

Mission Text Book
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Chapter 1

A Theology of Mission I Biblical & Theological Foundation for Mission

When Jesus spoke to his disciples at the end of Matthew 28, he presented them with a challenge that would not only occupy them for the rest of their lives, it would also be the preoccupation of the church to the present day. In this Great Commission Jesus commanded his followers to '*Go and make disciples of all nations*' (v.19). The task was an enormous one, yet Jesus gave this command as the one to whom all '*authority in heaven and on earth*' (v.18) had been given. This was a command that could not be disobeyed.

God in Creation

Christians throughout the centuries have been inspired and challenged by the Great Commission to bring the gospel to every continent on earth. These verses have been quoted in missionary meetings and conferences, and many have given up career and home comforts in response, and spent themselves on the work of mission. But however powerful and compelling this Great Commission is, it nevertheless forms only a small fraction of the biblical basis for mission.

The starting point of any theology of mission must be firmly rooted in the person of God, for at the very heart of mission, there is a God who wishes to reach out and embrace people in His love. As the biblical writers attempted to describe something of the character of God, they recognized that God was a being who was self-existent, that is, God does not need anything else in order to exist. He is a being who is absolutely self-sufficient, needing nothing outside of Himself either to enhance his existence, or prolong it. This, of course, is in marked contrast to human beings who are thoroughly dependant on each other and their environment for survival.

Jesus talked about the self-existence of God in John 5:26, stating that God has life '*in Himself*'. God did not receive life from any other source, but is always the living God¹. Although there was a time when the universe did not exist, there never was a time when God was not. God alone is eternal, so

¹ DA Carson, The Gospel According to John, p.256

in eternity past God was able to exist successfully, alone. It is for this reason that Paul was able to state to the Athenians that God is *'not served by human hands, as though he needed anything'* (Acts 17:25).

The question which needs to be asked is this, if God did not need anything, then why should he make human beings? It would be wrong to suggest that there was a sense in which God was lonely². If this were the case then we would need to conclude that God felt his existence was somehow inadequate prior to the creation of humanity. What is more, the very fact that God exists in trinity indicates that for all eternity there was a loving relationship between the different persons of the Trinity.

Although God does not need us, we still need to explain the reason for Him creating us. At least part of the reason must be that although self-existent, God is love and his creation of human beings stemmed from a desire to extend His love beyond Himself and reach out to others. The creation of the human race was therefore a selfless expression of divine love, creating humans so that God could embrace them. God's intention in creating the human race was that a relationship could be forged between the creator and His creatures. For this reason we are made in the image of God³. This image enables us to relate intelligently to God in a way that no other part of the created order can.

Given this fact, it is not difficult to see the link between God as a creator, and mission. By His very nature God made man so that he could embrace Him in His love. The work of mission involves reaching out to people who are estranged from God because of sin, and bringing them back into the very relationship with God for which they were created. Mission is therefore about satisfying God's desire to have a relationship with humanity.

God in Providence

God's love for humanity is not just seen in creation, but also in His providential care for the world⁴. God is portrayed in the Bible as the

² Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, p.161

³ There is considerable debate about the precise nature of the image of God in man. The most likely explanation is that it is the personality that we as humans have, incorporating intelligence, will, feelings and self-awareness. It makes us transcendent in the physical creation and able to enjoy a relationship with God.

⁴ By providence we mean the care that God demonstrates over the created order. God has not left the world to its own devices as the Deists suggest. Rather He is actively involved in His creation and He exercises government and preservation over creation so that nothing happens that is beyond His control.

absolute ruler of the universe. There is an old adage that states, ‘power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely’. If we were to look at some of the powerful leaders in history we would observe the truthfulness of this statement. The world’s dictators have had a tendency to use their power and authority to crush their opponents and use their influence to benefit themselves. God is all powerful, there is nothing that He cannot do and no power can restrain Him. Yet despite this awesome power, God is utterly benevolent, using His power to bless and sustain the world⁵. Psalm 145:16 pictures God supplying the need of every living thing. This is not a picture of a distant potentate, rather the Psalmist sees God as an active carer of His creation, one who is personally involved in meeting the needs of his creatures⁶.

These acts of providence, though personal, are nevertheless general in nature. But in a much more specific sense God’s providence was seen in His preservation of the nation of Israel⁷. Israel was chosen as a nation to be in a covenantal relationship with God. Within the terms of this covenant, the people were to be faithful to God and worship Him alone. For His part God would care for them in a special way and look after their interests. God’s care for them can be seen throughout the Old Testament, not least in their liberation from Egypt and the ongoing guidance and support that God gave them as they made their way to the promised land.

God’s providence can also be seen in the experience of Christians today⁸. Many can testify to God’s protection in their lives during particular times of danger, or to specific physical provisions in answer to specific prayer. Indeed the Christian life involves a living relationship with God in which God lovingly responds to our daily needs. Jesus himself taught us to pray, ‘*give us today our daily bread*’ (Matt.6:11), implying that whatever our profession or social status, we must recognize our daily dependence on the gracious providential care of God.

5 Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, p.414-419. Erickson defines providence as God’s ‘maintaining his creation in existence. It involves God’s protection of his creation against harm and destruction, and his provision for the needs of the elements or members of creation.’

6 Spurgeon pictures God as a king who rules his kingdom in such a way as his subjects are provided for (*Treasury of David*, vol. III p.380).

7 Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, p.414-415.

8 Berkhof helpfully lists the recipients of God’s providence. They are: the universe, the physical world, brute creation, nations, man, man in his career, chance occurrences, the righteous, God’s people, those who pray, the wicked (*Systematic Theology*, p.168).

As creator God wishes to lovingly embrace His creation. As provider He wishes to care for his creation. This too is a missionary quality. The job of mission is to bring people into a position where they can experience the fullness of God's providence. All men are the subjects of providence, but in a particular way God wishes to care for us as 'His people' and to providentially respond to our prayers. When we bring people to faith in Jesus Christ, they become the children of God and are therefore cared for by a loving Father. Mission therefore is about satisfying God's desire to providentially care for His people.

God in His Attributes

God's attributes also enable us to see that He is a God of mission. In 1 John 1:5 we read that '*God is light*'. George Peters states that 'This metaphor is full of meaning, especially as it refers to the outgoing of God, and consequently as it relates to missions'⁹. Throughout scripture, light has been linked with the concepts of revelation and salvation¹⁰. Lenski makes the point Light in the Bible symbolized flawless perfection (Ps.104:2). We often use the metaphor of light in contrast to darkness. That which is light is pure, and that which is dark is evil. Jesus was described as the '*Light that shines in the darkness*' (John 1:5). His mission was to expose that darkness and usher in God's cleansing light. His very presence was an invasion of the darkness and a challenge to its power. Lenski makes the point that light shines by its very nature and that Christ would inevitably impact darkness simply by being where darkness was¹¹.

Light also symbolizes illumination. Not only are men stumbling about in the darkness of sin, but being fallen creatures, they do not know how to live. As God's light shines, so they can see the way ahead and know how to live their lives. Jesus described himself as the '*Light of the world*' (John 8:12). He is the one who can enlighten our path, and apart from a relationship with him, there can be no spiritual light¹².

This metaphor of light clearly emphasizes God's missionary nature. He wishes to reach out to a world that has fallen and has lost its way. God sent His son into the world to be the light for every man (John 1:9). As

9 George Peters, A Biblical Theology of Missions, p.58.

10 Howard Marshall, The Epistles of John, p.109.

11 RCH Lenski, St. John's Gospel, p.44.

12 Carl Laney, John, p.158.

Christians we also reflect something of the light of Christ, and when we engage in mission, we direct people's attention to God's light so that they can benefit from it.

God is not only pictured as being light, God is also love. As we have already noted, His love is evidenced in creation and providence, but there are many more references in scripture to His love, and his love is seen as an innate quality (1 Jn.4:8, 16). It would be important to note that God is not just capable of loving. As human beings we are capable of loving, but our love is not absolute. At best it is failing and inconsistent. But God *is love*. It is part of His very nature to love, and with a passion that human beings are simply not capable of. As one writer puts it 'The words God is love mean not that loving is only one of God's activities, but rather that all of his activity is loving activity'¹³.

That being the case, it is in the very nature of God to be gracious to a sinful world. When we do the work of mission we are telling a hurting world that God is love and wants to treat them with kindness, if only they are willing to receive God's love. Mission is therefore about finding avenues for God to express His love practically towards a fallen humanity.

Old Testament Mission Motifs

Mission is found not just in the nature of God and his work, it can also be found in abundance within the plotline of the Bible. In the early chapters of Genesis we see both the judgment of God because of sin, and also pictures of God's salvation. When God created man he gave him freedom. This freedom was risky as it meant that man had the choice to reject God and to be disobedient¹⁴. This was the path that man chose, and the fall brought with it the disastrous consequences of alienation from God and death. But just as all seemed to be lost, we find God looking for Adam (Gen.3:9). God pronounced sentence on Adam and Eve because of their sin (v.16-19), but also provided clothes for them made from animal skin. This was primarily a covering to hide the shame of their nakedness, but as the garments were made from animal skin, this is an early indication that death of one creature was needed to cover the shame of another¹⁵.

¹³ John Stott, *The Letters of John*, p.163

¹⁴ Clark Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, p.74. Pinnock makes the important point that only a free creature would be able to respond to God with love so our freedom is an integral part of our relationship with God.

¹⁵ Calvin believed that the skins were made of leather not as an indication of sacrifice, but because leather

In Genesis 6 we see a similar cycle. The degeneration of the human race was there to be seen. This was an ancient society that had become utterly perverse in both thought and action (v.6). God decided to act in judgment by sending a severe flood which would wipe out the inhabitation of the earth. But there was one man who pleased God. Noah was a righteous man who had resisted the allure of his corrupt society. In response to Noah's blameless life God provided salvation in the midst of the judgment that was to come. This salvation would come in the form of an Ark which Noah was commanded to build. He and his family took refuge in the Ark during the flood, and when they came through unscathed, they offered up a sacrifice of thanks to God for the salvation He had provided¹⁶.

In Genesis 12 we begin to see the relationship developing between God and Abraham. This relationship would lead to a covenant that has implications for the whole world. The chapter opens with God calling Abram to leave his native land and go to a land that God would lead him to. Abram was a city dweller and the move northward to an unknown place would therefore have been traumatic, not least because he was leaving behind everything that would have given him personal security¹⁷. Nevertheless Abram obeyed the call and as a result received a great blessing from God (v2,3).

From a missiological point of view the importance of this passage lies not so much in God's promise to bless Abram, but rather God's promise to bless the nations of the world through Abram. It is not so much that Abram was to be an evangelist reaching out to the nations, but that Abram was to be a mediator of blessing to the nations¹⁸. Ultimately through the establishment

clothes were of a more degrading appearance than clothes made of linen or wool. It was a reminder to Adam of his vileness (Genesis p.182). Kidner sees the leather clothes as meeting the immediate needs rather than symbolizing the atonement (Genesis p.72). However Leupold is more convincing (Genesis p.78,79). He states 'That God does provide for the proper clothing for man's body does suggest and does render reasonable the conclusion that He will provide for the proper covering of man's guilty soul'.

16 Wenham makes the point that Noah's righteous behavior and his post-flood sacrifice were evidence of a pre-existing covenant with God (Genesis p.206). The rainbow was also evidence that God's covenant with Noah was then extended to all mankind. The world now had a new beginning and Noah, like Adam, was to be fruitful and fill the earth (Genesis 9:1 cf 1:28).

17 Joyce Baldwin, Genesis 12-50, p.28. Some scholars such as Westerman have argued that Abram being a semi-nomadic would have found it relatively easy to leave Ur and that there was probably some crisis in his life to which the call of God was a solution. But Wenham points out that this suggestion is groundless (Genesis 1-15, p.274).

18 Kostenberger & O'Brien, Salvation to the Ends of the Earth, p.30. Kostenberger notes that the emphasis of this pericope is on the final clause. It could be translated 'win for themselves a blessing'. In other words, rather than Israel being an evangelistic nation, the nations can make pilgrimage to Israel to find God. This kind of proselytization was typical within the Old Testament.

of a people of God, the world would have a role model to live by. People from every nation could come into contact with the living God through Israel, and could be saved. It is for this reason that the 10 Commandments were of such importance. They were not just a guide for Israel, they were God's shop window to the world.

When we move into the book of Exodus, we see God's missionary purposes unfolding once more. The Children of Israel endured 400 years of slavery in Egypt. It is not difficult to see a parallel between their helpless misery and that of all sinners who are held in bondage to sin. But God's plan was not just to set them free, but also to bless them by giving them the land of Canaan (Ex.3:8)¹⁹.

Pharaoh, of course, was stubborn, and initially was unwilling to let the Israelites go. But this would not frustrate God's plans to set His people free. In a devastating series of plagues he broke Egypt economically. The final plague was to be the most severe. In this plague the firstborn of Egypt would be put to death (Ex.12:12). Only children living in houses where blood had been put on the doorframes would be safe²⁰. Here the sacrifice of a lamb would point forward to the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, who is our ultimate protection against judgment. This picture of the work of Christ nevertheless demonstrates the God was active in saving His people and therefore engaging in the work of mission.

As the exodus continues and then becomes the conquest of Canaan, it is interesting to note how, although the nation of Israel was to be separate and holy, it was also to be inclusive. In this way non-Jews were still reached and the nations were being blessed by being able to come into contact with the living God through His agent Israel (Ex.12:38; Josh.6:25 ; 2 Sam.11:3, 15:19-23 ; Ex.12:48 ; 22:21).

Kostenberger notes that this inclusiveness had its limits, for example intermarriage was forbidden by leaders like Nehemiah (Neh.13:23-27)²¹. However this in no way detracts from the mission emphasis of the Old Testament. After all, mixed marriages were forbidden because they led to

¹⁹ Alan Cole, Exodus, p.28

²⁰ Durham notes that this final plague was to 'defeat all the gods of Egypt' (Exodus, p.154). He states that verse 12 ends with the statement 'I am Lord'. In doing so he was proving his supremacy over the forces of evil even as he was liberating his people from bondage.

²¹ Kostenberger & O'Brien, Salvation to the Ends of the Earth, p.36.

compromise, but those gentiles who were willing to serve God were welcomed. It is also interesting to note the eschatological emphasis on mission in the Old Testament. Writers like Isaiah look forward to a reconstituted Israel that will be gathered together along with the gentiles (Isa.2:2-4; chs.60-61).

It would be wrong to leave the Old Testament without giving due attention to one instance of cross-cultural mission that takes place in the book of Jonah. In general, Israel was a blessing to the nations because they were able to come to her and in doing so find God. In the case of Jonah, however, he is sent as a missionary to the gentiles with a plan for their salvation²². The most interesting feature of the book of Jonah is God's unstinting determination that the people of Nineveh should hear the message. When Jonah was first called he was at best an unwilling missionary. He fled to Tarshish, which was in the opposite direction to Nineveh. Clearly his desire was to get as far away from his calling and from God as possible. The Jews were not great seafarers and Jonah's willingness to risk a difficult sea journey rather than obey the call demonstrates just how opposed he was to bringing God's message to Nineveh²³.

God's loving care for Nineveh was not only greater than Jonah's unwillingness, God's power was also more than Jonah could resist²⁴. By sending a storm, and then providing transport in the form of a giant fish, God determined that Jonah would change his mind and go to Nineveh after all. Throughout the whole episode, God was the prime mover, not Jonah. Here we are presented with a God who is far more willing to have compassion for the lost than those he sends. A God who wants the message of salvation to be carried to the uttermost parts of the world and to the gravest of sinners.

22 Scholars vary in their views as to how much of a missionary mandate can be seen in the book of Jonah. Bright believed that the writer of the book not only felt an active obligation to win gentiles, but was also concerned by the lack of missionary zeal among his peers (A History of Israel, p.432). Kostenberger and O'Brien are more cautious. They recognize that the book says something about God's plans for the gentiles but do not see Jonah as a missionary role model (Salvation to the Ends of the Earth, p.45). This position is too understated. Dillard and Longman recognize two important features in the book (An Introduction to the Old Testament). Firstly, Jonah's lack of willingness to serve God is contrasted with the spiritual responsiveness of the pagans. Secondly, God expresses concern for the 'great city' (4:11) demonstrating that He is the God of the universe and not just Israel.

23 Leslie Allen, Jonah, p.205.

24 Walter Kaiser puts it beautifully when he states 'The word of God did triumph despite the prophets lack of theological application of the universal offer of the gospel...and for failing to accept the fact that God was also the God of their (his) enemies (Mission in the Old Testament p.69).

New Testament Mission Motifs

If mission is clearly seen in the pages of the Old Testament, it can be seen even more in the New Testament. Indeed as Herbert Kane points out ‘we find the idea of mission on almost every page’²⁵. In the gospels we are presented with Jesus, the first and greatest missionary of the New Testament, and the key to God’s plans for the salvation of the world. Then in Acts we have the ongoing missionary story of the early church. This is followed by the epistles which are basically follow-up letters, designed to encourage new Christians who were the product of missionary endeavour. Finally there in the book of Revelation. Here all those who have been saved by the mission that God inaugurated and carried out throughout human history, bow before their Savoir in worship. This is an eternal feed-back session in which believers celebrate all that God has done for them. George Peters sums up the missiological case for the New Testament by stating ‘There is perhaps little theology of missions as such in the New Testament because it is in its totality a missionary theology, the theology of a group of missionaries and a theology of a missionary movement’²⁶.

The natural place to start finding mission texts in the New Testament is in the gospels, and each gospel has something to say about mission. When we begin reading through the Gospel of John, for instance, we see the evangelist beginning his account by dealing with the issue of the incarnation. He defines what the incarnation means by stating that, ‘*the word became flesh*’ (1:14), and explains why Christ came into the world. Christ came as a light for mankind (1:4), to reveal God to us (1:14), and to bring us into God’s family (1:12). He would do this by coming as the Lamb of God to bear away the sins of the world (1:29,36). He became flesh so that the glory of God could be revealed to all flesh and that all peoples could be united in God’s family²⁷. This is the essence of mission. Mission involves revealing God to men so that they respond to Him. According to John this is exactly why Jesus came to earth, and he goes on throughout the book to focus on the mission of Jesus.

At the very heart of John’s message are the ‘signs’, seven in total, that authenticate the ministry and mission of Jesus. These signs are miracles that

25 Herbert Kane, *The Christian World Mission*, p.28.

26 George Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions*, p.131.

27 George Beasley-Murray, *John*, p.16.

Jesus performs, and each one is surrounded by a body of teaching. The claims that Jesus makes in these teaching sections are authenticated by the fact that he is able to enact the miracle. This is, in effect, a piece of circular reasoning. Jesus makes a claim about himself and his messianic attributes, and then he works a miracle so that there can be no doubt about the validity of his claim²⁸. The signs are: the changing of water into wine (2:1-11); the cleansing of the temple (2:18-21); the healing of the nobleman's son (4:46-54); the healing of the lame man (5:1-15); the feeding of the multitude (6:1-15); the healing of the blind man (ch.9); and the raising of Lazarus (ch.11). Though space does not permit an exposition of these themes, John is demonstrating a number of things about Jesus. From the first sign he is demonstrating that Jesus is superior to the Jewish religious system with all its rituals. From the second (Jn.4:54), that he is God's true temple, the place where men can come into fellowship with God. Then from signs three and four John shows that Jesus has power over life and death and that he will give life to those who ask, but judge those who do not seek him. Sign five demonstrates that Jesus can completely satisfy our deepest need, and that he is the source of life. John uses the sixth sign to show that Jesus brings light into the world helping us to see and get a proper perspective, including of our sin. Finally, the seventh sign gives proof that Jesus has power over death and can repair all the damage that has been caused by sin. When analysed all of these signs have clear missiological significance.

John also pictures Jesus as the 'sent one'. This may well be because in Jewish thought it was common for a father to send his son if there was an important message to be delivered²⁹. This message involves the salvation of everyone who believes (3:16), and Jesus was entrusted with it. A number of caveats need to be introduced here. Firstly, Jesus emphasized the closeness of his relationship with his father, the sender (7:29; 8:16). Secondly, he saw it as his duty to encourage others to honour his Father, the sender (7:18). Thirdly, He was obedient to the sender's will (4:34). Fourthly, the message he proclaimed was not his own, but a message from his Father, the sender (7:16). In each of these areas Jesus was obedient and becomes our missionary role model.

As well as dealing with the issue of Jesus being sent, John also states that the followers of Jesus also have a mission. Their mission is subordinate to the

28 Kostenberger & O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, p.206.

29 Kostenberger & O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, p.209.

mission of Jesus (1:15), but it is also related to it. Jesus himself sent his followers (20:21). John gives us some indication of what their mission involves. They are to harvest (4:38), bear fruit (15:8,16) and witness (15:27). Interestingly Jesus also told them that they would be able to forgive sins (20:23). This does not mean that any individual has the authority to declare sins forgiven. Rather the church as a collective body continues the work of Christ by declaring to the world the message of salvation, the proclamation of which involves explaining how sins can be forgiven³⁰.

Matthew too is full of mission overtures. As early as the first chapter we are told that Jesus came into the world to save people from their sins (1:21). Matthew, in his birth narratives, also includes the visit of the Magi who come to worship. Here is a clear hint that Jesus mission does not merely reach out to the Jews, but to all the nations³¹.

When we come to Matthew 5, we begin the Sermon on the Mount. Though this passage deals with the arrival of God's kingdom, there is nevertheless a mission theme within it. The kingdom will be extended as the followers of Jesus engage in mission. Jesus tells them that they are to be salt and light in a dark and corrupted world. (5:13-16). Their impact in the world should be such that others will begin praising God because of their deeds. They are also to pray that God's will may be done on earth as people join the heavenly beings in submission to God their king (6:10).

Chapter 9 shows us that Jesus had a clear mission in mind as he conducted his ministry. In verse 13 he stated that he had not come to call the righteous (or rather those who think they are righteous), but to call sinners to a point of repentance.

An interesting feature of Matthew is the different kinds of mission that are envisaged. On the one hand there is the mission to the lost sheep of Israel (10:6). But later on this mission is extended to include all nations (28:19). At first glance one might wonder as to why this progression has occurred. Certainly during Jesus earthly ministry, not only was it not the norm to

³⁰ Leon Morris, *Reflections on the Gospel of John*, p.712. Morris looks at a range of possible explanations for the verse before concluding, correctly, that the statement is not directed at individuals but to the church collective, and that it is spoken in the context of the overall mission of the church.

³¹ RT France, *Matthew*, p.80. France states that the visit of the Magi 'shows Jesus as messiah of all nations, opposed by the leader of the Jewish nation but recognized as the fulfillment of the hopes of the gentiles.'

minister to gentiles, but Jesus sometimes appeared to take positive steps to avoid ministering to them (10:5-6 ; 15:24,26)³².

Perhaps the best way forward is to see this as a two step process. Jesus goes first to the lost sheep of Israel because they ought to be under the care of the shepherd, but are not³³. By their own rebellion, the people of Israel had strayed away from their relationship with God, and Jesus wanted to win them back. But this particularism in the mission of Jesus was only temporary³⁴. His long term goal was that all nations are brought into the safety of God's care. Jesus mission was therefore universal, though for a time its scope only included reaching out to the Jews.

Matthew finishes his work with the Great Commission (28:16-20) which is arguably the most powerful mission passage in the whole of scripture. Jesus states in verse 18 that all authority both in heaven and earth has been given to him. With this authority his disciples are to go to all nations, baptizing them in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They are also to teach their converts all that Jesus himself taught his disciples. In other words, the disciples are not merely to proclaim the gospel, but they are to teach also³⁵. This will ensure that new converts will grow into a spiritual maturity and in obedience to Christ.

Mark also has an overtly mission message. Stein notes that one of Jesus first actions as he begins his ministry is to call his disciples, and in the case of Mark's account, this is recorded in the very first chapter (Mark 1:16-20)³⁶. The disciples were being called so that Jesus would make them 'fishers of men' (v.17). This thought is developed in Mark 4 where the evangelist talks about the Christian duty of spreading good news. Following the parable of the sower in which the different reactions to Jesus message are dealt with,

32 Kostenberger & O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, p.94.

33 RCH Lenski, *St. Matthew's Gospel*, p.391.

34 Donald Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, p.271. Hagner notes that the particularism of Jesus mission was limited to his earthly mission. He describes this as a salvation-history perspective which Matthew incorporated due to his Jewish-Christian readers.

35 Martin Goldsmith, *Matthew and Mission*, p.205. Goldsmith makes the following insightful comment, 'In the post-modern emphasis on anti-intellectual spirituality this emphasis on teaching and learning sounds old fashioned, but holistic mission demands the use of the mind...Often the national churches lack the biblical and theological teaching that will bring them into spiritual maturity and into a missionary vision for other peoples.'

36 Robert Stein, *Jesus the Messiah*, p.114. Stein notes that Jesus had a previous encounter with some of these men (Jn.1:35-51) and so the call to leave occupation and family was not a bolt out of the blue. It does, however, show Jesus persistence in calling them to service, as well as their conviction that Jesus was the messiah which spurred them on to service.

Jesus goes on to encourage his disciples to share this message with their contemporaries (4:21)³⁷. They are to allow their lamps to illuminate those around.

When we come to Mark 11, we see a shift, as we did in Mathew, from the particularism of the worship of the Jewish people to a wider hope. In v.17 Jesus enters the temple which was a focal point for Jewish worship, and quoting from Isaiah he calls it '*a house of prayer for all nations*'. This is accompanied by two interesting elements. Firstly, there is the cursing of the fig tree (11:12-14 ; 20-26). This incident symbolizes the cursing of the Jewish nation for their rejection of the messiah³⁸. Secondly, there is the parable of the tenants of the vineyard (12:1-12). Here the tenants are refusing to give the vineyard owner his share of its produce. He sends servants who are either beaten or killed. Finally he takes the decisive step of sending his son and he too is killed. In response the owner deals with them severely. The storyline is an obvious picture of God's dealings with His own people culminating in their rejection of Christ. In both these incidents the missiological lesson is clear. God was actively reaching out to His people the Jews with a mission to save them. Following the rejection of the messiah, this mission shifts its emphasis so that the invitation is extended to all nations. In Mark's own words, the vineyard will now be given to 'others' (12:9).

When we come to Luke, the mission theme continues. In the infancy narratives we have the songs of Mary and Zechariah (1:46-55; 67-79). Here we are told that God is a savior (v.47, 69, 71), a redeemer (v.68) and a forgiver of sins (v.77). These songs herald the coming of Jesus through whom all this will be accomplished. This hope is then confirmed by Simeon who prayed to God upon meeting the baby Jesus and declared '*my eyes have seen your salvation*' (2:30).

In chapter 4 we have what could be described as a programmatic statement

37 Lane argues that v.21 refers to the parusia when Jesus who is the lamp will ultimately be revealed (Gospel of Mark, p.166). This, he states, is God's ultimate purpose. Culver, however, argues that the disciples are to regard themselves as not just 'depositories of the truth but as dispensaries of them also' (A Greater Commission, p.79). This would fit more naturally into the concept of the sower (4:1-20).

38 Lary Hurtado, Mark, p.180. Hurtado believes that as the story of the cursing of the fig tree is interrupted by the account of the cleansing of the temple there is an obvious relationship. He suggests that both the fig tree and the temple looked good from the outside, but neither could bear good fruit. The temple along with its dead Jewish ritual was being rejected by Christ.

coming from the lips of Jesus (v.18,19)³⁹. He states that he is appointed to preach to the poor, proclaim freedom for prisoners and release the oppressed. This is as clear a mission mandate as can be found anywhere.

Luke also records for us the mission activity of the disciples. We are given two accounts, firstly of the sending of the twelve (9:1-6), and secondly of the sending of the seventy two (10:1-24). Before sending the twelve, Jesus gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases (v.1). They are then sent out on mission (v.2) and continue his work with his authority delegated to them. It is interesting to note that their work of proclaiming the kingdom and healing approximates to that of Christ himself (9:11)⁴⁰. When the seventy two are sent out Jesus sounds an additional note. He mentions the bounty of the harvest, but also that there are few workers to gather it all in. He asks them to pray to the Lord of that harvest to send out more workers (10:2). He also warns them that he is sending them into a hostile world (v.3).

Like Matthew, Luke ends his account with the Great Commission. Before this, however, he tells us a couple of parables in which a messianic banquet takes place at which Gentiles participate (13:28-30 ; 14:23,24). Here gentiles are placed on an equal footing, demonstrating that the kingdom is available to all men. In Luke's account of the Great Commission, the idea of repentance and forgiveness for all nations is emphasized (24:47). He adds that this must begin in Jerusalem which links this work with the book of Acts. Jesus also includes a promise of power for them as they fulfil the Great Commission (v.49).

The book of Acts is the second part of Luke's two-part work, and it continues where the gospel left off. From the first chapter the book is self consciously about mission with Jesus command (1:8) that his followers are to be witnesses, beginning in Jerusalem, but then going off to Judea, Samaria and even to the ends of the earth. This command from the risen Lord is unambiguous. The responsibility that rests on the shoulders of those who claim to follow Christ is that they are to ensure that the gospel is declared throughout the entire world⁴¹.

39 Kostenberger & O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, p.115.

40 Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke*, p.352.

41 Marshall notes the view of some scholars who suggest the expression 'to the ends of the earth' refers to the evangelization of Rome. He correctly sees this as unlikely (Acts p.61). Longenecker comments that this was Jesus 'last word before his ascension and, therefore, as one that is final and conclusive'. He goes on to say that according to Acts the Christian church 'is a missionary church that responds obediently to

When we come to chapter two of Acts we see this great missionary program beginning to work itself out. The believers were all together when they found themselves being filled by the Holy Spirit (2:1-4). Their immediate response was to move out of the room and into the assembled crowd who were amazed and perplexed by these men and women who were able to speak in a multitude of different languages (2:11,12). Peter rises to address the crowd by proclaiming the gospel and three thousand believe (2:41). As a result the church is born in Jerusalem, but as Luke points out, this is not the ultimate goal. The timing is significant as these events occurred when there were God-fearing Jews from every nation staying in Jerusalem. God's plan was that these members of the Jewish Diaspora would take the gospel back to their own lands.

The next half dozen chapters in Acts give us details of the spread of the gospel in Jerusalem as well as the trials and tribulations of the early church. Then in chapter 8 we read of the gospel spreading further a field into Judea, Samaria and beyond. One of the most interesting accounts is of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch. Philip is told to go South to the road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza. He obeys and finds himself in the presence of a high ranking official from Ethiopia. The Ethiopian was reading the book of Isaiah without understanding. Philip volunteered to explain its meaning and this led to the Ethiopian's conversion and baptism. At the end of the episode the Lord took Philip away and the Ethiopian returned home. Here was a clear case of God directing an evangelist to reach out to someone outside of the Jewish faith and as such it represents a further step towards fully-fledged Gentile mission⁴².

Chapter 9 tells of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, which of course has enormous implications as far as mission is concerned. Paul had been a violent opponent of the church before meeting Christ on the road to Damascus. Upon his conversion he is told to go into the city and wait for further instructions. Meanwhile God confronts Ananias and tells him to be of assistance to Paul. God also states that Paul already has a role in God's plans. He is to be a chosen instrument to carry God's name to the Gentiles (v.15). In this sense Paul's call into mission was synonymous with his conversion.

Jesus commission...and follows a program whose guidelines for outreach have been set by Jesus himself (Acts p.52).

⁴² Richard Lengenecker, Acts, p.157.

Paul begins his first missionary journey in Acts 13. From this point he moves center-stage in the storyline, and the main theme of the book from here onwards is mission. Paul and Barnabas are clear about their objectives. They have been sent to reach the gentiles and to take the gospel to the ends of the earth (v.46, 47). By the end of this first missionary journey they were able to report about the wonderful things that God was doing (15:4).

Luke records that at this point in the mission of the church, there was a serious point of contention. So many gentiles were being converted that it raised alarms among the Jewish Christians. As a result they began to insist that Gentile Christians must first be circumcised if they wished to be accepted as true believers. The church in Antioch, and its missionaries, had not required this of their Gentile converts, so there was an obvious clash⁴³. This clash resulted in the Council of Jerusalem.

Paul and Barnabas were sent on behalf of the church in Antioch to put their case. There were three major speeches at the council and they clearly convey God's mission purpose. The first was by Peter who demonstrated that God accepted the Gentiles and gave them His Holy Spirit (15:8). Then Paul and Barnabas spoke of the miracles that God performed in the mission to the Gentiles demonstrating His divine activity in this mission (15:12). Finally James spoke and reaffirmed God's acceptance of the Gentiles and urged that the church leaders fully support this missionary endeavor. This was done and God's mission purpose was free to begin again without significant interference from those doubting elements in the church⁴⁴.

Having overcome this problem, Paul returns to his missionary task which then occupies him until the very end of the book. It is interesting to note how the book of Acts draws to its conclusion. At the end of his third missionary journey Paul is arrested in Jerusalem and put on trial. This trial will ultimately take him to Rome itself. At his trial before Festus and Agrippa, Paul declares what his calling in life has been (26:16-18). He was called by Christ himself to be a witness to the Gentiles so that their eyes could be opened and their darkness turned to light. His mission was to declare to them the possibility of forgiveness and that they can be freed from

⁴³ Howard Marshall, Acts, p.242.

⁴⁴ It must be stated that the issue was not totally resolved at that stage. As Schnabel notes, 'Subsequent developments in, for example, the Galatian churches, clearly demonstrate that the dispute about the status of Gentile Christians persisted. By the second and third centuries, however, the church generally accepted the stipulations of the apostolic decree' (Early Christian Mission, Vol.2, p.1019).

the power of Satan to serve God⁴⁵.

Paul is then sent to Rome where he has a meeting with the Jewish leaders (28:17). He tells them that he is on trial without having committed any crime worthy of death, and that he has not committed any offence against Jewish customs. Rather he is in chains because he is declaring the 'hope of Israel' (28:20). He then goes on in a later meeting to explain this hope by using the Old Testament (28:23). In doing so Paul provides for them a theological continuity of God's plans throughout the ages, and demonstrates that God's mission in the Old Testament reaches its fulfilment in the New Testament person of Jesus Christ⁴⁶. In other words, God's plans and purposes remain the same, the salvation of the world.

Paul then continued to proclaim the kingdom of God to anyone who would listen. Luke records that for two years he stayed in his own rented house and welcomed everyone. When they came he boldly preached to them. His life, and the book of Acts, finishes on this appropriate note of mission. This had been Paul's life and calling and with his remaining sources of energy, he dedicated himself to the task, so becoming a model of Christian living. A life that is motivated by God's call to mission.

The Pauline Epistles

When we come to the epistles of Paul, we could hardly be surprised at their missiological content, for after all, their author was one of the greatest missionaries of biblical history. Paul was deeply aware of his calling to be a minister to the Gentiles (Rom.15:15,16)⁴⁷. This calling did not come from men, but from none other than Jesus Christ himself (Gal.1:1). Kostenberger and O'Brien make the point that in his epistles, as Paul talks about his call, he uses similar language to the Old Testament prophets thus seeing his

45 Marshall notes that Paul's call is similar to that of the Old Testament prophets and the promise of protection is likewise similar (Acts p.396). Kostenberger & O'Brien also see similarities with the Old Testament, but also with Jesus' mission. This leads us to assume that God had one continuous plan to reach mankind and the different personalities involved represent different phases of the same work (Salvation to the Ends of the Earth).

46 Bruce states, 'He certainly labored to prove to them that the gospel of Jesus Christ was the true and necessary fulfillment of Israel's religion, of Old Testament history and prophecy (Acts p.532).

47 Moo notes that Paul does not name himself an 'apostle' of the Romans (v.16), but rather a 'priest'. He was not actually a priest offering literal sacrifices, but the cultic language links the Roman Christians, who were Gentiles, with the Jewish believing community. This demonstrates a continuity in God's salvation plan (Moo, Romans, p.890).

mission as being in continuity with God's overall plan of redemption⁴⁸. In Ephesians he uses the term 'mystery' to describe God's plan of salvation (3:2-13). This plan not only includes the salvation of the Jews, but also the Gentiles as fellow heirs and members of the same body (v.6)⁴⁹. In Colossians, too, Paul himself was called to declare this mystery. Bearing in mind the orthodoxy of his Jewish upbringing and the antipathy towards Gentiles that such an upbringing must have produced, his sense of call must have been overwhelming.

Paul not only mentions his call to mission, but also the depravity of the human condition that necessitated God's plan of salvation. Chief among his expositions of this theme must be the book of Romans⁵⁰. Romans begins by drawing our attention to God's righteous wrath against mankind (1:18-3:20). It then goes on to show how God has provided an answer to man's dilemma in the person of Jesus Christ. The absolute need of the gospel is ably demonstrated in these early sections. Paul's aim is to show that all of humanity is 'morally bankrupt, unable to claim a favourable verdict at the judgment bar of God, desperately in need of His mercy and pardon'⁵¹.

The fallen-ness of man coupled with the solution that Christ provided, gave Paul a compulsion to preach. His whole missionary thrust was the outcome of the realization he had of the truth of the gospel and its implications. Once he became convinced that God was offering salvation through Jesus Christ to a dying world, he was compelled to preach that message. As Senior and StuhlmueLLer note 'All the elements of Paul's theology fused together to produce the explosive energy of his missionary apostolate'⁵².

The authors of the general epistles also have something to say on the subject of mission. Though much of what they say has only a tangential relationship to mission, it nevertheless is noteworthy. We must first note the desire that

48 Kostenberger & O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, p.165.

49 Questions could be raised about what new revelation Paul was bringing concerning the mystery of God's plans, if the Old Testament writers had already spoken of the Gentiles being saved along with the Jews. Kostenberger & O'Brien point out that the difference in Paul's message was the revealed manner in which this plan was accomplished (*Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, p.236). Both Jews and Gentiles are incorporated into the body of Christ.

50 It is interesting to note that the book of Romans was born out of Paul's missionary situation and experiences. Carson, Moo and Morris note, 'The past battles in Galatia and Corinth, the coming crisis in Jerusalem, the need to secure a missionary base in Spain, the importance of uniting a divided Christian community in Rome around the gospel – these circumstances led Paul to write a letter in which he carefully sets forth the case for the gospel' (*An Introduction to the New Testament*).

51 FF Bruce, *Romans*, p.81,82.

52 Senior and StuhlmueLLer, *The Biblical Foundations of Mission*, p.181.

these writers have to preserve the purity of the gospel. Clearly they were aware that the presence of false teachers would corrupt the fruit that had been produced by mission, and so they quickly denounced any teaching that would dilute the power of the gospel message (Jude 4 ; 2 Peter 2 ; 1 John 2:18,19 ; 2 John:11).

