth to be a blessing to all the world's peoples (this could be called "The Theory of the Hibernating Mandate"). Worse still, one scholar, with a lot of followers in later decades, propounded the idea that in the Old Testament the peoples of the world were not expected to receive missionaries but to go to Israel for the light, and that from the New Testament and thereafter it was the reverse, that is, the peoples to be blessed would not come but those already having received the blessing would go to them. This rather artificial idea gained acceptance partially by the use of the phrase, "centripetal mission in the Old Testament and centrifugal mission in the New Testament." Fact is, there is both in both periods, and it is very confusing to try to employ an essentially "Mickey Mouse" gimmick to explain a shift in strategy that did not happen. The existence of 137 different languages in Los Angeles makes clear that now, in the New Testament-and after period, nations are still coming to the light.

A more recent and exciting interpretation (see Walter Kaiser's chapter two) observes that Israel, as far back as Abraham, was accountable to share that blessing with other nations. In the same way, since the time of the apostle Paul, every nation which has contained any significant number of "children of Abraham's faith" has been similarly accountable (but both Israel and the other nations have mainly failed to carry out this mandate).

The average citizen of Israel was no more oblivious to the second part of Gen. 12:1-3 than the average Christian today is oblivious to the Great Commission!

The greatest scandal in the Old Testament is that Israel tried to be blessed without trying very hard to be a blessing. However, let's be careful: *The average citizen of Israel was no more oblivious to the second part of Gen. 12:1-3 than the average Christian today is oblivious to the Great Commission!* How easily our study Bibles overlook the veritable string of key passages in the Old Testament which exist to remind Israel (and us) of the missionary mandate: Gen 12:1-3, 18:18, 22:18, 28:14, Ex 19:4-6, Deut 28:10, 2 Chr 6:33, Ps 67, 96, 105, Isa 40:5, 42:4, 49:6, 56:3, 6-8, Jer 12:14-17, Zech 2: 11, Mal 1: 11.

Likewise, today nations which have been singularly blessed by God may choose to resist and try to conceal any sense of their obligation to be a blessing to other nations. But that is not God's will. "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required" (Luke 12:48).

Thus, how many times in the average church today is the Great Commission mentioned? Even less often than it comes up in the Old Testament! Yet the commission applies. It applied then, and it applies today. I believe **it** has been constantly applicable from the very moment when it was first given (Gen 12:1-3). As individual Christians and as a nation we are responsible "to be a blessing to all the families of the earth."

This mandate has been overlooked during most of the centuries since the apostles. Even our Protestant tradition plugged along for over 250 years minding its own business and its own blessings (like Israel of old)-until a young man of great faith and incredible endurance appeared on the scene. In this chapter we are going to focus in on the A.D. 1800-2000 period which his life and witness kicked off. No other one person can be given as much credit for the vibrant new impetus of the last two hundred years. He was one of four such influential men whom God used, all of them with severe handicaps. Three great "eras" of new plunging forward into newly perceived frontiers resulted from their faith and obedience (it took two of them to launch the third and final era). Four stages of mission strategy characterized each of these eras. Two perplexing "transitions" of strategy inevitably appeared as the fourth stage of one era contrasted with the first stage of the next. It is easier to see this in a diagram. Better still, the story.

The gruesome statistics of almost inevitable sickness and death that haunted, yet did not daunt, the decades of truly valiant missionaries who went out after 1790 in virtually a suicidal stream cannot be matched by any other era or by any other cause.

The First Era

An "under thirty" young man, William Carey, got into trouble when he began to take the Great Commission seriously. When he had the opportunity to address a group of ministers, he challenged them to give a reason why the Great Commission did not apply to them. They rebuked him, saying, "When God chooses to win the heathen, He will do it without your help or ours." He was unable to speak again on the subject, so he patiently wrote out his analysis, "An Enquiry Into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens."

The resulting small book convinced a few of his friends to create a tiny missions agency, the "means" of which he had spoken. The structure was flimsy and weak, providing only the minimal backing he needed to go to India. However, the impact of his example reverberated throughout the English-speaking world, and his little book became the Magna Carta of the Protestant mission movement.

William Carey was not the first Protestant missionary. For years the Moravians had sent people to Greenland, America and Africa. But his little book, in combination with the Evangelical Awakening,

quickened vision and changed lives on both sides of the Atlantic. Response was almost instantaneous: a second missionary society was founded in London; two in Scotland; one in Holland; and then still another in England. By then it was apparent to all that Carey was right when he had insisted that organized efforts in the form of missions societies were essential to the success of the missionary endeavor.

In America, five college students, aroused by Carey's book, met to pray for God's direction for their lives. This unobtrusive prayer meeting, later known as the "Haystack Prayer Meeting," resulted in an American "means"-the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions. Even more important, they started a student mission movement which became the example and forerunner of other student movements in missions to this day.

In fact, during the first 25 years after Carey sailed to India, a dozen mission agencies were formed on both sides of the Atlantic, and the First Era in Protestant missions was off to a good start. Realistically speaking, however, missions in this First Era was a pitifully small shoe-string operation, in relation to the major preoccupations of most Europeans and Americans in that day. The idea that we should organize in order to send missionaries did not come easily, but it eventually became an accepted pattern.

Carey's influence led some women in Boston to form women's missionary prayer groups, a trend which led to women becoming the main custodians of mission knowledge and motivation. After some years women began to go to the field as single missionaries. Finally, by 1865, unmarried American women established women's mission boards which, like Roman Catholic women's orders, only sent out single women as missionaries and were run entirely by single women at home.

There are two very bright notes about the First Era. One is

the astonishing demonstration of love and sacrifice on the part of those who went out. Africa, especially, was a forbidding continent. All mission outreach to Africa prior to 1775 had totally failed. Of all Catholic efforts, all Moravian efforts, nothing remained. Not one missionary of any kind

Can you imagine . . . students today going out into missionary work if they knew that for decade after decade 19 out of 20 of those [who had gone] before them had died almost on arrival on the field?

existed on the continent on the eve of the First Era. The gruesome statistics of almost inevitable sickness and death that haunted, yet did not daunt, the decades of truly valiant missionaries who went out after 1790 in virtually a suicidal stream cannot be matched by any other era or by any other cause. Very few missionaries to Africa in the first 60 years of the First Era survived more than two years. As I have reflected on this measure of devotion I have been humbled to tears, for I wonder-if I or my people today could or would match that record. Can you imagine our Urbana students today going out into missionary work if they knew that for decade after decade 19 out of 20 of those before them had died almost on arrival on the field?

A second bright spot in this First Era is the development of high quality insight into mission strategy. The movement had several great missiologists. In regard to home structure, they clearly understood the value of the mission structure being allowed a life of its own. For example, we read that the London Missionary Society experienced unprecedented and unequalled success, "due partly to its freedom from ecclesiastical supervision and partly to its formation from an almost equal number of ministers and laymen." In regard to field structure, we can take a note from Henry Venn who was related to the famous Clapham evangelicals and the son of a founder of the Church Missionary Society. Except for a few outdated terms, one of his most famous paragraphs sounds strangely modern:

Regarding the ultimate object of a Mission, viewed under its ecclesiastical result, to be the settlement of a Native Church under Native Pastors upon a self-supporting system, it should be borne in mind that the progress of a Mission mainly depends upon the training up and the location of Native Pastors; and that, as it has been happily expressed, the "euthanasia of a Mission" takes place when a missionary, surrounded by well-trained Native congregations under Native Pastors, is able to resign all pastoral work into their hands, and gradually relax his superintendence over the pastors themselves, 'til it insensibly ceases; and so the Mission passes into a settled Christian community. Then the missionary and all missionary agencies should be transferred to the "regions beyond."