But as well as preserving the purity of the gospel, the general epistles are concerned with its proclamation. Jude, for example, urges his readers to 'contend for the faith' (Jude 3). This expression is reminiscent of Paul's writings and contains the metaphor of an athlete who strives to achieve something. In this case, Jude's readers are to strive both to defend that gospel against false teaching, and proclaim it⁵³.

Hebrews is anxious to show that Christ can uniquely provide salvation for the world. The book begins with a number of remarkable statements about Christ and his supremacy before going on to show him as the Great High Priest who initiates a new and superior covenant (8:1-10:39). Christ can therefore deal decisively with the sin of the world and then 'sit down' (1:3 ; 8:1), his work having been completed. The implication of all of this is that God's promise of salvation for the nations has now been provided and Christians have a message to proclaim.

1 Peter talks about Christians being resident aliens, or 'strangers in the world' (1:1). His book was written in Rome during a time when persecution was becoming a reality for the church⁵⁴. He refers to the place from which he is writing as Babylon (5:13). It is not that Peter is trying to associate the city of Rome with the sinister Babylon of Revelation 17:5. But what he is saying is that in the same way as the children of Israel were in exile in Babylon, so he feels as though he is in a foreign land⁵⁵.

He comforts his readers with the thought that they have an inheritance in heaven that will never spoil (1:4), and that they will receive God's protection. But for a while they have to suffer because they are in a strange land (1:6). This suffering, however, will be limited because they are part of the family of God (4:17). But those who have not responded to the gospel will suffer immeasurably more. The implication of this is that Peter does not

53 Bauckham states that, 'Neither for Paul nor for Jude is this contest simply a defence of the gospel; it is offensive, promoting the gospel's advance and victory' (Jude, 2Peter, p.32).

54 Kostenberger & O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, p.237.

55 Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, p.311.

want his readers to become used to this world, for it is a foreign land that will be destroyed, and only those who serve God will have a glorious future. He wants them to view their lives here in the light of eternity and of God's provision of salvation.

The book of Revelation brings the New Testament to a close and as it does it demonstrates the tremendous success of God's great plan of redemption. We have a picture of people from every nation worshipping the Lamb as people who have been redeemed (7:9,10).

Revelation, however, is more than just a celebration of God's plan of salvation. It is also a challenge to the church. This is seen firstly in the letters to the seven churches where they are urged continually to remain faithful in the midst of difficulties (2:9,10 ; 17 ; 26 ; 3:5 ;12 ; 21). More specifically, in the letter to the church in Philadelphia (3:7-13), the believers are told that despite their weakness, God is holding a door open for them (v.8). This door is the door of salvation and Christ will empower them, if they remain faithful, to be a witness and a means by which others can be converted⁵⁶.

Secondly, the challenge to the church is seen in the fate of the lost. For those who have rejected Christ there is an eternity of suffering (20:15). For them there is no reprieve. Their judgment will be both decisive and severe. If their names are not written in the book of life, then they will be thrown into the lake of fire. Revelation began with the thought that Christ held the keys of death and Hades (1:18). Here his grasp is demonstrated conclusively⁵⁷. This ominous thought is in itself a clarion call to the church to proclaiming the gospel so that men and women meet Christ as their savior and not their judge.

Jesus

It would not be appropriate to deal with the biblical theology of mission without some comment on the two great missionaries of the Bible, namely Jesus and Paul. All four gospels tell the story of Jesus, God's greatest missionary, sent into the world to proclaim salvation. We have a picture drawn for us of a person who was completely committed to the task of

⁵⁶ GK Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p.286.

⁵⁷ PE Hughes, *The Book of Revelation*, p.219.

mission. Not only do we learn from the gospels about what Jesus did as a missionary, we also learn a great deal about his methodology. There is no doubt that this is deliberate, and that we are meant to view Jesus as our role model for service. There are a number of issues from Jesus ministry that are worth mentioning.

One of the first things to note about the mission of Jesus was that it involved variety. Matthew 9:35 records that Jesus went into all the towns preaching, teaching and healing⁵⁸. He proclaimed the message of the kingdom, he then established the faith, and this was accompanied by social action that demonstrated the love of God. This is an early indication of the content of mission work.

At the very beginning of the public ministry of Jesus, he chose a group of disciples. This was to be his team and it would provide a model for further mission enterprise. Jesus did not hastily construct a random collection of individuals. Rather he spent a night in prayer and then hand-picked 12 men (Lu.6:12-16). Jesus would have had prior knowledge of these men and picked them because he saw a potential in them⁵⁹. That is not to say that they were ideal candidates from a human perspective. Most were fishermen and few of them would have had much formal education. At least one of them was a freedom fighter, while Peter was impetuous, Thomas full of doubts and James and John were nicknamed the sons of thunder probably because of their bad tempers and aggressive ambition⁶⁰. These men were, however, to be the foundation of the New Testament church and key players in Jesus' mission strategy.

Before these men, and others, could be sent out they had to be trained. The training that Jesus gave them could only be described as 'on the job'. They learned as they engaged in mission. This training involved not only imbibing the theological content of his teachings, but also seeing him in action serving God⁶¹. This was a balanced training program combining formal academic rigor with practical outworking in mission.

58 Hagner notes that although Matthew gives a great deal of attention to the healing ministry of Jesus, yet it was of secondary importance to the preaching and teaching (Matt.1-13, p.260). He states, 'The crowds who think mainly of their physical maladies, have a more serious need of which those maladies are but an indicator'.

59 Those chosen to be the twelve would have been with Jesus from the time of John's baptism (Nolland, Luke 1-9:20, p.269).

60 MJ Wilkins, Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels, p.178-182.

61 Robert Stein, Jesus the Messiah, p.119.

Jesus taught them the most fundamental lessons about mission. Firstly he taught them to pray (Mtt.9:37,38). Then he sent them out to engage in mission (Mtt.10:1-5). As they went out he gave them a clear strategy to follow so that none of them could be in any doubt as to what their work should involve (Mtt.10:5,6). He organized them into manageable groups and gave them the spiritual equipment necessary to fulfil the task (Mk.6:7). When it came to the practical issues of support, Jesus talked about it openly, stating that the 'worker is worth his wages' (Lu.10:5-7). Jesus was also very careful to ensure that his missionaries would not cause any cultural offence to those whom they were meant to serve. (Lu.10:8). As well as dealing with all these practical matters, Jesus was also anxious to enforce the idea that mission involves having faith (Lu.9:3-5; 10:4-7). In addition, he stressed their accountability to himself and the need to report back all that they had done (Lu.10:17).

Mission in the Life of Paul

Paul was the great missionary statesman of the early church. He brought the gospel to much of the ancient world, and he too provides us with a model for mission. Like Jesus, Paul gathered teams to work with him, and on his third missionary journey, to administer the large offering he had collected (Acts 20:4,5). The latter were chosen from different geographical regions, presumably to give confidence to the donors. Within Paul's team strong opinions were expressed (Acts 15:37-39) which sometimes led to disharmony. But this did not in any way detract from Paul's desire to work in a team where each team member's weakness could be compensated by another's strengths. Paul referred to his team members as 'fellow workers' or 'partners' which emphasizes the sense of togetherness that Paul obviously felt (2 Cor.8 : 23; Phil.4:3).

It is interesting to note that despite his many talents and determined personality, Paul was no maverick. Not only did he work within teams, he also recognised his need for accountability towards others. This is seen firstly in his willingness to be 'sent' by the church in Antioch (Acts 13:1-3). Here Paul is sent in response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and the wishes of the local congregation⁶². His desire for accountability is also seen in his participation at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:2-35). There is no

⁶² Ben Witherington III, *New Testament History*, p.229.

evidence here that Paul saw the leaders at Jerusalem as the top end of an ecclesiastical hierarchy. Never the less as Marshall points out, the apostles and elders in Jerusalem were regarded as ‘The leading figures in the church’⁶³. Paul recognises this and goes to them to get their support, which he obviously values, for the Gentile mission.

He was also aware of the need to preach within a cultural context. In Acts 17:22-31 when Paul was at Athens, for example, he used pagan alters as object lessons and felt free to quote local poets in his communication of the Christian message⁶⁴. This was, in effect, contextulisation. He was communicating the gospel in a way that would be comprehensible to his audience.

Again like Jesus, Paul was a strategic thinker. He deliberately targeted some of the large cities of the ancient world because these were the places of influence as well as the major areas of population. He also worked through his itinerary step by step in a systematic way, reaching Central Asia Minor, the Aegean world, Illyricum and then Rome. As Bruce points out, ‘Many others were engaged in gentile evangelisation, but none with the overall strategic planning conceived in Paul’s mind and so largely executed in his dynamic energy’⁶⁵.

Conclusion

One thing that emerges from all of this is the fact that mission is so obviously a biblical pursuit. When we engage in mission we have the assurance that what we are doing is founded squarely on scripture and is an act of obedience to a God who has so clearly communicated His missiological intentions throughout His written word. To be a missionary, therefore, is to be a man or woman of the book.

63 I.H. Marshall, Acts, p.248.

64 DA Carson, The Gagging of God, p.449.

65 FF Bruce, Paul Apostle of the Heart Set Free, p.146.

Chapter 2

THE LOCAL CHURCH AND MISSION

There are many who regard 'mission' as a work carried out by individuals with a unique 'call' and aptitude who are supported by specialist organisations and see the role of the local church, as merely to provide a stream of new recruits and the funding to match.

This is a serious misconception with consequences both for church and for mission. The local church has most definitely a central role to play in mission and this has often been overlooked and delegated to 'professional agencies'. We can understand why this is often the case. Local churches encounter a wide range of agencies and societies, who seem to want their money and best people and often they are left wondering who to support and how they all fit together. Agencies often feel they have the knowledge, expertise and experience that churches lack, and want to be free to get on with the job, but can easily overlook the biblical role of the church in the whole process. As a consequence relationships between local churches and mission agencies can be difficult.⁶⁶

As a reaction to this tension, some larger churches, particularly in North America, have developed their own sending agencies,⁶⁷ and can see no particular role or need for the existence of so many organisations, with expensive overheads. This is not a new development for others have recognised the role for the local church and tried to put the church at the heart of mission activity.⁶⁸ George Peters comments that it is necessary to find a balance between historical developments that have produced "autonomous missionless churches on the one hand and autonomous churchless missionary societies on the other."⁶⁹ This can be a complex debate, but the starting point must be a clear understanding of the role and purpose of the church, placing the local church where it ought to be, at the centre of mission.

This call to place the church at the heart of mission is being recognised by some countries, which in recent years have begun to send cross cultural

⁶⁶ EMQ July, 1999. What local churches are saying to mission agencies.

⁶⁷ S Guthrie: Missions in the Third Millennium, p3

⁶⁸ W.E. Vine: The Divine Plan of Missions

⁶⁹ G.W. Peters: A Biblical Theology of missions p 214

workers to other parts of the world. Some have experienced high levels of fall out and often relate this to the fact that the local church of the missionary has not been engaged in the sending process. Their plea is that the church to be put back at the heart of the process. 70

THE GOAL OF MISSION

The New Testament teaches us that the church is central to God's plan. Jesus Christ promised his followers that he would 'build His church'⁷¹. That process began on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was sent to baptise the disciples and incorporate them into the body of Christ. Luke, the writer of Acts, records the history of the remarkable growth of the church during its first 30 years, and the letters of the apostles helped to establish the churches in orthodox belief, and Christian living in pagan society. Paul reminded the Ephesians that it is 'through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and heavenly authorities.'⁷² As God's chosen people the church is called to show forth the glory of God who called us into his light,⁷³ as his witnesses to the world.

It is also God's intention that the church should be at the heart of evangelism and mission. George Peters writes: "Missions is not an imposition on the church for it belongs to her nature and should be as natural to her as grapes are natural to the branches that abide in the vine. Missions flows from the inner constitution, character, calling and design of the church."⁷⁴

The church ensures continuity, provides a community where God is worshipped, new Christians nurtured, and from which light diffuses into the surrounding society. It is also the springboard for future evangelism thus it is always fundamental to the whole process of mission. Arthur Glasser's comment on the importance of the church in mission cannot be bettered: "If one were asked to describe the relative importance of the missionary task, he would be obliged to confess that evangelism is 100% important: men are lost, and "the coming of the Lord draws near." Training is 100%

70 Ed William Taylor: *Too Valuable to Lose*; p 185; p197 The chapter in this volume from Latin America relates much of the drop out rate to a lack of relationship with the sending church, or the acceptance of candidates who may not even have the recommendation of their local church. This may be unique to that part of the world, but some how we don't think it is!

71 Matt 16:18

72 Eph 3: 10

73 1 Peter 2:8

74 G.W. Peters: *A Biblical Theology of missions*

important: converts are babes, and God needs mature men if His work is to go forward. Church planting is 100% important: to ignore the church and its corporate ministry is to remove all possibility of permanence from evangelistic or missionary training efforts, and to violate a fundamental principle of the Word of God. No ministry is primary; no ministry is secondary. All are of fundamental importance. The programme of God embraces all three”⁷⁵

THE LOCAL CHURCH IS A CENTRE FOR MISSION OUTREACH

Biblical mission will always have as its goal the formation of indigenous local churches, which will continue to develop after those who planted them have moved on. In time they will become sending churches, as they release their members to service for God. This marks the start of a new phase, as that church becomes a centre for outreach and evangelism. It is helpful to examine some New Testament examples.

ANTIOCH

The church at Antioch was formed as a result of persecution. Jewish Christians, who had been driven out of Judea, travelled to this cosmopolitan town, and eventually broke through their cultural barriers by taking the gospel to the Gentiles.⁷⁶ There was a tremendous response to their evangelism as a great number of people turned to the Lord. When news reached the Jerusalem church, they sent Barnabas to see what was going on. He went to look for Paul (still known as Saul in those days) and together they taught the church as it grew to maturity. The Antioch story does not stop at this point for it was from this church that new missionary outreach began as Paul and Barnabas were released to take the gospel to new areas.⁷⁷

THESSALONICA

This church was planted by Paul and Silas during their first mission to Macedonia.⁷⁸ We are not sure exactly how long they stayed there, but it seems to have been a relatively short period of time, before opposition forced them to leave. This was also a church facing the fires of persecution,

⁷⁵ A Glasser; *Perspectives on the world Christian Movement* (1981 Edition) p. 103

⁷⁶ Acts 11: 19-26

⁷⁷ Acts 13:1-3

⁷⁸ Acts 17:1-10

but despite their immaturity, and the opposition, their vision for outreach and enthusiasm to share the gospel was well known. When Paul wrote to them some months later he stated that they had become a model church to all the other believers in Macedonia and Achaia, (the two principal provinces of Greece).⁷⁹ They were a model not only in the way they received the message and responded to suffering, but because ‘the word of the Lord had sounded out from them.’ In fact says Paul, people were talking about the Thessalonians faith and vision everywhere. Spreading the gospel was an important matter to these Thessalonians Christians, they didn’t feel they should leave it all to Paul or Silas, but got involved in the task themselves, and did not allow difficult circumstances to stop them.

PHILLIPPI

Another consequence of Paul’s turbulent first visit to Macedonia was the planting of a church in the Roman colony of Philippi. A warm relationship developed between these Christians and Paul, their father in the faith, even though one of them was his ex-gaoler! They showed their love and concern by supporting him in his missionary work, not only through prayer, but also by sending financial support. As Paul worked ‘to advance the gospel’ so they worked with him.⁸⁰ This was one of the reasons for his letter to them. Their courier Epaphroditis, who carried another of their gifts to Paul, took ill and nearly died.⁸¹ Now Paul sends him back with a letter of thanks for their generosity and support ⁸² recognising this as a true partnership in the gospel, for when they shared their money, they were showing their commitment to gospel advance.

These New Testament churches teach us some important principles, which are applicable in any generation.

1. The local church is a centre from which the gospel penetrates the local community. A church with no evangelistic vision has lost its purpose.
2. The local church must recognise and release to God’s service those whom he has called and set apart for this purpose.

⁷⁹ 1 Thes 1:7,8

⁸⁰ Phil: 1:3-6

⁸¹ Phil 2: 25- 28

⁸² Phil 4: 14-16).

3. The local church will use its resources to support God's servants to further the progress of the gospel.

Let's examine these in more detail.

1. THE LOCAL CHURCH AND ITS MISSION

We have seen that the local church, imperfect though it may be, is central to God's plan. Local churches are congregations of believers in particular locations, fragmented to our shame by two thousand years of history, but still important to God. They are part of the universal church, the total aggregate of all believers in Jesus Christ since the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came and the church was born, until the second coming of Christ. This mystical body, the universal church for which Christ died, is also called the bride of Christ.⁸³ It spans the centuries and will one day be complete and made perfect in heaven.⁸⁴

The local church has several purposes, among these are the provision of fellowship for its members, discipleship and training in the Word of God, participation in the Lord's supper and when necessary disciplining the members. Leadership and pastoral care is provided and in the life of the body, spiritual gifts are cultivated and expressed as the members grow to maturity.

One of the primary purposes of the local church is to look outwards in witness to the world. Although Jesus' words, "You are the light of the world",⁸⁵ were spoken originally to his disciples, it also applies to churches which should "shine like stars in the universe, as you hold out the word of life".⁸⁶ This light shines and begins to penetrate the darkness as the good news of Jesus Christ is proclaimed. John the apostle saw a vision of the glorified Lord walking among the lamp stands, which were symbols of the seven churches of Asia.⁸⁷ Many had compromised their witness and the warning that He would come and remove their lamp stand was real,⁸⁸ for a

⁸³ Ephesians 5:23 - 25

⁸⁴ Rev 21: 1-4

⁸⁵ Matt 5:14

⁸⁶ Phil 2:15,16

⁸⁷ Rev 1:12,13

⁸⁸ Rev 2:5

church that fails in its witness to Jesus Christ, soon loses its vision, and will eventually die.

The primary outreach of a local church will be concentrated in its own district, and each church must decide what methods are most effective. This will involve assessment of the community and its social and ethnic background, before trying various means of contact and outreach to the community which will allow the eventual communication of the message.⁸⁹ No one specific model of evangelisation is presented in the New Testament, as the apostles and their associates adapted to the unique circumstances of each location. The days, particularly in most western contexts, of setting up shop, opening the doors and expecting ‘them’ to come to ‘us’ are long past, though many have still to wake up to this fact. Evangelisation of their community is the primary mission focus of each local church.

Beyond the local programmes of the church, lies a world in great need and it is the responsibility of the leadership of each local church to ensure that a vision is developed for the world. Creating this vision will involve education, exposure of the members to mission in a wider context, meeting ‘live workers’ who are engaged in overseas or home mission, and challenging to the church to get involved.

An attitude that is present in some parts of the West, particularly in the UK and parts of North America is that we should now be concentrating our efforts on our homelands and be less concerned with the rest of the world.⁹⁰ Some of this thinking is due to a lack of information, and the assumption that the need ‘here’ is now greater than ‘there’. The arguments presented are: ‘We’ve sent so many people and so much money abroad, it’s time to concentrate on our own backyard, for after all church growth statistics tell the story of remarkable church growth everywhere but the West’. The problem with this story is that it is only partially true. It is true that we need to redouble our efforts and rethink our methods of evangelism in the secular arena of our own society, but we cannot forget areas of the world, where the kingdom of God is barely known.

⁸⁹ D Hesselgrave: *Planting Churches Cross Culturally* p 157-197

⁹⁰ We have both encountered this argument on several occasions, and do not deny that there is huge decline in the church in the UK and a general apathy towards missions. Some of this of course may be a response to contemporary pluralism and the denial of absolutes, so mission is undermined and certainly not politically correct.

The **right attitude** is that we need to do both, and in most effective churches these are held in balance. Mission at home and abroad, have priority in our prayer, efforts and support. A big vision includes the whole world while a defeatist mentality that expects only continuing decline and decay will be self fulfilling, and certainly not generate vision and passion for the unreached.

Think about these statements and ask the question: how seriously does my local church treat its responsibility to get involved in mission.

1. **Local churches have a responsibility to give high priority to evangelism where they are.**
2. **Local churches need to develop a global vision of world needs, and ensure their members are informed and aware**
3. **Local churches need to challenge their own members about involvement in mission**

Where there is a commitment to mission, the local church will pray that God will call some of its members to his service and be willing to release any who may be called to this task. The Bible assumes that every Christian will be a part of a local church, and that the church will have an important role in the process of identifying and releasing any of its members who are called to serve God. But how does this happen and what is involved in the process?

We can learn much from the Antioch experience recorded in Acts.91 While recognising that Paul had a special calling and God given task as the apostle to the Gentiles, there are important principles that can be discerned from the relationship between the apostolic workers who were sent, and the church which released them to this special service.

Different terminology may be used for this process, so we need to ensure that we understand the meaning of the terms used. 'The sending church' is probably the most frequently used term in contemporary mission literature. It is an important expression, as long as we understand that the initiative is God's, who is still the one who prepares and sends his servants. "Who will I

91 Acts 13: 1-3

send and who will go for us?”⁹², was the question Isaiah heard centuries ago, and it is still true today.

Others prefer to use the term “the commending church”, basing this on Acts 14: 26, which is translated commended in some versions of the New Testament. It is a good term with a long tradition, and needs clear definition so that we use it properly. In modern usage commendation is praise for a job well done, or accolades that are given to worthy people. The usage in Acts involves much more than this.

Some use the expression of “the commissioning church”, and this can help to define the important role of the church. ⁹³ However the definition must include the understanding that the workers who are sent are going to fulfil the commission of Christ, and not that of the church. Both church and missionary serve under His authority and Lordship

THE PROCESS OF SENDING

There are several steps in the process and we need to identify these and ensure our practice is based on a good foundation. We can never recreate the conditions of the first century, but we can search for principles that are applicable in every generation, even a post-modern one!

GOD IS THE SENDER.

John records the words spoken by Jesus to his disciples after his resurrection: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” ⁹⁴ This means that just as Jesus was sent to complete the work given by his Father, so his disciples are sent by him to fulfil the task he has left for them. O’Brien & Kostenberger comment: “Now Jesus’ followers are to embody the qualities and characteristics of their Lord during his earthly mission. As Jesus did the Father’s will, they have to do Jesus’ will. As Jesus did the Father’s works, they have to do Jesus’ works. As Jesus spoke the words of his Father, they have to speak Jesus’ words.” ⁹⁵ Jesus Christ himself commissioned his

⁹² **Isa6:8**

⁹³ D Hesselgrave: *Planting Churches Cross Culturally* p 135 - 154

⁹⁴ **John 20: 21**

⁹⁵ O’Brien & Kostenberger: *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth* p. 222

disciples in the great passages in Matthew and Mark, and tells them before he leaves them that they are being left to be His witnesses. 96

Any other basis for mission is flawed; for above all this is “the mission of God”. God recruits human beings and calls them to fulfil his purposes in the world. As Raymond Brown states “Their mission is to continue the Son’s mission; and this requires that the Son must be present in them during this mission, just as the Father had to be present to the Son during his mission.” 97

How this worked out in the experience of the early Christians is recorded when the church at Antioch came together to worship the Lord, to fast and to pray.

“While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” 98

The reason for this special meeting is not stated by Luke in the narrative, but it seems likely that it was linked to their desire to evangelise more widely and the church was seeking direction in the next steps. God answered and spoke through the Holy Spirit, most probably through one of the prophets, and revealed that two of their numbers, Barnabas and Saul were the ones chosen for his task. John Stott’s comment is important:

“There is no evidence that Barnabas and Saul ‘volunteered’ for missionary service; they were ‘sent’ by the Spirit through the church. Still today it is the responsibility of every local church (especially of its leaders) to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit, in order to discover whom he may be gifting and calling.” 99

Howard Marshall emphasises that “the calling to undertake the first ‘mission’ recorded in Acts is addressed not to Barnabas and Saul themselves as free individuals, but rather to the church at Antioch, which is commanded to send them out on God’s work.”100

96 Matt 28 : 20 -22; Acts 1:8

97 O’Brien & Kostenberger: Salvation to the Ends of the Earth p. 222

98 Acts 13: 2

99 John Stott; The Message of Acts; p 217

100 I Howard Marshall; The Gospel to the Nations, ed by P Bolt & M Thompson p 101

God's voice was clear; there was no need for debate, or delay. They responded to the direction of God, who was sending his chosen servants and so the first cross cultural missionary band was identified. Bruce comments: 'The call came from God; the church's responsibility was to recognise the divine appointment and act accordingly.'¹⁰¹

The Church at Antioch was asked to "set apart" Barnabas and Saul for this work. The idea behind that word is "marking off from the rest, separating and identifying as distinct."¹⁰² By the formal recognition of the men who had been sent by God, the church was responding to the command of God. Paul referred to his calling, and stated in his writings that he was "set apart for the gospel of God".¹⁰³ This applies primarily to his encounter with Christ on the Damascus road, but the recognition of his calling by the church at Antioch was another part of the "setting apart" process. It involved faith and confidence in God. John Stott comments: 'The call to go was clear, while the land and work was not. So in both cases (Abraham & Paul & Barnabas) the response to God's call required an adventurous step of faith.'¹⁰⁴

So far the church's role in the process seems to have been passive - a simple response to the call of God marking out the chosen apostles. Yet it was much more for, as they had been actively waiting on God for guidance, they proved that they were willing to respond with alacrity when God's will was revealed.

THE CHURCH RELEASE GOD'S CHOSEN SERVANTS

The voice of God was clear and the church at Antioch demonstrated their willing association with God's choice by releasing Paul and Barnabas to service. Luke records that the church did three things:

1. They fasted and prayed (presumably for several days)
2. They placed their hands on them
3. They sent them away¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ FF Bruce 'The Acts of the Apostles

¹⁰² W E Vine: Dictionary of NT Words

¹⁰³ Rom 1:1 & Gal 1:15

¹⁰⁴ John Stott; The Message of Acts; p 217

¹⁰⁵ Acts 13:3

1. The prayer and fasting now focused on those whom God had set apart. The principle of ensuring that any new initiative for God must be saturated in earnest costly prayer is universal. Paul followed this pattern throughout his missionary career and he often urged others to engage in prayer on his behalf.¹⁰⁶

2. They placed their hands on them, not to impart any specific charisma, but rather to identify them to the church as God's chosen servants, and to associate the church at Antioch with their mission. This was a serious undertaking, and there was total commitment to the task by those who remained in Antioch as well as by those who were released for service. FF Bruce comments that 'By placing hands on them they, by this means, expressed their fellowship with these two and their recognition of the divine call.'¹⁰⁷ John Stott expands the idea further: "This was not an ordination to an office, still less an appointment to apostleship (since Paul states that this was not 'from men nor by men') but rather a valedictory commissioning to missionary service."¹⁰⁸

3. They sent them away. Releasing was an important act, for they identified that God's claim on their service had the priority, so they let them go. It was an active response by the church, now fully identified with this task. John Stott says "In our anxiety to do justice to the Holy Spirit's initiative, we should not depict the church's role as having been entirely passive. Would it not be true to say both that the Spirit sent them out, by instructing the church to do so, and that the church sent them out, having been directed by the Spirit to do so?"¹⁰⁹

Luke records their return to Antioch after they completed this first mission: "*They sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed (commended) to the grace of God for the work they had now completed.*"¹¹⁰ The word translated commended or committed means to give or deliver over. "It contains the idea of releasing, delivering over or committing His servants to Him".¹¹¹ When they left Antioch "they were sent forth by the Holy Spirit"

¹⁰⁶ 1 Thes 3:1,2

¹⁰⁷ FF Bruce 'The Acts of the Apostles

¹⁰⁸ John Stott; The Message of Acts; p 2

¹⁰⁹ John Stott; The Message of Acts; p 2

¹¹⁰ Acts 14: 26

¹¹¹ W E Vine: Dictionary of NT Words

112 and released by the Antioch church, who committed them to God's grace. Biblical commendation has at its heart the idea of 'handing over' workers to the grace of God for His support and direction in the particular ministry to which He has called them.

THEY REPORT BACK TO THE CHURCH.

We have noted that after they completed their extended mission, Paul and Barnabas with their associates returned to Antioch to meet with the church again. *“On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles”* 113 The mission was completed, and they had seen how God had worked with power so now they recount to their sending church at Antioch, what God had done through them, and rejoice with the church there. There is no sense of coercion here, but an obvious desire to meet with these Christians and encourage them in what God had done. Bruce says: ‘The whole church sent them forth, and it was to the whole church that they gave the report when they returned.’ 114 They demonstrate by these actions a sense of accountability to the church which sent them, by their willingness to spend considerable time with them, reporting on what God had done. 115

Paul's second missionary journey also originated from Antioch, but it began in controversy as Paul & Barnabas disagreed about the composition of the missionary team. Paul was reluctant to risk Barnabas's nephew Mark again, who had abandoned the previous mission. They were unable to resolve the issue, so Paul chose Silas and left again for another cross-cultural mission. Luke records: *“Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.”* 116 Once again they are released to God's service, and the grace of God. The process that took place earlier when they left for the first mission was repeated.

The next period was momentous as the gospel began to penetrate Europe, first through Macedonia, then by the Athenian and Corinthian missions. It ended with a journey to Jerusalem with money sent by these new churches

112 Acts 13:4

113 Acts 14: 26, 27

114 FF Bruce 'The Acts of the Apostles

115 Acts 14:28

116 Acts 15:40

for famine relief in Judea, and then terminated at Antioch: ‘when he had landed at Caesarea and gone up and saluted the church, (i.e. the church at Jerusalem) he went down to Antioch’.¹¹⁷ The same pattern is repeated as Paul’s journey began and ended at the church which sent him. He again spends time with them, reporting and sharing their fellowship and support, before launching into a further period of outreach.¹¹⁸

This pattern of service has been described by David Hesselgrave as “the Pauline Cycle”. (See Fig.) The missionaries were commissioned by the church. They contacted their audience and communicated the gospel. Some hearers were converted, and began to congregate as new churches. Paul saw that their faith was confirmed and leaders consecrated in the new churches. Commending the believers to God, he returned to his sending church, reporting on his ministry and continuing relationships with them, before once again being commissioned to further mission outreach.¹¹⁹ It is a simple model, but demonstrates the relationship between the apostles (missionaries) and the sending church. We need to ask if our missionary methods approach the biblical model or need a radical rethink. (try and include the diagram at end of chapter or appendix)

Several key points can be identified from the model of Paul and his associates as recorded in Luke’s record:

1. They were members of the local church. Paul & Silas were already working in the church at Antioch as teachers and pastors. Their qualities were well known. When new members were added to the apostolic team, such as Timothy, we note that ‘the brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him.’¹²⁰ This means he had good references and the confidence of the church in his maturity and fitness for the task.
2. They were actively involved in the work of the church. They had already been meeting with the church at Antioch and teaching them for at least a year so the quality of their work was known to all,¹²¹ and their gifts and obvious fitness for this service was clear.
3. The call of God was clear to all and nobody needed persuasion. There was

¹¹⁷ Acts 18: 22

¹¹⁸ Acts 18:23

¹¹⁹ D Hesselgrave: Planting Churches Cross Culturally p58-63

¹²⁰ Acts 16:2

¹²¹ Acts 11:25,26

a clear recognition by the church that they had been chosen by God and so a collective response was made to His voice.

This principle is important and need to be considered when missionaries are sent. As Michael Griffiths comments: “Not even one missionary call recorded by the Holy Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles was subjective or the result of individual initiative alone. In most cases the subjective sense of call is not the aspect of the call that is brought to our attention by the Holy Spirit. In every case either the church or another missionary had a considerable part to play in the call.” 122

4. The church released them to service and identified with them. We saw that they fasted, prayed and laid hands on them. God had spoken so no one held back or questioned the divine instructions.

5. On the completion of their mission, they returned and reported to the church. There was a strong bond with the members of the Christian community at Antioch and the apostles maintained this and proved themselves accountable.

This last point is of great importance, stressing that the church is not the only responsible partner in mission, but that the missionary is also responsible to the church which sends him. ‘He recognises the delegating authority of the church, identifies himself with the church, submits himself to the direction and discipline of the church, and commits himself to be a true and responsible representative of the church.’ 123

Thus the three parties involved in the sending process were:- 1. God: who called and made his will known; 2. Paul & Barnabas: who were identified by that call; and 3. the church at Antioch: who released & sent them away. These three should still be at the heart of the process. When there are questions about the genuineness of “a call”, and the church does not always have such a clear indication as the unmistakable voice at Antioch, it is important to wait upon God and not to make rushed decisions. This will mean that both sending church and workers will have confidence that those who are being sent are truly those whom God has called to his service.

122 Michael Griffiths; You and God’s work overseas.

123 G.W. Peters: A Biblical Theology of Missions p 222

Recent studies of missionaries who left service early, which we have already mentioned have demonstrated that one of the reasons for some leaving the work early was that they did not have a clear sense of calling. 124 This was particularly true of new countries that have begun to send cross cultural missionaries in recent years, where the local church base was often weak. While we recognise that not everyone has an Isaiah type experience, and may not use the ‘familiar language’ to tell their story, the clarity of God’s guidance and the desire to do his will should always be central to missionary service. When this is absent, then local churches are right to raise questions, and in fact have an obligation to do so. If there is any uncertainty, it is better to delay, rather than risk potential disaster later.

THE LOCAL CHURCH AS ‘SENDERS’.

Although God is the primary sender of his workers, there is a clear sense in which the local church also sends. Two words are used for sending in the New Testament. The word generally associated with God’s sending is ‘*apostello*’, which we recognise from its associations. This word is associated particularly with commissioning to service, as when Jesus said to his disciples; ‘As the Father sent me, I am sending you.’ 125

Another word that is translated as ‘send’ is *propempe*, commonly meaning “to send on one’s way”. It is a more general term than “apostello”, and contains the idea that those sent would have everything provided for their needs. It suggests a responsibility of the sender to assist, and support traveling apostles and servants of God. It is used in several passages:

‘The church *sent* them on their way..’ 126

‘I hope to visit you while passing though and have you *assist* me on my journey there.’ 127

‘Perhaps I will stay with you on my journey .. so that you can *help me on my journey*, whenever I go.’ 128

‘*Send him on his way* in peace so he can return to me.’ 129

124 Ed William Taylor: Too valuable to Lose; p 85-102

125 John 20:21

126 Acts 15:3

127 Rom 15: 24

128 1 Cor 16: 6

129 1 Cor 16: 11

‘I planned to visit you on my way to Macedonia... then to have you *send me on my way*’¹³⁰

‘Do everything you can *to help* Zenas the lawyer and Apollos *on their way* and see they receive everything they need.’¹³¹

‘You will do well to *send them on their way* in a manner worthy of God.’¹³²

These verses describe much more than a handshake, hug and ‘God bless you’. It means that these travelling missionaries would be properly cared for and this included some money in their wallet, food in their bags, and suitable clothes on their back. Churches that ‘send’ in this way are fulfilling their obligation to itinerant missionaries and bible teachers.

The last reference refers to those who have gone out to serve for God: ‘*It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans.*’ Christians who were helped and taught by these workers had an obligation to help them on their way with material help and resources. John Piper states ‘We must either go out for the sake of his Name, or we must send and support such people who do, and do so in a manner worthy of God.’¹³³

Any local church that recognises and releases any of its members to service, must face up to these obligations. There is a financial responsibility to be faced, for it costs to live, to travel, to set up home and to serve in a new country or area. These needs have to be met, it is part of the obligation of sending.

ASSESSING THE CANDIDATES

How can a local church assess those whom God is calling to His service, or those who come seeking the backing of the church? Many church elders and leaders can feel inadequate in these situations, as they feel their lack of experience and knowledge and so tend to delegate the decision making and seek for outside advice. However a great deal can be done through applying God given wisdom and biblical principles.

¹³⁰ 2 Cor 1: 16

¹³¹ Tit 3: 13

¹³² 3 John 6

¹³³ J. Piper: Let the Nations be Glad p 225

There are several areas that need to be examined, but these can be grouped under two main areas.¹³⁴

1. KNOWLEDGE OF THE PERSON

Any person who is considering service for God will be a member of a local church, and would be expected to be fully involved in its activities, so the following ought to be considered in the assessment of potential new missionaries.

Validating the call.

The church, we have already seen, should be as convinced as the individual that God has called them to his service. Evidence for this must be examined and considered prayerfully. It will be necessary to ask hard questions, and these should not be avoided. This may involve considerable time and much prayer for mistakes can result in serious consequences, so the will of God must be clear. *Never be in a rush.*

Character.

The Christian testimony, maturity, spirituality and stability of the person should be evident. If there are questions in any of these areas, it is better not to proceed. The candidate may be told to wait, to work in the church and prove themselves before proceeding any further.

Commitment.

This will be demonstrated in a variety of areas to the local church, using opportunities for service for the Lord, and regular involvement in the routine activities of the church. If someone is not committed to the work of God in their home setting, then it unlikely they will demonstrate a different attitude in a new culture.

Gifts and Abilities.

¹³⁴ Commendation & Care , Publication by Echoes of Service

Is the person fitted for the work to which they feel they are being called? Have they adequate training or is further training necessary? Is there a capacity to learn a new language, to adapt to new cultural situations, to relate to other people and colleagues from different backgrounds?

Physical fitness.

Some environments are harsh and unhealthy. Are they fit, are there any major medical problems? A full and thorough medical will be necessary at some point before they leave preferably done by professionals with experience in this area.

Family Circumstances.

Is the home background stable, or are there problems known to the church. If the candidates are married, do they both share the calling and are they one in their desire to serve God. How do the children fit into the process, if there are any, have educational needs been considered? What is the attitude of parents and other members of the family are they supportive or antagonistic? Do you anticipate any problems ahead?

In the assessment of potential new missionaries the following need attention:

- **ESCAPISM.** Is the person getting away from difficult problems or unresolved issues by heading off to serve somewhere abroad. They will only carry their problems with them, and this needs to be explored in depth.
- **EXCITEMENT.** Do they have a romantic vision of what they are going to do or achieve, or are they really facing up to the issues and difficulties inherent in missionary service. A reality check is necessary.
- **EGOISM** Are they true servants of God, willing to sacrifice and if necessary suffer for his sake, or is this an ego trip, filled with their own plans and ideas. Will they work well with others?
- **EXCESSIVE ENCOURAGEMENT** Is this their own calling and God given desire, or are they being put under pressure by others to go to a

particular situation? If so how will they cope when problems arise?