Take note: There was no thought here of the national church launching its own mission outreach to new pioneer fields! Nevertheless, we see here something like *stages of mission activity*, described by Harold Fuller of SIM in the alliterative sequence (chart below).

Slow and painstaking though the labors of the First Era were, they did bear fruit, and the familiar series of stages can be observed which

goes from no church in the pioneer stage to infant church in the paternal stage and to the more complicated mature church in the partnership and participation stages.

Samuel Hoffman of the Reformed Church in America Board puts it well: "The Christian missionary who was loved as an evangelist and liked as a teacher, may find himself resented as an administrator."

Mission-Church Relations: Four Stages of Development

Stage One: Pioneer

Requires gift of leadership, along with other gifts.

No Believers-missionary must lead and do much of the work himself.

Stage Two: Parent

Requires gift of teaching.

The young church has a growing child's relationship to the mission.

But the "parent" must avoid "paternalism."

Stage Three: Partner

Requires changes from parent-child relation to adult-adult relation.

Difficult for both to change, but essential to the church's becoming a mature "adult."

Stage Four: Participant

A fully mature church assumes leadership.

As long as the mission remains, it should use its gifts to strengthen the church to meet the original objectives of Matt 28:19-20. Meanwhile the mission should be involved in Stage One elsewhere.

Lucky is the missionary in whose own career this whole sequence of stages takes place. More likely the series represents the work in a specific field with a succession of missionaries, or it may be the experience of an agency which in its early period bursts out in work in a number of places and then after some years finds that most of its fields are mature at about the same time. But rightly or wrongly, this kind of succession is visible in the mission movement globally, as the

fever for change and nationalization sweeps the thinking of almost all executives at once and leaps from continent to continent, affecting new fields still in earlier stages as well as old ones in the latter stages.

At any rate, by 1865 there was a strong consensus on both sides of the Atlantic that the missionary should go home when he had worked himself out of a job. Since the First Era focused primarily upon the coastlands of Asia and Africa, we are not surprised that literal withdrawal would come about first in a case where there were no inland territories. Thus, symbolizing the latter stages of the First Era was the withdrawal of all missionaries from the Hawaiian Islands, then a separate country. This was done with legitimate pride and fanfare and fulfilled the highest expectations, then and now, of successful progress through the stages of missionary planting, watering and harvest.

The Second Era

A second symbolic event of 1865 is even more significant, at least for the inauguration of the Second Era. A young man, after a short term and like Carey still under thirty, in the teeth of surrounding counter advice, established the first of a whole new breed of missions emphasizing the inland territories. This second young upstart was given little but negative notice, but like William Carey, brooded over statistics, charts and maps. When he suggested that the inland peoples of China needed to be reached, he was told you could not get there, and he was asked if he wished to carry on his shoulders the blood of the young people he would thus send to their deaths. This accusing question stunned and staggered him. Groping for light, wandering on the beach, it seemed as if God finally spoke to resolve the ghastly thought: "You are not sending young people in the interior of China. I am." The load lifted.

With only trade school medicine, without any university experience much less missiological training, and a checkered past in regard to his own individualistic behavior while he was on the field, he was merely one more of the weak things that God uses to confound the wise. Even his early antichurch-planting missionary strategy was breathtakingly erroneous by today's church-planting standards. Yet God strangely honored him because his gaze was fixed upon the world's least-reached peoples. Hudson Taylor had a divine wind behind him. The Holy Spirit spared him from many pitfalls, and it was his organization, the China Inland Mission-the most cooperative, servant organization yet to appear-that

eventually served in one way or another over 6,000 missionaries, predominantly in the interior of China. It took 20 years for other missions to begin to join Taylor in his special emphasis-the unreached, inland frontiers.

One reason the Second Era began slowly is that many people were confused. There were already many missions in existence. Why more? Yet as Taylor pointed out, all existing agencies were confined to the coastlands of Africa and Asia, or islands in the Pacific. People questioned, "Why go to the interior if you haven't finished the job on the coast?"

I am not sure the parallel is true today, but the Second Era apparently needed not only a new vision but a lot of new organizations. Taylor not only started an English frontier mission, he went to Scandinavia and the Continent to challenge people to start new agencies. As a result, directly

Taylor was more concerned for the cause than for a career: At the end of his life he had spent only half of his years of ministry in China. . . .the cause of Christ, not China, was the ultimate focus of his concern.

or indirectly, over 40 new agencies took shape to compose the faith missions that rightly should be called frontier missions as the names of many of them still indicate: China Inland Mission, Sudan Interior Mission, Africa Inland Mission, Heart of Africa Mission, Unevangelized Fields Mission, Regions Beyond Missionary Union. Taylor was more concerned for the cause

than for a career: At the end of his life he had spent only half of his years of ministry in China. In countless trips back from China he spent half of his time as a mobilizer on the home front. For Taylor, the cause of Christ, not China, was the ultimate focus of his concern.

As in the early stage of the First Era, when things began to move, God brought forth a student movement. This one was more massive than before-the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, history's single most potent mission organization. In the 1880s and 90s there were only 1/37th as many college students as there are today, but the Student Volunteer Movement netted 100,000 volunteers who gave their lives to missions. Twenty-thousand actually went overseas. As we see it now, the other 80,000 had to stay home to rebuild the foundations of the missions endeavor. They began the Laymen's Missionary Movement and strengthened existing women's missionary societies.

However, as the fresh new college students of the Second Era burst on the scene overseas, they did not always fathom how the older missionaries of the First Era could have turned responsibility over to national leadership at the least educated levels of society. First Era missionaries were in the minority now, and the wisdom they had gained from their experience was bypassed by the large number of new college-educated recruits. Thus, in the early stages of the Second Era, the new college-trained missionaries, instead of going to new

frontiers, sometimes assumed leadership over existing churches, not reading the record of previous mission thinkers, and often forced First Era missionaries and national leadership (which had been painstakingly developed) into the background. In some cases this caused a huge step backward in mission strategy.

By 1925, however, the largest mission movement in history was in full swing. By then Second Era missionaries had finally learned the basic lessons they had first ignored, and produced an incredible record. They had planted churches in a thousand new places, mainly "inland," and by 1940 the reality of the "younger churches" around the world was widely acclaimed as the "great new fact of our time." The strength of

these churches led both national leaders and missionaries to assume

that all additional frontiers could simply be mopped up by the ordinary evangelism of the churches scattered throughout the world. More and more people wondered if, in fact, missionaries weren't needed so badly! Once more, as in 1865, it seemed logical to send missionaries home from many areas of the world.

For us today it is highly important to note the overlap of these first two eras. The 45 year period between 1865 and 1910 (compare 1934 to 1980 today) was a transition between the strategy appropriate to the mature stages of Era 1, the Coastlands era, and the strategy appropriate to the pioneering stages of Era 2, the Inland era.

Shortly after the World Missionary

Conference in Edinburgh in 1910, there ensued the shattering World Wars and the world-wide collapse of the colonial apparatus. By 1945 many overseas churches were prepared not only for the withdrawal of the colonial powers, but for the absence of the missionary as well. While there was no very widespread outcry, "Missionary Go Home," as some supposed, nevertheless things were different now, as even the people in the pews at home ultimately sensed. Pioneer and paternal were no longer the relevant stages, but partnership and participation.

In 1967, the total number of career missionaries from America began to decline (and it has continued to do so to this day). Why? Christians had been led to believe that all

necessary beachheads had been established. By 1967, over 90 percent of all missionaries from North America were working with strong national churches that had been in existence for some time.

The facts, however, were not that simple. Unnoticed by most everyone, another era in missions had begun.

The Third Era

This era was begun by a pair of young men of the Student Volunteer Movement - Cameron Townsend and Donald McGavran. Cameron Townsend was in so much of a hurry to get to the mission field that he didn't bother to finish college. He went to Guatemala as a "Second Era" missionary,

building on work which had been done in the past. In that country, as in all other mission fields, there was plenty to do by missionaries working with established national churches.

But Townsend was alert enough to notice that the majority of Guatemala's population did not speak Spanish. As he moved from village to village, trying to distribute scriptures written in the Spanish language, he began to realize that Spanish evangelism would never reach all Guatemala's people. He was further convinced of this when an Indian asked him, "If your God is so smart, why can't he speak our language?" He was befriended by a group of older missionaries who had already concluded the indigenous "Indian" populations needed to be reached in their own languages. He was just 23 when he began to move on the basis of this new perspective.

Surely in our time one person comparable to William Carey and Hudson Taylor is Cameron Townsend. Like Carey and Taylor, Townsend saw that there were still unreached frontiers, and for almost a half century he has waved the flag

for the overlooked tribal peoples of the world. He started out hoping to help older boards reach out to tribal people. Like Carey and Taylor, he ended up starting his own mission, Wycliffe Bible Translators, which is dedicated to reaching these new frontiers. At first he thought there must be about 500 unreached tribal groups in the world. (He was judging by the large number of tribal languages in Mexico alone). Later, he revised his figure to 1,000, then 2,000, and now it is closer to 5,000. As his conception of the enormity of the task has increased, the size of his organization has increased. Today it numbers over 4,000 adult workers.

At the very same time Townsend was ruminating in Guatemala, Donald McGavran was beginning to yield to the

He was further convinced [that Spanish language evangelism would not reach all] when an Indian asked him, "If your God is so smart, why can't he speak our language?"

The task is not an American one, nor even a Western one. It will involve Christians from every continent of the world.

seriousness, not of linguistic barriers, but of India's amazing social barriers. Townsend "discovered" the tribes; McGavran discovered a more nearly universal category he labeled "homogeneous units," which today are more often called "people groups." Paul Hiebert has employed the ter-

As happened in the early stages of the first two eras, the Third Era has spawned a number of new mission agencies. Some, like the New Tribes Mission, carry in their names reference to this new emphasis. The names of others, such as Gospel Recordings and Mission Aviation Fellowship, refer to

If the First Era was characterized by reaching coastland peoples and the Second Era by inland territories, the Third Era must be characterized by the more difficult-to-define, non-geographical category which we have called "Unreached Peoples"-people groups which are socially isolated.

the new technologies necessary for the reaching of tribal and other isolated peoples of the world. Some Second Era agencies, like Regions Beyond Missionary Union, have never ceased to stress frontiers, and have merely increased their staff so they can penetrate further-to people groups previously overlooked.

minology of "horizontal segmentation" for the tribes which each occupied their own turf, and "vertical segmentation" for groups distinguished not by geography but by rigid social differences. McGavran's terminology described both kinds even though he was mainly thinking about the more subtle vertical segmentation.

More recently many have begun to realize that tribal peoples are not the only forgotten peoples. Many other groups, some in the middle of

Once such a group is penetrated, diligently taking advantage of that missiological breakthrough along group lines, the strategic "bridge of God" to that people group is established. The corollary of this truth is the fact that *until* such a breakthrough is made, normal evangelism and church planting cannot take place.

partially Christianized areas, have been completely overlooked. These peoples are being called the "Unreached Peoples" and are defined by ethnic or sociological traits to be people so different from the cultural traditions of any existing church that missions (rather than evangelism) strategies are necessary for the planting of indigenous churches within their particular traditions.

McGavran did not found a new mission (Townsend did so only when the existing missions did not properly respond to the tribal challenge). McGavran's active efforts and writings spawned both the church growth movement and the frontier mission movement, the one devoted to expand-in within already penetrated groups, and the other devoted to deliberate approaches to the remaining unpenetrated groups.

If the First Era was characterized by reaching coastland peoples and the Second Era by inland territories, the Third Era must be characterized by the more difficult-to-define, non-geographical category which we have called "Unreached Peoples"-people groups which are socially isolated. Because this concept has been so hard to define, the Third Era has been even slower getting started than the Second Era. Cameron Townsend and Donald McGavran began calling attention to forgotten peoples over 40 years ago, but only recently has any major attention been given to them. More tragic still, we have essentially forgotten the pioneering

As with Carey and Taylor before them, for twenty years Townsend and McGavran attracted little attention. But by the 1950s both had wide audiences. By 1980, 46 years from 1934, a 1910-like conference was held, focusing precisely on the forgotten groups these two men emphasized. The Edinburgh-1980 World Consultation on Frontier Missions was the largest mission meeting in history, measured by the number of mission agencies sending delegates. And wonder of wonders, 57 Third World agencies sent delegates. This is the sleeper of the Third Era! Also, a simultaneous youth meeting, the International Student Consultation on Frontier Missions, pointed the way for all future mission meetings to include significant youth participation.

"Closed countries" are less and less of a problem, because the modern world is becoming more and more interdependent. There are literally no countries today which admit no foreigners.

techniques of the First and Second Eras, so we almost need to reinvent the wheel as we learn again how to approach groups of people completely untouched by the gospel!

We know that there are about 10,000 people groups in the "Unreached Peoples" category, gathered in clusters of similar peoples, these clusters numbering not more than 3,000. Each individual people will require a separate, new missionary beachhead. Is this too much? Can this be done?

Can We Do It?

The task is not as difficult as it may seem, for several sur-

prising reasons. In the first place, the task is not an American one, nor even a Western one. It will involve Christians from every continent of the world.

More significant is the fact that when a beachhead is established within a culture, the normal evangelistic process which God expects every Christian to be involved in replaces the missions strategy, because the mission task of "breaking in" is finished.

Furthermore, "closed countries" are less and less of a problem, because the modern world is becoming more and more interdependent. There are

literally no countries today which admit no foreigners. Many of the countries considered "completely closed"-like Saudi Arabia-are in actual fact avidly recruiting thousands of skilled people from other nations. And the truth is, they prefer devout Christians to boozing, womanizing, secular Westerners.

Best of all, nothing can obscure the fact that this could and should be the final era. No serious believer today dare overlook the fact that God has not asked us to reach every nation, tribe and tongue without intending it to be done. No generation has less excuse than ours if we do not do as he asks.

But our work in the Third Era has many other advantages. We have potentially a world-wide network of churches that can be aroused to their central mission. Best of all, nothing can obscure the fact that this could and should be the final era. No serious believer today dare overlook the fact that God has not asked us to reach every nation, tribe and tongue without intending it to be done. No generation has less excuse than ours if we do not do as he asks.

Culture, Worldview and Contextualization

A key question for Christians who work cross-culturally is, "What is God's view of culture? Is Jewish culture created by God and therefore to be imposed on everyone who follows God? Or is there some indication in scripture that God takes a different position?" I believe we have our answer in 1 Corinthians 9:19-22, where Paul articulates his (and God's) approach to cultural diversity. Paul says, "While working with Jews, I live like a Jew" but "when working with Gentiles, I live like a Gentile." His approach, then, is to "become all things to all men, that I may save some of them by whatever means are possible."