2. KNOWLEDGE OF THE WORK THEY ARE GOING TO DO.

This is the second major area that must be considered in pre-field assessment. This will involve some research into the proposed area of service. Sources of help are other missionaries, those already working in the area, mission agencies, service groups, the internet etc. Some of the areas that need to be explored are:

- What will their role be, where will language learning take place; what are conditions like; are there specific dangers either environmental, political or health.
- If the worker is unmarried, is it suitable location for a single person?
- Has the potential worker researched the field well? How much do they know about the work, the people, the language and the environment? Have they visited?
- Has work already been established there and for how long? Who is doing this work?
- Have contacts been made, will they receive a welcome? Are they wanted?
- Are they compatible, culturally and doctrinally with the church in the area and any workers who will be their colleagues?
- Will the local church (if one exists) welcome them? Do they recognise and accept the authority of local leadership?

These are some of the issues that need to be explored, and at first sight this may seem a daunting list, but if the local church does its research, and collects the right information, it will be in a much better position to make a considered and wise decision about sending new workers to serve in mission.

We have tried to demonstrate in this chapter that the local church has a most

important role to play in mission which if neglected, will lead to the impoverishment of the church, and the contraction of its vision and effectiveness. If it is to fulfil God's purpose, each local church must get involved in mission, or else it will die. History proves that very clearly. A pertinent point has been made by Paul Beals: "Local churches are the key to world missions. They are the source of missionary personnel, support and informed prayer. They are the engine, which under God drives world mission"¹³⁵

We conclude with a suggested list of some of the features of a local church with a strong missionary focus:¹³⁶

- The church will have an outward, not an inward focus
- At least 30% of the budget will go to missions
- There will be regular mission education throughout the church's programme
- There will be an openness and desire to send its own members
- A missions team or at least a secretary that promote mission in the church
- There will be concern and regular prayer for the lost
- Internal training in evangelism and mission will be included in the programme
- Assistance will be given to other churches in mission
- A strong local evangelism programme will be included
- There will be a challenge to its young people to get involved in short term mission teams.

How does your church match up to this programme?

¹³⁵ Paul Beals

¹³⁶ Adapted from Tom Telford 'Missions in the 21st Century'

Chapter 3

The History of Christian Mission

It would be wrong to study a subject like missiology without having a look at the history of Christian mission. Today's missionaries have a wonderful heritage. They have been preceded by generations of faithful men and women of God who have courageously proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to the world. We need to recognize their hard work, and learn lessons from their experiences. It is to this end that we will not turn and examine what has happened over the past two millennia of Christian history.

The Apostolic Era

Any history of missions should really begin in the apostolic era where Jesus' followers began to put into practice the Great Commission which he had given to them. They did not have many of the technologies that modern missionaries often take for granted. For example, there was no organizational structure to coordinate their efforts. They did not have access to Christian theological education or textbooks on missiology. Many of the early Christians were poor and so financial resources would have been relatively scarce (1 Cor.1:26). They also lacked political influence. What they did have in abundance, however, was a desire to share their faith with everyone they came across, and the Holy Spirit used this to great effect.

Even though those early Christians had many obstacles to overcome as they tried to spread the gospel, they also had three important factors in their favour. Firstly, there was the Greek language. Alexander the Great had conquered much of the then known world during his short reign. As he did so he made Greek culture and the Greek language universal throughout his empire. Even though the Romans later conquered much of this territory, the Greek language remained the language of the civilized world¹³⁷. The

137 Merrill Tenny, *New Testament Survey*, p.54. Latin was the language of the law courts and Roman literature. It was spoken in the western Roman world, in places such as North Africa, Spain, Gaul and Britain. Greek, however, was the cultural language of the empire, the common language of everyone from Rome eastwards, and familiar to anyone who was educated.

missionaries of the apostolic age could therefore travel far and wide, preaching throughout the ancient world, without having to learn any languages.

Secondly, there was an excellent road system throughout the Roman Empire¹³⁸. The Romans were excellent engineers and wanted to make all parts of their empire easily accessible. The roads which they built made it possible for the early Christian missionaries to travel quickly and safely, bringing the gospel to those they were trying to reach. Thirdly, there was the Jewish Diaspora. The Jews had scattered themselves throughout the empire and could be found in nearly every major town and city. Wherever they went they built synagogues so that they could continue to follow their religion¹³⁹. The early Christians, being Jews themselves, used these synagogues as centres for the propagation of the gospel.

In many ways, early Christian mission was 'kick-started' by circumstances beyond the control of the church. Persecution against the Christians broke out in Jerusalem and the Christians living there found themselves on the run, fleeing for their very lives (Acts 8:1). As they fled, however, they shared their faith and others were converted¹⁴⁰. Churches sprang up in places like Antioch. These newly formed churches, in turn, began to send out their own missionaries (Acts 13:1-3). In this way many thousands of people were becoming Christians throughout the empire and the fires of missionary activity began to burn brightly.

Despite the dramatic growth of the church, things continued to be difficult for the early Christians. Many Jewish leaders saw the church as a threat (Acts 4:1-22). As more and more Jews became Christians, the Jewish leaders decided to take action and a systematic campaign of harassment against the church was launched. Stephen, one of the early casualties, was stoned to death (Acts 7:58).

The Jews, however, were not only opponents that Christians had to face. As time went on, the Roman authorities also became hostile to Christianity. In AD 64 Rome was badly damaged in a terrible fire, and Nero made the

138 Merrill Tenny, *New Testament Survey*, p.61.

139 Gresham Machen, *The New Testament*, p.41. Unlike today, the Jews of the first century were missionary minded. Their synagogue gatherings consisted not only of Jews, but Gentiles also. Furthermore the language of the synagogue was Greek and the Septuagint was used. This would have made it accessible to the Gentile world, and key for Christian evangelism.

140 H Marshall, *Acts*, p.152.

Christians scapegoats¹⁴¹. This event sparked off a persecution of the Church, though it was more because of the charge of arson than because they were Christians¹⁴². Walker makes the point that the unpopularity of Christians at this stage made the accusations believable and easy to make¹⁴³. It was during the reign of Nero that Paul was imprisoned and beheaded¹⁴⁴. Persecutions were to continue for some time, though sporadically. Indeed the first attempt to wipe out Christianity throughout the empire did not occur until 250 AD under the reign of Decius¹⁴⁵. The popular perception of these persecutions is that countless thousands of Christians died. This, however, is somewhat of an exaggeration¹⁴⁶. Nevertheless we should not underestimate the terrible sufferings of the many hundreds of Christians who were martyred, or the very real fear the church in general felt, living in such a hostile environment.

In AD 70 Jerusalem itself was destroyed, not because of the Christians, but to quell a Jewish uprising¹⁴⁷. This event nevertheless affected the church because up until this point, Jerusalem had been the centre of Christianity. After AD 70 this was no longer the case. But despite all these problems, Christianity kept growing as the persecuted church continued to spread the good news (Acts 8:4).

The Post-Apostolic Era (100-312 AD)

The persecution of the church continued, not least because so many sections of Roman society were upset by the Christians. The Roman leaders were angered by the Christians refusal to take part in idolatry¹⁴⁸. Rival religious groups also opposed the Church out of a competitive spirit¹⁴⁹. The upper classes and intelligentsia despised the church because it attracted people who were considered to be worthless and objectionable¹⁵⁰. In short, as the

141 E.M. Green, Illustrated Bible Dictionary, p.1194.

142 Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church, p.43.

143 Williston Walker, A history of the Christian Church, p.43.

144 FF Bruce, New Testament History, p.367.

145 Clouse, Pierard & Yamauchi, Two Kingdoms, p.47. Decius required everyone to make offerings to himself and to swear an oath of loyalty. People then had to obtain an official document known as a *libellus* as proof that they had offered a sacrifice. Those who refused to participate in this activity faced harsh penalties.

146 Luter, Dictionary of Later New Testament, p.720.

147 Jagersma, A History of Israel, p.144.

148 Reasoner, Dictionary of Later new Testament, p.325.

149 Clouse, Yamauchi, Pirard, Two Kingdoms, p.41.

150 Stephen Neil, A History of Christian Missions, p.40. Celsus expressed the attitude that many had towards the church, describing Christians as, 'worthless and contemptible people, idiots, slaves, poor

Christians lived out their faith, they came directly into conflict with the institutional sinfulness of the Roman world.

Once again, however, the great opposition to the gospel did not prevent it being spread. Wherever you were to look on a map, Christians could be found preaching the gospel and establishing churches ¹⁵¹. Churches became firmly established in Syria and then the gospel advanced further into Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). Towards the West, Macedonia, Achaia (modern day Greece) and much of Italy came under the sound of the Gospel. It also reached Gaul (modern day France), Spain and Britain.

But Christianity was not just expanding into Europe. To the south the Egyptian church was becoming both large and influential, and from there the gospel spread into modern day Algeria and Tunisia. In the East it had also advanced into Armenia (Southern Russia) and into modern day Iraq. By the time Constantine assumed the throne, churches could be found in almost every corner of the Roman Empire and between 5 and 15 percent of the empire had become Christians, although the spread was very uneven ¹⁵². With this dramatic growth came many heresies and doctrinal problems, but nevertheless it was obvious to all that God was at work in the world.

The State Church Era (312AD-500AD)

On October 28, 312 AD, Constantine went into battle against Maxentius, his rival for the Roman Empire. The night before the battle, he claimed that he had a dream in which he saw the initial letters of the name of Christ with the words 'By this sign you will conquer'¹⁵³. He entered the battle at Milvian Bridge claiming to be a Christian, and won. In doing so he became the ruler of the Western part of the Roman Empire. The following year an edict was passed which granted complete religious freedom to Christians. Christianity did not become the official religion of the empire, but it had full legal equality with any religion of the Roman world.

women, and children'. This was true to a degree, but in time intellectuals such as Justin Martyr (100-165) found that Christianity met their needs also.

151 Lion, p.64,65.

152 Clouse, Yamauchi & Pierard, *Two Kingdoms*, p.51. In areas such as Asia Minor, Cyprus and Armenia Christians were a majority. They were a significant minority group in Greece, Italy, Syria and Egypt, while in Arabia, Morocco and along the Black Sea they were sparsely represented.

153 Wilston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, p.101.

Though undoubtedly preferable to persecution, this new state of affairs nevertheless posed a significant threat to the purity of the Christian church. Christianity became so popular that it was seen as a way of advancing oneself in society. Indeed in the century that followed Constantine, the number of Christians in the Empire quadrupled¹⁵⁴. Soon the church, once so full of courageous believers willing to die for their faith, became diluted in its zeal. Many who claimed allegiance to the church had no real living relationship with Jesus Christ. As the church became rich, bishoprics became contested for personal gain. The church now had the freedom to evangelize the world, but the world also entered the church. To make matters worse, these developments were accompanied by further doctrinal error. In short, the link between church and state was proving to be a mixed blessing.

One of the great missionaries of this period was Patrick of Ireland. Patrick set about bringing the gospel to Ireland. Born 390 in Old Kilpatrick near Dumbarton in Scotland, he had a British upbringing before being taken captive by marauding Irish tribes at the age of sixteen¹⁵⁵. After six years working as a slave in East Antrim he escaped¹⁵⁶. He later returned in 432 following a vision in which he was called back to Ireland as a missionary.

His strategy was to plant monasteries in strategic places from where monks could go out and evangelize the area. This method would prove key to the evangelism of Scotland in later years. There was opposition both from the representatives of the old religion and some of the kings whom he tried to convert. His work was also disrupted by British raiders who would slaughter his converts, but none of this could halt his vision and determination¹⁵⁷. At the beginning of his ministry the land was completely

154 Stephen Neil, *A History of Christian Missions*, p.41. Neil points out that not everyone was happy with Christianity's new found popularity. For example Symmachus, who represented the ancient Roman aristocracy, protested strongly at the removal of the Altar of Victory which was a traditional symbol of the ancient power of Rome.

155 Blair, *Dictionary of Later New Testament*, p.752.

156 The details of Patrick's life are somewhat sketchy, not least because some of the sources we have on his life are unreliable. On the issue of his escape from Ireland, Blair argues that he went over to Scotland (Blair, *Dictionary of Later New Testament*, p.752) while Neil argues for France (Neil, *A History of Christian Missions*, p.49).

157 At some point in his ministry, it seems as if Patrick distanced himself from the Roman church which was being established throughout the empire. Certainly the Celtic church which he established was to have a distinct character. It differed from the Roman church in that it was based round a monastic order that 'reached out' as opposed to having a cathedral which expected communicants to 'come in'. It also prized art, scholarship and an ascetic lifestyle. Celtic monks were famed for the difficult lives and ministries that they embraced.

pagan, but by the end, Christianity had spread throughout the whole country¹⁵⁸.

Pre and post Middle Ages (500AD-1600AD)

By the time of the Middle Ages the Roman empire had declined and Europe was ruled by a number of different monarchs. At the same time the church had become enormously powerful and wealthy, making the Pope one of the most powerful men on earth. The Pope claimed to be the Vicar of Christ, ruling on earth as Christ's representative. This power led to great corruption, and scandal was not uncommon within the corridors of ecclesiastical power.

Despite the decadence of the church, some significant missionary activity was still taking place. Pope Gregory the Great did more than any other man to strengthen the power of the papacy and to establish the church as the Roman Empire was disappearing¹⁵⁹. Legend has it that while still a monk he saw English slaves in Rome and commented: "*Non Angli sed angeli*" (Not Angles but angels). In 596 he sent 40 monks under Augustine to evangelize the Anglo-Saxon and Jute kingdoms¹⁶⁰.

Gregory decided that this mission could begin with King Ethelbert who was a leading figure among the twelve Anglo-Saxon rulers of Britain. No doubt this was because Ethelbert had married a Catholic Frankish princess. Ethelbert and thousands of others were to embrace Christianity, indeed by the end of the year Augustine had baptized 10,000 converts¹⁶¹.

At least part of Gregory's motivation in sending Augustine to England was to halt the progress of the Celtic church which was continuing to grow and move down from its strongholds in Ireland and Scotland into Northern England. Augustine was instructed by Gregory to wean converts slowly from paganism, and pagan festivals and temples were re-dedicated. Augustine was made Archbishop of the English Church in 597, and at this point Ethelbert gave him his palace in Canterbury. But this competition between the two churches was not to last. An amalgamation took place in 664 at the Synod of Whitby. Due to the lack of structure in the Celtic

158 Stephen Neil, A History of Christian Missions, p.50.

159 Stephen Neil, A History of Christian Missions, p.58. Gregory became the Bishop of Rome in 590, having come from a Monastery. As a result of the work that Gregory did, the church became the one institution in the Western world to survive the collapse of the Roman Empire.

160 Clause, Yamauchi & Pierard, Two Kingdoms, p.124.

161 Stephen Neil, A History of Christian Missions, p.59.

church, this effectively ensured that Celtic Christianity would be absorbed into the Roman tradition and Celtic spirituality would die out¹⁶².

Another important missionary of this period was an English monk named Boniface (680-754)¹⁶³. At the age of 40 he went as a missionary to work in Belgium. The Pope made him Bishop of the German frontier. He then established a mission to the German tribes. His great courage was demonstrated at Geismar where he cut down a sacred oak tree of Thor and made it into a chapel¹⁶⁴. Victory in such confrontations caused a large turning to Christ. He was a brilliant scholar and administrator, as well as a passionate evangelist. He founded many monasteries and churches. At 753, aged 80, Boniface gave up all his responsibilities and became a missionary in Holland. Unfortunately within a short time of his arrival, he and 50 companions were attacked and martyred.

As time passed the Franks became the most powerful European tribe. They were led by Charlemagne who was a wise and powerful king. He became a Christian and was crowned King of the Holy Roman Empire by the Pope on Christmas day A.D.800. He then set out to make Europe Christian by the force of arms. The other great tribe were the Saxons and they became his target. He made conversion a term of peace. Any Saxon who refused baptism was put to death. Atrocities took place on both sides during this conflict, and some missionaries died as a result of the turbulence. In the end however, patience and prayer eventually bore fruit as Christianity continued to spread.

The Eastern church was established by A.D.800 and a great rivalry developed with the West. The battle between Constantinople and Rome was particularly evident especially when both sets of missionaries would converge on the same area. The two great Eastern missionaries of the period were Constantine and Methodus, two Slavs (tribes east of the Saxons). Both were noblemen with a good education and sharp theological minds. They created a Slavic script and translated part of the Bible into the new language

162 Many scholars see this as a tragedy for the rugged piety of Celtic Christianity was ultimately lost.

163 Boniface was a name given to him latterly, his real name was Winfrith of Crediton. He is described by Stephen Neil as the greatest missionary of the Dark Ages.

164 Clouse, Yamauchi & Pierard, *Two Kingdoms*, p.127. Boniface told his audience that he would chop the tree down to prove that Thor was no god, and also to demonstrate the superiority of the God of Christians. As he did so a storm gathered and the onlookers expected to see him struck down by lightning for his blasphemy. However a wind blew and the tree was torn down.

¹⁶⁵. They also decided to preach only in Slav and translated the liturgy. Initially there was little fruit and constant struggles against Western officialdom. Later, however, Christianity spread through Bulgaria to Russia and this led eventually to the formation of the Russian Orthodox Church.

While much political intrigue was taking place in the Western church, Islam was becoming a significant threat in the East. Muhammad (570-632) was the posthumous son of an unknown father. He was born into the Quraysh tribe, the leading merchant clan in Mecca. His mother died when he was six leaving him in the care of his grandfather. He married his employer, a rich widow of 40, who bore him some children, but only one survived, his daughter Fatima.

Muhammad was a very religious man who spent much time meditating and fasting. He certainly came into contact with Christians and Jews and despised the crude polytheism of his native Mecca. He received his call in 610, when in a vision he was given a reading of the Koran.

His move to Medina in 622 marked the beginning of a rapid extension of his teaching so that, by the time of his death, the whole of Arabia was conquered by Islam¹⁶⁶. By 656 AD areas known today as Libya, Egypt, Syria, Israel, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan had also become Islamic. By 715 AD the Muslims had conquered much of Spain and it was not until the Battle of Pointers in 732 AD that Islamic forces were halted in Europe.

On Mohammad's death his followers choose Abu Bakr to become his successor (Caliph). He became the civic and religious leader of the Islamic community and this greatly aided the expansion of Islam. A later Caliph collected the sayings of the prophet into a book and called it the Koran (recitation)¹⁶⁷. Though many other prophets were recognized, Mohammed was given a special place of honour. Islam was ultimately to fragment into two sections (Sunnis & Shiite) due to a deadly feud¹⁶⁸.

165 Graham Cheeseman, Mission Today, p.47.

166 Southern rightly states that, 'About the year 700 Christendom was in the process of losing to Islam a large part of the lands that had been Christian for hundreds of years' (RW Southern, The Middle Ages, p.53).

167 Clouse, Pierard & Yamauchi, Two Kingdoms, p.137.

168 Clouse, Pierard & Yamauchi, Two Kingdoms, p.137. The feud which took place involved two assassinations. Uthman was killed and succeeded by Ali the son-in-law of Muhammad. He in turn was killed and the two groups of followers continued their own separate tradition.

In 711 the Moors, a Berber tribe that had converted to Islam, conquered Visigothic Spain¹⁶⁹. Although they were ultimately repelled in the Battle of Pointers, they presented one of the greatest threats to Christianity that the church had ever encountered. The Holy land also came under the domination of the Saracens¹⁷⁰. In an attempt to free these sights, and in the belief that the 'infidel' were either to be exterminated or committed to slavery, eight crusades took place, only the first of which (1096) achieved it's objective. 30,000 of the original 300,000 reached Jerusalem and massacred its inhabitants. The violence and greed of many of the soldiers involved in the crusades was to embittered Muslim/Christian relationships forever. It was a terrible period of history in which sincere people, including children, were offered all kinds of spiritual rewards and were deceived into participating in these misguided ventures.

The Franciscan Order, formed in 1209 by Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) had the aim of renewing the simplicity of the Christian faith and carrying the Christian message to the masses. St. Francis himself was dedicated to a life of poverty and the abandonment of worldly goods. This was to become the Franciscan way of life¹⁷¹.

He made two unsuccessful attempts to reach Muslims with the gospel and then on his third, he accompanied soldiers of the 5th crusade. Francis was allowed to preach to the Sultan of Egypt where he suggested a trial. He challenged the Muslim religious leaders to walk with him on fiery coals to see who worshipped the true God. They declined, but the Sultan was not converted.

Franciscan missionaries continued this work and went around the world with the Christian message. Some went to the powerful rulers of the Mongols in the East. Others went West to reach the Indian tribes of the Americas. Francis himself believed that it was important to carry the Christian message to the Saracen leaders rather than to wage war against them.

While serious efforts were made to master indigenous languages and provide literature for them, there were grave deficiencies. Most Spanish and

169 The term Moors was used by the Spanish to describe their Islamic conquerors. They were essentially North African.

170 The term Saracen was used collectively of the different Islamic groups.

171 Southern, *The Middle Ages*, p.282. Francis saw poverty as the essential way in which he could imitate Christ. It was his rigorous spiritual discipline as opposed to his organizational ability that made his ministry so effective.

Portuguese colonizers believed in the view of Aristotle that some races were born to menial tasks. This attitude was to be a barrier to the indigenisation of their work. Often superficial conversions were sought. This was evidenced by that fact that when some of the Indians embraced the Christian faith, they were still denied the Eucharist. It is also interesting to note that no North or South American Indian was ordained as a priest until 1794, over two and a half centuries after the arrival of Catholicism in the Americas.

As part of the reaction to the Reformation, the Society of Jesus was formed in 1540 by Ignatius de Loyola. His "*Spiritual Exercises*" was greatly influenced by the Franciscans, but he added the solemn oath of complete loyalty to the Pope. The Jesuit Order laid great emphasis on education, and so formed close links with the aristocracy and governing classes. By 1626, around the world, 400 colleges provided free tuition to all comers.

Francis Xavier (1506-1552) was one of the original six men whom Ignatius de

Loyola conscripted into the Society of Jesus while he was at the University of Paris¹⁷². Xavier was dispatched by Loyola to India in 1541 and later moved on to Japan. In both places he had such success as a missionary that he was nicknamed 'The Apostle to the Indies and Japan'. Xavier literally burned himself out for the cause of mission, often getting no more than 2 or 3 hours sleep per night. Today the Jesuits credit Xavier with more than 700,000 conversions¹⁷³.

Another Jesuit missionary of note was Robert de Nobili (1577-1656), who worked in India for fifty years. In the words of Stephen Neil, 'To win the Indians he would become an Indian'¹⁷⁴. Nobili felt that converts were being made to conform to Portuguese culture. His response was to make a careful study of Brahman culture and set aside anything in his lifestyle that could cause offence. He became a vegetarian, wore no leather, and used the robe of a guru. He also mastered Tamil, Telugu and Sanskrit, being the first European ever to do so. He did not require converts to abandon caste. A good number of high caste and many low caste Indians were converted.

The Reformation Era (1500-1700)

172 Linder, Great Leaders, p.226.

173 Linder, Great Leaders, p.232.

174 Stephen Neil, A History of Christian Missions, p.156.

The Reformation was a landmark in the history of the Christian church. Though Europe had totally embraced Christendom, the Roman church which so dominated European life had become deeply corrupt and riddled with false doctrines. There were, of course, many true believers in the Roman church, but Rome as a religious institution was, in the view of many, beyond redemption. A German monk by the name of Martin Luther sparked off the Reformation, and this new movement was then consolidated by the theological work of John Calvin, through his Institutes¹⁷⁵. Soon much of northern Europe had embraced Protestantism.

The Reformation period was not noted for its missionary endeavor. Indeed the theological wrangling that took place within European Protestantism, coupled with the thirty years war and a theology that elevated predestination above man's responsibility to evangelize, conspired to ensure that during this period, world mission was dominated by the Roman Catholic orders.

There were, however, some helpful circumstances that would in time aid protestant missionary expansion. Firstly, as a result of the Reformation there were now many thousands of true believers in churches throughout Europe. Secondly, the northern European countries where Protestantism dominated were now beginning to trade with the East, and this in turn would lead to missionary endeavour there. Thirdly, Guttenberg had just invented the printing press so it was possible to begin a mass production and distribution of Christian literature.

The Puritans and Pietists (1600-1800)

David Brainerd (1718-1747) was touched by the great awakening associated with George Whitfield and John Wesley. He was sent by the Scottish Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge in 1741, he worked for a few years among North American Indians. His suffering and devotion as he fulfilled his ministry, before dying of tuberculosis at the age of 29, are recorded in his diaries. These served as an inspiration for William Carey and Henry Martin fifty years later¹⁷⁶.

As the Puritans began to involve themselves in mission, they, like other protestant missionaries, were linked to the colonial activities of the Western

¹⁷⁵ Owen Chadwick, p.92. When Calvin first penned the institutes it was just a small book, but in time it grew. His clarity of style made it accessible and therefore powerful.

¹⁷⁶ Brainard, p.95.

European nations. The Dutch East India Company sent out chaplains who, in some parts, were paid a sum of money for each convert who was baptized. The British East India Company thought that chaplains would spoil trade relations, but was eventually forced to send some. One noted missionary of this period was Henry Martin. He went to India in 1805 and translated the New Testament into Hindustani and Persian. His career was short-lived, however, because he had burned himself out by the age of 31 and died on the home journey back to England ¹⁷⁷.

The puritan missionary John Elliot (1604-1690) left England for the Americas in 1631 and became a pastor of the church in Roxbury, Massachusetts ¹⁷⁸. He began to acquire a knowledge of the Indian language and dedicated himself to reaching the Indian tribes of his area. One of his great accomplishments was to translate the whole Bible into the language of the Mohican. The New Testament was published in 1661 and the Old Testament in 1663¹⁷⁹. He also organized praying towns which were semi-European style communities where the believing Indians would live. Some fourteen of these were formed with a population of more than a thousand ¹⁸⁰. Tragically, war between the English and the Indians completely destroyed his work. Today no one can read his Mohican Bible.

As the Protestant churches became affected by formality and lost their fervour, a movement began towards the end of the seventeenth century which re-emphasized personal conversion, a concern for the lost, and holiness of life. Affecting all types of churches, it became known as German Pietism. In Britain the Evangelical Awakening was a development of it.

Bartholomew Ziegenbalg and Henry Plutschau were both students in Halle, the centre of Pietism, and they went out to India in 1706 to begin their missionary careers ¹⁸¹. Initially they encountered considerable opposition not least because the resident Danish chaplains considered them to be intruders. Ziegenblag was even imprisoned for a time. Nevertheless they worked for thirteen and five years respectively and had considerable success. They linked schools with the churches they planted, made the word of God

177 K.S. Latourette, A History of the Expansion of Christianity vol.6, p.102.

178 K.S. Latourette, A History of the Expansion of Christianity vol.3, p.218.

179 Stephen Neil, A History of Christian missions, p.192.

180 K.S. Latourette, A History of the Expansion of Christianity vol.3, p.219.

181 K.S. Latourette, Three Centuries of Advance, p.278.

available in the language of the people, based their preaching on an accurate knowledge of the language, and tried to establish Indian leadership as soon as possible. Interestingly Ziegenblag had some clashes with the organization that supported him back in Europe¹⁸². The mission felt that its missionaries should remain single and travel widely proclaiming the gospel. Ziegenblag on the other hand got married and was involved in projects that kept him in one place as well as requiring considerable European funds.

Another key figure was Nicolaus Count von Zinzendorf (1700-1760). He was educated in Halle, and in 1719 was deeply moved by seeing a painting in Dusseldorf of the crucified Redeemer, with the words: "*All this I did for you. What are you doing for me?*" He dedicated himself to worldwide evangelism.

In 1722, a group of Moravian Brethren and other refugees settled on his estate, seeking freedom from persecution¹⁸³. They were a community characterized by great personal devotion and prayer. Zinzendorf challenged the group to take their missionary responsibility seriously, and there was an overwhelming response. Within twenty years of commencing mission work, they had started more missions than all the Protestants in the previous 200 years¹⁸⁴. Such was their mission zeal that they had three missionaries for everyone who stayed at home. One hundred and fifty years later 2,700 missionaries had gone out from the Moravian Brethren, often to the most inhospitable regions.

The Great Century of Mission (1789-1914)

While the term 'Great century of Mission' refers to the nineteenth century, it is convenient to see the period as extending from 1789 (The French Revolution) to 1914 (The First World War). It is called the Great Century of mission because of the many achievements that took place during this time. At the outset of this period, over the greater part of the earth's surface the population was untouched by the Christian message. At the end of this period, this could be said of only a few countries, such as Nepal, Tibet and Afghanistan, which remained completely closed to Christians.

182 K.S. Latourette, *Three Centuries of Advance*, p.279.

183 Broadbent, *The Pilgrim Church*, p.274.

184 Graham Cheesman, *Mission Today*, p.55. There can be little doubt that the sheer passion for mission was a major reason why the Moravians did so well. They would often choose tough places such as Greenland, Africa and leper colonies, and would go at the drop of a hat with only enough money to get them to their destination.

The advance in Bible translation is also remarkable. In 1800 the whole or part of the Bible was available in 70 languages. By 1900 the whole Bible was available in 100 languages, the New Testament available in 120 languages while gospel portions were available in a further 300 languages¹⁸⁵. All this was achieved without the help of modern linguistic knowledge or the tools to do translation work.

Various factors aided this missionary expansion. Europe enjoyed a century of relative peace after the long and devastating wars of the previous century. The Industrial Revolution in Europe had also created a thirst in the rest of the world for European ideas and products. What is more, rapid means of communication and travel changed the situation drastically. Napoleon's troops could travel no faster than those of Alexander the Great 2,000 years earlier, but by 1825 the first railway was operating, and by 1845 the first steamship crossed the Atlantic. The imperial interests of some European nations to colonize parts of Africa and India brought the needs of people in these areas to the attention of churches and individuals in some European nations, especially Britain. In turn this led to a heightened missionary focus on India and central Africa. Many individuals responded to the missionary call and their work was often made easier by the development of transport, communication and administration that was provided by the colonizers. This coupled with revivals in European and American Christianity, and the sacrificial service of thousands of dedicated missionaries, ensured that the gospel would be heralded throughout the world.

There were various key players in mission history at this time. Perhaps the best known of these is David Livingstone who pioneered a large section of Central Africa. He was the first of many who would subsequently transform this part of the continent. Livingstone believed that along with the gospel, commerce and civilisation should be brought to Africa. He believed that if African communities could be made economically viable, then the attractiveness of the slave trade would decrease¹⁸⁶.

William Carey, shoemaker turned Baptist preacher, also impacted the world of mission, writing a book called *"An enquiry into the Obligation of*

¹⁸⁵ Graham Cheesman, *Mission Today*, p.58. Many of these early translations were far from perfect and in time needed a great deal of revising. This, however, does not take away from the momentous achievement that it was.

¹⁸⁶ Clouse Pierard and Yamauchi, *Two Kingdoms*, p.492.

Christians to use means for Conversion of the Heathens"¹⁸⁷. Many were influenced by this book, as well as his personal appeals and the Baptist Missionary Society was formed the following year. Carey himself went to India and put his extraordinary abilities to work. He and his team produced six translations of the whole Bible, 23 of the New Testament, and portions in ten other languages. In 30 years of unbroken missionary service in India he translated works of the Hindu religion, produced a 1,000 page grammar, and founded a centre for higher education as well as a horticultural society.

Hudson Taylor is another name associated with mission at this time. New approaches and structures were needed in order to meet the immense challenge of the great continental inland regions with their vast populations as yet unevangelized. Hudson Taylor was a young man of thirty three, with seven years missionary experience behind him, when he prayed on Brighton beach for 24 able and ready workers for China. Two days later he was given £10 to help with the work. He formed the China Inland Mission which grew to over 600 missionaries within thirty years.

Taylor's approach was to accept missionaries from a variety of denominational backgrounds and all levels of formal education. This he achieved and missionaries joined him from almost all Protestant churches¹⁸⁸. He also insisted that the decision making for his mission should be done in China, not England where mission's personnel would be remote from the situation.

One group which was significant in this story of mission was the Christian Brethren.

Modern Missions (1900-)

As the story of mission entered the 20th century, missionaries were able to avail themselves of the many new tools that were available to them¹⁸⁹. Christian Radio and TV became important means of mass communication with millions listening regularly. Though follow up was necessarily

187 For an Exposition of Carey's work see SP Carey, pp.70-77.

188 Fiedler, *The Story of Faith Missions*, p.34.

189 Graham Cheeseman, *Mission Today*, p.62,63. Cheeseman notes that by 1980 there were 13 mission societies involved in running 1,450 broadcasting stations to 960 million regular listeners and receiving 4 million letters in response.

difficult, Christian radio has enabled the gospel to be proclaimed not only widely, but also in countries where mission activity was forbidden.

Literature work also became significant and with vast numbers of tracts and booklets being printed cheaply, this proved another useful form of mass evangelism. Part of the expansion of literature work included correspondence courses. With most countries having a modern postal system, hundreds of centres have been established for the production and distribution of correspondence courses.

Great use has also been made of ships and aircraft. Missionary pilots have been able to make contact with remote tribes and reach them with the gospel. Ships have also been used not only to do direct evangelism in ports around the world, but also to express God's love by providing medical help and poverty relief programs.

In addition to the use of new tools, new ministries have also dramatically changed the face of mission work¹⁹⁰. The presence of tentmakers and short term workers have greatly increased missionary numbers and the former have also made it possible to impact countries closed to traditional missionary personnel¹⁹¹. Missionaries who specialize in areas such as children's work or relief work have also made it possible for mission work to be much more focused and versatile.

There have also been some important thinkers in mission over the past hundred years. One such figure is Cameron Townsend. Townsend went to Guatemala as a missionary and quickly became convinced that the Spanish Bible was inadequate for the needs of the Indian tribes. He produced a translation of the New Testament into the tribal language of Cakchiquel in 1931 before going on to focus on other tribal languages.

Townsend's vision was to think in terms of "*people groups*" rather than countries and to produce a copy of the Bible for each of these groups. Simply defined a people group is a people with their own distinctive culture and language. Viewing peoples in this way enabled missionaries to

190 Graham Cheeseman, *Mission Today*, p.64-66.

191 The term 'tentmaker' refers to a missionary who has a salaried job within the country where he serves. It hails from the fact that the apostle Paul would sometimes work while engaging in mission and his trade was tent making. Tent making should be seen in a positive light. In countries where traditional missionaries are not permitted, tentmakers can get access because of the professional skills which they offer. Furthermore they are financially independent, and are in a position to easily make contacts.

recognise that even if there was Christian activity in a country, that did not mean that the country was reached as many peoples within that country might not have heard the gospel. As a result of the work done by Townsend, the Wycliffe Bible Translators and its sister organization the Summer Institute of Linguistics were formed ¹⁹².

Another key figure was Donald McGavran. Born in India of missionary parents McGavran returned there in 1923 to begin his missionary service. In 1954 he published a work called "*The Bridges of God*" which has become the classic work on evangelism using the bridges of family or kinship ¹⁹³. His idea was that the traditional mission station approach, which gathered together converts into a 'colony' that was divorced from mainstream society, should be changed. Instead, missionaries should seek to influence not just an individual, but a people group as well.

McGavran argued that most mission was being done either by people from the West or people trained and influenced by westerners. They were therefore highly individualistic and their work did not take account of the corporate way in which some cultures operate. Furthermore, a person becoming a Christian in the West was not looked down upon because his individualism would be admired, however in a society where individualism is shunned, a new Christian might be ostracised from his community.

McGavran concluded that as a missionary reaches out to a culturally distinct group who as yet are substantially untouched by the good news of Christ, he should endeavour to Christianize the whole group to the point of conversion and not just individuals within that group¹⁹⁴. He argued that this kind of evangelism provided the bulk of church growth in some parts of the world. Though many have struggled with McGavran's emphasis on reaching groups, he nevertheless reminded missionaries that many parts of the world do not operate in the individualistic way that westerners do.

The Future of Mission

¹⁹² An interesting extract from an essay written by Townsend can be found in Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, pp. B-116-B-118.

¹⁹³ Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, pp.B-137-B-156.

¹⁹⁴ Donald McGavran, Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, B-138. It must be noted that McGavran felt that the power of these people movements to Christ depended largely on the number of people within that movement who were truly converted. He felt that his emphasis must not detract from the need for people to be justified by faith and filled with the Holy Spirit, something that would not automatically happen just because they were part of a people movement to Christ.

In concluding this brief history of mission a couple of things must be stated when looking towards the future. Firstly, though missionary activity has changed over the centuries and the methods used by contemporary missionaries utilize the best of modern technology, the work of mission remains the same. That is to preach the gospel and establish the church while practically expressing the love of Christ. This will continue to demand both spirituality and commitment on behalf of missionaries.

Secondly, it is obvious that mission is alive and well within the church and will continue to be for the foreseeable future. Though some signs of decline are apparent within the church in the West, yet God is still busy with the work of mission and is raising a huge army of missionaries from the developing world who will continue the exciting mission story until Christ comes again.

Chapter 4

The Challenge of Today's World

The twenty-first century dawned with a great outburst of global optimism. We may remember the fireworks over Sydney Harbour Bridge; the Hallelujah Chorus sung by South Sea Islanders; celebrations at the Millennial Dome in London; the crowds in Times Square New York and so on round the world. A few years later the world is a different and hostile place. The events of September 9, 2001 have almost defined the 21st century with the result that security and terrorism have removed the feel good factor and added to the challenges facing disciples of Christ who want to make the gospel known among the peoples of the world.

Every generation faces a particular set of problems that seem unique to that era, but on closer examination are often similar to those encountered in the past. That is why a study of mission and church history is so important. It has been stated that if we do not learn from the mistakes of the past, we are destined to repeat them. However our era does present challenges on a scale that has not been seen before, at a time when we have the resources and also the technology with which to meet these. It is also a time when the Church of Christ is growing at an unprecedented rate, so the sheer size of the task must be balanced by the reality of what God is doing in our age. In this chapter we will explore some of the major challenges of the 21st Century

1. A Growing World.

There are now more people living on Planet earth than ever before, and the population number is predicted to continue growing well into the future. There have been serious attempts to slow the growth rate in many parts of the world, for example in China where couples who have more than one child are penalised financially. Population growth has already stopped and is even declining in developed countries¹⁹⁵, and also in some developing ones.¹⁹⁶ The countries that still have the fastest growth rate are the poorest, and consequently are least able to cope with such continuing rapid growth.

¹⁹⁵ Meic Perase: Why the Rest hates the West. The chapter on demographics in this book is a shocking reminder of how western societies are aging and failing to replace themselves. Declining birth rates in Europe mean that immigrant labour has become a vital necessity to maintain economies and fill jobs. The situation will only get worse as we move deeper into the 21st century.