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The early Christians were Jewish. It was natural for them to believe that the cultural forms in which the gospel came to them were the only right ones for everyone. So, they believed, everyone who comes to Jesus must also convert to Jewish culture. But God used the apostle Paul, himself a Jew, to teach his generation and ours a different approach. In the above text, he articulates God's approach. Then in Acts 15:2ff, we find him arguing fiercely against the majority position of the early church for the right of Gentiles to follow Jesus within their own sociocultural contexts. God Himself had shown first Peter (Acts 10), then Paul and Barnabas, that this was the right way, by giving the Holy Spirit to Gentiles who had not converted to Jewish culture (Acts 13-14).

But the Church has continually forgotten the lesson of Acts 15. We have continually reverted to the assumption that becoming Christian means becoming like us culturally. When, after New Testament times, the church required everyone to adopt Roman culture, God raised up Luther to prove that God could accept people who spoke German and worshiped in German ways. Then Anglicanism arose to show that God could use English language and custom, and Wesleyanism arose to let the common people of England know that God accepted them in their culture. And so it has been that there are major cultural issues in the development of every new denomination.

But sadly, the problem persists. Communicators of the gospel continue imposing their culture or denomination on new converts. [So we attempt to apply anthropological insight to missions to protect those to whom we go from our

inclination to make them like us.] If, then, we take a scriptural approach, we should adapt ourselves and our presentation of God's message to the culture of the receiving people, not misrepresent God as early Jewish Christians did (Acts 15:1) by requiring that converts become like us to be acceptable to God.

Culture and Worldview Defined

The term culture is the label anthropologists give to the structured customs and underlying worldview assumptions which people govern their lives. Culture (including worldview) is a peoples' way of life, their design for living, their way of coping with their biological, physical and social environment. It consists of learned, patterned assumptions (worldview), concepts and behavior, plus the resulting artifacts (material culture).

Worldview, the deep level of culture, is the culturally structured set of assumptions (including values and commitments/allegiances) underlying how a people perceive and respond to reality. Worldview is not separate from culture. It is included in culture as the deepest level presuppositions upon which people base their lives.

A culture may be likened to a river, with a surface level and a deep level. The surface is visible. Most of the river,

Unfortunately, when we see others living according to cultural patterns and with worldview assumptions different from our own we often feel sorry for them, as if their ways are inferior to ours. If we are able, then, we may seek ways to "rescue" them from their customs.

however, lies beneath the surface, and is largely invisible. But anything that happens on the surface of the river is affected by such deep-level phenomena as the current, the cleanness or dirtiness of the river, other objects in the river and so on. What happens on the surface of a river is both a response to external phenomena and a manifestation of the deep level characteristics of the river.

So it is with culture. What we see on the surface of a culture is patterned human behavior. But this patterned or structured behavior, though impressive, is the lesser part of the culture. In the depths, are the assumptions we call *worldview*, on the basis of which people govern their surface-level behavior. When something affects the surface of a culture it may change that level. The nature and extent of that change will, however, be influenced by the deep-level worldview structuring within the culture.

Culture (including worldview) is a matter of structure or

patterns. Culture does not do anything. Culture is like the script an actor follows. The script provides guidelines within which actors ordinarily operate, though they may choose on occasion to modify the script, either because they have forgotten something or because someone else changed things.

There are several levels of culture (including, of course, worldview). The "higher" the level, the more diversity is included in it. For example, we may speak of culture at a multinational level as "Western culture" (or worldview), or "Asian culture," or "African culture." Such cultural entities include a large number of quite distinct national cultures. For example, within Western culture there are varieties called German, French, Italian, British and American. Within Asian culture are varieties called Chinese, Japanese and Korean. These national cultures, then, can include many subcultures. In America, for example, we have Hispanic Americans, American Indians, Korean Americans and so on. And within these subcultures we can speak of community cultures, family cultures and even individual cultures.

In addition, the term "culture" can designate types of strategies (or coping mechanisms) used by people of many different societies. Thus, we can speak of entities such as a culture (or worldview) of poverty, deaf culture, youth culture, culture factory workers, taxi drivers culture, even culture of women. Identifying people in this way is often helpful in working out strategies for their evangelization.

People and Culture

Just as in drama we recognize the difference between actors and their scripts, so it is with culture. It has been common for both non-specialists and specialists to refer to culture as if it was a person. We often hear statements such as "Their culture *makes* them do it," or "Their worldview *determines* their view of reality." Note that the italicized verbs in these statements give the impression that a culture behaves like a person.

As in drama, the patterns are there and the actors ordinarily follow them by habit. But the "power" that keeps people following their cultural script is the power of habit, something inside of people, not any power that culture possesses in itself. Culture (including worldview) has no power in and of itself.

The way of Jesus is, however, to honor a people's culture and its incorporated worldview, not to wrest them from it.

People ordinarily follow the patterns of their culture, but not always. People regularly modify old customs and create new ones. Though the habits that result in great conformity are strong, we can change our customs. It is important that cross-cultural witnesses recognize both the possibility of change and the place and power of habit.

The distinction we are making is embodied in the contrast between the words culture and society. Culture refers to the structure, society refers to the people themselves. When we feel pressure to conform, it is the pressure of people (i.e., social pressure) that we feel, not the pressure of cultural patterning (the script) itself.

Cultures and Worldviews Are to Be Respected

Cultural/worldview structuring functions both outside of us and inside of us. We are totally submerged in it, relating to it much as a fish relates to water. And we are usually as unconscious of it as a fish must be of the water or as we usually are of the air we breathe. Indeed, many of us only notice culture when we go into another cultural territory and observe customs different from our own.

Unfortunately, when we see others living according to cultural patterns and with worldview assumptions different from our own we often feel sorry for them, as if their ways are inferior to ours. If we are able, then, we may seek ways to "rescue" them from their customs. One of the tragedies of American (including missionary) attempts to help other peoples is that we have so often shown little respect for their traditional customs.

The way of Jesus is, however, to honor a people's culture and its incorporated worldview, not to wrest them from it. Just as He entered the cultural life of the Jews to communicate with them, so we are to enter the cultural matrix of the people we seek to win. Following Jesus' example, we note that working from within involves a biblical critique of a people's culture and worldview assumptions as well as acceptance of them as starting points. But if we are to witness effectively, we have to speak and behave in ways that honor the only way of life they have ever known. Likewise, if the Church is to be as meaningful to receiving peoples as Jesus wants it to be, it needs to be as appropriate to their cultural lives (though not uncritical of unbiblical customs and assumptions) as the early Church was to the lives of first century peoples. We call such appropriate circles "dynamic equivalence churches" (Kraft 1979), "contextualized churches" (see below) or "inculturated churches."

The Subsystems of Culture

With worldview at the center, influencing all of culture, we can divide surface-level culture into subsystems. There are many cultural subsystems. These subsystems provide various behavioral expressions of worldview assumptions.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CULTURE (INCLUDING WORLDVIEW)

There are a number of characteristics of culture and worldview that may be listed. Space does not allow us to detail these. A fuller discussion of them may be found in my book Anthropology for Christian Witness (1996).

CHARACTERISTICS OF CULTURE AND WORLDVIEW

Culture/worldview provides a total design for living, dealing with every aspect of life and providing people with a way to regulate their lives.

Culture/worldview is a legacy from the past, learned as if it were absolute and perfect.

Culture/worldview makes sense to those within it.

But no culture/worldview seems to be perfectly adequate either to the realities of biology and environment or to the answering of all of the questions of a people.

Culture/worldview is an adaptive system, a mechanism for coping. It provides patterns and strategies to enable people to adapt to the physical and social conditions around them.

Culture tends to show more or less tight integration around its worldview. Worldview assumptions provide the "glue" with which people hold their culture together.

Culture/worldview is complex. No simple culture/worldview has ever been found.

Cultural/worldview practices and assumptions are based on group or "multipersonal" agreements. A social group unconsciously agrees to govern themselves according to their cultural patterns.

Culture/worldview is structure. It doesn't do anything. People do things either according to their cultural script or by modifying that script. Any supposed power of culture or worldview lies in the habits of people.

Though analytically we need to treat people and culture / worldview as separate entities, in real life people and culture / worldview function together.

Though it is tempting to present Christianity as the replacement of a traditional religion with the religious forms of Western Christianity, this is the wrong way to witness. Christianity is to be directed at the worldview of a people so that it will influence each of these subsystems from the very core of the culture. Truly converted people (whether in America or overseas) need to manifest biblical Christian attitudes and behavior in all of their cultural life, not just in their religious practices.

If we are to reach people for Christ and to see them gathered into Christ-honoring and culture-affirming churches, we will have to deal with them within their culture and in terms of their worldview. We will do this either wisely or unwisely. It is hoped that by understanding more of what culture and worldview are all about, we can deal with them more wisely than might otherwise have been the case.

Worldview and Culture Change

Significant culture change is always a matter of changes in the worldview. Just as anything that affects the roots of a tree influences its fruit, so anything that affects a people's worldview will affect the whole culture and, of course, the people who operate in terms of that culture.

Jesus knew this. When He wanted to get across important points, He aimed at the worldview level. Someone asked, "Who is my neighbor?" So He told them a story and then asked who was being neighborly (Lk 10:29-37). He was leading them to reconsider and, hopefully, change a basic value deep in their system.

On another occasion Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your friends, hate your enemies.' But now I tell you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you... If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, let him slap your left cheek too" (Matt 5:43,44, 39 GNB). Again the seeds were being planted for change at the deep worldview level.

When there is change at a deep level, however, it frequently throws things off balance. And any imbalance at the worldview center of a culture tends to cause difficulty through the rest of the culture. For example, when we in the U.S. believed at the worldview level that we could not be defeated in war, but then could not win in Vietnam, there was a deep sense of demoralization that rippled throughout the society, contributing greatly to the disequilibrium in our land at this time.

Major worldview problems can be caused when even good changes, introduced by well-meaning people such as missionaries, are applied at the surface level without due attention to the deep-level meanings people attach to them. For example, the almost universal missionary requirement that Africans who have more than one wife divorce the "extras" before they can be baptized has led both Christian and non-Christian Africans to certain undesirable worldview assumptions concerning the Christian God. Among these are: God is against the real leaders of African society, God is not in favor of women having help and companionship around the home, God wants men to be enslaved to a single wife (like whites seem to be), God favors divorce, social irresponsibility and even prostitution. None of these conclusions is irrational or far-fetched from their point of view. Though we believe God intends that each man have only one wife, this change was forced too quickly, unlike God's patient approach in the Old Testament where He took

many generations to do away with the custom.

As mentioned, even good changes, if they are introduced in the wrong way can lead to cultural disequilibrium and demoralization. Among the Ibibio people of southern Nigeria the message of God's gracious forgiveness resulted in many people turning to the Christian God because He was seen as much more lenient than their traditional god. But the converts saw no need to be righteous, since they believed God would always forgive them, whatever they did. In aboriginal Australia, among the Yir Yoront people, the introduction by missionaries of steel axes to replace the traditional stone axes had a powerful disruptive effect simply because the axes were given to the women and the younger men who traditionally were required to borrow axes from the older men. This change, though providing the people with better technology, challenged their worldview assumptions, leading to the destruction of the authority of the leaders, widespread social disruption and the near extinction of the people. Add to such examples the enormous damage (both cultural and spiritual) among non-Western peoples that has been done through the influence of Western schools (including those run by missions), and you can understand that there are at least a few valid reasons (among the invalid ones) for certain anthropologists to be critical of missionary work.

Contextualized (Appropriate) Christianity

The aim of Christian witness is to see people come to Christ and to be formed into groups we call churches that are both biblically and culturally appropriate. The process by means of which the church becomes "inculturated" in the life of a people has been called "indigenization," but now is more frequently referred to as "contextualization."

The contextualization of Christianity is part and parcel of the New Testament record. This is the process that the apostles were involved in as they took the Christian message that had come to them in Aramaic language and culture and communicated it to those who spoke Greek. In order to contextualize Christianity for Greek speakers, the apostles expressed Christian truth in the thought

patterns of their receptors. Indigenous words and concepts were used (and transformed in their usage) to deal with such topics as God, church, sin, conversion, repentance, initiation, "word" (logos) and most other areas of Christian life and practice.

The early Greek churches were in danger of being dominated by Jewish religious practices because those who led them were Jews. God, however, led the apostle Paul and others to struggle against the Jewish Christians to develop a contextualized Christianity for Greek-speaking Gentiles. In order to do this, Paul had to fight a running battle with many of the Jewish church leaders who felt that it was the job of Christian preachers to simply impose Jewish theological concepts on new converts (see Acts 15). These conservative Jews were the heretics against whom Paul fought for the right for Greek-speaking Christians to have the gospel expressed in their language and culture. We conclude from such passages as Acts 10 and 15 that it is of God that biblical Christianity be "reincarnated" in every language and culture at every point in history.

Biblically, the contextualization of Christianity not simply to be the passing on of a *product* that has been developed once for all in Europe or America. It is, rather, the imitating of the process that the early apostles went through. To return to our tree analogy, Christianity is not supposed to be like a tree that was nourished and grew in one society and then was

transplanted to a new cultural environment, with leaves, branches and fruit that mark it indelibly as a product of the sending society. The gospel is to be planted as a seed that will sprout within and be nourished by the rain and nutrients in the cultural soil of the receiving peoples. What sprouts from true gospel seed may look quite different above ground from the way it looked in the sending society, but beneath the ground, at the worldview level, the roots are to be the same and the life comes from the same source.

In a truly contextualized church, even though the surface level "tree" may look different, the essential message will be the same and the central doctrines of our faith will be in clear focus, since they are based on the same Bible. But the

ADDITIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF WORLDVIEW

A worldview consists of the assumptions (including images) underlying all cultural values, allegiances and behaviors.

Worldview assumptions and images underlie our perception of reality and responses to it.

There are two realities, REALITY as God sees and perceptual reality as we with human limitations see (1 Cor 13:12). Our worldview provides us with the lens, model or map by of which we perceive, interpret, structure and respond to God's REALITY.

Worldview assumptions or premises are learned from our elders, not reasoned out, but assumed to be trite without prior proof. It seldom occurs to us that there may be people of other groups who do not share our assumptions.

We organize our lives and experiences according to our worldview and seldom question it unless our experience challenges some of its assumptions.

In cross-cultural ministry, the problems that arise from differences in worldview are the most difficult to deal with.

formulation of that message and the relative prominence of many of the issues addressed will differ from society to society. For cultural reasons, such things as what the Bible says about family relationships, fear and evil spirits, and the advocacy of dance and prescribed rituals will be much more in focus in contextualized African Christianity than they might be in America.

God intends today's Christianity to be dynamically equivalent to New Testament Christianity, perceived by people today as excitingly relevant to the problems they struggle with. Though many non-Western churches are dominated by Western approaches to doctrine and worship, it is not scriptural that they remain so. There are, of course, similar basic problems (e. g., the problem of sin, the need for a relationship with Christ) that peoples of all societies need to deal with. But the ways those problems manifest themselves differ from people to people and need to be approached in different ways, culturally appropriate ways, for each cultural group.