¹⁹⁶ Check out UN or WHO web sites e.g. www.unfpa.org/modules/6billion/facts/htm

Although the world's population has quadrupled in the past 100 years, the major growth has taken place in the last 50 years. For centuries the rate of population growth was only gradual, constrained by the classical Malthusian¹⁹⁷ factors of war, famine natural catastrophe and disease. Rapid growth was observed in the last part of the 20th century particularly in the post war baby boom area. Medical advances and better health care produced a significant reduction in mortality in the less developed regions of the world, with the result that by 2000 the world was nearly two and a half times the size it was in 1950, a phenomenon called 'the population explosion'¹⁹⁸.

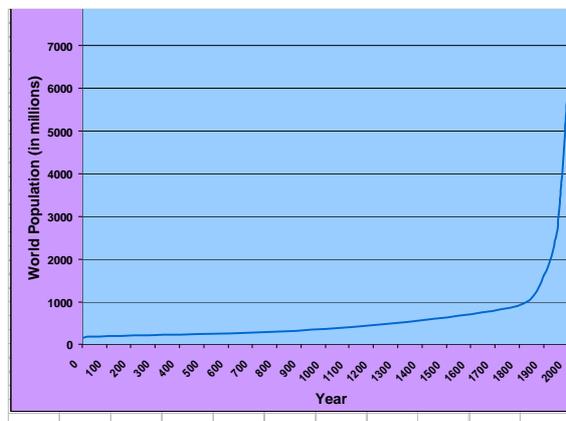


Fig 1. Graph of population growth over 2000 years

This growth is predicted to stabilise around 2050. United Nations estimates are of an estimated population of 8 billion by the year 2028. Figure 2 demonstrates the major differences in rates of growth, which is still significant in Asia, Africa and Latin America, but much slower and even declining growth in western developed nations.

197 Thomas Malthus: Essay on the Principle of Population 1798
 198 United Nations: Revision of world population and estimates

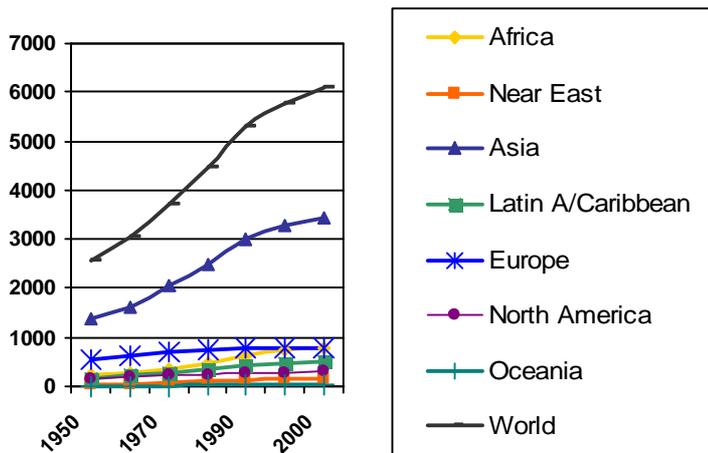


Fig 2 UN World Predicted population growth

One major effect of such rapid growth is that the developing world is largely a young world, with a high proportion of these countries with a population under the age of 16. This is very different from the affluent nations of the developed world, which have ageing populations and long life expectancy. When the four poorest and the four richest countries in the world are compared, then the major differences in life expectancy and population distribution can be seen.

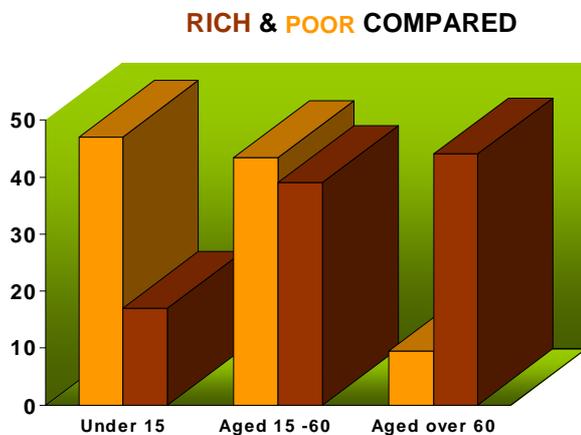


Fig 3 Comparison of 4 richest & 4 poorest nations 199

Some more recent factors have appeared and that seem likely to effect these growth prediction. The effect of HIV/ AIDS, is beginning to bite particularly in Africa but also potentially in other parts of the world such as Asia in the

199 The four richest nations used are Switzerland, Sweden, Singapore and Norway, the poorest Sierra Leone, Angola, Niger & Afghanistan

medium term. Some African nations are already experiencing a precipitous drop in life expectancy and many sub-Saharan countries have a reducing rate of expansion or are noting a decline in their total population. In such circumstances outreach to the young and unreached becomes even more vital.

2. Urbanisation

This growing world has become a world of cities, as more people leave the rural areas and move to live in the sprawling metropolises of the world in search of employment, prosperity and the hope of a better life. The reality is frequently different with the growth of shanty towns, massive social deprivation and large numbers of street dwellers.

Urbanisation has been a 20th century phenomenon and by the end of the century just under half of the world's peoples lived in cities. The UN estimate is that in the years 2003- 2010 all of the population growth will be concentrated in the urban areas of the world.²⁰⁰ During that period it is estimated that the urban population will increase by 2 billion people, the same number that will be added to the whole population of the world.

By the year 2000 there were 410 cities with more than 1 million inhabitants, compared to 20 in 1900. These cities are home to more than 2 billion urban poor who live at varying levels of deprivation.²⁰¹ There are now 19 world cities with more than 10 million inhabitants (depending on definition and whose statistics you follow) and this number is predicted to grow over the next 10 years to 23.²⁰² In current terminology these are called mega cities which are defined as “large high density concentrations of population with immense sprawl and a serious increase in infrastructural, socio-economic and ecological overload”²⁰³

Before World War 2, mega cities were a phenomenon of industrialised countries, today the greatest number are concentrated in developing or new industrialised countries.

Agglomeration	Population 2000	Agglomeration	Population 2015
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²⁰⁰ UN Urbanisation Prospects; The 1999 revision

²⁰¹ Status of Global Mission: International Bulletin of Missionary Research; January 2004

²⁰² ibid

²⁰³ www.megacities.org

Tokyo	26.4	Tokyo	27.1
Mexico City	18.06	Dhaka	22.7
Sao Paulo	17.9	Mumbai (Bombay)	22.5
New York	16.7	Sao Paulo	21.2
Mumbai (Bombay)	16.08	Delhi	20.8
Los Angeles	13.2	Mexico City	20.4
Calcutta	13.05	New York	17.9
Shanghai	12.8	Jakarta	17.2
Dhaka	12.5	Calcutta	16.7
Delhi	12.4	Karachi	16.1
Buenos Aires	12.02	Lagos	15.9
Jakarta	11.01	Los Angeles	14.4
Osaka	11.01	Shanghai	13.5
Beijing	10.8	Buenos Aires	13.1
Rio de Janeiro	10.6	Metro Manila	12.5
Karachi	10.1	Beijing	11.6
Metro Manila	9.95	Rio de Janeiro	11.5
Seoul	9.8	Cairo	11.5
Paris	9.6	Istanbul	11.3
Cairo	9.4	Osaka	11.01

*Fig 4:
Table of
top 20
world
cities with
their
predicted*

*growth*²⁰⁴

Of the current top 20 we see that only 3 lie in what was the industrialised world: New York, Los Angeles and Paris. 11 lie in Asia, 3 in Latin America and only 2 in Africa. The common characteristics of these cities are high population concentration, largely uncontrolled expansion, high traffic levels, in some case severe defects in infrastructure, high concentrations of industrial production, signs of ecological strain and overload, insufficient housing provision and social polarisation. ^{205A} growing acquaintance with these cities confirms that deprivation and a host of social problems are present in most of them, but that they have not received the attention their population demands when it comes to mission and evangelism. In fact they are the most neglected mission field and perhaps the hardest. Christians have to a large extent retreated from them, although they are now receiving

²⁰⁴ UN Population Division; World Urbanisation Prospects: The 2001 Revision

²⁰⁵ www.megacities.org

greater attention as ministries are developed to reach the poor in a variety of ways and share the good news of Christ.²⁰⁶

It has been said that ‘Cities are the centres of political power, economic activity, communication, scientific research, academic instruction and moral and religious influence. Whatever happens in cities affects entire nations.’²⁰⁷ Thus cities need to occupy the most prominent place in any praying, thinking and planning for mission as we face the future. While not neglecting rural areas, we must remember that with largely static populations, they should not receive the bulk of resources, whether in personnel or material help. Much traditional missionary work has been done in the rural areas and although ‘unreached villages need to hear the gospel, in view of the masses of unsaved and unchurched people in cities, our major attention must be given to urban centres.’²⁰⁸

3. Resurgent World Religions

Far from religion being eclipsed as the world modernised, the last decades of the 20th Century saw a great surge in the growth of religious belief. Greater numbers of people than ever before became Christians, alongside growing numbers of adherents to other faiths. This led to major tension and even violence in many parts of the world and the conflict between the ‘Christian’ west and some aspects of Islam were at the root of the attack of Sept 11.²⁰⁹ The range of beliefs and religions grows by the year and new belief systems are added to many ancient religions, although frequently the new are just updated forms of old religious systems.

This growth has been accompanied by increasing instability and a backlash from much of the non-western world against anything associated with modernity.²¹⁰ For many people Christianity is often equated with the modern world, and thus is blamed for its ills.²¹¹ While tolerance is preached in the many Western countries which have Christian roots, and any form of discrimination against other faiths frowned upon, this is not met

²⁰⁶ A Heart for the City; John Funder p 70

²⁰⁷ Roger Greenway Perspectives p 553

²⁰⁸ ibid

²⁰⁹ Bill Musk: Passionate Believing

²¹⁰ Peter Riddell & Peter Cotterell: Islam in Context: This is a good recent review of the relationship between Islam and Christianity. In particular see the chapter on Westophobia and the Radical Islamist worldview

²¹¹ S Guthrie; Missions in the Third millennium p 167

with a similar reaction in parts of the world where there is another dominant faith. The intolerance of many of these faiths to others, and frequently to Christian belief, result in reactions throughout the globe. Stan Guthrie states 'Islamists control the rules of debate in Indonesia and the Arab world, radical Buddhists are cracking down on Christians in Sri Lanka; and right-wing Hindus are terrorising Christians in India'.²¹² The religious world has become a complex and dangerous place.

	1970	Mid 2004
Total of all distinct religions	6,000	10,600
Christians (all types)	1,234 million	2,090 million
Muslims	547 million	1,271 million
Non-Religious	532 million	774 million
Hindus	462 million	841 million
Buddhists	233 million	376 million
Atheists	165 million	150 million
New-Religionists	77 million	106 million
Traditional Religions	160 million	242 million
Sikhs	10 million	24 million
Jews	15 million	15 million

Fig 5. World Population by Religion ²¹³

If we examine the statistics produced by David Barrett, we note some significant findings. Of the 6.36 billion people in the world today, we see that the largest grouping, at just over 2 billion comes under the Christian Umbrella, This represents about a third of humanity and includes (Figure 6) Roman Catholic, Orthodox, as well as all the main Protestant churches. The majority of these are 'nominal' or cultural Christians, who never go to church, have had no living contact with Jesus Christ and are ignorant of the gospel of grace.

However when we consider this remarkable figure we can understand the statement of Escobar that "No fact of history is more amazing than the spread of the influence of Jesus". ²¹⁴

Alongside the mainline Christian churches, a number of sects have also multiplied, the best known of these being the Jehovah's Witnesses and

²¹² Ibid

²¹³ Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission 2004; D Barrett & Todd Johnson. IBMR Jan 2004

²¹⁴ S Escobar: A Time for Mission p 32

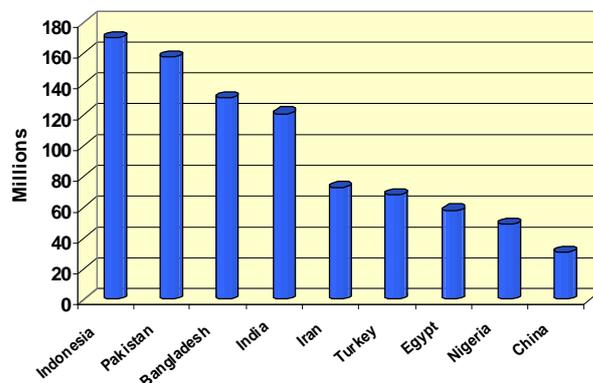
Mormons. They now number many millions throughout the world and continue actively propagating their beliefs.

Christian Breakdown	1970	Mid 2002
Anglicans	47 million	81 million
Independents	97 million	414 million
Marginal Christians	11 million	31 million
Orthodox	139 million	217 million
Protestants	210 million	367 million
Roman Catholics	665 million	1103 million

Fig 6 Major Christian groupings 215

The largest non-Christian block is the Muslim world. With a total population of 1.27 billion, Muslims now constitute 1/5 of humankind, a proportion that has grown in recent decades mainly due to higher birth rates in Muslim nations. We are well aware of the challenge of radical Islam, and the increasing tensions between the Western and Islamic nations due to global terrorism.

The major Islamic nations cover a swath of the world, from North Africa, through the Middle East to the far reaches of Indonesia. The largest Muslim nations are listed in figures 3, and when the percentage of the population that is Muslim is calculated, the figures are sobering. This demonstrates that there are only small numbers of Christians in some of these countries, and these are often a beleaguered and frequently persecuted minority. Significant numbers of Muslims are now found in Western nations, and their rapid growth in some of our cities presents a huge challenge for Christians in the West to develop evangelistic strategies to reach them.²¹⁶



²¹⁵ ibid

²¹⁶E.g Love Your Muslim Neighbour: John Martin; The Christians Pocket Evangelistic Guide to Islam: M Steer

Fig 7 Largest Muslim Populations

Hindus form the second largest non-Christian religion and are now much more familiar in the Western countries as Hindu populations spread around the world. The Hindu heartlands are found in India where there is now a total Hindu population of 780 million, in this nation of over 1 billion people. The other significant Hindu nation is Nepal, although in recent years there has been a major advance of the gospel in that land which now has significant numbers of Christians. There are also growing numbers of Hindus in parts of Europe and North America.

In recent years there has been a rise in Hindu militancy with the growth of Hindu political parties, such as the BJP, who have gained political power in India and pursued an active anti-Christians policy.²¹⁷ Some Indian states have passed laws prohibiting conversion to other faiths. This has spilled over in violence and even the martyrdom of some expatriate workers such as Graham Staines²¹⁸ and his sons as well as many Indian believers. This changing attitude will have major repercussions on Christian evangelism, particularly in India, where there has also been significant response to the gospel in the past two decades.

The Buddhist world centres on several nations in South East and East Asia, where this religion, which originally developed from Hinduism is dominant. The principal nations and the numbers of Buddhists in these are seen in figure 7, and some of these have shown a more aggressive anti-Christian stance in recent times. There are differing forms of Buddhism for example in Myanmar, Theravada Buddhism is followed, in Japan Zen-Buddhism is common and in Tibet a form of Buddhism involving spirit worship is practiced.²¹⁹ Buddhism is not confined to the East however and has gained several high profile followers in Western countries, who are attracted to the meditation and mystical aspects of this faith. Yet it cannot provide a means of forgiveness or lasting peace.

²¹⁷ Vishal Mangalwadi: *The Quest for Freedom and Dignity*

²¹⁸ *Burnt Alive, the Story of Graham Staines*: Published by GLS, Mumbai

²¹⁹ David Burnett: *The Unseen face of Buddhism*

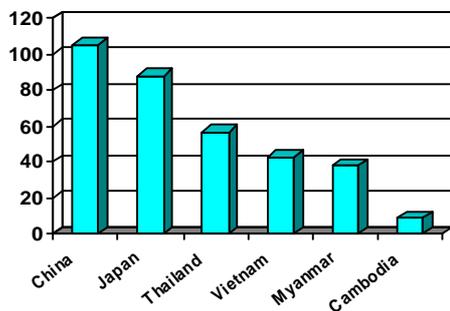


Fig 7: Major Buddhist Populations

Sikhism emanates from the Punjab, and is a syncretistic religion combining features of Hinduism and Islam and there are around 24 million Sikhs throughout the world. They are people of a book, their Adi Granth being their canonical scriptures. The Golden Temple in Amritsar is a special focal point for this people.

Alongside these there are still significant numbers of people who follow either ancient or modern new religions. 14 million people are classified as Spiritists and 6 million follow the Baha'i faith. There are 1 million who classify themselves as neopagans, 700 thousand Rastafarians, 600 thousand Scientologists and 150 thousand who still follow the ancient Persian religion of Zoroastrianism. David Barrett lists a total of 10,600 religions in the world, so there seem to be something to suit every choice, which is very wide.²²⁰ The challenge to reach these is very great.

4. Poverty and its effects

'The rich get richer and the poor get poorer', may be an old cliché, but it is certainly true of the world in which we live. While most of the globe has seen a rise in living standards, opportunities and freedoms in the past 50 years, for at least 20% of people grinding poverty and subsistence living is their daily lot, and the gap seems to widen rather than decrease by the year. It is estimated that over 1 billion people exist on less than £65 per annum, and many of these on much less than that!²²¹ One startling statistic quoted a few years ago was that the wealth of the 200 richest people in the world equalled the total income of the people in the 43 least developed countries in the world.²²²

²²⁰ Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission 2004; D Barrett & Todd Johnson. IBMR Jan 2004

²²¹ UNICEF Report 1999 "State of the World's Children",

²²² UN Human Development Report 1998

The major concentration of poverty is now found in sub-Saharan Africa, which contains 30 of the world's poorest 50 countries.²²³ 55% of people living in these countries have poor water and sanitation and all of the world's poorest 10 countries are in Africa. Yet many of these poor nations live with an incredible £1.4 trillion of external debt and loans they cannot service, and which cripple any development prospects. In "Heavily Indebted Poor Countries" half the population lives on less than 60p per day and in 1998, the debt of these HIPC's was reckoned to be 386% of their annual export earnings. Many countries, such as Malawi, Tanzania and Honduras spent 20-50% of the national budget on the debt burden, this leaves little for medical care, education and development. ²²⁴ For example Tanzania spends six times more on debt repayment than it does on education.²²⁵

The effects of poverty are stark with 35 million poverty induced deaths a year, 1 in 4 having no access to health care (1.5 billion), 1 in 4 without safe water to drink and 3 in 5 having either unsafe water or poor sanitation.²²⁶

The Effect on Children.

Poverty always affects the most vulnerable and weakest members of any society, so the children of the world are most severely hit. Around 1/3 of the present world are under the age of 15, which means there are over 2 billion young people. As a result of poverty, 30,000 children die each day from preventable causes, such as malnutrition, diarrhoeal illnesses, malaria and other easily treatable illnesses.²²⁷ Poverty and AIDS are linked and at this point in some parts of Africa, 1 child in 3 has lost a parent and 1 in 6 both parents from this disease. According to World Vision, of the 600 million people living in the slums of the world's large cities, 74% are children and youth under the age of 24.²²⁸

Children are widely exploited and used for labour and with an estimated 100 – 300 million children working world wide. 90% of these are found in Asia and Africa, where between 25% and 50% of 10 to 14 year olds work.²²⁹

²²³ Data from UNPD, saved as /population/population2.xls

²²⁴ UNICEF - Children in Jeopardy, The challenge of freeing poor nations from the shackles of debt.

²²⁵ UNICEF report on education 1998

²²⁶ UNICEF Report 1999 - State of the World's Children.

²²⁷ UN Human Development Report 2000

²²⁸ World Vision report on Children

²²⁹ Rainbows of Hope Crisis Report (WEC) <http://www.wec-int.org/rainbows/>

UN estimates that at least 100 million children live or work on the streets although only 20 million of these spend all their life on the street with their whole family. 230 Street children are affected by violence, danger, abuse, drugs, AIDS and lack of love. UNICEF estimate that **57,000** children died in 2000 due to child abuse, with children under 4 at the greatest risk.²³¹

Perhaps one of the most distressing features of this age is the sexual exploitation of children. 10 million of the world's children are reported to be involved in prostitution with 31% of prostitutes in Cambodia said to be children. 1 million children a year are recruited into the sex trade each year with 10,000 imported from Burma to Thailand. It is also reported that one third of Asia's child prostitutes have AIDS or HIV.²³²

War and its result

The continuing wars of our world also affect the poor and vulnerable. During the last decade of the 20th Century, war and internal conflicts forced 50 Million people to flee their homes. The world's civil wars alone killed five million people, alongside the 6 million killed in armed conflicts during the same period.²³³ UNICEF reported that between 1990 and 1999, 6 million children were seriously injured or disabled by war, 12 million children were left homeless, over 1 million children were orphaned or separated from parents by war and 2 million children were killed.²³⁴

Of the 25 million refugees and 30 million "internally displaced people", 80% are women and children. Children in refugee camps often are without schooling and even family. Where schools are set up, family groups are reinforced and conditions are less bad. In the aftermath of war, poor sanitation and disease greatly increase child mortality, and it is easily forgotten that 90% of war victims are civilians, mostly women and children.

Children also fight in the armies of the world. UNICEF estimated there were 250,000 soldiers under the age of 16 in 1995 to 1996, fighting in at least 30

²³⁰ UN Human Development Report 2000

²³¹ British Medical Journal October 2002, quoting Unicef Report

²³² Children in Crisis. WEC Publication by Glenn Myers; UNICEF Report 1999 - State of the World's Children

²³³ UN Human Development Report 2000

²³⁴ UNICEF State of the World's Children 2001; UNICEF Children In Armed Conflict Report 2000

nations. This figure has now risen to 300,000. ²³⁵Both boys and girls are involved and fight in both “government” and “rebel” armies in many internal conflicts. The innocence of childhood is soon lost on the field of battle

DISEASE

It is well recognised that disease and poverty are closely linked, even in Western environments, where poorer members of our societies have a lower life expectancy. While we who live in the West suffer from diseases related to our lifestyle and affluence, the poor of the world die from infections for which they have no available or affordable medication, or diseases related to lack of clear water, sanitation or the absence of basic medical care.

A good indicator of health of a population and the availability of good medical care is the Under 5 child mortality. This figure is the total number of deaths per thousand children under the age of 5. Figure 9 compares the top 4 and bottom 4 nations in the world and these display very clearly the difference in economic circumstances and development. The gap is large and we can see the effects of war for three of the highest have had chronic wars for many years, and this more than anything else disrupts the delivery of any health care programme.

However there has been some solid progress made in recent decades, and the figures for the worst countries are declining.

Country	Under Five Mortality /1000	Country	Under Five Mortality /1000
Sierra Leone	316	Singapore	4
Angola	295	Norway	4
Niger	275	Sweden	4
Afghanistan	257	Switzerland	4

*Fig 9 Comparing Under 5 mortality in rich and poor countries*²³⁶

The number one global scourge is HIV/AIDS, now reaching frightening proportions in some Africa countries, and beginning to bite deeply in areas of Asia. Whatever we may feel about the cause of Aids and the solution to this epidemic, millions of innocent people have now contracted this disease,

²³⁵ UNICEF Children In Armed Conflict Report 2000

²³⁶ Unicef: The State of the World’s Children 2001

with figures not only growing in Africa and elsewhere, but rising once again in the West. The global summary given in figure 10 is frightening when we realise there were 5 million new cases during 2002, and that this figure is continuing to accelerate. The effect is being seen in some countries where growing populations have now started to decline, with dramatic reductions in life expectancy, and the growing number of HIV orphans throughout Africa. Christians cannot sit on the sidelines, but must respond with compassion to this sea of need.

GLOBAL SUMMARY OF HIV/AIDS EPIDEMIC DECEMBER 2003

Number of people living with HIV/AIDS :		37.8Million [34-6 -
Total		42.3]
		35.7 million[32.7 -
Adults		39.8]
		17 million[15.8 –
Women		18.8]
	Children	
under15		2.1 million[1.9 – 2.5]
<hr/>		
People newly infected with HIV in 2002:		
Total		4.8 Million [4.2 – 6.3]
		4.1 million[3.5- 5.6
Adults		
	Children	630,000 [570-
under15		740,000]
Aids death in 2002:		
Total		2.9 Million [2.6 -3.3]
		2.4 million
Adults		[2.2 -2.7
		1.2 million
Women		
	Children	490,000 [440-
under15		580,000]

Fig 10 Global HIV/AIDS Numbers 2003237

Other world scourges don't receive the same headlines as AIDS, but Tuberculosis, has grown significantly and now claims several million lives each year, often linked to HIV infection. Malaria is another growing problem, as the optimistic claims made 30 or more years ago of global eradication have not been fulfilled, while disease carried by contaminated water and food strike millions on a daily basis. Once again these diseases are linked to poverty and lack of resources or available medical care.

Around one fifth of the people in the world do not have accessible medical care, i.e. a doctor, nurse or clinic within easy reach. While our Western budgets for health care explode as sophisticated and costly medicine keep increasingly aging populations alive for longer, many nations can still only afford to spend a few dollars per head of the population each year. Christians must be concerned about these large inequalities and do whatever they can to enable those in the front line of care for the sake of Christ.

LITERACY

Literacy, the ability to read and write, is vital if any people hope to develop and escape the poverty trap. Literacy rates approach 100% in developed economies and countries, but a surprisingly high percentage of people still do not have this ability. This places them at a serious disadvantage, and distances them from the ability to access and use modern technology and education. It also means they cannot read the Bible, if one is available for them in a language they understand, so literacy is important for the discipling of new Christians and the growth of the church.

At the end of the 20th century global literacy stood at 79%. This meant that over 1 billion people, of whom two thirds were women, entered the 21st Century unable to read. This figure will not improve rapidly if 130 million children of primary school age in developing countries, including 70 million girls, continue to have no access to basic education. In the world's least developed countries only 56% of boys and 44% of girls enroll in primary schools. 238

As well as teaching people to read it is necessary to provide accessible scripture in the mother tongue of the reader. The number of world

238 UNICEF Report 1999 - State of the World's Children (Check if more up to date one)

languages as estimated by Wycliffe Bible Translators in 1998 was 6,701. While we realise that some of these languages are spoken by small numbers of people, there are still significant people groups who have no scriptures at all in their own tongue. The number of languages with part or the entire Bible at that time was 2,197. A Complete Bible was available in 363 languages, the New Testament in another 905 languages and a portion of scripture, but not a complete bible or testament in 929 languages.

Although only 5% of the total number of languages have a complete Bible, this represents 76% of the world's population, who can read the scriptures in their mother tongue. The remaining 1,440 million people do not have a Bible in their language and 360 million people do not yet have a portion of scripture in their language.²³⁹ This demonstrates the great importance of the continuing task of translating and producing scriptures in new languages.

SECULARISATION IN THE WEST

While the church is growing significantly in many parts of the world, in Western contexts and especially in Europe there has been a steady decline as our societies have become increasingly secular. God has no or little place in public life, (well certainly the God of scripture), and religion is privatised with Christian ethics and values regarded as irrelevant to daily life. A person may hold any belief they want in private, but in post-Christian materialistic societies, religious belief has no relevance to how we govern our nations or the basis of morality. The lands that were at the heart of Christendom in the middle ages, have become a spiritual desert and Britain, the heart of missionary outreach in the nineteenth century is now in desperate need of revival.

Declining church attendances hasten the process. For example every church survey done in the UK has shown a major erosion of church attendees,²⁴⁰ although many in society would still claim a belief in God. Every public dispute in the State church is seized on by the media and the majority of our affluent, prosperous societies see no need of God, or feel that he has any relevance to their lives. This has largely marginalised any Christian voice in the public arena and the passing of Christian cultural dominance means that those Christians who remain committed to Jesus Christ and his gospel must

²³⁹ Wycliffe Report 1998: GPM Literature Report

²⁴⁰ Peter Brierley: UK Church survey

adopt a “ missionary stance in which the quality of Christian Life goes ‘against the stream’.”²⁴¹

A major shift in the thinking of many people has been caused by the emergence of pluralism. This is now a common response to the variety of belief systems and religions evident in our multi-cultural societies. The essence of pluralism is summarised in the following statement: “Pluralism rejects the suggestion that there is anything significantly unique, normative or superior about Jesus Christ and the Christian faith. Salvation (or enlightenment or liberation) is said to be present in *its own way* in every religion”.²⁴²

Pluralism in Western societies is being driven by the presence of a variety of ethnic populations with their religious diversity. Many major Western cities now have growing Muslim, Hindu or Sikh populations, which provide a significant presence. Truth claims are regarded with great scepticism as it is commonly held that there is no overarching truth that applies to all people, at the one time, but each religion can be valid for its followers.²⁴³ As Harold Netland states: “Many enthusiastically embrace the possibility of multiple saviours and religious paths, while they dismiss as religious imperialism the Christian insistence upon just one Saviour and one correct religion”.²⁴⁴ How the church of Jesus Christ responds to this challenge will be one of the major issues facing Christian witness in coming decades. While accepting cultural diversity and avoiding intolerance of people who are different from ourselves, we must at the same time affirm the truth claims of Christ and his uniqueness.

GLOBALISATION

During the 20th century and especially in the last decades, rapid travel, easy communications and migrations of people have shrunk the world to ‘a global village’. This process is called globalisation, as communications, migration of peoples, technology, and global trade in the global market have become a fact of life for the majority of the world’s peoples. The collapse of communism in the early 1990’s left “one world power with several poles

²⁴¹ S. Escobar: A Time for Mission p 35

²⁴² Harold Netland & Keith Johnson: Telling the Truth p 50

²⁴³ Harold Netland & Keith Johnson: p 55

²⁴⁴ Harold Netland: Encountering Religious Pluralism p 248

connected to it”.²⁴⁵ The major unifying force has now become economics, not politics or ideology. Multinational corporations, based in the West, manufacture their goods in Asia and export them to a global market. So the market has won, and is the main driving force behind the process of globalisation.²⁴⁶ The transforming affect of globalisation can be witnessed in every part of the world, as the poorest communities spout satellite dishes outside their homes, sports stars are marketed to a global audience, Coca Cola can be bought in the remotest corners and everyone seems to be chasing the ‘Western (or American) dream’. A comment from a most unlikely source demonstrates what is really driving this process when Deng Xiaoping, leader of Communist China stated “to get rich is glorious”.²⁴⁷

Not everything about globalisation is negative and mission can benefit from many of its features. Rapid and cheap transport make moving around the world so much easier. Electronic communications and the Internet have had, on balance, a positive effect, with the downside of information overload and the accessibility of pornography. However as Western materialistic values permeate more societies and as prosperity increases, hearts are drawn away from spiritual priorities to materialistic ones. The work of God grows better in the soil of adversity and prosperity and affluence don’t generally breed strong Christian discipleship.

Materialism has drained the spiritual fervour and evangelistic thrust from much of the Western church. While we pray for our own revival, we must also pray that Christians in countries which have experienced dramatic church growth amidst the adversity and suffering they have seen, will not loose their zeal as prosperity arrives.

Global Church Growth

The list of the problems and forces that must be confronted can be dispiriting and cause us to loose our courage. However we must set against this the remarkable growth of the church of Jesus Christ in the last 50 years of the 20th century, and especially in the last decades. This growth is continuing into the 21st century and far from the church continuing to atrophy and disappear, under God’s Spirit it continues to expand. It is largely a Southern phenomenon, which means it mainly affects the South Nations of the world,

²⁴⁵ S Escobar; In Global Missiology for the 21st Century p 29

²⁴⁶ S Escobar: ibid p 30

²⁴⁷ Global Missiology p 422

and although it can be difficult to get accurate statistics that allow realistic predictions to be made, Phillip Jenkins observes: “We are still observing major trends in the development of Southern Christianity, and in every case, these suggest surging growth.”²⁴⁸

Patrick Johnston has documented this global growth in several editions of Operation World, ²⁴⁹ and each successive publication records significant Christian growth in Asia, Latin America and Africa. He has also documented the startling changes of the past 40 years, as Christians in these continents now far outnumber those in the Northern parts of the world, a gap that has progressively widened since the 1960’s.²⁵⁰

The most dramatic growth, and until recent years the least documented has been the growth of the church in China. Amidst much suffering and a systematic attempt to exterminate Christian faith, there has been the most remarkable period of church growth in history.²⁵¹ Experts and various analysts will disagree about the number of believers²⁵², the lowest estimate being round about 60 million, with the optimists placing the number above 100 million. Whatever the true figures, God has done a remarkable thing in China as the church, official and unofficial keeps growing²⁵³ and now adds to this growth a missionary movement from China back along the old silk roads towards Jerusalem.²⁵⁴ Who, in the dark days of the Cultural Revolution, could have conceived of such a thing happening.

So God is at work in a significant way in our generation, and in the midst of turbulence and distress ‘the gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations’ ²⁵⁵ just as our Lord promised.

²⁴⁸ Philip Jenkins: The Next Christendom p 89

²⁴⁹ Patrick Johnstone & Jason Mandrek: Operation World

²⁵⁰ Patrick Johnstone: The Church is bigger than you think .p 110

²⁵¹ Tony Lambert: China’s Christian Millions

²⁵² Tony Lambert: International bulletin of Missionary Research. Jan 2003

²⁵³ Brant Myers: China (Briefings)

²⁵⁴ Paul Hathaway : Back to Jerusalem

²⁵⁵ Matthew 24:13

Chapter 5 Encountering other cultures

When going to another country, the first thing that any missionary notices is that people in other countries behave in a different way from his own. These differences can at first seem confusing. They might also appear to be charming, but however the missionary feels about them, they are an aspect of mission work that has to be reckoned with. These differences occur simply because the missionary has stepped into a different culture, with all that this word implies.

But what is culture and how are we to understand it? A useful starting point is to look at the definition of culture that was defined at the Lausanne Congress for World Evangelism in 1974. It described culture as follows:

"Culture is an integrated system of beliefs (about God, reality ultimate meaning), of values (what is true, good, beautiful, normative), of customs (how to behave, relate to others, talk, pray, dress, work, play, trade, farm, eat), of institutions which express these beliefs, values and customs (government, law courts, temples, churches, family, schools, hospitals, factories, shops, unions, clubs etc.), which bind society together and gives it a sense of identity, dignity, security and continuity".

It is clear from this definition that when we talk about culture we are referring to a system of beliefs and values that cover everything from language and social costumes to politics and family life. It is an all encompassing explanation for the way people behave and how they think. Indeed culture involves anything that enables a society to function and remain distinct and coherent.

Why Study Culture?

As far as the work as mission is concerned there are at least four reasons as to why we should study culture. Firstly, the study of culture helps us to understand, appreciate and love the people to whom we are witnessing. If we can understand what makes people tick, and why they behave as they do, then we are less likely to hold prejudices towards them which will hinder our loving them and winning them for the kingdom.

Secondly, the study of culture will help us to fit more easily into the host culture. It is an easy thing when living in another country to unintentionally do and say things that are offensive, or that emphasize that fact that we are strangers. Such cultural 'gaffs' will only distance us from those we are trying to reach. They will put unnecessary barriers in the way of the gospel. Of course, we will never totally imbibe the host culture. A thorough study of the host culture, however, will enable us to be less conspicuous.

Thirdly, the study of culture will help us communicate the gospel more accurately. The people to whom we preach will have a different world-view from our own. Their pre-suppositions and attitudes are different from ours. It is therefore necessary to understand how they think if we are to communicate in understandable terms.

Fourthly, an understanding of the Biblical culture, our own culture, and the host culture will prevent us taking anything into the host church that is extra biblical and culturally irrelevant. It is inevitable that churches in our own culture will take on something of the flavour of our culture. The job of mission, however, is not to transfer one cultural expression of Christianity from one country to the next, but to take, as far as is possible, the pure gospel to another culture. As we get to grips with the host culture as well as the biblical one, this will be a smoother process.

Before we look at how culture affects us there are a number of things that we need to understand about culture²⁵⁶. To begin with, we need to realize that culture is a learned phenomenon. There are some aspects of our being that we inherit. For example I am male, I am also white. These are not things I have learned to be, but come from my parents and are things that I am by my very nature. Culture is different. We are not born with a culture, but as we grow and develop in a specific society we unconsciously learn its cultural pattern as we go along. Thus we become enculturated in a particular group. Shaking hands with people and enjoying the Sunday roast are two aspects of my culture, but these things did not just happen. They were cultural features which I imbibed as a learned process.

Initially the learning process comes from our parents. Without even thinking about it, parents are daily instilling cultural values in the lives of their children. Then school plays an important part. The entire education

256 David Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross Culturally*, p.100.

system of any given country will be culturally shaped, and in turn it will shape children's lives so that they conform to their culture. As we go through life everything that we come into contact with has its influence on us and we develop as well as reinforce our culture.

Another thing we need to realize is that, as we learn our culture, it becomes so natural to us that we automatically believe our culture to be the norm. If we are then brought into contact with another culture that differs from ours, we naturally perceive it to be strange and not the norm. This is sometimes referred to as ethnocentrism²⁵⁷. Of course, these people with whom we come into contact believe that their culture is the norm, and that our culture is the one that is strange. The reality is that our respective cultures are only the norm for those of us who grow up within them. There is no such thing as a right or wrong culture. Each culture is right for those who practice it.

We also need to realize that culture is not random. It is easy to feel that way when you are in a strange culture that confuses you. Beneath the seemingly bizarre customs, however, there is a coherent world-view that binds the whole culture together. There are rules that govern every culture and once those rules are understood, the culture can be made sense of and even enjoyed.

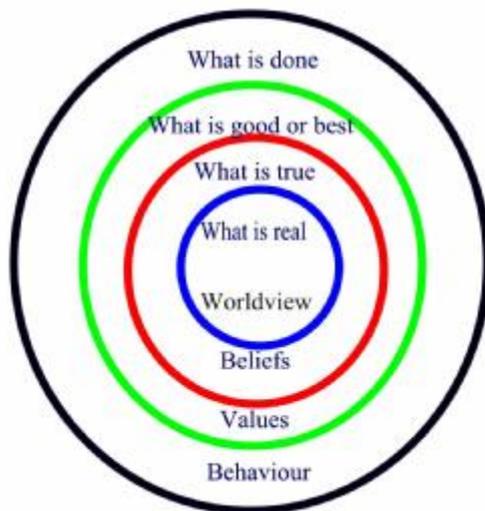
One last thing that we need to understand is that, in general, no one culture is intrinsically worse than another. Some, of course, may be less well developed than others, but that does not necessarily make them worse. There are aspects of every culture that are evil because every human culture is fallen and flawed. But there are also good aspects to every culture. It is easy to see the faults in another culture whilst turning a blind eye to the faults in our own. A balanced view of any culture, our own included, will see both the good and the bad.

Peeling Back a Culture

As we try to understand how culture works the analogy of an onion is often used. As you peel an onion you get down to the first layer. But below that layer that is another, and another, and another, until you reach the very heart of the onion. In much the same way, as you peel back the skin of any culture, you will be faced with layer after layer, each explaining why the

257 Geert Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences*, p.25

layer above looks like it does. Lloyd Kwast has identified four layers of culture to help our understanding ²⁵⁸.