Contextualizing Christianity is Very Risky

There are great risks involved in attempting to promote a Christianity that is culturally and biblically appropriate. The risk of syncretism is always present. Syncretism is the mixing of Christian assumptions with those worldview assumptions that are incompatible with Christianity so that the result is not biblical Christianity.

Syncretism exists whenever people practice Christian rituals because they consider them magic, or use the Bible to cast spells on people or, as in India, consider Jesus just another of many human manifestations of one of their deities, or as in Latin America, practice pagan divination and witchcraft right in the churches, or insist that people convert to a different Culture to become Christians. In America it is syncretistic, unbiblical Christianity that sees "the American way of life" as identical with biblical Christianity or assumes that, by generating enough faith we can pressure God into giving us whatever we want, or that we should out of love and tolerance regard homosexuality and even homosexual "marriage" to go unopposed despite clear biblical condemnations.

But there are at least two paths to syncretism. One is by importing foreign expressions of the faith and allowing the receiving people to attach their own worldview assumptions to these practices with little or no guidance from the missionaries. The result is a kind of "nativistic" Christianity or even, as in Latin America, "Christo-paganism." Roman

Catholic missionaries, especially, have fallen into this trap by assuming that when people practice so-called "Christian" rituals and use "Christian" terminology, they mean by them the same thing that European Christians mean.

The other way to syncretism is to so dominate a receiving

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people's practice of Christianity that both the surface-level practices and the deep-level assumptions are imported. The result is a totally foreign, unadapted kind of Christianity that requires people to worship and practice their faith according to foreign patterns and to develop a special set of worldview assumptions for church situations that are largely ignored in the rest of their lives. Their traditional worldview, then, remains almost untouched by biblical principles. This is the kind of Christianity evangelical Protestants have most often advocated, probably out of a fear of the first kind of syncretism. In many situations, this kind of Christianity is attracting some of those who are westernizing. But the masses of traditional people find little or nothing in Christianity that meets their needs, simply because it is presented and practiced in foreign ways to which they cannot connect.

Though we must be cautious concerning syncretism, there is a middle road that involves deep trust in the Holy Spirit's ability to guide people and the receiving people's ability to

God intends today's Christianity to be dynamically equivalent to New Testament Christianity, perceived by people today as excitingly relevant to the problems they struggle with.

follow that guidance. We, then, are to always point to the Holy Spirit (not ourselves) as the Guide while participating with them in discovering His leading. We can assure people that the Holy Spirit will always guide them in accordance with the Scriptures. Practicing this approach, missionary Jacob Loewen chose to never answer directly any questions from the new Christians such as, "What should we do?" Instead, he would ask them, "What is the Holy Spirit showing you?" Only after they had struggled with the answer to that question would he participate with them in seeking guidance, and even then his approach was to offer them at least three alternative approaches from which they might choose. In response to this approach they usually developed a fourth alternative that was uniquely their own. If that approach

worked they would continue it. If it did not, they felt free to change it in needed ways, since it was their own and did not come with the prestige that often accompanies the suggestions of respected outsiders.

Though the risk of syncretism is always present when Christians attempt to inculturate Christianity, it is a risk that needs to be taken in order that people experience New Testament Christianity. Whether in a pioneer situation or after a foreign brand of our faith has been practiced for years, the quest for a vital, dynamic, biblical, contextualized Christianity will require experimenting with new, culturally and biblically appropriate ways of understanding, presenting and practicing the "faith which once and for all God has given to his people" (Jude 3 GNB). It will especially require attention to what is going on at the worldview level. To this end the insights of anthropologists into culture and worldview can be harnessed to enable us to advocate a Christianity that is truly contextualized, truly relevant and truly meaningful.

Understanding Culture Aids Contextualization

Understandings of culture and worldview such as those presented above have helped us greatly in our attempts to understand what biblical and cultural appropriateness means. Among the understandings that have come from such studies are the following:

1. God loves people as they are culturally. As we see from the Bible, He is willing to work within everyone's culture and language without requiring them to convert to another culture.
2. The cultures and languages of the Bible are not special, God-made cultures and languages. They are normal human, indeed pagan cultures and languages, just like any of the more than 6,000 cultures and languages in our world today. The Bible demonstrates that God can use any pagan culture (even Greek or American) with its language to convey His messages to humans.
3. The Bible shows that God worked with His people in culturally appropriate ways. He took customs already in use and invested them with new meaning, guiding people to use them for His purposes and on the basis of new worldview understandings. Among such customs are circumcision, baptism, worship on mountains, sacrifice, the synagogue, the temple, anointing and praying. God wants churches today to be culturally appropriate, using most of the customs of a people but attaching new meaning to them by using them for God's purposes. In this way, people get changed at the worldview level as well as at the surface.

4. But God's working within culture never leaves that culture unchanged. God changes people first, then through them the cultural structures. Whatever changes are to take place in the structures are to be made by the people themselves on the basis of their understandings of the Scriptures and God's workings in their lives, led and empowered by the Holy Spirit, not pressured by an outsider.

5. Though contextualization within a new culture risks a nativistic kind of syncretism, a Christianity that is dominated by foreign cultural forms with imported meanings is anti-scriptural and just as syncretistic. We are, therefore, to follow scripture and risk the use of receptor culture forms.

What it Means to Be a World Christian

What, then, shall we call this discovery that can change us so radically and yet make us so healthy? And, what shall we call those who have experienced it?

By now it should be obvious that all Christians are born again *into* the Gap between God's world-wide purpose and the fulfillment of it. But there's more than one kind of *response* to that Gap.

Some are asleep, some are on retreat, and some are determined to stand in the Gap, particularly at its widest end where billions await the opportunity to hear of Christ for the first time. Some are heading into the "sunrise of missions" while others huddle in the shadows. Many move along at a sluggish pace, changing little in the Gap because of their own internal gap-of-unbelief. Others run the race before them setting no limits on how, where, or among whom God will use them.

Some are trapped in boxes of pea-sized Christianity, full of myths about missions that rob them of incentive to care about the unreached. Others have broken through into cause-Christianity, ready to reach out with God's love to the ends of the earth. They are determined to make Christ's global cause the unifying focus - the context - for all they are and do in the Gap. Yielded to the mediator, they are willing to be broken and remolded to fit in the Gap wherever they can make the most strategic impact. In turn, they're growing to know Christ, obey Him, and glorify Him as the mediator.

So, what shall we call the discovery that redirects Christians toward the needs of the Gap? And how shall we distinguish those who have made it?

Some Christians in the Gap are stunted by selfishness and petty preoccupations or by a cautious obedience and love reserved for the closest and easiest to care about. How shall we distinguish the others in the Gap whose growth in discipleship is unmistakable, with a vitality that comes only to those who help bring lost sinners from many nations home?

What shall we call this distinct group of Christians who have taken a stand that says:

David Bryant is founder and Director of Concerts of Prayer International, and Chairman of America's National Prayer Committee. Formerly he was a pastor and later missions specialist with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. *From In the Gap*, by David Bryant, 1979.

We want to accept personal responsibility for reaching some of earth's unreached, especially from among the billions at the widest end of the Gap who can only be reached through major new efforts by God's people. Among every people group where there is no vital, evangelizing Christian community there should be one, there must be one, there shall be one. Together we want to help make this happen.

For a moment, let's call them WORLD CHRISTIANS. Of course, any new term might be misunderstood. For example, some might think I said "worldly" Christians' not World Christians. By now we know, however, if you are one, you can't be the other. If you are one you don't *want* to be the other!

No, the term is not in your Bible concordance. Don't worry. It isn't another cliché like the words of the bumper sticker that read "Honk-if-the-Rapture-starts. Nor is it an attempt to label some spiritual elite who have a corner on a super-secret blessing. Rather, the term describes what all of us are meant to be and what some of us have started to become.

The term "World Christian" may have been coined first by Daniel Fleming in a 1920 YMCA book entitled *Marks of a*

We want to accept personal responsibility for reaching some of earth's unreached, especially from among the billions at the widest end of the Gap who can only be reached through major new efforts by God's people.

World Christian. More recently the term has appeared in publications of such groups as the World Team missions, Conservation Baptist Foreign Missionary Society, United Presbyterian Center for Mission Studies, the Mission Renewal Teams, Inc., and the Fellowship of World Christians, as well as Campus Crusade for Christ and Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship.

A World Christian isn't better than other Christians. But by God's grace, he has made a discovery so important that life can never be the same again. He has discovered the truth about the Gap, the fact that he is already in it, and the call of Christ to believe, think, plan, and act accordingly. By faith, he has chosen to *stand* in the Gap as a result.

Some World Christians are missionaries who stand in the Gap by physically crossing major human barriers (cultural, political, etc.) to bring the gospel to those who can hear no other way. But every Christian is meant to be a World Christian, whether you physically "go," or "stay at home" to provide the sacrificial love, prayers, training, money, and quality of corporate life that backs the witness of those who "go."

World Christians are day-to-day disciples for whom Christ's global cause has become the integrating, overriding priority for all that He is for them. Like disciples should, they

actively investigate all that their Master's Great Commission means. Then they act on what they learn.

World Christians are Christians whose life-directions have been solidly transformed by a world vision. This is not a term for frustrated Christians who feel trapped into the world missionary movement and sporadically push a few buttons to say they've done their part. Having caught a vision, World Christians want to keep that vision and obey it unhesitatingly.

World Christians are (in Corrie Ten Boom's phrase) tramps for the Lord who have left their hiding places to roam the Gap with the Savior. They are heaven's expatriates, camping where the Kingdom is best served. They are earth's dispossessed, who've journeyed forth to give a dying world not only the gospel but their own souls as well. They are members of God's global dispersion down through history and out through the nations, reaching the unreached and blessing the families of earth.

By taking three steps we become World Christians. First, World Christians *catch* a world vision. They see the cause the way God sees it. They see the full scope of the Gap. Next, World Christians *keep* that world vision. They put the cause at the heart of their life in Christ. They put their life at the heart of the Gap. Then World Christians *obey* their world vision. Together they develop a strategy that makes a lasting impact on the cause, particularly at the widest end of the Gap.

Many years ago a World Christian named John R. Mott, leader of the Student Volunteer Movement that sent out 20,000 new missionaries, outlined similar steps:

An enterprise which aims at the evangelization of the whole world in a generation, and contemplates the ultimate establishment of the Kingdom of Christ, requires that its leaders be Christian statesmen with far-seeing views, with comprehensive plans, with power of initiative, and with victorious faith.

Catch! Keep! Obey! - these are the three steps to becoming a World Christian. Take a closer look:

Step One: Catch a World Vision

- See God's world-wide *purpose* in Christ
- See a world full of *possibilities* through Christ
- See a world full of *people* without Christ
- See my world-sized part with Christ

Step Two: Keep a World Vision

- Be a World Christian
- Join with other World Christians

Step Three: Obey a World Vision

- Obey as you regularly *build* your vision
- Obey as you *reach out* directly in love
- Obey as you *give* your vision to other Christians
- Obey as you pray your vision back to God.
- How can someone know if they've taken these three basic

STEP ONE: Have I caught a world vision?

PURPOSE: Do I see the big picture of Christ's global cause from God's point of view?

POSSIBILITIES: Do I see the Church's potential in our generation for closing the Gap between God's world-wide purpose and its fulfillment?

PEOPLE: Do I see the great scope of the earth's unreached peoples, especially the billions at the widest end of the Gap who have yet to clearly hear the gospel?

PART: Do I believe that I, along with other Christians, can

STEP TWO: Have I kept a world vision?

BE: Am I willing to stand in the Gap with Christ, to unite my whole relationship with Him around His global cause?

JOIN: Am I willing to team-up with other World Christians to stand in the Gap together? **PLAN:** Am I willing to design specific ways to obey my world vision and help close the Gap?

PLAN: Am I willing to design specific ways to obey my world

STEP THREE: Do I obey a world vision?

BUILD: Do I take time to study the cause? Am I letting my world vision grow?

REACH OUT: Do I personally get involved in the cause? Am I helping to reach unreached peoples, especially at the widest end of the Gap?

GIVE: Do I transfer my vision to other Christians? Am I seeking more World Christians to stand in the Gap and serve the cause?

Ultimately, however, becoming a World Christian goes beyond "steps" that we take. It is the gracious work of Christ Himself! Our faith must always be in Him, not in any simple three-step process. It is Christ who opens us up to catch His world vision. He alone anchors us to that vision and then empowers us to effectively obey it.

Catch The Vision

God is doing amazing things in our world. He's sending Navajo missionaries to the Laplanders and European Gypsy believers to Madagascar. He's shaking up Christian finances for His worldwide Cause, blasting open the Iron Curtain and riddling China with a searing spiritual hunger. God is raising up a movement of excited disciples ready to go anywhere and do anything.

This article is an excerpt from the US Center for World Mission web page. www.uscwm.org

Followers of Jesus Christ are increasing by more than 90,000 every day. Eminent world watchers have documented an unprecedented initiative of God in this final decade of the 20th century, during these closing years of the second millennium.

Maybe your heart is restless to be a part of His big picture. Maybe you're restless to catch a new vision for your life.

What Are You Doing?

Think over the energy you're throwing into life now-trying to be the best you can be, trying to get ahead, to be a better Christian, a better family member, a better you.

Why work so hard?

Why ask so often for God's blessing on your life?

If it's to have a nicer, happier life, that's not a bad goal. Especially since that's what heaven will be-an easier, nicer existence. But if that were God's purpose for you right now, He would simply take you home to heaven, right? In the here-and-now, Biblical discipleship is never described as "nice" or "easy."

The Cause

God does want to bless you. But not to make your life easy. He'll bless you because He's got a demanding job for you-a specific task, one that lays down rails to guide your major life decisions, to keep you from spinning your wheels in Christian self-improvement.

Go ahead: Break out of the Christian-culture idea that to join God's family is to become part of a nice, privileged group. It's more like being born into a family business-everybody is naturally expected to take part in the Father's work. Do you know what the Father is doing these days?

How many times have you heard or given testimonies about God's wonderful plan for your life? Just how clear is that plan to you?

An Unchanging Purpose

Get a grip on your Bible. It spells out how to break through to the crystal-clear, specific task God has for you in His historic purpose-in His "family business." He does have a wonderful plan for your life!

Psalm 67 is a perfect overview of God's purpose:

*May God be gracious to us and bless us
And make His face shine upon us;
that Your ways may be known on the earth,
Your salvation among all nations.
... God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth
will fear Him.*

It's not too hard to figure out that God has blessed us for a specific purpose, right? Notice too, Jesus' summary of Scripture and His role in fulfilling messianic prophecy:

"This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" Luke 24:46-47.

What you'll see over and over in these passages about God's purpose on earth are terms such as peoples, nations, families, languages, tribes, the Gentiles or even Greeks-all signifying the idea of "people groups." A people group, according to Christian anthropologists and mission experts, is the largest ethnic group within which the

Gospel can spread without being stopped by barriers such as language or culture.

Peoples Power

The 70 people groups formed at the Tower of Babel had splintered into about 60,000 by the time of Christ-when He commanded us to make disciples of every "nation" or people group.