Layer 1 – Behaviour

The first layer of a culture that we encounter is the behaviour of the people within that culture, that is, what they actually do. This includes such things as the way they dress, their gestures, forms of greeting and their general activities. In each of these areas the behavioural patterns of different cultures will vary. Let us think about the issue of greetings as an example. Some years ago I went on a teaching trip to the GLO Bible College in Zambia. At the college were students from several different tribes. They were all Zambians, but each had his own language and distinctive culture. As I entered the lecture room each morning I was greeted warmly by each of the students. Because they came from different cultures, however, the way in which they greeted me was different. Some shook my hand as a British person would, while others grasped their right elbow with their left hand as they shook my hand. Still others did not shake my hand at all, but rather made welcoming gestures. These gestures were not all alike either. Some of them held their hands close to their bodies and gave a couple of short claps, others clapped three times, and still others clapped several times and nodded their heads. These students were only greeting me, but the behavioural patterns of their various cultures demanded a variety of different ways of

258 Lloyd Kwast, Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, 1st edition, p.361.

greeting. Similar differences would later manifest themselves in the way they dressed and their daily activities.

If I were to have asked these students ‘Why do you greet me in that particular way?’, they would simply have replied by saying to me ‘Its just the way we do it’. Their distinctive greetings were not something which they had to think about, it just came naturally to them as an instinctive habit pattern. The same is true, of course, for British people. When we greet people we do not have to think about how to do it. We do not analyze whether kissing the person on both cheeks like the French, or embracing the person as they do in Ethiopia, might be better. We too have been taught to behave in a certain way when greeting people and we do that without thinking. For all of us our cultures have provided a pattern for the way things are done. This pattern provides a sense of identity which makes us feel comfortable and not embarrassed.

Layer 2 – Values

But behaviour is merely the first layer in a culture. The next layer down is described as the values of the culture. Behaviour is what we see externally, values are what determine the behaviour. It is the values of a culture that determine whether a choice made is good, bad or neutral, and whether something is beneficial or not. Again a few examples are helpful.

In some cultures (such as Korea) people sit on the floor. In other cultures (such as Britain) people sit on chairs. The Koreans will take off their shoes when they enter a house and put on a pair of special house slippers. They will even put a second pair of house slippers on when they go into the toilet, and a third pair when they go into the kitchen. These are then replaced by their ordinary house slippers when they go back into the main areas of the house. In Britain people behave very differently, they are more than happy to wear shoes in the house.

The reason for the difference in these behavioural patterns is that the two cultures have two different value systems. For Korean people, the floor is considered to be intrinsically clean. They must not wear shoes in the house because they are dirty, and they are happy to sit on the floor. The British, however, consider the floor of the house to be intrinsically dirty. They have no problem wearing shoes in the house and like to sit on chairs.

Another example is that of time. Often Europeans going to Africa find it very frustrating that many of their African colleagues have no real concept of time. Not only are they late for every meeting and appointment, but they do not seem to think that their lateness is either rude or inconsiderate. This pattern of behaviour is very different from the kind of behaviour that one would find in Europe, Japan or America, but the values that underpin this behaviour are also very different. To an African, time is much less important than people. Keeping an appointment is therefore much less important behaviourally than continuing a conversation. As an African friend of mine often says 'Europeans have watches but no time, Africans have time but no watches'.

Layer 3 – Beliefs

The third layer is that of beliefs. This is the layer that deals with the issue of what is true. It is a deeper level in that it provides the foundation upon which choices are made. For example, some cultural beliefs see honesty as vital while others give the same importance to saving face. The two belief systems illicit two different values and behaviours.

There is, however, a problem here. There are times in our lives when we know something to be true and yet we do not allow that truth to affect the choices that we make, or even chose in a way that is contrary to what we believe. This is because there are two kinds of belief. There are those belief that affect our values and behaviour (these we will call functional beliefs) and there are those beliefs that do not affect our values and behaviour (these can be called theoretical beliefs).

Despite this anomaly, beliefs remain important. Ultimately what we believe to be true about our world will have a significant bearing on the choices we make in life, and therefore the behaviour that emanates from those choices.

Layer 4 - Worldview

There is, however, one more layer still to be found. At the core of any culture is the answer to the most basic of question, what is real? This area is concerned with the ultimate questions of reality. Who are we? Where did we come from? Is there more to life? Each culture will have specific answers to these questions. These answers will control and integrate every component of the culture. This is known as a world view.

This core explains the confusion that sometimes exists when new beliefs are introduced, but the basic world view remains unchanged. Values and behaviour may still reflect the old belief system even if the new ideas are confessed. This affects the presentation of the gospel if teaching has not touched a deeper level. It can lead to weak Christians who fall away. I will illustrate this with an example.

I met Solomon several years ago in Zambia. He was a Christian and regularly attended his local church. Having come from a background of African tribal religions, he grew up being well aware of the power of the spirit world and this worldview coloured his whole outlook in life. The missionaries who witnessed to him and led him to faith in Christ were delighted at the transformation which they saw taking place. He got baptized, was committed to his local church, and appeared to enjoy reading his Bible and fellowshiping with other Christians. But all these evidences of conversion, however important, only affected him at the levels of his behaviour and his values. Despite his profession of faith, his worldview remained that of African tribal religions.

Consequently, when Solomon has a crisis in his life like bereavement or the loss of a job, rather than viewing the problem in a biblical way, he blames the spirit world. His solution is not to go to the Bible for help and strength, rather he goes to the witchdoctor and buys a spell to cure his ills. It is not that he ceases to believe in Jesus during these low points in his life. He is certainly a Christian. But the communication of the gospel which he heard was at such a superficial level that it did not change his worldview, it merely made him a Christianized tribal religionist. Clearly the communication of the gospel must be at such a profound level that these mistakes do not take place. Such communication demands a high level of cultural understanding.

Understanding National Culture

As well as understanding that a person will have a number of cultural layers, it is important also to understand culture in other ways. Geert Hofstede has produced some seminal work on what he describes as national culture ²⁵⁹.

259 Geert Hofstede, *Cultures Consequences*. Hofstede is a Dutch researcher who was asked by IBM to research their international teams, in particular their failure to function effectively and the stresses caused by the different nationalities working together. From

He uses this concept of national culture to distinguish between different cultures and to see how they operate. These national cultural distinctions that enable us to place different cultures into broad categories, and gain some understanding as to how we should approach the culture in which we are working.

Hofstede defines four sets of cultural characteristics that are common to all countries. He also described a fifth characteristic of time orientation that applies mostly to eastern cultures. Firstly there is *power distance*, secondly *uncertainty avoidance*, thirdly *individualism and collectivism* and fourthly *masculinity and femininity*. A breakdown of these categories will prove both eye-opening and useful.

Power Distance

The first of these is power distance which Hofstede defines this as 'The extent to which the less powerful members (of society) expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.'

In every human society there are people who have dominance over others. In one sense this dominance is an expression of inequality within a society, yet this trait is inevitable and can be caused by a plethora of reasons. Dominance can result from physical or mental characteristics, but equally from things such as wealth, status, bloodlines and legal systems. Whatever the reason for this dominance, it can be seen in terms of power distance, that is the distance in relative power and influence between the most powerful people in a society and the least powerful.

The important thing to note is that this power distance varies from one society to another. In some countries such as the Philippines, Mexico, India and Singapore the distance is very great (high power distance), whereas in other countries such as Austria, Denmark, Ireland and New Zealand the distance is relatively small (low power distance).

Power distance is seen in various aspects of daily life. In high power distance cultures parents put a high value on their children's obedience, students like to conform, employees never disagree with the boss, and managers tend to be autocratic. In low power distance cultures the opposite

his research he described these pairs of cultural characteristics

is true. Parents tolerate a low level of obedience from their children, students like to think and act independently, workers are happy to have an argument with the boss, and managers are happy to consult with their subordinates.

Uncertainty Avoidance

The second feature of national culture is uncertainty avoidance which is defined by Hofstede as 'the extent to which members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations'. In every day life people have to live with uncertainty. As the future has yet to occur we have no way on knowing what will occur. Everyone can cope with a certain level of uncertainty in life, but if the level climbs too high then stress and anxiety set in.

In order to cope with life's uncertainties, human societies have developed ways of dealing with it. In general these ways have fallen into the categories of technology, law and religion. We have technology to help us deal with the uncertainties in the behaviour of the environment, law (either formal or in the form of social custom) to help us deal with the uncertainties in the behaviour of others, and religion to help us deal with the uncertainties that exist beyond the physical realm.

Once again there are significant differences between cultures when it comes to the issue of uncertainty avoidance. Countries like Greece, Portugal, Japan and Peru will have a very strong sense of uncertainty avoidance, whereas countries like Singapore, Denmark, Sweden and Hong Kong will have a low tendency to uncertainty avoidance. It is important to note at this stage that uncertainty avoidance does not divide rich and poor nations into two camps. Japan and Denmark are on opposite ends of the scale as far as uncertainty avoidance is concerned, yet they are both wealthy and technologically sophisticated countries. The difference is that whereas Denmark is a country with relaxed civil and social laws, flexible working practices and a secular mentality, Japan is a country that is inflexible in work practices, social and civil laws, and is deeply religious. For high uncertainty avoidance countries, what is different is dangerous. For low uncertainty avoidance countries, what is different is curious.

Again the differences between countries at opposite ends of the spectrum are noticeable. In high uncertainty avoidance cultures people tend to live

stressful lives, to work exceedingly hard, to adhere to strict and formal social codes and to stick fairly rigidly to the letter of the law. They are conservative, often nationalistic and desire absolutes in truth and values. In low uncertainty avoidance cultures people tend to be more relaxed about life, they do not see hard work as a priority per se. They enjoy relaxed social codes, wish for fewer legal requirements, tend to be less nationalistic and conservative and they are more given to experience than to objective truth and values.

Individualism/ Collectivism

The third national cultural trait is that of individualism and collectivism. The definition of each is important.

When individualism is dominant we find 'Societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself and his immediate family. In societies that are collectivist 'People from birth onwards are integrated into strong cohesive groups, which protect them throughout life in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.'

It could be argued that all of life is about relationships and how we conduct ourselves within them. Though this is true, the kinds of relationships we have will largely depend on the type of society in which we live. Some people will live within a nuclear family of parents and their immediate children. Others will live in extended families. Still others will live within a tribal unit based on ties of kinship. This relationship between the individual and those to whom he relates falls into this category of individualism. It is the tension between autonomy and collectivity. On one side of the spectrum are cultures where autonomy is emphasized, whereas on the other side of the spectrum the emphasis is on collectivity.

Among the more individual cultures would be countries such as the USA, Australia, Great Britain and Canada. Examples of collectivist cultures would be countries such as Pakistan, Columbia, Peru and Venezuela. In high individuality cultures initiative is encouraged, personal friendships are sought after, enjoyment of life is a priority and everyone has a right to their own opinions and a private life. In low individuality cultures initiative is frowned upon, friendships are pre determined by family ties, a strong sense of duty prevails, people groups share opinions and the individuals private life is invaded by others.

From the perspective of mission it is important to note that the majority of the world is collectivist with the power of the group being their only protection against the hardships of life, and the "we" group also provides the major source of identity. Only the more affluent cultures can afford to place the interests of the individual before the group, where personal preferences are paramount, and the emphasis is on the nuclear family.

Masculinity/Femininity

The final trait of national culture is that of masculinity/ femininity. Definition is important here for he is not thinking of feminism but the way societies characteristically behave. Where masculinity is high 'Societies have clear distinctions in the social gender roles. Men are meant to be assertive, competitive and tough. Women more concerned with taking care of the home, children and people in general'. Where femininity is the dominant characteristic we find 'Societies where the social gender roles overlap. Boys and girls learn to be non-ambitious and modest, assertive behaviour is ridiculed. Excellence is kept to yourself.'

In every society the distinction between men and women is recognized. Sometimes this distinction manifests itself in terms of the different roles which the two sexes play in the life of that society. For example, men are often seen as the breadwinners while women are seen as the homemakers. In many Western societies these roles are increasingly seen as stereotypes to be avoided, and feminism is exerting itself as a powerful force for the social emancipation of women. But these roles are still firmly entrenched in many cultures and therefore make a division between low masculinity cultures and high masculinity cultures.

Examples of high masculinity cultures are countries such as Japan, Italy, Austria and Venezuela. Examples of high femininity cultures are countries such as Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands and Denmark. Once again the clues as to how these cultures operate are there to be seen. In low masculinity cultures people are generally more sympathetic to the weak, they are less work orientated, and are also committed to group decisions. They are less motivated by recognition and have comparatively more women working in mixed job situations. In high masculinity cultures people are generally less sympathetic towards the weak, they put a higher priority on work, they prefer to make independent decisions, they love and are

motivated by recognition and have fewer women working in mixed job situations.

While it is true that these national cultural traits are more about social custom than the method of assimilating truth and therefore have no direct bearing on the presentation of the gospel, they are nevertheless an important. When working as a missionary within a culture it is vital to grasp something of how people operate. Otherwise the potential for cultural misunderstanding and offence, which will close the door to the gospel, will be much greater. We therefore need to identify and begin to understand the particular social nuances of the culture in which we are working.

The Gospel in Culture

Having examined the different layers that will be encountered in any culture, and the national cultural traits that exist, we must now turn to the issue of how all of this relates to our presentation of the gospel. In other words what does culture have to do with mission? In answering this question we need to remember that because of their different cultural outlook, the people that we are trying to reach will have a fundamentally different set of values to us and a different way of looking at the world. Therefore there needs to be clarity in what we communicate so that people understand not just the vocabulary that we use, but also the meaning behind and within the words. We also need to remember that we as missionaries have a culture of our own which needs to be divorced from our message.

As missionaries approach their task of cross-cultural mission, there are a number of things that they need to ensure. I will list these in random order:

- **The missionaries need to ensure that only the gospel is taken into the culture and not cultural baggage.**

It has often been the case that when a missionary has gone into another culture with the gospel, he has also taken his church traditions with him. These traditions have emerged from a religious experience within his own culture, but are culturally irrelevant to the peoples to whom he has gone. For example, some missionaries have imported European music, dress codes and architectural styles to Africa. These may have had a cultural relevance for churches in the UK, but are largely irrelevant to churches in Africa.

- **The missionary needs to ensure that his presentation of the gospel is appropriate to the cultural needs of the audience.**

When speaking to the people of Lystra (Acts 14:15-17) Paul had a different presentation from the one where he was at Athens (Acts 17:16-34). This was because the first group was Jewish and had an Old Testament heritage, while the second was not. In much the same way, the audience we are reaching must determine how our message is presented. Communication is more than just words, it is about transferring concepts. What we say needs to be understood by our audience and that will require a culturally sensitive presentation.

- **The missionary needs to ensure that the good aspects of the culture in which he is working are affirmed, while the bad aspects are criticized.**

We have already noted that there is good and bad in every culture. It is easy to point out the wrongs in another culture because they are so obvious. It is much more difficult to identify the bad things in the culture in which we are immersed. However, the missionary must think clearly about the culture in which he is working and determine which behaviour patterns his converts should keep and which need to be changed.

- **The missionary should ensure that no cultural offensive is given.**

If a missionary behaves in the host culture in the same way that he does in his home culture, this could offend. For example drinking alcohol or eating pork in an Arab culture is sure to offend and will obstruct the communication of the gospel. He should ensure that there is nothing in his lifestyle, dress, speech and behaviour that could cause cultural offence.

- **The missionary should ensure that the church planted is truly indigenous.**

Ideally this will mean indigenous music, architecture, clothes and styles, which will need to be examined and incorporated into the worship of the new believers, if free from evil cultural associations.

Cultural Distance

Because the issue of culture is so large, it is important that when a missionary enters a cross cultural situation, he works out the extent of the difference between his own culture and the culture he has entered. He should do this so that he is fully aware of the extent of adaptation needed in order to fit into the host culture. This awareness is a vital bridgehead in the battle to be culturally relevant. A common term used to describe the difference between cultures is the term *cultural distance*, that is the distance culturally between two different cultures.

At Lausanne in 1974 Ralph Winter presented a chart which tabulated various levels of cultural distances²⁶⁰. A look at this chart will help us to make a distinction between the cultural distance that exists between us and non-Christians both in our own and foreign cultures.

Classification of Cross-cultural mission

Evangelism

E - 0	Reaching uncommitted church members
E - .5	Nominal Christians on the fringe of the church
E - 1	Non-Christians speaking the same language and with no church contact

Cross-cultural mission

E - 1.5	Non-Christians in a similar but different culture
E - 2	Non-Christians in a similar but very different culture
E - 2.5	Non-Christians in a completely different culture

Using the above list it is possible to measure the cultural distance between ourselves and the people we are trying to reach. Obviously the higher up the scale we go the greater the adaptation necessary. If we are working in an E - 2.5 country we will need to work very much harder on our cultural adaptation than we would if we were working in a situation that was E-.5. That is not to say that we do not need to think about our communication at E-.5. On the contrary, we always need to think about whether or not people really understand what we are saying and adapt our presentation in

260 David Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross Culturally*, p.169.

accordance with this²⁶¹. But when we are dealing with people who come from a radically different culture then the distance becomes much larger, and great care and skill is needed.

Cultural distance will obviously lead to difficulties in communication. We will therefore need to give some attention to how human communication actually works. Once the mechanics of communication are understood, we will be in a position to examine the best way of communicating to the people to whom we are ministering. This is dealt with in the chapter which follows.

Living in a different culture

As we have seen, the issue of culture affects the way a missionary does his work. We also need to remember, however, that cross cultural mission will have an affect on the missionary himself. It is simply not possible to live for a prolonged period of time in a strange culture without suffering a degree of cultural stress. Different people, of course, are affected in different ways, and to differing degrees. Some people have the capacity to fit easily into other situations while others really struggle. But even those few people who are exceedingly adaptable need to recognize that their presence in a different culture will have an impact on them. These cultural stresses are not a reason to avoid mission. They are part of the human cost of serving God. If they are understood, however, it is possible to deal with them and to live very happily in a strange culture.

There are two important ways in which cross cultural mission can be stressful. These are culture shock and lifestyle cultural stress. I will deal with these in turn.

Culture Shock

When entering a different culture a person rapidly discovers that he is unfamiliar with the cultural clues, and therefore is not sure how to behave. He will try to fit in and read his situation, but will be very aware that he is making lots of mistakes. At the same time there will be many disappointments as he discovers that things do not work in his host culture in

261 In my book, *Sharing the Good News in C21*, I point out that even churches working within their own culture can use forms of evangelism and language that is totally irrelevant to the culture.

the same way as they did back home in his own culture. These differences might at first seem quaint. Indeed culture shock doesn't set in fully until the person has been in the new situation for several weeks. But eventually these differences begin to annoy and frustrate the person. This is when culture shock begins to bite.

Although the person is learning all the time in his host culture, this knowledge does not initially lessen the sense of culture shock. Rather, the more a person learns about his new environment the more he realizes he is doing things wrongly. This leads to further insecurity, and this can be greatly exaggerated if the person is learning a new language as well. Learning a language as an adult is difficult. There is the frustration of only being able to say a few sentences. Then there is the frustration of not fully understanding people when they speak to you, and of not being able to reply to any questions you are being asked. There is the frustration of making frequent mistakes and saying things that people laugh at. And the frustration of knowing what you want to say, but simply not finding the right word which would make sense of the sentence. All this adds together to make culture shock a difficult phase to live through. With patience, however, a person can come through the culture shock and begin to enjoy and appreciate their new culture.

Life-style Stress

Once the culture shock begins to recede, there is still the issue of lifestyle stress to deal with. It can be draining dealing with issues that you find difficult and frustrating but that you cannot change. Some missionaries have found themselves in ministries where they are simply unable to get the privacy they once enjoyed and where the standards of hygiene and personal safety were poor. It is one thing to be in a situation like that for a few weeks or months, but when it lasts for years it can sap a person of their vigour. My father, who was a missionary in Ethiopia for 17 years, told me that in all those years he never got used to pit toilets with their stench, their numerous flies, and the possibility that a snake might be sheltering from the sun in the toilet shack. He loved the country with all his heart, but that was one aspect of life he always found stressful throughout his entire ministry.

Other missionaries have found themselves in cultures where even simple tasks take a long time to complete because of the inefficient bureaucracy in the country or the laid back attitude of the people. Again this can be

stressful in the long term. One missionary once said to me, 'After a while you just get sick of meaningless forms, inefficient bureaucracy and civil servants who couldn't care less about you'. He had been living in his host country for six years and was really feeling the effects of the life-style stress.

The presence of lifestyle stress will not necessarily make the missionaries life an unpleasant one. Indeed almost all of the missionaries I have met say they dearly love the countries where they work and some have even said that they want to stay in their adoptive country for the rest of their lives. But however much you love a country and its people, the lifestyle stresses do need to be taken into consideration. Missionaries need to have a good sense of humour and a willingness to accept that things are the way they are. They also need to respect the host culture and appreciate its good points. If this does not happen, a bitterness can emerge which will sour relationships and hinder the work.

Chapter 6

Communicating in Context

By this time we have seen that the central task of mission is the clear presentation of the gospel of Christ to people of differing languages and cultures. Having just examined some of the aspects of culture we are learning that this is a more complex task than perhaps we realised. We have a gospel to communicate but this needs to be done in such way that the message is received as being true and relevant for the situation of the people being reached, and not rejected as a foreign import. This acceptance will lead to saving faith in Jesus Christ and maturing Christian discipleship. A word describing this process has been introduced to mission thinking in the last 30 years²⁶², contextualisation. This term describes a process that has taken place ever since God sent his messengers to communicate his word to people, for they had to clothe the message in words that could be understood by those to whom they were sent. In our understanding of mission we need to learn how to communicate with people in a new culture and remove any obstacles that hinder the effective communication of the gospel.

We have already looked at the missionaries' experience when they enter a new country or encountered different people. There is an immediate barrier of language, so verbal communication is limited, until the new language is acquired. This is likely to be a long term process. However communication is also non-verbal, so the missionary's actions and behaviour will be observed from the beginning. Specific cultural differences should be noted, so that taboos are not broken which may cause offence and erect barriers to communication. This involves observing the behaviour, customs, mannerisms and art forms of the new people and will help to develop an understanding of the new culture. It is of greatest importance to understand the world view of the new culture: what the people understand as being ultimately real. We have noted the importance of world view, which is defined as 'the way people see or perceive the world, the way they "know" it to be.'²⁶³ A superficial understanding of a new culture that does not grasp their underlying view of reality will result in a failure to present the message in a way that creates a Christian world view in the minds of the recipients.

²⁶². D Hesselgrave & E Rommen: Contextualisation p 30

²⁶³ David Hesselgrave: Communicating Christ Cross Culturally. P 197

This as has already been said produces a veneer of Christian belief being added to a world view that is still non-Biblical.

The task of the missionary is to present the gospel in this new context in a way that allows the true biblical message to be understood and received by the hearers. It will mean 'finding points of contact with other people's contexts and removing things from one's own context that might block communication'²⁶⁴ There has been considerable debate surrounding the definition of the term contextualisation²⁶⁵, and some controversy about its application. In the understanding of some practitioners it implies changing the gospel to suit the differing needs of culture. However firm biblical roots, will not permit us to deviate from the authority of scripture and the universality of the gospel.

David Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen state this with clarity: ' Christian contextualisation can be thought of as the attempt to communicate the message of the person, works, word and will of God in a way that is faithful to God's revelation, especially as it is put forth in the teachings of Holy Scripture, and that is meaningful to respondents in their respective cultural and existential contexts'.²⁶⁶

Communication

At the heart of the process lies communication and a basic understanding of this process is necessary. David Hesselgrave has set this out with great clarity in his important volume where he uses a simple diagram to illustrate the process.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁴ Stan Guthrie Missions in the Third Millennium p 102

²⁶⁵ Hesselgrave & Rommen: p31-35

²⁶⁶ Hesselgrave & Rommen: p 200

²⁶⁷ David Hesselgrave: Communicating Christ Cross Culturally. P 41

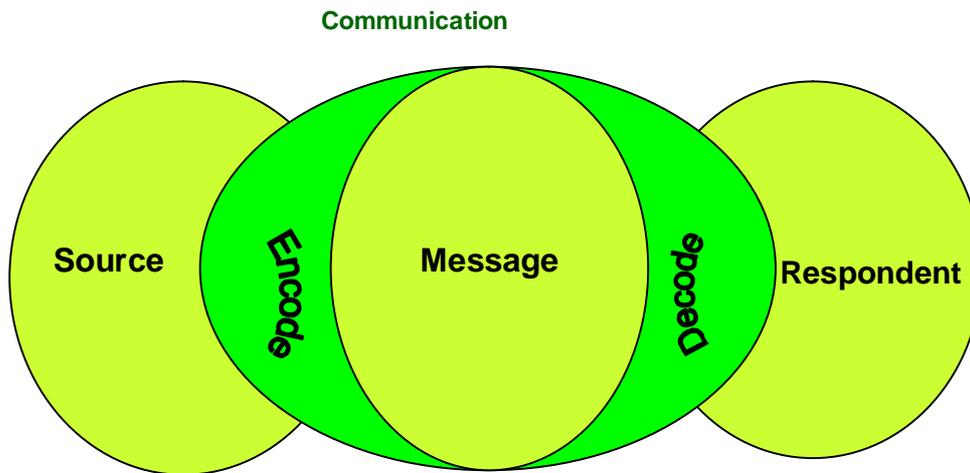


Illustration: From Communicating Christ Cross Culturally; p41

The “Source” is the speaker, communicator or Christian missionary. The respondent corresponds to the listener, audience, or people group being targeted. The message is generally the spoken word, and corresponds to the gospel of Christ. Normally the message of the bible is verbalised and spoken (encoded), although other forms of communication may be used, e.g. picture, film, or drama. The respondent hears, sees and interprets what is being communicated and gains some understanding of what is being said, turning the ‘code’ back into a message (decode). How much is understood depends on the linguistic ability of the source, as well as the appropriateness of the means chosen for communication to the respondent culture.

Hesselgrave makes a comment that should be given serious consideration by any aspiring communicator:

“Missionaries must divest themselves of the naïve notion that the gospel message as decoded by respondents is the same irrespective of how it is conveyed to the world- whether by book, magazine, radio, television, film, sound recording, tract, chalk artistry or drama. Perhaps no fiction has had wider currency in Western missions than the idea that if you put the gospel message into any of these media at one end, it will come out the other end as the same gospel message”.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁸ David Hesselgrave: P 50

There are multiple examples of how the message can get lost, and misinterpreted, through the wrong choice of language to the use of illustrations inappropriate to the culture. One example from my own experience was of an overseas visitor to an African country who was preaching by interpreter. To a rural congregation he wanted to teach the principle of refraction! Bad idea! Attempting to explain that light when passing through a prism is broken into the seven colours of the rainbow, he did not realise that this was interpreted as : ‘when light shines into a prison, it reaches every cell’. The rest of the message was totally lost, as was a scientific illustration on rural people.

Yet the process is even more complicated! In addition to the difficulties of communication and the chance that only a small amount of the message will be understood, the process is complicated in missionary communication by the complexities of culture. Another diagram from Hesselgrave helps us to appreciate what is involved.

Three Cultural Model of Missionary Communication

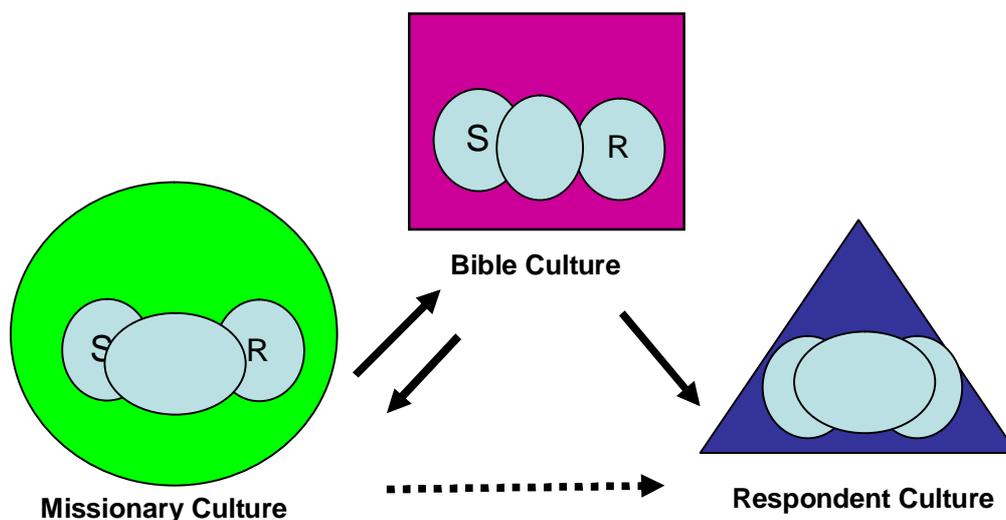


Fig From Hesselgrave: Communicating Christ Cross Culturally p 108

The missionary is called to communicate the message of the Bible, which contains God’s self-revelation though patriarchs, prophets, apostles and His Son, Jesus Christ. These all lived centuries, indeed millennia ago, in ancient times and most different cultures. They spoke God’s word to their generation, as people of their times, in a specific cultural context. When

scripture was written they used Hebrew or Greek, with some Aramaic, and these languages are not known to the majority of Bible readers today. Yet we believe they spoke the unchanging word of God, and the process of communication of this message involves, not only the recounting of the stories but the proper interpretation and application of the Biblical message.

Cross cultural missionaries arrive with their own cultural and ecclesiastical background. They have been reared in a particular culture, and have adopted many of the forms of that culture. They carry with them their own particular cultural understanding or bias, and use forms of communication that are appropriate to their home culture, e.g. the 45 minute expository sermon, often with no visual content. They will also bring with them specific church practices, which may have been adopted in an attempt to apply biblical models in the church. However order of services, manner of dress and the music used will show forms that are unique to the missionaries' cultural background.

Finally there is the receptor culture, the new culture encountered by the missionary communicator. These people already have their own cultural norms, means of communication, traditions, world view and codes. Now they are encountering this strange person who looks, talks and behaves differently. They are told stories about events that happened long ago in a far off country, certainly not the missionaries' home land. We can see that the situation has become very complex and how easy it can be for the wrong message, or an incomplete message or even a different message to be transmitted.

Another factor that needs to be added is the variable of cultural distance, as introduced in our last chapter. Some cultures are close: languages may be similar and ways of thinking almost identical. For example a Spanish missionary who goes to serve in Argentina would find many similarities, although differences will also be apparent. A worker from the UK, reaching a people group in Papua New Guinea, will face greater differences, in language, culture and worldview.

Once again we take another illustration from Hesselgrave's work which illustrates the different dimensions of Cross Cultural communication.²⁶⁹ He describes seven areas of cultural difference and the further cultures lie

²⁶⁹ Hesselgrave p 193

apart, the greater will be the difficulty in communicating the message through this grid. This represents a most important study and we can only recommend that you look at this in greater depth.

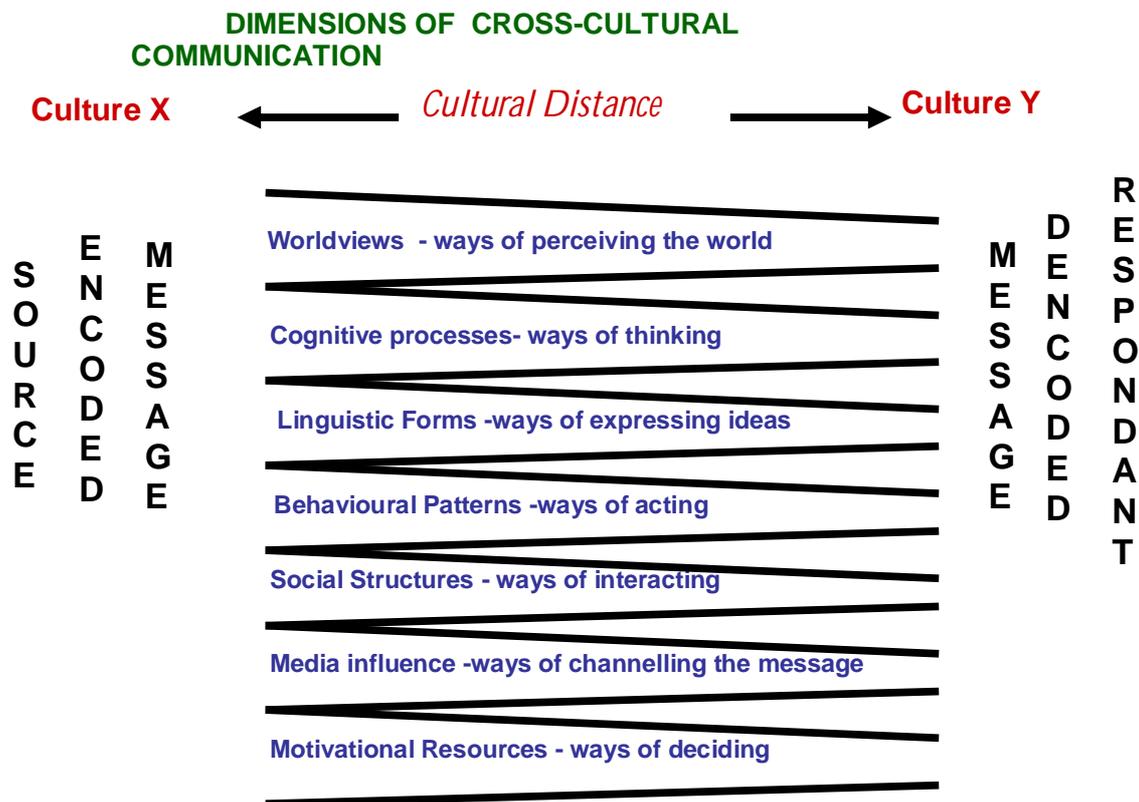


Fig From Hesselgrave: Communicating Christ Cross Culturally p 91

The seven areas which are highlighted are:

1. Worldview, how the world and reality is perceived by the respondent group being targeted by the missionary. The aim is to communicate a Christian worldview, that is God’s revelation in the Bible. Some of the common worldviews encountered will be secular, animist, Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic.

2. Cognitive Processes refers to how people think, and how their minds work. This area is often a problem for a person of Western origin in contexts such as Africa, or Asia. We think conceptually, using abstract concepts and ideas. When the mystical thought of the east is encountered or the concrete

though of the tribal peoples come across our paths, a lot of adaptation is required.

3. Linguistic forms or language is a major part of the difference. The way language is used and how ideas are expressed varies enormously. Learning another language is more than acquiring a string of new vocabulary or grammar. It involves understanding the idioms used and thought forms of the new group

4. Behaviour is part of cultural distance, and each society has its ways of acting that are acceptable. Dress is an important part of behaviour and if inappropriate can damage the communication process. Learning what is appropriate and what should be avoided early on can prevent the erection of barriers that may take time to come down again.

5. Social Structures and behaviour needs to be learned and understood. In some cultures there are rigid in social patterns and it is vital to acknowledge these, for example in some Eastern cultures like Japan, or in African tribal societies.

6. Media influences are important when we move from societies where communication happens in many different ways. In an age of multimedia, these means may not be appropriate to the receptor culture. They can appear strange, or novel and attention may be diverted to the means rather than the message.

7. Motivational resources define how societies make decisions. Most people in Western contexts make individual or personal decisions, and the process by which they come to these decisions may or may not be logical. In some cultures decisions are made by family groups or villages or even by whole tribes, thus understanding of the process is important.

It is not possible to examine these vital subject in the depth it requires, and we would encourage you to study the works cited, but the above give some insight into why the attempt to contextualise and improve communication is so important. It is worth considering these words “ No one should ask more of the missionary-evangelist than that his hearers have the opportunity to accept or reject a Christ who has been faithfully and forcefully

communicated in accordance with scripture and in reliance on the Holy Spirit”.²⁷⁰

Biblical examples

Much can be learned by a study of how the early church and in particular the apostles communicated the gospel to the variety of peoples they encountered. Initially they were preaching to Jews, with the same language, a worldview moulded by the Old Testament scriptures and common spiritual categories. So Peter on the Day of Pentecost, quotes widely from Old Testament scriptures to prove that Jesus is the expected Messiah, in whom they must believe. The response was dramatic as 3000 accepted and believed the message.²⁷¹

Some time after this we find Peter in the home of Gentiles for the first time, when after considerable divine persuasion, he visited the home of Cornelius, the Roman Centurion, a man who had been influenced by his exposure to Judaism.²⁷² Peter chooses to recount the main events of the life of Christ, with which they would be familiar, concentrating on his own eyewitness account of what happened and the accuracy of the facts. No direct quotation is included from the Old Testament, although there is an allusion to the witness of the prophets to Christ, as Cornelius and his associates had some familiarity with the Scriptures. ²⁷³ His communication was well adapted to the background and needs of the hearers and the response was again dramatic.

Paul is the dominant figure in the second part of Acts and the narrative recounts his missionary travels, and evangelism among mainly Gentile peoples and nations. His first recorded sermon was delivered in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia,²⁷⁴ so the majority of the audience were Jews. He starts with the Exodus of the Hebrew people from Egypt, their journey through the desert and the conquest of Canaan. Then he recounts how David was made king, and develops the promise of a Saviour prophesied from David’s descendants. This leads into an account of the

²⁷⁰ D Hesselgrave p 183

²⁷¹ Acts 2:14-41

²⁷² Acts 10:2

²⁷³ Acts 10: 34-44

²⁷⁴ Acts 13: 16-41

coming of Jesus, his rejection, death and resurrection, in confirmation of the scriptures, which he quotes extensively. The sermon is full of Old Testament allusions, and only truly understandable by those who knew these scriptures, but as Paul was speaking to Jews and Gentile proselytes this was entirely appropriate for the context.

Luke, the writer of Acts records two of Paul's communications of the gospel to Gentiles, who had no background in the Old Testament scriptures and a different world view than theistic Jews. Paul and Barnabas went to Lystra, 275 a city of Asia Minor (South Central Turkey today). After a miraculous healing of a lifelong cripple, they were mistaken for some of the Greek gods come down, and the people of the city wanted to offer sacrifices to them. They rush out and try to correct this misconception of the nature of God, and potential idolatry. Paul presents the living God, whose providential care is evident to all, who rules the nations, and provides for them each day. No scripture is quoted as he attempts to get to the very heart of their world view and present a proper understanding of the nature of God, and correcting their polytheism and idolatry. This was unsuccessful and the situation changed when Jewish opponents, manipulated the mood of the people who then attacked and stoned Paul. Although not every apostolic communication met with success, this short sermon shows how Paul attempted to begin the process using common ground on which he could build a true understanding of God and his actions.

Paul's sermon to Athenian debating society on Mars Hill is regarded as the best examples of communication to people who of a different world view and concept of God. 276 Paul, after preliminary contacts with different groups of Athenian philosophers is given the opportunity to explain what he is teaching about God. He begins with a point of contact, their altar to 'The Unknown God'. He has come to proclaim the God they know nothing about. This God made the world, he is not confined to temples, does not need human support, but in fact gives and sustains the life of all. He made the world, controlling its bounds and destiny, yet he is accessible to all, in fact their own poets have stated this. Thus we cannot make images of this great God, and idolatry is a sin that God in the past has chosen to overlook, but no longer. He has intervened in history, and commands people to turn to him, or

275 Acts 14: 15-18

276 Acts 17:22-31

else judgement will be inevitable and will be accomplished by Jesus Christ, who died and rose again.

So Paul's points of contact with this audience are the nature of God, his creation and sustenance of life, and of the world. He speaks of God's accessibility, the misunderstanding of his nature that is idolatry, and God's actions through Jesus Christ, whose resurrection is proof of God's future judgement. So he moves from the nature of God to the facts of Christ and the meaning of the resurrection. No scripture is quoted, in fact his references are to Greek poets, and much of the argument fits into a Greek world view, correcting their errors and pointing them in the direction of Christ.

Paul's model teaches us a great deal about the establishment of points of contact with respondent groups, and how their background, culture and world view can be used by the Christian evangelist.

Missionary examples

We now understand that effective communication which leads to a proper contextualisation of the gospel involves more than just knowing a language and selecting the right words, but includes other aspects of behaviour. Mission history provides several examples of how this has been done in the past and we can learn from these.

Hudson Taylor adopting Chinese dress

One of the best known examples of how barriers were removed to reaching the Chinese people resulting in great progress with the gospel, is that of Hudson Taylor. It could be argued that what we have here is not true contextualisation, but a removal of cultural barriers to communication but this is part of the process. For the majority of Chinese people, the gospel was rejected, for it was brought by foreign devils and thus was not acceptable to them or their ancient culture. Hudson Taylor, who arrived in China in 1854 had joined a missionary community which at that time adhered strictly to British dress and codes, a reflection of their felt superiority. This man of vision was burdened with the need to expand outreach beyond a few coastal enclaves and reach the millions of untouched in Inland China, began to itinerate and visit these areas. As he adapted to culture and learned language, he felt the need to go further for fuller acceptance. So he decided to adopt Chinese hair style, growing a queue and

shave his head like Chinese men and he also began wearing Chinese clothes. He soon saw that such actions and dress were a great help to his work in the interior, furthering his contacts with the Chinese and ability to present the gospel. His actions were regarded very differently by the rest of the missionary community, who were shocked by his actions in “going native”. This proved to be a threat and indeed eventually broke the ring of white solidarity.²⁷⁷

The results of Taylor’s actions are recorded and vindicated by history. As the founder of the China Inland Mission he enabled hundreds of Christian missionaries to enter China and reach to every corner of that land with the gospel. His actions enabled a closeness and understanding of the Chinese people and culture that aided communication and demonstrated that Christianity was not just a religion for foreigners, but applicable to all. In our times, adoption of local dress and other cultural norms in Islamic or other contexts are now widely accepted as an aid in the process of reaching these peoples.

Dan Crawford ‘Thinking Black’

The evangelisation of Central Africa was spearheaded by David Livingstone who was followed into these unreached areas by a large band of workers in the late 19th and first half of the 20th century. The common attitude of that time was that much of African civilization and culture was almost subhuman and replacing this as quickly as possible with Western based education, schools and hospitals would elevate the natives to a more cultured and civilised level. There was an automatic assumption of cultural superiority on the part of most, and little attempt was made to analyse and understand African culture. Not all however thought this way and some made a serious attempt to understand how African society operated and how Africans thought. One man, who made a serious attempt to do so was a Scot named Dan Crawford, whose main work was based at Luanza, on the shores of Lake Mweru in Southern Belgian Congo. He spent years translating the scriptures into the local language and established a model Christian community. His book, published in 1912 called “Thinking Black”²⁷⁸, was a remarkable publication as it provided the first serious attempt to understand how Africans acted, how their culture operated and their worldview was

²⁷⁷ Roger Steer: J Hudson Taylor, A Man in Christ

²⁷⁸ Dan Crawford: Thinking Black (1912) Morgan & Scott

created. It was early attempt at missionary contextualisation and as Stephen Neill writes, "In a remarkable way Crawford managed to think himself into the African point of view, and so gained in a memorable degree the confidence of Africans".²⁷⁹

Don Richardson – Peace Child

Don Richardson's attempts to reach a Stone Age people in Irian Jaya are documented in his book, *Peace child*²⁸⁰. One of the main barriers to communication with these people was not so much language as social behaviour, for these were warring people who were also cannibals. Virtue and honesty were not prized virtues, but treachery was highly regarded as a desirable characteristic in their society, and when the story of Christ was told, Judas Iscariot became the hero. The missionaries faced a serious problem: how could a gospel of love and forgiveness be communicated effectively? At one point during a long period of war between two tribes, the missionaries were at the point of leaving, but the people did not want to lose their skills, medical care and help. In order to persuade them to stay, a ceremony was arranged to end the war and bring peace. To ratify the peace treaty, one chief gave his infant son to the care of his enemy, "the peace child", who would ensure peace would be maintained between the warring peoples as long as he lived.

Now Don Richardson had his opportunity, as he could now explain with imagery drawn from their own culture how God gave his son as a peace child, for all peoples. They now understood for the first time and suddenly the gospel began to progress among this people group. A cultural symbol had become a tool that allowed effective communication of the gospel. Many others before and after, have drawn symbols, pictures, stories from local cultures to present the unchaining message of God's grace in Christ.

Contextualising the Gospel.

Our earlier discussion of the three model understanding of missionary communication, led to the conclusion that the message must be tailored or contextualised in a way that remains faithful to the biblical message, while

²⁷⁹ Stephen Neill: *A History of Christian Missions* p.322

²⁸⁰ Don Richardson: *Peace Child*

understandable and relevant to the receptor.²⁸¹ This will involve on the part of the missionary a thorough and deep understanding of the Bible, and the ability to interpret this correctly. It also requires an understanding of the culture, thinking and worldview of the receptor people group.

We have also moved significantly from the assumption that all cultures need to be civilised. i.e. become more Western. While we recognise that the gospel will change culture for the better, it will not destroy the good things in any culture.²⁸² Every culture needs to be changed in some way as the values of the kingdom of God are brought to bear upon it, and this includes Western cultures as much as any other. But the gospel will never destroy the good things in another's culture, but will rather celebrate the diversity of God's world and the uniqueness of the peoples that he has made.

This means is that evangelistic methods which are effective in the missionaries sending country, may not necessarily work in other parts of the world. The automatic assumption that techniques that work at home will work everywhere is not true. We recognise that ultimately it is the Holy Spirit who illuminates the minds of those who are hearing the gospel, and He alone can penetrate the barrier of ignorance and unbelief. However this does not remove the responsibility of the missionary, to ensure that any communication is appropriate for and acceptable to the people with whom they are trying to communicate.

One of the writers served among animistic background peoples in Africa. Many people receive the gospel willingly, and profess faith in Jesus Christ, yet frequently fall way, or fail to develop as mature disciples of Christ. Why might this be the case? They believe in a supreme deity, who created the world, so they are not polytheists. However although the God they accept is powerful and immense, he is also distant and not involved in day to day life. They have some idea of the transcendence of God, but little of his immanence, or nearness. Every day life is invaded by the spirit world, and these ancestral spirits, good and bad form the basis of their reality.²⁸³ Nothing happens by chance and every event takes place because someone has been manipulating this spirit world. That is the world view of the average African tribal person..

²⁸¹ Stan Guthrie: Missions in the Third Millennium p 104

²⁸² Lausanne committee on Gospel and culture

²⁸³ Marvin Wolford: Free Indeed p 38

The Christian missionary comes along and presents the gospel, frequently as it would be done in his or her home context, then calls for belief in Christ. If knowledge of the language is still basic, when an appeal for a response is made all that may be asked for is agreement, particularly if the wrong verb or tenses are used. So there may be a significant, even mass response, which can seem wonderful and sounds impressive in the newsletters home! But if time has not been taken to fully explain the nature of the one in whom they have believed, his power, sovereignty over Satan and demons and the complete victory that Christ won at the cross, then what can happen is that a layer of Christian belief is added to an animistic world view. So many new professing Christians continue to practice behaviour associated with the spirit world, especially when sickness occurs, or other major life events intervene, demonstrating a limited understanding of what they claim to have believed.

Failure to properly explain and contextualise the gospel thoroughly produces Christian professors, but not disciples of Christ. As Michael Griffith states: “Presenting the gospel in our own language, and in terms of the culture in which we have grown up is a relatively simple matter compared with the intellectual challenge of presenting it in a totally alien culture.”²⁸⁴

Some other examples

When the gospel is communicated to Islamic peoples, there are many areas of common ground. After all, Muslims are monotheists, who believe in an omnipotent, sovereign deity. They accept the Old Testament prophets, and believe that Jesus was a prophet sent by God and that he will come again. It is in areas such as the Deity of Christ or his atoning death that major problems can arise. Thus in our attempt to communicate the gospel to Muslims, it is best not to start, with the statement and claim that Jesus is the Son of God. There are other ways to build up to this, but in order to gain time to develop a deeper understanding this should not be the initial point of contact.

Those who have expertise in this area suggest that in communicating the gospel the evangelist should concentrate on four areas. ²⁸⁵ Firstly the Knowledge of God and how God, who seems distant to many Muslims

²⁸⁴ M, Griffiths: Lambs dancing with wolves

²⁸⁵ Malcolm Steer: A Christian's Evangelistic Pocket Guide to Islam

reveals himself through Jesus Christ. Forgiveness of sins and how God forgives us through the atoning sacrifice of Christ. Assurance of salvation, and the fact we are accepted by God on the basis of grace and not law. Finally, change of heart, and how inward change is different from outward reform. The particular issues where Muslims have misconceptions, such as the deity of Christ, the death of Christ etc, can be dealt with in time, but should not be the initial points of contact.

Evangelising Hindu peoples requires a particular understanding and an approach that understands their world view. The story of an Indian evangelist, who left the south of India and went to the north to reach Hindus, provides a valuable lesson and warning.²⁸⁶ Raised in Christian circles in South India, he felt his preaching should concentrate on the simple gospel of John chapter three, “You must be born again”. So this is what he constantly communicated to his Hindu friends and neighbours. His lack of true understanding of the Hindu worldview was displayed when one eventually turned to him in exasperation and said “Yes, I know I need to be born again, that’s what I’m afraid of!” Without considering the Hindu view of reincarnation and by failing to explain the true significance of Jesus words on spiritual rebirth, he had reinforced their concerns, rather than offering them an alternative message and way of salvation.

Western cultures, from which many missionaries come, are guilt cultures. Our individualism is demonstrated when we stress in our preaching our personal guilt before God, and the need for personal individual salvation, which will remove guilt and is received as a free gift. Many of the world’s cultures are shame cultures, where loss of face is experienced when wrong doing is exposed. This brings shame to the family, the village or the tribe, and the person who has brought dishonour, may be sanctioned severely. Social cohesion and keeping or saving face is very important in such environments. I remember many years ago in Central Africa observing the upset and shame of a senior evangelist, who arrived at my door to return some small articles that had been stolen from our home by his daughter. His apologies were so profuse and genuine that we realised how ashamed he felt and how his daughter’s actions had brought great dishonour to the family and the village.

²⁸⁶ Personal Communication: D Smith

In such contexts a presentation of the gospel that only concentrates on justification and legal righteousness from the guilt of our sin, will not meet the need of people who need to have their shame removed and realise that the gospel cleanses from defilement and rebuilds harmonious, honourable relationships with God and with others who have known the same acceptance through Christ.

Lest we make this subject too complex, we must remember that the gospel has been preached in virtually every nation, and has been received, accepted and believed by a multitude of peoples on the earth. Christian evangelists have been able to make Christ known and contextualise the gospel in just about every environment. Sometimes the results may be criticised or seem less than perfect, but Christ is a universal Saviour, and he is for all peoples. When the attempt is made to present him with true understanding of receptor peoples and using means and language that speaks to their hearts, there is always a response.

Contextualising Christian practice

Any new culture when it is encountered for the first time seems alien to missionaries, and they will judge what they see against their own home culture. We have already stated that there is good and bad in every culture, for all cultures have been affected by the fall and human sinfulness. However practices which are alien need to be assessed, not from our own cultural perspective, but by the supra-cultural standards of Scripture.

William Carey encountered suttee in India, the immolation of widows on their husbands' funeral pyres. This Hindu practice had been in existence for centuries, but using the biblical standard of the sanctity of life, he stood against the killing of innocent women in this tragic way. He was one of the early movers to have this practice banned throughout India. Carey respected Indian cultures and languages, giving much of his life to translating scripture into Indian languages, but his biblically informed worldview forced him to stand against a cultural practice that was against the laws of God.²⁸⁷

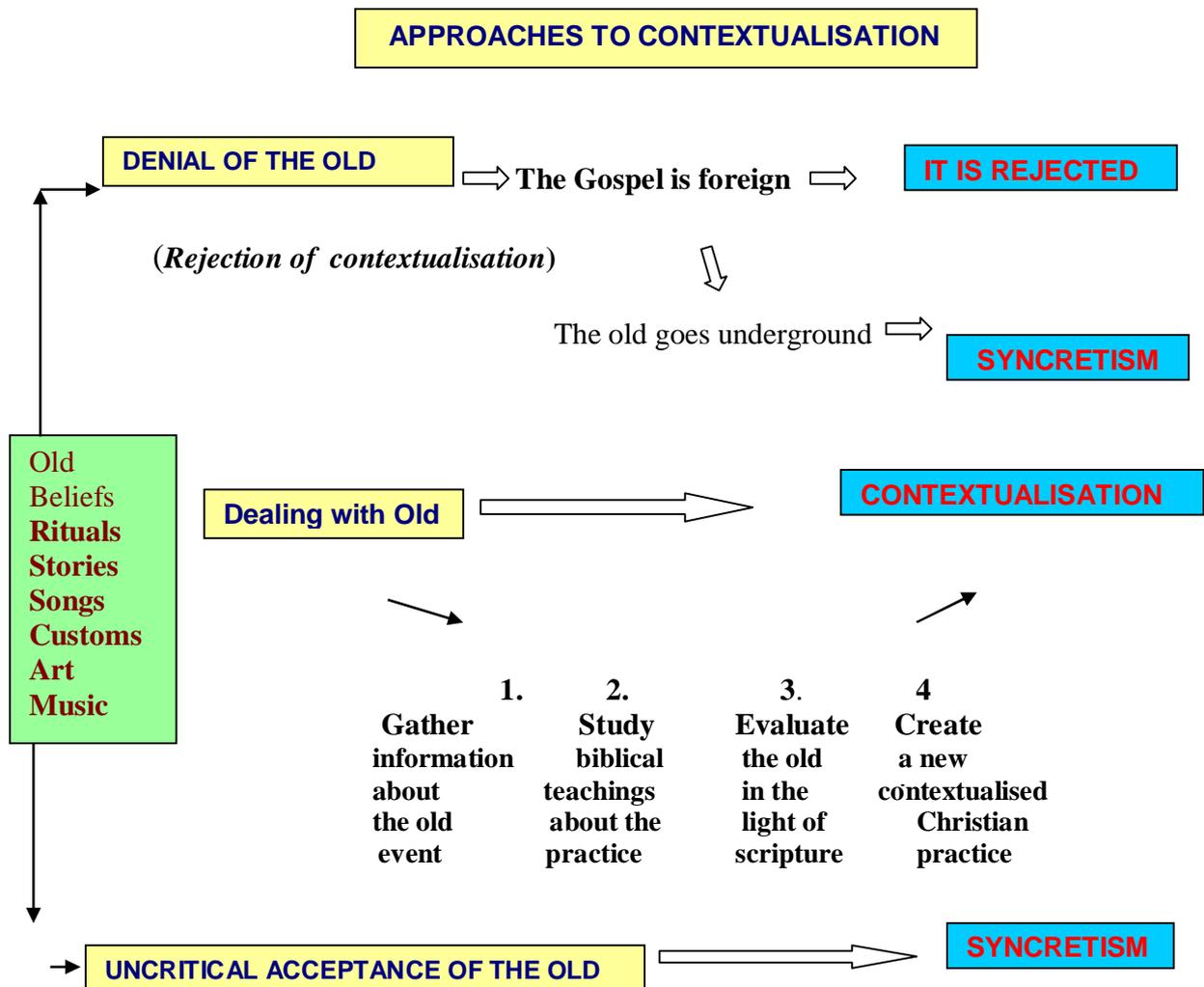
Livingston and other early workers in Africa encountered slavery, not so much a cultural practice, but for some tribal chiefs a good means of income.

²⁸⁷ Vishal Mungalwadi: The Quest for freedom and dignity p158

His Christian conscience forced him to make this open sore known to the world and urge action against the trade in human lives. Early workers in China encountered and stood against the exposure of female infants, who were regarded as being of less value than boys, and often abandoned. The use of children in temple prostitution in India motivated Amy Carmichael to open a home where such girls could be cared for in safety and removed from a life of abuse and degradation. When Christian truth encounters any new culture there will be areas that need to be exposed and changed.

The vexed area of polygamy in Africa and other parts of the world caused long and some time inconclusive discussions among early generations of workers, and even to the present day, different approaches may be found. Ancestor worship in Japan is another example, where Christian faith comes into conflict with local customs and creates tension. Some have attempted to replace this with a contextualised Christian form, but not all are happy to go down this route. These are only a few examples of many issues that will inevitably arise as the gospel grows and is received.

Once again we are grateful to David Hesselgrave for outlining an approach to an area that will be encountered in every attempt at cross cultural mission. This is outlined for us in this figure.



Adapted from D Hesselgrave

From the above we can see there are essentially three possibilities of action when facing new cultural experience and contexts. The components of a new culture which will be encountered are listed and include beliefs, which really are an extension of the basic worldview of the people. Rituals invade every area of life and behaviour, from birth through to death. Stories may contain tribal lore and are a means of conveying their history, traditions and even morals, but may also include fables as to origins and deities. Songs will be unique to the culture and the folk music tells much of the culture and the way it has developed, and there may also be links with a spirit world unrecognised at first by an uninformed listener. Customs develop over the years and cultural understanding will allow the worker not to break any taboos, or make social faux pas that can cause offence

The first approach is called denial and will we hope disappear as a better understanding and approach to culture prevails. However it is still possible. When the prevailing view was of the superiority of civilised, Western cultures, little attempt was made to understand receptor cultures, which were often labelled uncivilised and degraded. However too much blame cannot always be placed at the feet of the missionaries, for colonisers were not always Christian, nor were their motives the elevation of people. On the whole the missionary movement has preserved cultures and languages, and is largely in credit on this score.²⁸⁸

It is still possible to misunderstand or not even make an attempt to gain a good understanding of the culture being evangelised, and this rejection of the contextualisation process can have two outcomes. The gospel, preached by Western people, in Western clothes, who have built Western churches with imported architectural styles, who sing translated Western Hymns, with imported Western musical instruments or no instruments at all, who insist on Western timekeeping and preach structured western sermons, seems to be entirely imported and have little relevance to most people hearing this message and seeing this model. The result is that Christianity is seen as a foreigner's religion and it is rejected, because no attempt is made to translate living biblical faith to the receptor culture in forms that are appropriate.

There may be some who accept the message at a superficial level, but because the issues of their worldview are not addressed and proper teaching given, the consequence is that the old is retained, without any modification, and so in time the two become so mixed that Syncretism occurs, the merging of the two into one whole. This results not in a true understanding of the gospel but a hybrid that has lost the essentials of saving faith in Christ.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, but with the same outcome, are those who reject nothing and include everything. All culture is good, nothing needs to be changed, God is the God of diversity, so all that is new is accepted uncritically, with no biblical filter being applied. This also results in syncretism and a blurring of truth, which is often ultimately lost. The motivation may be to draw as many people into the kingdom of God, but truth and error, right and wrong are still central to Christian confession, so this approach also should be firmly rejected.

²⁸⁸ Brian Stanley: The Bible and the Flag

The right approach lies between these two extremes of total rejection or uncritical acceptance. This involves an examination of the old through a biblical framework, with an acceptance of all that is good and acceptable but a rejection of practices and forms that are against the teachings of scripture and the ethical and moral standards of the Word of God. This approach will take time; it will involve study, a willingness to constantly return to scripture and for the missionary to examine his own positions under its authority. The assumption that the missionary is unaffected by cultural expressions of Christian practice is of course absurd and we all still have a great deal to learn in this field, if we submit to the authority of God's revelation. It will not always be easy, but if the process is approached with care and the genuine desire to strengthen the people of God and their witness in their community, it will yield results and strengthen the growth of the work of God. It will also allow the new believers to recognise that what they have believed is not a foreign import, but a universal message that can be applied and will work in any context, especially their own.

Contextualisation and Church practice

The church planting missionary leaves a trail. Simple observation of the church they have planted will often reveal their country of origin, denominational affiliation, theological emphasis and acceptance or rejection of certain practices. This is almost inevitable for despite all good church planting theory, the workers experience is of their home church model and this will, to a large extent, be the template they use. If working in a team with other church planters, there will be some modifications, but usually church planters who work together have a similar ecclesiology and goal in mind.

We cannot ignore 2000 years of church history, which has affected every Christian worker, so that we will all come from a certain strand of churchmanship, and carry this with us. The aim should always be to attempt to plant biblical churches, but very few can successfully go back to the scriptures and solely apply a biblical model while ignoring the influences that have moulded their own lives. It is a fascinating to examine the parts of the world where churches have developed and grown with little outside influence. Different models have emerged as many of these indigenous churches have grown rapidly, adapting a form that is particularly suited to their own context. One of the best examples of this would be the Chinese

House Church Movement which has grown so dramatically in the last 25 years.

Worship forms, music, leadership structures, dress and buildings are some of the areas where divergence of ideas and experience can cause problems. When one encounters a full size Anglo-Saxon church building complete with belfry and bats in the middle of the African Bush, admiration may be felt for the generation who served there and built this structure, but its foreignness jumps out at any casual observer. However others, who build simple rural churches with mud brick and grass roofs, may still insist on a form of worship, music and practice which is equally foreign. We've sung "Blessed assurance" in many different languages, usually with enjoyment and appreciation, but how much more authentic to listen to local believers worshipping God in song with musical rhythms and accompanying instruments that are totally indigenous. Such worship always seems more spontaneously and genuine.

While attempting to teach the principles of what the church is and how the local church should function, the church planter must ensure as far as is possible that the form that develops is not given canonical authority. It should be the most appropriate and applicable to the local context but contexts and times change, and as Western churches face the problems of evangelising in rapidly changing, secular and post modern contexts, so the process of globalisation has accelerated the same process in every corner of the world. Thus methods that worked 20, 30 or 40 years ago, no longer are so effective, and although God calls his people to faithfulness, our core faithfulness is to Jesus Christ and his gospel. More stresses and strains occur in the area of change, than in any other part of church life. The Christian worker will always strive to maintain biblical fidelity, while at the same time ensuring that the message and practice of discipleship is not strangled by a methodology that no longer works, but has through the years been granted an unbiblical authority.

Chapter 7

PRACTICAL MISSION SUPPORT

How can we get involved in helping to advance the work of God throughout the world? If we are convinced that mission is God's plan for the salvation of the peoples of the world, then we will try to discover what we can do to support this task. However before we get seriously involved, there are some attitudes that we may encounter, and misconceptions that need to be removed. Evangelism and mission are not the number one priority for the majority of western, certainly UK Christians, who are no longer convinced of the urgency or even the necessity of mission. So don't be surprised if you encounter some of the following positions.

1. A suspicion of mission. The basis of this position is that mission was in the past a branch of hated colonialism, and linked to empire.²⁸⁹ Although not now building empires, missionaries still spread western influence, change indigenous cultures and promote globalisation. At a deeper level, there may be unease about the concept of trying to convert people to Christ, as the pervasive pluralism of our age and culture undermines our confidence and challenges the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and his gospel.²⁹⁰

In response to this while we should not ignore mistakes and cultural insensitivities of the past,²⁹¹ it is easy to forget the good done by generations of missionaries who have preserved languages and indigenous cultures. Sometimes they stood firmly against the interests of the colonial powers, defending peoples against exploitation and serving them in all their social and spiritual needs. We will require resolution and good apologetics to confront the prevailing philosophy that all religions are equal and reach for the same goal. We need to recover our confidence in the uniqueness of Gods revelation in scripture, the absolute centrality of Jesus Christ and take our stand against the politically correct culture of our age. Then we also

²⁸⁹ Brian Stanley: The Bible and the Flag, p11

²⁹⁰ Harold Netland: Encountering Religious Pluralism. "Consumerism has powerfully affected how people think about religion and spirituality, encouraging eclecticism and pluralism" p 85

²⁹¹ B Stanley p 182 "What has made the greatest negative impression on the collective memory of Christians in the former colonies is not the role played by missionary opinion in the process of imperial annexation, but the countless instances where missionaries have displayed arrogance, insensitivity and lack of trust in non-European capacity to discharge responsibility in the church. These failings must be taken seriously by all involved in world mission today, for they are sadly still to be found among Western Christians working overseas."

need a fresh vision of humanity as God sees them, lost, blind and needing to find the truth.²⁹²

2. The end of mission. Some people believe that the missionary task has largely been completed, and that our attention has to turn to the huge spiritual and social needs where we are, so our efforts should be mainly at home and not abroad. This attitude has grown in the USA since the attack of 11 Sept, and has already been present in parts of the UK for several years. As we have already noted, it is true that there has been remarkable church growth taking place in many areas of the world in the last 50 years, and we now know that the majority of the Christians in the world are to be found in the developing or two thirds world. However the argument is less convincing when we discover that there are areas and peoples of the world that are still to be effectively reached for the first time, as new parts of the world accessible, that were closed 10 or 20 years ago. Then there are areas of the world where the church was formerly strong such as Western Europe, that need re-evangelisation. Christians living in the developed world possess huge resources compared with the rest of the world, and simply cannot selfishly hoard these for our own use. Yes the needs are great at home and must be tackled, but they are still very great in the many other parts of the world.

3. The responsibility of mission. Another argument that is deployed is that mission is for the professionals, the “called” and if we are not in that category, then it does not affect us. If we believe this then we are ignoring the demands of Christian discipleship and the responsibility of every Christian to serve God and help in the establishment of His kingdom. The hard success of past generations of missionaries has been due largely to the backing of ‘ordinary’ Christians in their sending countries who prayed and supported mission in a sacrificial way. As Os Guinness states so well, we are all called, **by** Christ, **to** Christ and **for** Christ. This means that at every time, in every place and in every circumstance we will live for Christ.²⁹³ This includes mission, and we all need to be involved at some level.

So how can we get involved in practical mission support? What can we do and how can we do it more effectively? Here are some suggestions.

²⁹² Robertson McQuilkin: *Lost Perspectives on the WC Movement*, 3rd Edition p156-161

²⁹³ Os Guinness: *The Call* p 31

1. DEVELOP A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

Our Christian identity is firstly as members of the Kingdom of God, and the church of Jesus Christ. Although we have national and ethnic identities, these have been superseded by something much larger. God intends that the relationship we have with other Christians, no matter what their ethnic origin²⁹⁴, should be stronger than the cultural ties of race and tribe. Several years ago the term ‘World Christian’²⁹⁵ was developed with the intention of promoting an outward looking view of the world. It attempts to create big horizons and a passion to engage with what God is doing in all the nations and peoples of the world, not just “you in your small corner and I in mine”.

So how do we develop a big vision? First of all we need to see the world through God’s eyes. Until the 16th century the word mission as we now use it was used exclusively of the work of the Father sending the Son, and the sending of the Spirit after the resurrection of Christ. ²⁹⁶So when we get involved in mission we are connecting with the global purposes of God. If we pray for His kingdom to come and His will to be done on earth²⁹⁷, then we will work to promote the knowledge of His name and salvation to all the peoples of the earth.

A Christian world view will try to develop an understanding of all that makes up our contemporary world. This will include its peoples, populations, religious groupings, physical and social needs [some of the areas covered in chapter 3]. With so much data available we cannot know everything, so will have to select what is important for us individually. Experience shows that many people have little idea about what is going on in the world today, the staggering growth of the Christian church in some parts of the world, and how much is being done to reach the unreached, or the difficult to reach. A little understanding of what God is doing globally provides a useful counterbalance to the pervasive pessimism found in some Western, especially UK churches.

²⁹⁴ Ephesians 2:19

²⁹⁵ R. Winter: Perspectives on the WC Movement; p 718-723

²⁹⁶ The Message of Mission: V Ramachandra & H Peskitt p 29 “ Mission then is primarily God’s activity. God is reaching out to his world through Christ and his Spirit. He is engaged in liberating the cosmos and humankind from its captivity to evil, and it is his purpose to gather the whole creation under the Lordship of Christ.”

²⁹⁷ Matt 6: 10

A Christian world view will attempt to think biblically about the world and all the issues raised by our rapidly changing age. John Stott defines such a mind clearly: 'A Christian Mind asks questions, probes problems, confesses ignorance, feels perplexity, but does these things within the context of a profound and growing confidence of the reality of God and of his Christ'.

298 This is the most challenging part of a true Christian worldview.

Generally we are quite clear in our thinking about the gospel and salvation, as we hold firmly to the apostolic gospel. But our age continually throws up all sorts of difficult questions that also require us to think in the same biblical way about many serious issues²⁹⁹: race and ethnicity; poverty and wealth; gender and sexuality; social class and casteism; reacting and relating to other faiths; the HIV crises and the Christian response. These will confront us as we go into the world, and they can prove very uncomfortable for middle class, affluent western Christians.

In order to be effective in mission support we must have the right attitude, which will include knowledge of our contemporary world with its trends, alongside strong Bible foundations which will enable us to interpret what we encounter from God's viewpoint. As well as individuals, our churches also need to develop this bigger view. An outward looking church which constantly enlarges its members' vision, will also engage in effective evangelism in their own community. Stephen Gaukroger gets it right when he states: "When local congregations are absorbed with "external needs", internal crises (such as worship and music) are not major sources of contention. When a church is "internally focused" mission is neglected as internal issues absorb increasing amounts of time and energy. Let's get our churches facing upward to God and outward to the world."³⁰⁰

2. HOME & AWAY- THEY ARE THE SAME

We must beware of the historic tendency of dividing mission in to Home and Foreign and giving the greater status and emphasis to cross cultural work. This attitude began to develop during the era when Western Countries, such as Britain had a large Christian population and the world beyond our shores was classified as 'the mission field'. As the modern missions movement developed those who went to serve there were accorded great importance

298 J Stott; I believe in Preaching p 86

299 See J Stott: Issues facing Christians Today

300 Stephen Gaukroger: Why bother with mission? P. 119

and status. Some became national heroes and were buried in the highest places in the land.³⁰¹ Much of that mystique has gone, and we now need to see the continuity of evangelism and mission at home and abroad as work that requires our effort and support.

There is still a great need for cross cultural mission, although much of this is now being done by workers from non-Western sending countries. The growing missionary work force has become multinational as receiving countries now become senders, an encouraging trend that will continue to grow. The cross cultural worker has to develop particular skills, such as acquiring a new language and appropriate cultural skills to function effectively in a new environment. Thus pre-field training will have to be tailored to their needs. However their ultimate goals are the same as 'home based workers'. It is often the case that home workers may find the going much harder in a secular post-modern era than those who serve cross culturally in some of the more responsive parts of the world. Home and away belong together, and we should not separate them unnaturally.

3. GETTING THE RIGHT INFORMATION

Information is fundamental to mission support, but what information do we need and how do we filter what is essential from the mass of data available. 'Information overload' is a modern syndrome that has accelerated with the growth of the Internet and electronic communication³⁰². The flow is endless, publications, books and web-sites grow rapidly, and it is easy to be left floundering in this sea of unprocessed data.

Personal Information

Each of us knows our own capacity and how much information we can cope with, however there are a variety of important sources of missions' information. Anyone with a serious interest in missions will get hold of a copy of *Operation World* ³⁰³. This book is an indispensable source of information, statistics, analysis, with specific points for prayer for every

³⁰¹ David Livingston's tomb is still prominently located in Westminster Abbey in London

³⁰² It has been stated that a weekday edition of the New York Times, contains more information than a person living in the 16th century encountered in a lifetime!

³⁰³ *Operation World*, : Ed by P Johnstone & J Mandryk (Ed 2001)

country in the world. For those who prefer an electronic format, a CD is available.

There are many mission agency publications, which provide information about their work and the workers connected to them. One of the writers works for an organisation that produces a monthly magazine³⁰⁴, with articles on mission and extracts from missionary letters, linked to a daily prayer guide. This is an aid to daily prayer for missionaries by regular readers and supporters. This is not unique and there are many more mission publications available, often set out in a daily prayer format. What we choose to read will depend on personal interest and our support links. Better to read one or two regularly and make these a basis for prayer rather than try to cover too much ground.

Electronic communications have overtaking paper mail for many as the preferred means of communication. Information may be sent by e-mail, or web sites can be visited as a means of keeping up to date with missionary needs and news. Some agencies send a weekly e-mail bulletin containing news and Points for Prayer. There are many useful mission related web sites or sources of country information that increase our knowledge and awareness of what is going on.³⁰⁵ Prayer letters from individual workers help us to keep in contact with those we know and hopefully we will remember to pray for them.

Church

What is true for the individual is also true for the local church. A regular stream of selected information is necessary to keep the church informed. Someone, or even better, several need to be appointed as the missions secretary or committee, with the responsibility for finding the best means of keeping the church up to date with their own workers, or those who are linked to the fellowship. Notice boards, bulletins, church newsletters can all be used as means of getting information to the members. Regular mission events need to be planned to keep the focus clear. It is important and the whole church will benefit.

4. PRAYER IS ALWAYS THE FOUNDATION

³⁰⁴ Echoes of Service: visit www.echoes.org.uk

³⁰⁵ e.g. Oscar is a wide ranging mission web site with good links and the CIA handbook a good source data and statistics fro every country in the world

The most important contribution any of us can make to the progress of God's work is to pray. Yet if we are honest with each other, this is a promise we often make, but probably fail to keep more than any others. It's very easy to say 'I'll be praying for you' yet in reality we quickly forget and our priorities seem to be elsewhere. However, it is not true of all, and God has raised up in every generation those who commit to this vital work. You note the use of the term work, for that is what prayer is: hard, concentrated work. It doesn't come easy to most people, although with habit, it becomes a natural and eventually an indispensable part of our lives.

It is not only indispensable for us, but even more so for those who depend on our prayers. We know that ultimately every missionary depends on a faithful God, who will never abandon them, but we can also help as we come to God on their behalf. We can share the burdens of those who are in dangerous places, or who are seeing little progress in their work, or who have health issues or have to make difficult family decisions about their children and their education. There are so many matters that require our prayers and when we pray, our prayers count with God and do make a difference. Paul recognised that the prayers of other Christians affected his work as he wrote once 'I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers'.³⁰⁶ So faithfulness in prayer by the Christians at Colossae, affected Paul's ability to continue preaching the good news.

Regular Prayer

We can see from the spiritual habits of many servants of God in the Bible, that prayer was a part of their daily discipline. They didn't just pray occasionally or when the mood took them. Daniel is one of the best examples of a man who prayed each day three times, and even when such activity put his life at serious risk, he did not alter the first priority of his life.³⁰⁷ Jesus' life was full of prayer, as he spent many periods communing with God, his Father.³⁰⁸ He also prayed for others, for their growth and progress when trial was about to come.³⁰⁹ Paul, we have already seen felt highly dependant on the prayers of others in his evangelistic outreach, so he asked 'Finally brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread

³⁰⁶ Phil 1: 22

³⁰⁷ Daniel 6:10

³⁰⁸ Mark 1:35

³⁰⁹ Luke 22:32

rapidly and be honoured'.³¹⁰ In most of his letters as well as praying for those to whom he wrote, he also asked for their prayers for himself.³¹¹

Anyone who dips into Christian biography will be aware of how much time great servants of God in any generation spent in prayer, for themselves and for others, and how much this was the primary discipline of many of their lives. One whose short life stands out is David Brainerd, who wrote in his journal of his consuming passion for prayer: "Blessed be God, I had much freedom five or six times in the day, in prayer and praise, and felt a weighty concern upon my spirit for the salvation of those precious souls and the enlargement of the Redeemer's kingdom among them."³¹²

Our regular personal prayers will include items, unique to our own circumstances and needs, but if we follow the guidance that Jesus gave to his disciples, then we will also pray "Your kingdom come",³¹³ and that is certainly a prayer for mission. This will not be an occasional prayer, but a regular one, and a priority one, for it comes in this model prayer before we begin to pray for our own needs. The interests of God and the growth of his kingdom should always come first.

So what can we conclude? In our regular prayers, whether we pray five times a day, twice a day or only once a day, we should pray for mission and those involved in this work. We may set aside time to pray in the morning, or the evening, or some other time in the day may suit our pattern and lifestyle, but in these prayer times we should remember to pray for people involved in God's work throughout the world. God will hear our occasional prayers, but the examples of the past show us the value of regular prayer for others.

Targeted Prayer

It is good in our regular prayers to pray for individual people and specific issues. General global prayer may have a place, but specific intercession for people and their needs engages more effectively with God and them. But how can we select what our prayer priorities should be, when we are

³¹⁰ 2 Thess 3:1

³¹¹ Ephes 6:19

³¹² John Piper: The Hidden Smile of God p 148

³¹³ Matt 6: 10

presented with a vast range of needs and workers. We cannot pray for everybody and everything, except in the most general terms, so selection becomes important.

If we have taken the first steps to becoming informed, then we already have a good basis for our prayers. The first place on our prayer list or diary will be those we know. These may be missionaries who have been sent by our local church, or friends who have asked us to pray for them and their work. There may be other workers in whose work we have developed an interest and whom God has placed on our hearts. These will be the first ones on our regular prayer list, and we will decide if we are going to pray for them daily or assign them a specific time of the week or month, when we will intercede on their behalf. If we have no contacts serving God in mission or evangelism, then it may be necessary to develop links with someone who we can pray for on a regular basis. This may mean adopting a missionary or through our reading finding a ministry for which we can pray regularly.