God is carrying out His unchanging purpose through His obedient servants around the globe.

Since then, these groups have merged through communication, trade and primarily the reconciling power of the Gospel, into about 24,000 distinct people groups.

To learn more of God's heart for the world as revealed in Scriptures, read through the following references. (If time allows, read the context of each verse as well). They summarize God's "unchanging purpose" on earth-to bless His

people, and through them, to bless every people group on earth.

Fourteen thousand people groups are currently being disciplined. The other 10,000—mostly among the Muslim, Han Chinese, Hindu, Buddhist and tribal cultures—have no church among them and little or no mission work.

Genesis 12:1-3, 18:18, 22:17-18, 26:4,5, 28:14;

2 Chronicles 6:32-33;

Psalms 67, 96, 105;

Isaiah 49:6, 51:4, 56:6-8;

Zechariah 2:11; Malachi 1:11;

Matthew 28:18-20;

Luke 2:30-32, 24:45-47;

Acts 1:8;

Romans 1:5, 10:13-15, 15:8-24, 16:25-27;

Galatians 3, verses 8, 14 & 29;

Ephesians 3:1-6;

Revelation 5:9; 7:9.

India, the Muslim/ Nomadic Fezara of Sudan, the Folk/ Religionist Manchu of China, the Shamanistic Ulchi of Russia and about 9,994 others.

Where are they?

In the remote jungles of Irian Jaya, in the ethnic neighborhoods of Berlin and nearly every major metropolitan city in the world, on Native American Indian reservations in the United States, in restricted-access countries, in India, in....

Your Vision

If you have a vision to share Christ in your neighborhood, your town or even all of your country, rejoice! Reaching your Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria is critical. But keep in mind that your country—no matter how large—represents only a very small part of our planet's total population—and a very small part of God's heart for the world.

It's also important to realize that God never expected or asked that we create a perfect society. If we get it in our minds that we must totally transform and "save" our city or country before we move on to other areas, we never will move on!

A "healthy" local church or body of believers walking in obedience to the Word of God will be active in two major areas:

Evangelism and discipleship in their local area and,

Assisting in the "whole Church" task of establishing a

church movement in every remaining unreached people group—a church movement which can effectively do in those peoples what their church does back home.

So clothe the needy and feed the hungry, witness across the street and stand up for righteousness in your society with an expanded vision of God's whole heart for the uttermost parts of the world!

And when you win your neighbors to Christ, equip them to join the Cause of reaching every people group with the Gospel. Make sure that you and your church are a part of God's historic purpose to add to the Body of Christ those purchased with His blood "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation."

God is carrying out His unchanging purpose (see Hebrews 6:17 and context) through His obedient servants around the globe. And the pace of completing that purpose is accelerating rapidly in this final decade of the century!

God has a job for you, and it has to do with reaching the remaining 10,000 unreached people groups on this planet.

Lessons From The Past

Historically, the modern Protestant movements to reach the ends of the earth with God's blessing have occurred in waves. The first era, championed by William Carey in the late 1700s, penetrated the coastlands of the globe's continents. The second, spearheaded by Hudson Taylor around 1865, penetrated the inland regions of many countries.

The third wave, responding to Cameron Townsend and Donald McGavran's call to go to all the remaining "hidden" or "unreached peoples," is nearing completion in this last decade before the year 2000.

Each wave has been characterized by student activism, revival and prayer movements. This last wave is no different.

We're living at a very interesting point in the history of the world, in the unfolding of God's unchanging purpose.

With unprecedented technological breakthroughs in cultural studies, communication and travel, we are better equipped than ever before to reach the whole world! And Christians worldwide are getting excited, realistic and specific about throwing themselves into the final era of God's unchanging.

The Remaining Task

While we're working so hard to improve our lives, to deepen our fellowships, to seek God's healing for our families and our land, let's simply face the fact: We haven't yet finished the missionary assignment that Jesus gave us.

Can we do it? It seems like an intimidating task. But God will accomplish His purpose. The gates of hell that lock in the unreached peoples of the world can't stand against His church. At the end of time Christ will be exalted with the song: "...you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9).

So the question isn't "Can we do it?" but rather "Will we do it?"

The fact is, the "Lord of the harvest" has showered His Church with more than enough resources to complete the task:

Participating in what God is doing will mean shifting our expectations from being blessed to becoming a blessing. Refusing to embrace the vision of being a blessing was a key problem in Old Testament Israel. (Haggai's even spoke of this.)

Missions is not popular is because active participation in the big picture of God's plan is also dangerous. It's the danger of signing on in wartime as a soldier who doesn't "entangle himself in the affairs of everyday life" (2 Timothy 2:4).

Battling the "powers and world forces" (Ephesians 6:12) that have bound these 10,000 groups for thousands of years means spiritual warfare. And warfare means casualties, body counts, blood, sweat and tears.

Think about it.

Is there any good reason you and your fellowship don't take seriously your part in God's unchanging purpose to disciple the nations? Have you (or will you) allow Christ and His perfect plan to be at the very center of your life?

Look What God Is Doing!

3,000 new churches are opening every week worldwide.

The Church in Africa is increasing by 20,000 per day on the average; the southern part of that continent was 3% Christian in 1900 and is nearly 60% Christian today.

Worldwide, Christianity is growing at the rate of 90,000 new believers every day.

More Muslims in Iran have come to Christ since 1980 than in the previous 1,000 years combined.

In 1900, Korea had no Protestant church; it was deemed "impossible to penetrate." Today Korea is 35% Christian with 7,000 churches in the city of Seoul alone.

In Islamic (Muslim) Indonesia, the percentage of Christians is so high the government won't print the statistic-which is probably nearing 15% of the population.

After 70 years of oppression in Russia, people who are officially Christians number about 85 million-56% of the population. In one Siberian city people are being baptized 24 hours a day!

God is creatively sending Chinese believers to reach Tibetans, Hondurans to reach North African Muslims and Navajos to reach Laplanders. There are currently more than 60,000 non-Western missionaries from over 1,000 non-Western mission agencies. Many of these are serving in places which are hostile to Western missionaries.

Where the church has been planted, it's growing like wildfire. The Good News is breaking loose worldwide: In AD 100, only one in every 360 people was an active believer. Today one in ten people is an active believer (9 to 1)

In AD 100 there were 12 unreached people groups per congregation of believers. Today, with six million churches worldwide, there are 600 congregations for every remaining unreached people group!

That's what your God is doing.

What will you do?

What will you do with your restlessness to be a part of God's exciting, dangerous plan?

○ I'll obey. I affirm my commitment to be part of God's work to disciple the "nations," the people groups of the world (Matthew 28:19) whether that means staying on the home front and serving as a "sender" or going and serving here or abroad as a missionary.

○ I'll pray specifically for His will to be done on earth-that every people group may hear and that laborers will be thrust forth into the harvest (Matthew 9:37-38).

○ I'll live according to God's purpose. I'll evaluate my priorities and begin to adjust my lifestyle according to God's purpose (Matthew 6:24-33; 10:37-39). I'll give to efforts to reach the unreached peoples.

○ I'll study. I'll learn everything I can about the big picture of God's purpose in Scripture (see Luke 24:45-47), current mission efforts, global events and research on unreached people groups.

○ I'll link up. I'll become accountable to other believers to pray, study, give, mobilize, send or go in my part of God's plan (Hebrews 10:24-25).

○ I'll share this vision. Right here in my region I'll help spread the news of what God is doing worldwide.

○ I'll give my time. I'll devote 5 or 10 hours every week helping my church or student fellowship reach out to the unreached peoples of the world.