We will also need to select from the wide range of agencies, ministries and outreaches, specific ministries that can be added to our prayer list. We may have an interest in the Islamic world, so our prayers will be drawn in this direction. Our concern may be for those who engage in Bible translation, or who target unreached people groups. Some have a particular burden to pray for one specific people group and continue to do so for a long period of time. Many people use a monthly prayer diary or missionary magazine. This helps us to focus prayer on specific workers or issues that are recorded in the publication, and even although we may not know the workers well, we can still pray for their ministry. 314 Remember that prayer is a long term commitment, so we need to be persistent, not to give up³¹⁵, and to take the long view.

Informed Prayer

As we develop our personal prayer lists then we will try to ensure we have the most recent information to give us matters for prayer. We can find this in missionaries' personal prayer letters, which we can receive from those we are closely involved with. Some keep this information in a file or prayer diary, so it is accessible for prayer times. Much information is now available

314 e.g. Echoes of Service is produced monthly, as are many other publications Visit www.echoes.org.uk
315 Galatians 6: 9

via e mail, web sites and by widespread use of the internet. This brings its own problems, but at least we do not need to wait weeks for news from the ends of the earth. If you use e-mail to get prayer information, remember when communicating with them to be sensitive to the area of the world where the worker is located. If they receive many messages a day, they need time to respond, and it is not always realistic to expect a quick reply.

The use of missionary magazines, publications, prayer focuses, and sources of information are important tools to keep mission prayer well informed, specific and targeted on those whom we have placed on our prayer list. However when we remember individual workers there are some specific areas that we can pray about:

- protection, from evil and temptation,
- health and ability to function in a cross cultural environment;
- language learning if they are new workers,
- family if they have children, their schooling, needs as they grow;
- relationships with colleagues and the national church if there is one;
- relations with neighbours, government and authorities;
- their support and daily needs;
- their ministry, whatever that may be;
- their family and relatives in the sending country;
- any contacts or specific names they have asked us to remember,
- coming events for which they seek prayer,
- any particular problems and stresses being faced.

The list is long, and these are only a few selected but important topics to consider when we pray for them.

Follow- up

We pray because we expect God to answer our prayers, not because of our faithfulness but because he is faithful. If we are praying about a specific matter it is important to find out how this has developed. Some missionaries provide feedback about specific prayer items for which they have asked for prayer, but sometimes we may need to do the follow up ourselves. Don't be afraid to do so, for if you have been praying for someone, or something, they will be very glad of your inquiry. Your prayers means a great deal to the

workers, and this enables you to give thanks to God for prayers that have been answered, or keep praying until the answer comes.

For consideration.

1. Do you pray for missionaries and mission – regularly/ occasionally/ rarely/ never at all?
2. Do you pray – for specific individuals/ works/ or with a global sweep
3. Do you use a prayer diary and record names and events for prayer?
4. Do you get up to date missionary news?

Collective Prayer

Most of what has been written about personal prayer also applies to collective mission prayer. This may take the form of a church missionary prayer meeting, a smaller prayer group or a focus prayer group, where Christians come together to pray for a country, area or specific outreach activity. These occasions can either be a time of great encouragement or if poorly run fail to achieve their objective.

1. The time needs to be well planned and well led.
2. Adequate, but not overwhelming information should be made available
3. Letters may be read, data communicated, or points for prayer listed.
4. Ideally produce an information sheet before the prayer meeting so that everyone can have the data. Most of our memories are inadequate.
5. List the points for prayer on a whiteboard, or on an acetate for the OHP, or if you have the technology on power point.
6. Encourage everyone to keep their prayers short and specific, and to pray for one or two points at most. Beware 'locust prayers' that eat up all the prayer material and ruin it for the rest!

7. You may wish to pray corporately or break into smaller groups. This all depends on the size and inclination of the group.
8. Ensure any feedback, if you have it for subsequent prayer events.
9. Keep the focus clear. It is an occasion for prayer and communicating with God.

5. USING MONEY WISELY

Although money is only a commodity, it is an important part of life, and we all need a certain amount to survive. It is likely that the majority who read this will live and work in the prosperous part of the world, where we have a considerable amount of disposable income after we pay our bills and meet the basic necessities of life. We may not feel that we are prosperous, but in global terms we are the affluent of the planet.

How do we use our prosperity is a key question for the Western church? Do we spend it on ourselves, or invest it in the kingdom of God? While material possessions are one of God's good gifts for us to enjoy, if we hold them with the wrong attitude then they can control our lives and draw us away from God.³¹⁶ As Craig Blomberg writes "A necessary sign of a life in the process of being redeemed is that of transformation in the area of stewardship".³¹⁷ God will not judge us for our prosperity but he will call us to account for the way we use our prosperity, whether we hoard and accumulate, or share and bring blessing to others.³¹⁸ To quote Blomberg again "Generous giving rather than selfish hoarding, accompanied by compassionate commitment to doing what will most help the genuinely needy, must remain a priority for God's people". ³¹⁹

Several issues need to be faced, if we as individuals or local churches are to use what God has given us in the most effective way. We have a stewardship responsibility for the way we use our resources and need to think deeply about these issues. This will involve seeking the guidance of God's Spirit while asking some key questions about the purpose of our mission support. We are surrounded by needs, bombarded by demands and needy causes, and

³¹⁶ Matthew 6:19-21

³¹⁷ C Blomberg : Neither Poverty or Riches p. 244

³¹⁸ 2 Corinthians 9:6-9

³¹⁹ C Blomberg p 175

our resources are never limitless, though our God is, so we need to set priorities and decide, who, where, how and what we will support.

Robertson McQuilkin³²⁰ provocatively suggests there are four questions we need to ask about our giving to mission and its goals:

1. Does the giving win the lost?
2. Does the giving encourage true discipleship?
3. Does the giving honour the role of the local church?
4. Does the giving nurture generous giving?

We may argue or even disagree with these priorities, but they raise important issues that need serious discussion.

As we consider the area of the financial support of mission some priorities need to be decided. The options listed below are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but generally most churches or regular givers to mission fall into one or either of these categories.

1. PROJECT or PEOPLE

Do we give to projects that have a defined end point, or are we concerned about the regular support of people? A special project catches the imagination, it provides a definite target, and the possibility of a successful conclusion. Everyone involved feels satisfied if the goals are achieved. It is usually easier to recruit people to support a project and generate enthusiasm. It may even be possible to send people to visit the project, to see how it is progressing and develop links with those running it. Projects can be very valuable to the work of God and progress of mission. Many younger givers prefer to give to projects, and then when the project is completed switch their support to something new. Project support may allow relationships to be made with local Christians in the project area, which may continue to each others benefit in the longer term.

However once a project is completed, it generally requires people to keep it going in the long term. The work of the long term missionary cannot necessarily be done in a few months or years but may require many years to come to fruition. Language learning and cultural adaptation take time.

³²⁰ Robertson McQuilkin. EMQ, need to find reference

Church planting may be a slow process in some parts of the world. Those called to translation work may spend many years before even part of the scriptures are translated. If we neglect the people who are dependant on our support either as churches or individuals, then the projects may also collapse in time. Beware the short term fix, for often the results may be short term, but not last. Don't forget that people, whether cross cultural missionaries or national workers are still the most valuable resource in mission and need regular systematic financial support.

2. SYTEMATIC or ONE-OFF

This point follows from the first point, and is an attempt to make us think about consistency in giving and support. Is our giving regular or sporadic, as individuals and local churches? Does it follow a consistent pattern or fluctuate according to what are the needs of the moment? There will always be the need for special responses for crises situations. However what often happens is that people divert giving from regular commitments, or reduce it for a while to allow a sudden response. When crises arise a response may be necessary, but we should try not to ensure our regular commitments are maintained. Those we have a responsibility or commitment to support have needs that continue on a daily and weekly basis, and should not be forgotten when we suddenly decide to help elsewhere.

3. EMOTIONAL or PRAYERFUL

We are familiar with appeals for help that touch our hearts and move us to respond. There are huge and genuine needs throughout the world, and pictures of orphans, refugees, or persecuted Christians speak to our hearts. It has always been this way and as a consequence some types of work with a strong emotional pull have been well supported. As we saw in Chapter 3 world needs are enormous, with poverty, disease, the exploitation of children and war so common. Needs are endless, we cannot respond to them all, so we have to constantly ask God for guidance about our priorities. If we believe that God will guide us in every area of life, then certainly he will guide us when it comes to our use of financial resources, so we will make the right choices in support. We will have different interests and apply varying criteria in our decision making but we all ought to pray before we respond.

4. CRISIS DRIVEN or STRATEGIC

As well as the poor always being with us, there seems to be an increase in various crises events throughout the world. Rapid information exchange has made us much more aware of what is happening. The news seems full of reports of floods, or earthquakes and other natural disasters; harvest failures and famine; and of the widespread effects of global pandemics such as AIDS. How should we respond, what is the best way to use our resources, how can the prosperous help the weak and needy in the most effective way?

It is right and biblical to respond to those in deep physical and social need. In fact Paul the missionary spent a considerable amount of time organising a relief collection of the poor Christians in Judea affected by famine, and eventually carried the gifts of the Macedonia churches to them.³²¹ So when we respond to similar needs we have good apostolic precedent, but how and when should we act?

One problem that has to be faced is that if we lurch from global crises to crises and allow our giving to follow these, then work that is important for the advance of the gospel, can be neglected. As in every other area of Christian living, it is a question of balance and discernment of how God would have us respond to the situations and needs we face. Crises will always be there, but strategic opportunities to enter a new area, or support key workers, may give us a window of opportunity that has to be grasped, and if we have exhausted all our resources on the urgent, we will not be able to help the really strategic.

Our priorities in support

So how do we establish who and what we should support? While this must remain a personal matter for each individual, and the leadership of each local church must determine their own priorities, yet there are some important principles that can help.

Our first priority must be to our own local workers/ missionaries. They have the primary call on our resources, and will include those we have been sent and who have gone from our local church to serve God. Alongside these will be others with whom we have developed strong links. Although not

³²¹ 2 Corinthians 8: 6,7

necessarily from our own church, they may have relationships with us and we feel a commitment to them and their service. If there are no local workers serving as missionaries, some churches chose to adopt some workers for regular support. This will have a positive effect on the life of the church and should be encouraged whenever possible. Alongside these regular commitments, there may be a specific project the church has decided to support, or some regular sponsorship of a person or ministry.

The cost of support

Accurate knowledge of the costs involved, particularly for those for whom we have a regular support responsibility, is vital. As well as knowledge of family size and basic needs, other important costs which need to be explored include:

- Cost of travel to and from the area of service
- Living costs compared to the home country - the UN Index will help
- Housing - Will they rent or buy? How much does accommodation cost?
- Transport – what sort of vehicle do they need?
- Education – what are the likely costs of family education?

These are some of the major extras costs that may be different from the normal at home and need to be considered.

Practical issues in giving

When considering the mechanics of our support for missionary work, some practical issues need to be resolved.

a) Personal or through local church.

How much we give is a personal matter between ourselves and the Lord. We have a responsibility to support of our own local church, for its maintenance needs, programmes and the support of its own workers. Beyond that, we will follow our own understanding of how God wishes us to use the resources he has given us. Some believe that having given to their church, they are free to direct the rest of their giving as God guides them. Others give all through their church, trusting the leaders to make the wisest decisions as to how the resources should be used.

b) Use of Tax Efficient giving.

Those who live in the UK have a favourable tax environment for charitable giving. All who pay income tax can recover the tax paid on any gift made to a charity (which includes local churches and missionaries) and this is added to the value of the gift. The value of the gift is increased significantly when giving is made through gift aid.³²² Anyone who pays income tax can use this option and serious give it serious consideration. Other countries may have their own means of recovering income tax on gifts given to support missionary work. For those in the UK information is available from many sources³²³

c) Mechanics of giving:

The days of stuffing some cash in a registered envelope and sending it abroad have gone and modern banking allows a number of ways to transfer funds.

1. Electronic transfers are becoming the norm and most overseas workers, are able to maintain accounts in their sending countries. The majority now prefer a direct transfer of funds to their own Bank Account. They can then transfer funds for their own use when they require them using the cheapest method for transfer.
2. Bank charges both at home and abroad can eat into the value of a gift. On occasions a small cheque sent aboard directly to a worker, is worth very little after local bank charges have been deducted.
3. Service groups are able to offer transfer facilities and ease of management of gifts to overseas workers. They know the preference of the workers, how they wish funds to transferred to them and have facilities to ease the transmission of gifts to those in remote places. It makes sense to use them for this purpose.

d) Accountability

³²² The present UK figure is 28% which means that a gift of £10 becomes £12.80, when tax recovered is added, and a gift of £100 becomes £128.

³²³ Contact Echoes of Service for information & forms. E –mail: echoes@echoes.org.uk

If you give a gift to a worker, it is right to expect an acknowledgement from the worker/ missionary you are sending to, and also the service agency if you use one. If this is not received, enquire why not, for sometimes post and even e-mails can go astray. It is an important exercise for any worker to acknowledge gifts and thank those who are supporting them.

If large amounts are transferred for specific ministries, then a record should be provided on the use of these funds, and if necessary a set of audited accounts. In many parts of the world, there is an increasingly close regulation of charities so proper financial accountability has become an important matter.

6. SENDING AID – WATCH THE PITFALLS

The missionary parcel was a common means of getting supplies to workers in remote areas, where shortages were common there was little to be had in the stores. It was also a way of showing practical care to workers who were very far away. It still has value in some situations. As more severe crises emerged and shortages grew, it became possible to send supplies by container, and thus a new support system developed. Containers of essential goods, medicines, hospital supplies, literature, emergency relief goods were sent around the world by different donors. These were invaluable and essential supplies were delivered and the poor helped. Many Christians became involved in enthusiastically collecting, sorting and sending goods to some of the remoter parts of the earth, or newly opening areas of eastern Europe.

This has also been a good means of developing mission support and enthusiasm in the home base, and is still a part of the support mechanisms in many parts of the world. However it comes with a downside for as goods flooded into some parts of the world, the initiative of local people was undermined as they began to anticipate and expect western handouts. This creates what is called “dependency”, and sometimes the volume of goods from many sources has undermined local industry. One example is the Central Africa country of Zambia where the local clothes manufacturing industry had to close down as it could not compete with the masses of important clothes sent by many Western donor agencies.

One of the most difficult challenges when poverty and human need is confronted is how to develop the most appropriate response. Escobar states that “The challenge for missionaries will be how to avoid the pitfalls of missionary paternalism and of the failed secular welfare classification.”³²⁴ How can we help those in material need, while at the same time maintaining human dignity and not removing their own responsibility to do something to improve their situation?³²⁵ We must avoid ‘compassion fatigue’ losing our concerns, or letting our senses be numbed by constant exposure to need, while at the same time avoiding the serious dangers of dependency.

7. SENDING

This term describes the role fulfilled by those who provide back up those who go. The term ‘sender’ is used to describe people who volunteer their labour in supportive ways for specific missionaries and for the overall task of world evangelisation. For every fruitful missionary we invariably find a dozen or more people under girding their efforts’³²⁶.

This subject has been covered in a book by Neal Pirolo³²⁷, which should be essential reading for all who play a role in this process. Senders have a role in the moral support, of those who go. This means getting behind those whom God is calling and preparing, giving them our rock-solid support, and praying them through the process of engaging in service for God. It will involve logistical support, which includes practical input, help with supplies, administration and all the things that need to be managed in their affairs. Financial support has already been thought of, and should never be forgotten as well as the fundamental necessity of regular specific prayer support.

When missionaries are in their field of work, communication support is necessary. The old missionary airmail form, hard to open at times, has been replaced in the majority of cases by e-mail. Generally this is an excellent way of communicating, fast cheap and easy, but remember there are downsides. The area of service may be sensitive, so find out from the

³²⁴ S Escobar: A Time for Mission p 64

³²⁵ Several years ago while working in Central Africa I was confronted with this dilemma. A particularly high flood cut off some remote villages for several weeks. No transport could get through, and as their harvest and fields flooded food stocks ran low. With the help of an international agency, sacks of maize were sent by helicopter to the area. The following year, no one in these villages planted any maize! They expected it to be provided again.

³²⁶ Steven Hawthorne: Perspectives on the world Christian Movement p 709

³²⁷ Serving as Senders: Neal Pirolo

workers there what words and comments should be avoided in any communication. Don't expect an immediate reply. Most people in service don't sit at their desks waiting for the next 'ping' in the inbox, they have work to do, and most likely will (or at least they should!) manage their e-mail as ordinary paper mail. Give adequate time for response. Remember that e-mail attachments may be expensive to download in some parts of the world, so don't attach the recent family photo, unless you have permission to do so. Then don't forget the personal touches. Much e-mail communication can be stark, factual and devoid of human feeling. Warm greetings, expressions of concern mean a great deal. There is still nothing to beat the handwritten card or note, so please don't go completely electronic. Remember that it is becoming cheap to telephone most parts of the world and voice contact can be a real encouragement to workers in distant places.³²⁸

Re-entry support is so important when workers return to their sending base. They need those who will listen, accept them again, hear all the details of their work, though it seems so remote, pray, laugh and cry with tired and sometimes disappointed missionaries. Such people are invaluable and generally very thin on the ground. There are not many of them around, but it is all part of the process of sending, and we can do this in a more effective and supportive way. Sending is service a very essential part of the process of missions and we as members of local churches and individuals need to do it better. This quote helps sum it up, "Local churches are the key to world missions. They are the source of missionary personnel, support, and of informed prayer. They are the engine, under God that drives world mission."³²⁹

³²⁸ A former colleague received a monthly telephone call from his local church in his home country. The conversation was recorded, taken to the local church, where it was played then together they prayed for the matters discussed. That was effective praying!

³²⁹ Paul Beals, (find this)

Chapter 8

What kind of People Does God Use?

There is no such thing as an ideal candidate for mission. Indeed a glance at the history of mission would reveal that God uses all kinds of people. One of the many reasons why I love going to missionary conferences is that I get a chance to meet a great cross-section of people. Missionaries come in all kinds of shapes and sizes. They represent so many different personality types, opinions, interests, and view life in vastly different ways.

All this having been said, however, there are some things that are prerequisites for missionary service. That is not to say that all missionaries meet these prerequisites in full measure, but if they are to be successful missionaries, they must embody at least a number of basic qualities. A number of these qualities are not innate. By that I mean they are not qualities that people are born with. Rather they are qualities that can be developed if we so choose. I would suggest that anyone considering missionary service as an option should work at these aspects of their life, for these qualities will greatly increase their effectiveness.

A good general grasp of the Bible

The first quality that missionaries need is a good general grasp of the Bible. The work of mission can be and is extremely varied. Missionaries can be medics, computer programmers, mechanics, teachers and agricultural advisers. The love of God can be demonstrated through all of these avenues. But the ultimate purpose of mission is to bring men and women into an authentic relationship with God. This can be done in an overt way through up front evangelism, or it can be done in more subtle ways. However it is done, all missionaries must have their eyes focused on the kingdom of God and its expansion.

It goes without saying that if a missionary has this objective in mind, a good biblical knowledge is a necessity. It is through the word of God that we meet God Himself. It is the Bible that gives us our belief system and differentiates us from any other religious group. A knowledge of Biblical teaching will be the key to being able to share the Christian message with those we are serving.

Some formal theological training is also strongly recommended if at all possible. Bible College enables people to study the Bible intensively as well as studying a range of other useful subjects such as theology, missiology, evangelism and world religions. It also affords the opportunity to interact with other students and scholars and to make use of substantial libraries. Veteran missionary Herbert Kane tellingly states ‘All missionaries, regardless of their specialization, should have a thorough understanding of missiology, including the history, theology, philosophy and methodology of missions, non-Christian religions, cross-cultural communications, missionary anthropology, area studies, church planting etc’³³⁰.

Some Christians are suspicious of theological education and scholarship. This kind of attitude is wrong and foolish. If it were not for good biblical scholarship we would not have the Bible available to us in English, nor would we have any of the valuable resources which make Bible study easier. Going to a good Bible college will therefore be hugely beneficial.

A consistent and stable Christian life

Just being in a mission situation does not necessarily mean that a person will be making a positive contribution. An unstable Christian could do a great deal of damage on the mission field, and therefore be of no benefit at all. What is more, the stresses encountered in cross cultural situations tend to emphasize our weaknesses. Christians who struggle spiritually and then go to the mission field, find that in the new situation they struggle even more.

It is also important to bear in mind that on the mission field there are very few of the spiritual support structures that many Christian enjoy in their home situations. It is therefore vital that missionaries have sufficient depth and consistency to survive the spiritual isolation. That does not mean that all missionaries should be spiritual superstars, but they should have a consistent walk with Christ.

Credibility with the home church

Another important prerequisite for missionaries is having credibility with their home church. Most missionaries depend heavily on the support of their home church. This support can involve prayer, finance and emotional

330 Herbert Kane, *The Making of a Missionary*, p.61.

affirmation. But support should not just be assumed, it is something that should be earned. If the missionary has earned the trust and confidence of his church, then he will have proved himself to be worthy of support.

In my role as an elder of a local church I am very aware of the high expectations church members have of missionaries. If someone has a great deal of credibility with the church, it is comparatively easy to get church members to pray for them and back them with practical support. However there are few jobs more difficult than persuading a church to support someone who they do not really respect.

The best way to build credibility with a local church is to be involved. Whenever my students come to talk to me about the possibility of missionary work, the first thing I ask them about is what they were doing in their home church before they came to college. If someone is not active in their local church it is unlikely that they will be active on the mission field. Sometimes those students have replied that there were no avenues for service in their local church, or they were not encouraged to be involved. Of course, some churches are poor at motivating their young people and in some churches there are not many opportunities for genuine involvement, either because the church is just too big or because it lacks vision. But rarely is this a genuine excuse. In most cases the reality is that the person is not sufficiently motivated to get involved. That being the case, the mission field is not the place for them. Missionary work is tough, and most missionaries need a great deal of motivation because they have to create ministries for themselves, rather than have everything handed to them on a plate.

A group of elders will only be able to have confidence in one of their church members if they see them in action, in the local church, doing all that they can. It has been my experience that, in general, when people are active in their local churches, their elders, and their fellow church members, are happy to send them to the mission field and to support them.

Spiritual gifts and/or natural talents that are usable on the field.

Another important prerequisite is to have gifts and natural abilities that are usable on the mission field. People sometimes talk in glib terms about the 'call of God' to missionary work. Often they have not really thought about what they mean by this expression. I certainly believe that God calls and

guides people in their Christian lives and that He makes His will clear to us if we seek it. However, when it comes to the issue of our 'call' I think it is important to use our brains and sanctified common sense. Indeed an important way in which God does guide us is by using the capacity of intelligent thought and reasoning that He Himself has given us. We should never be afraid of our intellect; rather we should use it as a means of determining what God is saying to us.

That being the case, whenever we think about where we should go as missionaries, it is important to ask what we can contribute. God has a strategy for mission and has been active in working it out for the past 2,000 years. He knows exactly what kind of people are needed in which situations and expects us to think about where each of us best fit into this strategy. It goes without saying that if one particular mission situation desperately requires a school teacher and not a medic, and you are a medic but not a school teacher, then it is not the right place for you to be. I think it is also logical to conclude that if you simply do not have the gifts or skills necessary to do a work on the mission field, then you either should not go now, or you should not go at all. This is not an unreasonable position, and given the fact that there are many different roles available on the mission field, this should not be a discouragement.

A willingness to learn.

Christians should never be arrogant. They should never think that they know it all and have nothing more to learn. We are all fallible and fallen human beings and making mistakes is simply part of what we are. Mistakes are always wrong, but are not a disaster if we are willing to learn from them and move on. Unfortunately this does not always happen.

I know of a case where new missionaries went to the mission field feeling that they had lots to give and nothing to learn. Upon arriving they did not like what they saw and decided that they were going to put things right. More seasoned missionaries tried to dampen down their ardour and coupled it with wisdom. This did not happen and the missionaries caused a great deal of harm. Their intentions may have been pure, but they were not willing to learn or even to concede that they might possibly be in the wrong. This kind of arrogance is unforgivable and is very damaging to the kingdom of God.

A willingness to fit into another culture.

It is important not just to learn and to be willing to admit that you can be wrong, it is also important to do what you can to fit into the host culture. This too takes a great deal of humility as well as wisdom. In a previous chapter we looked at the issue of culture and cross cultural communication. The reality is that even if we do understand a culture well and work hard at getting into it, we will never really fit in completely. We will always be 'foreigners' or strangers. I grew up in Ethiopia where my parents were missionaries. They worked very hard at the language and loved the culture to the point where they preferred living in Ethiopia to living in the UK. But they were always the 'fareengee' or white people. I grew up within that culture and knew it far better than my British culture, but even I was a 'fareengee'. I was white; I spoke English, and was part of a family that retained a distinctive Britishness. These were things I could not help and would not be able to change.

This is not a problem! People in host countries are not necessarily looking for missionaries to be what they are not. They don't expect missionaries to utterly conform to the culture in every conceivable way. Indeed this is simply not possible. But what they do expect, and reasonably so, is for missionaries to live in such a way that they respect the traditions of the country and do not do anything that will overly accentuate their differences.

The opposite of this is to stubbornly refuse to change or to acknowledge the local culture. This happens when a missionary enters the country with a superior attitude thinking that his way of doing things is the best way. This is simply rude! We would not like it if people came to our country and behaved in a way that gave the impression that they thought they were better than us. We should expect the same standard of behaviour of ourselves.

A missionary should make sure that he involves himself in the local culture and that he does not do anything that would be perceived by the locals as culturally offensive. Getting down to the nitty-gritty this means a number of things. It means that the missionary should try to enjoy the local food and express appreciation of it. It means that he should attempt where possible and appropriate to get involved in cultural events. It also may mean that he should resist the temptation of sheltering his family from the local community. I can well remember missionaries in Ethiopia who built verandas on the side of their houses so that when they were having a

meeting with some of the locals, they did not have to invite them into the house. This is clearly a wrong attitude and will cause a great deal of offence.

A Willingness to endure tough times

Sometimes missionary work is glamorised. We have an image in our minds of the missionary as a respected member of the local community achieving great things for God while his home church applauds all his endeavours. Certainly in some measure these images are often a reflection of the truth, however, there is another side to the story. There are the frustrations and the disappointments, the lonely times and the times when the missionary feels vulnerable and a long way from home.

There are also times when money is low and faith sorely tested. Missionaries often experience a drop in their standard of living, especially when working in the developing world. The hours can be long and the work difficult. Not everyone can cope with this range of pressures. A certain hardiness is required and a willingness to endure patiently.

A willingness to work with others and compromise when appropriate.

Mission work often involves team work. There is good reason for this. There are very few missionaries who are gifted enough to work in an isolated ministry. More usually missionaries work together so that their strengths can be pooled and their weaknesses compensated for. This team work also means that they are able to support one another.

Team work, however, requires a great deal of co-operation and a willingness to accommodate each other. It would be a strange thing to find two missionaries who worked in exactly the same way and thought the same thoughts. We are all individuals in our own right and made that way by God. That means that there are areas where we will disagree with each other. It is at times like this that our sense of unity gets tested. The missionaries who are able to compromise will be the ones who will make the team work. Missionaries who refuse will inevitably cause division.

In saying that missionaries need to compromise, I am not saying that they should not have strong opinions or that they should not stand up for things they think are right. On the contrary most missionaries are strong people

and have to be in order to do their jobs. Some are even rugged individualists who achieve a great deal due to the strength of their determination. But however difficult compromise is, it will produce dividends, so even missionaries who are strong and forceful personalities must try to accommodate each other and work together.

A correct attitude to the Christians in the host country

Not only do missionaries need to have a correct attitude towards each other, they also need to have a correct attitude towards the Christians in the country where they are serving. It is all too easy for them to do their own thing with no real regard for national Christians, but this is always a mistake. It is the job of the missionary to help the church in their host country to grow and not hinder it. When all is said and done, the missionary will eventually return home to his own country and church. The Christians in the country where he is serving, however, will stay there for the rest of their lives. Ultimately the future of the church rests in their hands, not the missionaries, so they should be the ones who decide its shape and future.

Problems with national believers can occur for a variety of reasons. Sometimes the missionary is not willing to take any advice from national Christians. There may even be times when a national church leader needs to correct a missionary and this is invariably a painful thing for both of them. In such situations the missionary might react badly to the situation. Sometimes missionaries can also be too possessive of the work they have established and are unwilling to hand over the responsibility to the national Christians. The result of these problems is that the missionary outstays his welcome while the leadership potential of the national Christians is not developed. At times national leaders do things very differently from the way the missionaries did them and this causes upset. They feel that the leaders who have replaced them are either going wayward in their theology or are not respecting the heritage that was left to them.

However these problems occur and whatever the reason for them, these relationship issues between the missionary and the national Christians must be dealt with before they cause too much damage. Missionaries need to get the balance between being leaders, and being willing to hand over the leadership to others. They need to do the very best they can while training national Christians, and then allow the national Christians to make their own mistakes. Above all, the missionary needs to learn when to support and

when to let go. This is a difficult issue which will be dealt with in greater detail later, but must be highlighted now because of its importance.

A genuine desire to build the Kingdom of God

More than anything else, however, the missionary needs to keep his eyes focussed on the kingdom of God. Just because someone is a missionary, it does not follow that he is automatically a spiritual person. We often make this assumption, but it is unfounded. I have met church elders and leaders who were not spiritual men. Likewise I have met missionaries who are not spiritual people. Though they may have a measure of success for a time, I do not believe that there will be much lasting fruit from their work.

People who lack real spiritual depth are people who are concerned about their own needs and aspirations. They are overly absorbed in what others think of them and they long for praise and recognition. Jesus taught us to seek first God's kingdom. To have our focus on the kingdom of God is to take our eyes off self and all our own aspirations. This is easier said than done because it requires a level of spirituality that can only come from an intimate walk with Christ, but it is this kind of spirituality that will, in the end, see God's kingdom firmly established.

This list at first appears to be very demanding. We should not be surprised by this, however, for the call to mission is a call to a difficult life and not an easy one. But it is nevertheless a very satisfying and exciting life to lead. I often talk to people who are unhappy in their work and wish they were doing something else. But I have rarely met a missionary who does not like their work, and I have never met one who regretted going to the mission field. Being a good missionary is difficult, but it is a deeply meaningful and purposeful life, and of course one with great heavenly rewards.

However difficult the above list may seem to attain, we need to remember that we have the Holy Spirit within us and his influence can mould us daily, making us the kind of people God wants us to be. If we are yielded to his will and seek his help it will be there, and though we are at best fallen and flawed, we can become increasingly the kind of people who will change the world by establishing the kingdom of God.

Chapter 9

OPTIONS FOR SERVICE

The last decades of the twentieth century saw the beginning of some major changes in the way cross cultural mission was perceived, and these will have an increasing impact as we penetrate further into the new millennium. These changes are due to several factors and include the results of globalisation and the changing balance of the church of Christ.

Globalisation has made the whole world accessible, very easily. Gone are the weeks of travel, replaced by a few hours in a jet, at a price that is in real terms cheap, certainly for Westerners. This increased mobility has produced the phenomenon of short term missions and ‘missionary tourism’, both with their downsides as well as the positives. However even greater has been the emergency of the missions movement from the two thirds world, making the missionary force more multinational than at any other time. Most Christians in Western areas have not caught up with what this means. Mission as we have regarded it for so long is “what we do over there”. So the mission field is anything outside our own land, whether UK or USA, Canada etc. But now as ethnic groups migrate to our Western cities, we suddenly realise that the world is different, and missionaries from Korea or Africa may be working in our own backyards, as well as in many other parts of the world. So we need to take in the change that mission is now ‘from everywhere to everywhere’. In fact if we include national workers serving in their own countries in evangelism and church planting, then the majority of the workers in our age are already from non-Western contexts, and this number will continue to grow. Catching up with this radical shift can be uncomfortable for our Western confidence!

Historical Pattern

It helps to remember how the pattern of missionary service evolved before looking at the changes which have produced the modern options that now exist. When William Carey went to India he never returned to his native land, and his 40 years of service there were unbroken. Many of that early generation followed a similar pattern, or else they only returned to their sending country after a period of several years. Many expected to die in their

adopted country of service and part of the 'kit' for some of the early workers in Africa was a coffin!

The pattern of several years spent in their adopted country of service with a 'furlough' back in the sending country had become established by the mid 19th century and into the 20th. Often a five year term would be followed by a year at home which would be spent visiting local churches, participating in missionary conferences, reporting on exotic and far off lands, and telling fascinating stories accompanied by a challenge for more recruits. Many responded to the new challenge and so the numbers grew. The pattern developed in the 19th Century continued well into the 20th, although the war years, seriously interrupted the pattern. For most of this period the major sending country was Great Britain, with many also going from British Colonies. The exposure of many American GIs to the world during the war years, led to a remarkable thrust from North America in the post war years so that by the 1960s over 60% of new missionaries came from this part of the world.

With modern air travel the time spent travelling was dramatically cut, and so the pattern began to alter. The length of terms of service and periods of furlough decreased, and the possibility of visiting previously inaccessible places grew. This also meant that it became possible to help for a limited period of time without the necessity of a lifetime commitment. The changing and shrinking world bred many new options, and also produced a debate on the value of 'short term service', which is discussed more fully in the next chapter.

New youth movements emerged in the 1960's and the first of these, Operation Mobilisation, challenged and mobilised a new generation for mission, as the Student Volunteer Movement had done at the end of the 19th Century. Young Christians gave themselves to evangelism in unreached places for a few weeks or months, and many ended up in full time service, and are still there today!. Other movements followed the lead that OM gave and recruited young people to summer team evangelism, or other forms of short term service.³³¹ The missions' world was changed, with an inevitable accompanying debate.

³³¹ e.g. GLO (Gospel Literature Outreach) has been sending summer teams to Europe and elsewhere for over 30 years.

In this changed and continually evolving age, what are the options that exist in missionary service? How can the skills, experience and commitment of the multinational missionary force best be used? In all of the choices and options we must keep the goal of mission clear, and not make our choices for selfish reasons. The purpose is to make known the gospel of Christ, to extend the kingdom of God and to call people from all nations to submit to the Lordship of Christ. It is not about having exciting experiences, or seeing the world, or furthering careers, or else we will degrade the noblest task of all into an enterprise that we can pick up and put down as we please. Our aim in this section is to consider what options are possible and examine the role and value of each in the growth of the work of God.

The Career Missionary

Here we are defining the traditional missionary, who goes to serve God in a cross cultural situation, with an open ended commitment. Career missionaries are there for the long haul, which generally means life, and will ensure adequate preparation and training is undertaken before they leave for their area of work, or the role they have been prepared to fill. Some may not like the term 'career missionary', but it has proved a convenient description for the long term cross cultural worker.

Calling.

Those who commit to long term service in a cross cultural context will have a sense of Divine Calling. This is a vocation, not another job option, and it is pursued in response to a sense of God's call and will for their lives. If different generations of missionaries are examined, then the emphasis on the call of God is usually strongest in the Senior generation, and may be least prominent in those from Generation X (the generation born post 1965). However it needs to be remembered that although they may not use the traditional language of calling, this does not mean that they have not been moved by Divine impulse, but do indeed see themselves as those whom God has selected for his work. Stereotyping can be very dangerous! However every generation must be willing to examine their motivation and confirm the will of God.

Training.

Adequate preparation and training is essential for those who are following God's call to service. This may take place over the course of several years. At the heart of any training for Christian service is personal spiritual development, which will involve 'clarifying your basic commitment, your spiritual gifts, your call and making sure your spiritual foundation is solid.'³³² It will certainly involve serving God in the context the home church and gaining as much experience as possible as a member of the body of believers. This will include demonstrating reliability, maturity and commitment to a work in the long term. Opportunities will be taken to witness, to contribute to the programme of the church and to disciple others in faith.

Any necessary professional training for the role to be fulfilled in service will also be undertaken. This may include special training in linguistics, customised medical training or courses for health professionals, learning appropriate technology for those in a practical role, and theology and bible study for those who are going to engage in a teaching and training role. Specific missionary training is necessary, in particular in culture and cross cultural communication, methods of evangelism in other cultures, church planting, gaining some knowledge of other religions and their world view, as well as how to approach these groups with the gospel. If know to be deficient, then biblical training is necessary so that the new worker is as well equipped as possible for the role they will be fulfilling.³³³

Going

The process of getting to the area of service may be long and drawn out for the career missionary. Most likely it may involve several years of preparation and will include developing relationships with the sending church, with prayer and practical supporters, and relationships with any agencies. It is likely to include visits to establish the area of service before finally departing for the field. The process of packing and moving is more complex than that for the few week or month short term mission trip. Advice will be needed as to what to take, how to transport it, what accommodation is available, schooling for families, life style and thousands of new things that need to be learned.

³³² Perspectives p 714

³³³ There are many training options from different colleges and institutions. The year programme 'Training for Service' runs at Tilsley College,. Where one of the authors teaches.

As the career missionary is there long term, the early priorities will be language learning, essential for a natural and colloquial level of communication. This is a long term project and although communication at a basic level may be attained quite quickly by some, deeper understanding takes much longer and cannot be short-circuited. Anything in the early months and years that threatens adequate language learning should be avoided. As language is learned so cultural understanding is also acquired and after the phase of culture shock passes, the process of entering a new culture, and getting to know the people can be pursued with increasing ease as language skills improve.

Adapting to a new role and learning a ministry are long term tasks that take time, particularly in many non-western parts of the world. Long term service allows long term goals to be set, so that the process can be approached with enough time to make sure it is done properly.

The Tentmaker

This term has become popular in mission circles in recent years, although it has been practiced as a method of mission during the centuries.³³⁴ It is based on the model of Paul who at Corinth, in Thessalonica³³⁵ and probably in other locations, worked at his trade as a tentmaker to provide income for his living expenses. He explains that his main motivation for this was to remove any possibility of the accusation that he was preaching for gain, which could have harmed the new Christians in these towns.³³⁶ He also wanted to set an example and work ethic that they would follow³³⁷. However he was also supported by the gifts sent by some churches and when support was received it allowed Paul to give himself completely to preaching and teaching, his primary calling.³³⁸

In current usage, this term is applied to those who choose to serve God as self supporting workers and take up a job in their country of service. They may be professionals, and work in their profession. Some are students in universities who may be engaged in postgraduate research or employed as

³³⁴ It could be argued that the medieval monastic movement used this model as these communities moved to new areas and spread the gospel.

³³⁵ Acts 18:1-4

³³⁶ 1 Thessalonians 2:5-9; 1 Corinthians 9:12-15

³³⁷ 2 Thessalonians 3:7-10

³³⁸ Acts 18:5

lecturers. This can provide an entrance to the student and academic community that may not otherwise exist. Others can run small businesses in their country of adoption, which provides them with the necessary permission to be there, which would not otherwise be given. There are a wide variety of options for work that can be pursued.

Although adopting this role can allow access to otherwise closed lands, this role is not always as easy as it seems and needs to be thought through with care. It is as much a calling as the career missionary, who may also of course be a tentmaker, and the hardships, isolation at times and conflict in roles can create tensions in the workers themselves. As Ian Prescott thoughtfully writes:

“Tentmakers are not just missionaries in disguise, nor are they just professionals pursuing their professional vocation in another country and taking the opportunity to witness. They are individuals who have responded to a calling from God to contribute to the establishment and growth of the church in another country and culture- using their professional skills to enable them to do these things.”³³⁹

There are many options and opportunities, and great advantages from this means of working. Doors otherwise closed open, restricted access countries are reachable, the need for financial support is met, and relationships can develop with otherwise inaccessible groups in society. Networks of tentmakers have developed and a great deal of information has now been published on this important area.³⁴⁰

However there are some real disadvantages in the tentmaker role. The work of the tentmaker as secular employment in any other part of the world, may be demanding and require many hours of commitment. Opportunities to witness and share the gospel may not always happen as anticipated. Isolation from indigenous Christians may be the norm in some countries, so that Christian fellowship is within the expatriate community only. These potential problems need to be understood before such work is embarked upon.

The Non-Resident Missionary

³³⁹ Global Missiology: p 427

³⁴⁰ See Ruth Siemens p 733-741 Perspectives on the world Christian Movement

Although not physically living among the people group or in their country of service, these workers are able to serve them in different ways. They may not be able to reside for different reasons, political issues being the most likely, but reach them by means of radio programmes, literature and other media productions. They may help by mobilising prayer support and so continue to serve and advance the work in a specific area.

Part of this ministry may be visiting immigrants or different ethnic groups around the world. Often when dislocated from their homeland, refugees or immigrants are more accessible and frequently more open to the gospel. Those who can come alongside them with knowledge of their language, culture and home country can be welcomed and find the door open. Some have engaged in ministries among a variety of ethnic groups such as Iranians, Turks, Arabs, Kurds, Gujuraties, Vietnamese and many more. Sometimes there has been a significant response to the friendship shown producing in time enquirers and those who have come to faith in Christ.

There are many examples of how this has happened, and perhaps one of the best is Algeria. Several generations of missionaries served in Algeria, some working specifically among the Kabyle peoples³⁴¹. After the Algerian War came independence from France and eventually expatriate missionaries were expelled from Algeria in the 1970's. However the work of reaching these people did not stop and from distant locations continued to reach the people of Algeria through radio broadcasts. Under the hand of God, the result has been a considerable response to the gospel in that part of North Africa, where there are significant numbers of Kabyle Christians.³⁴² The non-resident missionary worker was a key means to this breakthrough.

The Ethnic Minority Missionary

Travel and migration of people is a feature of the modern world that will bring immigrant groups of various nationalities to our own countries. Multiculturalism is a reality in most of the major cities of the West and in some London boroughs 65% or more of the population are ethnic minorities with large Indian, Muslim and African communities. This means that suddenly groups which may be completely inaccessible in their own

³⁴¹ Charles Marsh: Too Hard for God

³⁴² Daisy Marsh: There is a God in Heaven

countries are our neighbours and if approached in the right way, may be more open to the message.

Some have been called to work among these particular groups either in their own locality or choose to move to areas where there are concentrations of immigrants. This is a work that demands immersion in these communities. Occasional forays will not achieve much evangelistically, and generally the work can be done more effectively by those Christians who come from the same ethnic background. Their language ability, cultural understanding can all build bridges and practical care and support can present opportunities to share Jesus Christ with these people who are often much more vulnerable and consequently more open.

Short Term Workers

The options are many and will receive a fuller discussion in the next chapter, but cheap travel, easy accessibility and the willingness to help for a short period can have a positive input in the lives of those who go and be of considerable benefit to those with whom they work.

WHAT ARE THE JOB OPTIONS?

A visit to the “missionary job centre” will reveal a wide range of skills and required. A short survey done a few years ago of nearly 400 missionaries found over 70 job types described or being performed by that group³⁴³, so we can all potentially fit in some where.

A debate in recent years concerns the validity of all these roles, and whether they all reflect what is biblical mission? A common word used in mission vocabulary is ‘holistic’, emphasising the need to care for the whole person and be involved in not just saving souls, but transforming societies. This it is argued is part of our Christian response to the huge inequalities and the poverty we encounter in so many areas of the world.³⁴⁴ It has always been part of a Christian response to human need, modelled on the example of Christ. Long before modern missions developed, Christians were involved in setting up the first hospitals and schools, caring for leprosy sufferers and

³⁴³ A survey was done of 385 missionaries listed in Echoes Daily Prayer guide in 1997. When asked for job descriptions 75 job descriptions were provided by these workers

³⁴⁴ Bryant Myers: EMQ etc

helping the poor. It is natural that missionaries when they encounter need should strive to address this, driven by the compassion of Christ.

While accepting the validity of the need to care and provide help, those on the other side of the debate are concerned that the primary focus of Biblical mission, which is making disciples of the nations, gets lost in a sea of laudable projects, that do not build the church of Jesus Christ.³⁴⁵ While support ministries may be important they are not what mission is about. It is easy, and perhaps more politically correct to provide aid and encourage development, rather than call people to repentance and conversion to Christ. This is an important argument and both sides need to be considered, while keeping our biblical foundations firm.

The discussion is not helped by a tendency to divide service into spiritual and social ministries, with the immediate assumption of the superiority of the first. While calling people to Christ will always be the primary goal of mission, yet whatever role God calls us to, is extremely important, and the division of life into sacred and secular, is more a result of Greek philosophical thinking than the more biblical Hebraic world view. Os Guinness states this precisely when he states that we are all called, by Christ, to Christ and for Christ. This calling comes to every Christian and the result is that everything we do, at *every time* and in *every place* is done for his glory.³⁴⁶ Our primary calling is to be Christ's people, and we work at this daily in our secondary calling whether as a teacher, a postman, a typist, doctor or evangelist. We need a more holistic view of life, that is a biblical holism that does not create division in our activities where God has not placed them.

FRONT LINE JOBS

Among what may be called front line jobs are those that lie at the heart of mission, for without them mission is not valid. They include evangelism, the discipling of new Christians and church planting.

Evangelism

³⁴⁵ David Hesselgrave EMG etc

³⁴⁶ Os Guinness The Call

Whatever the situation, whether in a totally unreached group (E3) or among near neighbours, every Christian should be concerned to witness for Jesus Christ and share his good news. When a person is called to missionary service, whatever their primary role, concern for evangelism should be maintained, and opportunities taken when they arise to share the gospel. A negative result of increasing specialisation of roles is that some may feel little responsibility to get involved outside their own area of work, but anyone called by God will always maintain a deep concern for witness and evangelism.

While everyone is expected to be willing to witness and defend faith³⁴⁷, not all have the gift of an evangelist³⁴⁸. Those who have this special gifting and calling as evangelists, will develop their ministry in the most appropriate way. As already noted in a cross cultural context this will normally involve language learning and cultural understanding and adaptation. The best means of developing contacts and bridge building need to be explored, as well as how most effectively the message can be communicated. An understanding of communication theory and process, will help in this choice and remove the assumption that what works at home will work everywhere. This subject is developed in more detail in Chapter 12.

Discipling

New Christians need to be nurtured and helped in their spiritual growth. A valid criticism of missionary methods in some parts of the world is that we have been good at producing converts, but very poor at making disciples. An attempt is being made to correct this omission and ensure that the good seed is not only received but produces fruit. Discipling may involve one to one sessions with new believers; it may take the form of teaching specific courses in a home setting, training and mentoring them in the ways of the Lord.³⁴⁹ Bible teachers are always required to teach new converts and see them brought to maturity.

347 1 Peter 3:15

348 Ephes 4:11

349 There are a wide variety of materials available, which can be used with new Christians. Much will depend on language and what has already been translated. Materials by Emmaus Bible School, Navigators, New Tribes Mission, TEE schools etc are of high quality and it is important to see what is already available before resorting to producing more. The missions world is frequently very good and duplication and 'reinventing the wheel,'.

Some may be called to a longer term teaching role, which may be local, either working mainly with one local church or a Bible school, or involve an itinerant ministry.

Church Planting

As already stated this is another essential stage of the missions' process, which cannot be omitted. The local church provides the environment where new Christians receive care, support, encouragement and spiritual nutrition. A greater emphasis on the planting of indigenous churches is emerging as the only means to give permanency and long term stability to any work. If weak churches with poor leadership are planted or if no churches are planted at all, then evangelistic and discipling ministries have not succeeded.

Church planting is a long term proposition and cannot necessarily be accomplished in a specific time scale. Those who feel this is their primary ministry will have had experience either with church planting or in building up a local church before they leave to serve cross culturally. Often such a ministry is better accomplished by a team of workers, for mutual support and so that a variety of gifts can be brought to the team.

PROFESSIONAL JOBS

There is a long tradition of using professional skills and qualifications in the service of God. Christian education has been used widely and blessed. In some parts of Africa, the first generation of national leaders after independence from colonial rule was educated in Christian Mission schools. Christian education is still a powerful means of influencing many young people, and provides opportunities to teach the bible and share the gospel of Christ. In some countries where the majority religion is not Christianity it can be a strategic opportunity.

Medical care also walked hand in hand with the growth of mission in the 19th century. The itinerant doctor or nurse was supplemented in time by the rural clinic, and then the mission hospital developed. Some hospitals grew into prestigious teaching institutions and still function as respected Christian colleges which train nurses and doctors. There is still a major need for Christian doctors and nurses to get involved in this type of ministry in many parts of the world. Much of Africa, struggling with the scourge of AIDS, seems unable to provide its own medical services and this is a great

Christian opportunity. The emphasis has moved from the heroics of the one man or woman to a broader based primary care programme, emphasising the training of local workers, but the value of this form of service is still real.

Specialists in linguistics are needed to work on languages where there are still no scriptures or for the revision of older and archaic translations of scripture. The huge need for quality Christian literature is not being met, and those who have language and literacy skills can make a significant contribution. Those who are called by God to engage in this type of work will ensure they have adequate linguistic training before they leave for their field of service.³⁵⁰

Management has become an important professional skill that can be used in mission. Many workers now shoulder the responsibility for managing significant programmes, budgets and development projects. These are not jobs that can be delegated to the untrained, but require the skills of financial, project and people management. Recurrent global crises are becoming more frequent, and many have to become involved in organising relief operations, or helping to manage human catastrophes following natural disasters. In such circumstances they will receive and handle large amounts of money and this needs to be done efficiently with proper accountability to donors who want to know that their gifts are being applied appropriately.

Missionary aviation has grown in the last 50 years and provides a lifeline for workers in many remote parts by transporting essential supplies and personnel to areas of need. Well trained pilots to fly the planes, and good mechanics to service them while they are on the ground, are all needed. The experience and qualifications may take years to achieve.

LOGISTICAL JOBS

Many different skills and people are needed in support and back up roles, essential for the overall development of the work.

Mechanics always seem to be in short supply, particularly in the remoter, rural parts of the world. Vehicles, which are punished by bad roads, need to

³⁵⁰ Wycliffe has made a major contribution to the field of linguistics and languages over many years. They provide excellent pre-field training in linguistics, and more specialised help for translators.

be repaired and maintained, and equipment such as generators serviced so good mechanics are invaluable.

Maintenance personnel who can repair, fix, and do a variety of practical jobs, have a vital role. As our dependence on computers and e-mail grows, **IT specialists** also have a role in keeping the computers going and serviced for missionaries who are dependent on them, but usually have little idea of how to maintain, repair or develop them.

Some serve by running guest houses in strategic centres, which provide accommodation and hospitality to other workers on the move. As well as teachers, house parents are necessary in boarding schools where they act as surrogate parents to the children during term time and caterers and school nurses are also needed.

Administrators and secretaries are always needed in a variety of situations.

DEVELOPMENT JOBS

There is a whole list of possibilities that come under this category. This includes those who have skills and training that are used to develop and improve the environment and lives of those they serve among. They may be agriculturalists, or water engineers, experts in microfinance, or small business development. There will be others who train and impart practical skills, such as sewing and dress making, or building, or mechanics or carpentry, providing a skill that will allow people to earn an income, support themselves and their families and so escape the poverty trap. All have a valuable part to play alongside all the other roles mentioned above.

Builders and practical people are of great use, often in short term projects, where they can work with a team³⁵¹, tackling a practical project in a short period of time. Even skilled DIYers can be used in some of these situations.

This may seem a long list but it is certainly not exhaustive for there are many options. However this is more than another job centre providing work possibilities in distant and perhaps exotic locations. The goal is to advance the work of God, to work in His mission, and so for all who get involved, whether for a short or longer period, there must be an overriding conviction that this is what God wants me to do. When we engage in mission our goal is not to improve our own CV but to serve God and help to advance his

³⁵¹ e.g. Brass tacks is a UK based organisation that sends teams of builders, carpenters, electricians and other practical people abroad to provide project support. www.brasstacks.org

kingdom. Whatever skills and gifting we have must be surrendered to him first of all so they can be used most appropriately in his work.

Chapter 10

Short Stay or Long Haul?

There have been many changes in mission over the past fifty years, but one of the biggest has been the change of duration in many missionary careers. Just as missionaries do a range of jobs, so they go to the mission field for a range of time periods. The uses of short-term missionaries and mission trips have contributed significantly to the work of mission by bringing a new dimension.

Perhaps the most staggering thing about the use of short term mission is the sheer growth that it has enjoyed. To describe the rise of short term mission as an explosion is not an exaggeration. MARC estimated that the number of people in the US alone who got involved in short term mission rose from 22,000 in 1979 to 250,000 in 1992³⁵². The *Missions Handbook* also estimated that the number of short term missionaries sent out by mission agencies rose from 38,068 in 1992 to 100,386 in 1999³⁵³.

At the same time concerns have been raised about the usefulness of such short term mission stints. Just as some missionary organizations have used short term workers extensively, others have been reticent to get involved in short term ministry. Which of these is the correct position? It seems to me that this is not an either/or question. Rather, both long and short term missionaries are needed, but for different reasons. They should also be used in different though complimentary ways.

Before we get into the debate, however, it is necessary to set out what we mean by short and long term mission and come up with some definitions. The first term that we could define is that of the 'career missionary'. In modern missiological parlance when we talk about career missionaries we do not necessarily mean people who spend their whole lives as missionaries. Rather we refer to a period of missionary service of at least five years. Of course there are still many missionaries who do spend the bulk of their lives on the mission field. On my last trip to Ethiopia I had the privilege of meeting two missionaries, one of whom had been working in the country for

352 Stan Guthrie, *Missions in the Third Millennium*, p.87

353 Stan Guthrie, *Missions in the Third Millennium*, p.87

36 years and the other for 56 years. Such long term campaigners have been the bedrock of mission for centuries.

The second term we could define is what I would call the 'short term worker'. This is a flexible term that refers to someone who spends anything from 2 months to three years on the mission field. Usually the person fulfils a specific role during this time, but the role can vary considerably and sometimes the person can be in the role long enough to develop a significant measure of competence. They might even be able to work with a measure of independence for much of the time.

The third term we could define is a 'mission trip'. This is when a person spends a couple of weeks in a mission situation. Most of the time this kind of mission experience takes place in a team situation where the team of short term missionaries is supervised by a more seasoned missionary, or by national workers. It is neither advisable nor appropriate for these people to do their work independently as they do not have a long enough stay in the situation to build up a proper understanding of the culture.

It is important to ask at this stage why short term missions have become an option. There are really four reasons worth considering. Firstly, modern travel is both rapid and relatively inexpensive. When William Carey went to India in 1793 the journey was very arduous and took five months³⁵⁴. Even 50 years ago when my father went to Ethiopia it took many hours and cost the equivalent of several weeks wages. Last year I went for a short teaching trip to Ethiopia and I got there in only 12 hours at the cost of two weeks wages. I have also flown to several European destinations for mission trips and paid less than £100. Clearly the low cost of travel and its convenience has made the world a small place, and this has meant that people can quite easily take time off work to do a mission trip.

Secondly, the vast population increase in our world has necessitated a radical approach to missions which means using every tactic at our disposal to reach the lost. When Carey began his missionary career he estimated that the world's population was around 730 million³⁵⁵. Today there are 6 billion and this number is growing all the time. This has prompted mission leaders

354 Stan Guthrie, p.29

355 Sam Wellman, William Carey, p.59

to try and get the gospel out to as wide a range of people as possible. This pro-active approach has in turn required short term missionaries.

Thirdly the availability of vast quantities of Christian literature in many different languages has made literature distribution an important component in mission work. This in turn has led to large numbers of short term missionaries being used to distribute the literature. By its very nature literature distribution does not require a detailed knowledge of the language or an extensive program of cultural adaptation, just a willingness to serve. This has made the job of acquiring short term missionaries much easier and therefore led to the swelling of their numbers.

A fourth reason for the development of short term mission is the changing perception of the church. We live in a global village where nowhere seems very far. The church has begun to understand that good work can be done on the other side of the world in a limited period of time because that is the way society at large operates. Young people who show an interest in mission work are not scorned for their lack of commitment when they only want to spend a couple of weeks or months in a mission situation. Rather their churches understand well the benefits of short term missionary work and are, in general, very sympathetic and supportive of this approach to mission.

Examples of short term missions work

One question I am often asked is ‘what do short term missionaries actually do?’ This question cannot be adequately be explored in just a few pages because the range of jobs which they do is vast. However I will give a few examples to illustrate the kind of involvements that short term missionaries can have.

The first example I will give is of Robert, a young Irish man who does a short term mission trip each year in Scotland. Robert is slightly unusual in that many people go to a range of different places for mission trips, but Robert has chosen to go to the same location year after year. This has meant that he has got to know the local situation well and has made many friends.

Going to Scotland poses no linguistic difficulties for Robert, nor is there a different culture to learn. As a result the teams that go to this location are able to do a great deal of work that involves contact with the local people. These activities would include door to door work, children’s and youth

clubs, men's outreach events and community praise evenings. In each of these areas Robert is able to fulfil a full & productive role which is an invaluable help to the church planting team that work in the area.

The second example is that of Debbie. Like Robert she goes on a missions trip every year, but the difference is that she goes to Denmark which is a cross cultural situation. Many Danes speak English so communication is not an insurmountable barrier, nevertheless the program needs to take this into consideration and the teams that go into this situation are limited in some ways by the language issue. Much of the work that is done in this situation is distribution of Danish tracts and Debbie can do this without a knowledge of the language. There are also open airs in the city centre which can be done in English as a sufficient number of English speakers pass by to make it worthwhile. The church that the team work with also lays on outreach musical evenings. Here again Debbie can make a significant contribution, not just because she can give a testimony through interpretation, but also because she is a talented musician and can lead the whole program.

The third example is that of John. He is an older man who taught Religious Education at university prior to retiring. He has time on his hands, as well as considerable teaching ability and theological training. These he uses in short term mission trips, not as part of a team, but on his own. John visits Pakistan where he ministers to and encourages the missionary community there. He also teaches in a small Bible school in the former Yugoslavia. Though he does not speak the language his lectures are interpreted and are of great benefit to the school.

Then there is Peter. He is a surgeon working in a large hospital in England. He has taken his family on several trips to Zambia where he has offered his services free of charge to a mission hospital. His visits not only enable him to do several weeks of concentrated surgical work in the hospital, but he is also able to update the staff there as to the latest innovations in medicine.

The last example is Mark. He is an Australian who works as a joiner in his hometown of Sidney. He went to Zambia for one year to help out in a mission station. His job description was very broad indeed as he helped practically in every project that needed him. If some of the missionaries needed repair work done to their houses, Mark was there to help. If the local mission hospital was needing some drainage work done, Mark did this too. Whenever people needed a lift to the airport, or help with their shopping, or

just someone to service their car, Mark was available. But not only did he get involved in all these practical tasks, he was also a youth leader in the local Zambian church where he was greatly used as an encourager. His usefulness to the missionaries in that part of the country was such that when he went home at the end of his year, there were many who hoped he would come back again for a second year.

The benefits of short term mission

As we begin to assess the overall usefulness of short term mission, we will start by looking at the benefits of this type of mission involvement. The benefits are considerable and are listed in random order:

- Short term mission achieves specific goals

Arguably the major benefit of short term mission is that it gets work done. A team can go to a large city and distribute 15,000 tracts in the space of a fortnight. A skilled craftsman can go to a mission hospital in Africa and repair all the windows and doors in three months. During a drought, a group of relief workers can run a nine month program which will save hundreds of lives. A teacher can spend a year in a mission school thus enabling a seasoned missionary teacher to take a sabbatical. In all these ways the use of short term missionaries can achieve a great deal when properly utilized.

- Short term mission often leads to a greater commitment to mission

Another obvious benefit of short term mission is that it can lead to a longer term commitment to mission. Many of the missionaries who serve with GLO began their careers by doing GLO summer teams. This led to them being so burdened by the needs of the mission field, that they became missionaries themselves. In my own case, with each summer team that I did prior to entering full-time Christian work, I became more and more convinced of the absolute necessity of proclaiming the gospel. Even now, having been in Christian work for 14 years, I still get reinvigorated with every short term mission project that I take part in.

Of course not everyone who does a summer team or who engages in short term mission will end up being a missionary. But their lives will be changed and their mission focus sharpened. The experiences they have been through will never be forgotten and they are more inclined to support mission

through prayers and giving than they would otherwise have been. Indeed one study conducted on the issue suggested that people returning from short-term mission will support the work of mission at almost double the level they did before going³⁵⁶. I frequently meet people in churches who reminisce about short term mission experiences they had years ago and it is obvious that they greatly valued the experience. Many are still in touch with the missionaries they met and pray for them constantly.

- Short term mission is a shop window for career mission

Not only does short term mission lead to a greater commitment to mission, but it also enables prospective missionaries to see what is involved in missionary work. People often glamorize missionary work and have an unrealistic view of what is involved. Although missionary work can be both exhilarating and deeply rewarding, it is difficult. Most people are unaware of the struggle of language learning, or the loneliness of being away from family. There is little appreciation of the difficulty of trying to maintain a spiritual life in an area where there are few Christians, or of the struggle to really enjoy worship in a strange church setting where the church culture is so different from back home. These things can often be a shock to young missionaries.

When a person has done short term mission, they are aware of at least some of the issues that are involved in longer term missionary work. It enables them to go to the mission field with a realization of what missionary work will mean for them. In some cases, there will be people who get involved in short term mission and then decide that a longer term commitment is not for them. Even this must be seen as a positive thing because it is better for them to discover that they could not cope before they make a long term commitment, than if they went and then had to come home prematurely because it was all too much.

- Short term mission opens our eyes to the real world

On short term mission, the hazy awareness of poverty, injustice and suffering that we get from the evening news is suddenly transformed into a grizzly reality. No longer are these events sanitized by the small screen where the horrible pictures can be switched off and forgotten, and where the

356 Mack & Leanne Short, Short Term Missions, p.38

stench of disease and the noise of chaos are altogether absent. Short term missionaries can taste, touch and interact with a hurting world in a way that they would never have been able to do before. These experiences fundamentally change the way in which they view their world.

- Short term mission is spiritually enhancing

Short term mission, as we have seen, is good for the mission field. But it is also good for those people who get involved in it. I have spoken to many people, young and old, who have been involved in short term mission and they have all spoken of the blessing that it proved to be for their spiritual walk. Some have even commented that it was the defining moment in their Christian lives. Our experience in GLO has shown us that our summer team program is not an end in itself, but in the long term it produces people who have a hunger for God and an increased desire to serve him. We have tried to capitalize on this by including a structured Bible teaching program on every summer team. Often when I go to churches and talk about our teams, I tell church leaders that if they want a new generation of godly, passionate people, then they should send all their young people on GLO summer teams.

There are several reasons why short term mission is spiritually enhancing. Firstly, those who do short term mission will end up working with others who are involved in mission, often in a team situation. This fellowship provides a stimulating atmosphere within which they can thrive spiritually. Secondly, short term mission is challenging and stimulating and so builds strong spiritual muscles. Thirdly, short term mission often involves a measure of evangelism which is at the forefront of spiritual warfare. There is nothing like spiritual confrontation to sharpen our spiritual wits. Finally mission is at the very heart of what God is doing in our world. Those who obey and involve themselves in mission reap blessing from a God who is pleased with them.

- Short term mission can envision local churches

One of the hidden benefits of short term mission is that churches in the sending country can be encouraged and stimulated when their members who have been on short term mission trips come home and share their experiences. This is good for the spiritual life of the sending church and enables it to have an expansive vision for the needs of the world.

- Short term mission is pastorally useful.

One final reason in favour of short term mission is that it can provide a measure of pastoral support for the career missionaries who are serving on the field. I often hear some of our GLO missionaries saying that they really enjoy it when the summer teams come out to visit. This is despite that fact that organizing these teams involves a lot of hard work. Not only are the missionaries encouraged, but their children are as well because they meet committed young Christians whose ages often approximate to their own. I also hear from missionaries who express gratitude for individuals who have encouraged them during a short term mission project.

One aspect of this is visits to missionaries by their elders. This too should be seen as short term mission. The elders are there to visit and encourage the missionaries they have commended to the work. This is a massively important task, especially if it is repeated with a measure of regularity. In some cases it will not only be of personal blessing to the missionaries, it will also ensure the longevity of the work.

The limitations of short term mission

Having looked at the advantages of short term mission, we now turn to the disadvantages. We do this not to be negative, but to be realistic. If we want to make a proper assessment of the role of short term mission and see how it should fit into an overall mission strategy, we not only need to see what it does, but also what it does not do. These negatives will enable us to use short term mission to the full, but not be hampered by it.

- Language and cultural limitation

The first and most obvious limitation of short term mission is that those who engage in it do not have the linguistic or cultural apparatus to fulfil a varied role in the mission situation. That is not to say that such people working in a foreign language situation can do nothing of value. We have already seen that short term missionaries can do some very productive work indeed. But they will not be able to perform the range of tasks that career missionaries who have the language and the culture will be able to perform. Let me give you an example.

I have been to several vacation teams to Italy, but I do not speak Italian and do not really understand Italian culture. On those teams I was able to distribute thousands of tracts, but if one of the people to whom I was delivering them were to ask me a question, I would not be able to reply. I have also done a great deal of preaching and Bible teaching on these Italian trips, but I always needed an interpreter. What is more, on all the occasions that I was in Italy I needed some of the career missionaries there to organize my day, take me everywhere and explain everything. I have no doubt that they appreciated me being there, but my visits were time consuming for them and my contribution depended entirely on an interpreter being with me at all times.

- Relational limitations

A second limitation of short term mission is the relational limitations. If you talk to any pastor, church leader or missionary, they will tell you that Christian work is all about relationships. When we witness to non-Christians, it is primarily our relationship with them that makes them listen to us. When they become Christians it is our relationship with them that enables us to get close to them to disciple them. In church life it is good internal relationships that make the church function properly. Here is the crunch! You simply cannot build and sustain deep relationships on the back of a two week mission trip, or even one that lasts six months. Relationships take time to develop and more time to sustain. Short term mission does not have time, so such relationships are rarely possible.

- The danger of turn off

Another limitation is the potential of what I call 'mission turn off'. This does not happen very often, but it can happen particularly if the short term mission experience is not well thought through. I have mentioned already that short term mission can lead to long term mission commitment. Though that is usually true, sometimes the opposite happens. There have been times when people have had bad experiences of short term mission and have therefore been repelled by the very concept of mission. Let me give you two real examples, though for obvious reasons I will use fictitious names.

Mike went on a mission team to France. He was initially very excited to go and looked forward to serving God with his fellow team members. When he got to the mission depot in France from which he and his fellow team

members were to be launched, he was shocked to find out that the minibus that was provided to transport them hundreds of miles was in very poor condition and did not have enough seats for all the team members. Undeterred they set off to their designated area with their tent in the back. After a full days drive they began to assemble the tent on a camp site only to discover it had a tear in it. This meant that half of them would have to sleep in the minibus and the other half under it.

The team was still enthusiastic and began to do their literature distribution in this, a very rural area of France. It occurred to them that there were no known churches in the area so they all began to wonder about who would end up doing the follow up if their labours bore fruit. These doubts continued when the team ran out of money and found it very difficult to contact headquarters to get some more. To make matters worse, they discovered that their maps were inaccurate and out of date, even to the point that some of the villages to which they drove many miles for distribution, no longer existed. To cut a long story short, rather than this experience being an impetus in Mike's life, he decided that he would no longer bother being involved in mission.

Jonathan went to Africa to do some work on a mission station. He was to be there for six months to help practically with the ongoing work there. He very much enjoyed the work, and got on very well with some of the local Christians. The problem was, however, that the inter personal relationships between the missionaries on the station were at an all time low. The missionaries were refusing to speak to each other and there was a great deal of backbiting between them. Jonathon felt awkward being among all of this turmoil, and to make matters worse the missionaries were maligning each other to him which only served to increase his sense of isolation and insecurity. He saw his six months out but decided never to go to the mission field again.

These two cases are both extreme and unusual. The vast majority of short term mission experiences are positive, enjoyable and very exciting. But they do illustrate the need for such experiences to be well organized and appropriate. If this is not the case, the end result will be that those who try them will be turned off mission.

- Significant cost

A fourth limitation of short term mission is the cost involved. A group of 10 people going on a two week team to Madrid could conceivably pay a total of between £3000 and £4000 for their flights and accommodation. This is a significant amount of money, especially in the eyes of some struggling missionary who is praying daily for money to keep him on the mission field. Likewise, if a joiner went out to Zimbabwe for a couple of months to do some building work in a mission hospital, his flight could cost him £700 and his accommodation during that time another £300. Again this is a lot of money in a country where the annual per capita income is only £550. It is also dubiously spent if the same job can be done to the same standard by local workmen at a fraction of the cost³⁵⁷.

These sums of money should not put us off short term mission. But they should make us think about how the money is being spent. With such sums involved, it is important to ensure that the investment is worthwhile and that those who spend this money to do short term mission are well used. A number of years ago, for example, one missionary organization was looking for a team of 25 people to go to Burkina Faso. Their aim was for these people to drive all over the country in four wheel drive vehicles and do nothing but pray. I am a strong believer in prayer and think that Christians should be doing more of it. However I would question that amount of money being spent when no research, fact finding, evangelism, discipleship or church building work was being done. To me this incident spoke volumes about the mission organizations naïveté, as well as their doctrine of God.

- Potential of developing an instant fix psyche

A subtle limitation of short term mission is that it can feed the notion that there can be a quick fix in mission. Though undoubtedly beneficial, short term mission was nevertheless developed at a time in our culture when society began to believe in the instant solution. Mission is not something that can be hurried. If too large an emphasis is placed on short term mission then there could be an adverse physiological impact in that participants believe that short term mission will meet the world's needs.

- Potential lack of strategic value

³⁵⁷ The term quality is important here because in some situations it is impossible to get the same quality of work done locally, particularly on a larger scale, so the expense is well justified.

Another limitation of short term mission is its lack of strategic value. By this I do not mean that there is no strategic value in short term mission. This is far from the truth. But there is limited strategic value if short term mission is seen in isolation. If it is part of a wider strategy it can be very useful, but short term mission should always be seen as part of a bigger picture. It should therefore be controlled by those who are involved deeply in the situation where the short term missionaries are sent.

- Deflection from career mission

A final limitation of short term mission is in its ability to detract from career mission. I have mentioned before that people who experience short term mission often commit their entire lives to the cause of mission. I have also emphasized the benefits of mission. However, there has been such an emphasis on short term mission in recent years that attention has been deflected away from career mission. Indeed there are a number of prominent missionary organizations that put such emphasis on short term mission that only a small proportion of their overall mission personnel are there on a long term basis. This I suspect is a mistake. The establishment of a strong national church will take the efforts of many missionaries who give extended periods of their lives for the cause of the gospel.

Assessing the value of short term missions

Having looked at the benefits and the limitations of short term mission, we must now assess its value to the overall work of mission. There can be no doubt that short term mission has become an important and desirable addition to the work of God's kingdom. Short term workers achieve a great deal given the limitations already mentioned, and they themselves are spiritually enriched as a result of their experiences. But there are a few qualifying comments that must be made if we are to make the most of the work done by short term.

Firstly we need to emphasize that long term commitment must remain at the heart of our missionary endeavour. If we ever lose sight of this then we will be making a big mistake. The mission field needs people who fit well into their cultural environment and can communicate well in the language of the area. There is a great need for committing time to mission projects and not just looking for the instant approach. Church planting needs wise and

committed people who will be there for the long haul. This can only be achieved with career missionaries.

Secondly, short term mission must never be conducted in isolation. You can never build a coherent mission strategy on short term mission. Therefore it must always be seen as a component of a bigger vision and as supplementary to long term mission. In other words short term mission is not an end in itself, but a means to achieving a greater end as part of an overall strategy.

Thirdly, short term mission must be well organized and thought through. This is true of all mission, but particularly of short term mission. On a short term mission trip you might only have two weeks to get it right. On a six month mission trip you have a little more time, but still not enough time to make too many errors. The fact that time is so limited means that what time is available must be used to the full. This requires thought and organization.

Fourthly, it would be helpful to have some kind of orientation so the short term missionary goes to their field of service with the right attitude. In this orientation a number of points could be made to the short term worker including the following:

- Research as much as you can about the country to which you are going³⁵⁸.
- Read books on the history of the church in the country that you are going to.
- Be as helpful and considerate as you can, otherwise you could become a hindrance rather than a help.
- Don't have a stereotyped idea of what a missionary does. There is a vast array of valid and useful missionary roles.
- Respect the input of the career missionary over the long haul and be careful about criticizing. Often short term missionaries can draw hasty conclusions about career missionaries that are inaccurate and any criticism that ensues from their viewpoint is extremely hurtful.
- Be prepared to help in any way that is required. Don't go with a pre-conceived notion of what you want to do.
- There are some bad missionaries, but they are very much the exception.

358 This could be done by using the internet or even using a book such as 'Lonely Planet'.

Fourthly, those who do organize short term mission must learn to be creative. It is amazing what can be achieved when a little imagination is used. In our church planting work in Viewpark, Scotland, we have had many vacation teams coming to work with us. God has used these teams to be a source of great blessing and we have found that creativity has enabled us to get the most from our teams.

Finally, we need to encourage short term missionaries not just to give a few weeks or months to the cause of mission, but to give their whole lives. The needs of the world are so desperate that we need as many men and women as possible to make mission their career. Only then will we be able to fulfil the Great Commission by bringing the gospel to all nations.

Chapter 11

Teams in Mission

When we think of the issue of mission, we need to think of Jesus. He was uniquely sent by his father, God, and in fulfilling his commission he perfectly revealed God to all mankind. As we think of mission, therefore, we need to see Jesus as our role model. As we see the work that he did, we see a model of how mission should be conducted.

It is highly significant that from the very beginning of the public ministry of Jesus, he chose a group of disciples to follow him. This was to be his team, and this model of mission would set an example for further mission enterprise.

Jesus began to form his team by asking specific people to be part of it. There was nothing random about the process, rather he hand picked his team following a night in prayer (Lu.6:12-16). He then brought them into his mission and encouraged them to give themselves to this great work. Jesus first challenge was to get his team to pray about mission (Mtt.9:37,38). He also trained them for the task. Significantly, this training did not just involve a program of theological education, it also involved putting what they had learned into practice through hands on ministry. In other words, Jesus method of training involved not only telling his disciples what to do, but showing them also. His own life was a perfect example as he role modelled ministry for them.

When Jesus sent his disciples out on mission, he gave them a strategy to follow (Mtt.10:1-6). At times he would organize them into manageable groups so as to make them more efficient. But this was a spiritual task and so Jesus gave them the spiritual equipment necessary to complete it (Mk.6:7). He also dealt frankly with the very practical issue of support (Lu.10:5-7). As well as this he ensured that they were culturally sensitive so as not to put any unnecessary stumbling block in the way of people hearing their message (Lu.10:8). Along with these practical instructions, Jesus made it clear that ultimately mission involves faith (Lu.9:3-5 ; 10:4-7). He also stressed their accountability to himself and the need to report back all that they had done (Lu.10:17).

Clearly team work was at the very heart of all that Jesus did. But it is also interesting to note that there were other people in the New Testament who also believed in teamwork. Indeed, throughout the New Testament as a whole the concept of partnership or fellowship is very prominent. Paul, for example, gathered teams to accompany him on his missionary journeys (2 Cor.8 : 23; Phil4:3). These people he prized highly and worked closely with.

As we draw together all this biblical evidence, there are a number of important principles that we can apply to contemporary missionary practice:

- Teamwork is at the heart of mission

Firstly we can conclude that team work is at the very heart of mission. In fact there are few occasions in the New Testament where we read of mission being done by individuals working on their own. That is not to say that missionaries should never work alone. There are times when such a ministry is a necessity. Nevertheless the principle still stands that teamwork is an important component of the work of mission.

- Teamwork as a training ground

Secondly we can conclude that training is a thoroughly biblical thing and should be strongly encouraged. This training must begin in the local church, where it should be a key feature of church growth. Specialised and concentrated training can also be found by going to Bible College, where a person can have the same intensity of training that Jesus' disciples were able to have. And when a person joins a team, ongoing training should be a part of everyday team life. Sometimes people avoid training because they want a shortcut to the mission field and see training as a distraction. This however is very unwise. To put it bluntly, if Jesus thought that training was important, we are arrogant to say the least, if we think that we do not need it.

- Teamwork promotes strategic thinking

Thirdly, we note the importance of strategy in mission. As Jesus went about his mission, his strategy was clearly defined and he communicated it to his disciples. Paul too had a plan in mind as he went about his mission. Mission is a serious business and worthy of careful planning. To do such an important job in a mere ad hoc way is very wrong indeed. Our belief in the

guidance of the Holy Spirit should never prevent us from thinking through what we are doing in mission and using our God given intellect to produce a strategy for effective mission. This strategy should temper and focus everything that the team does, and every member of the team should be aware of and committed to the team's strategy.

- Teamwork encourages openness on financial matters

Neither Jesus nor Paul shied away from talking about money and practical support. Faith is vital and God the ultimate provider, but there should be sufficient trust among workers to share needs and to be open about finance. A team should promote such a sense of trust that its members can talk openly about financial matters.

- Teamwork is accountability

Another principle that we can draw is in relation to accountability. This was clearly evident from Jesus ministry and also practiced by Paul and his colleagues. The missionary is not a lone ranger. He cannot assume that he can behave as he likes and have his own agenda without consulting anyone else. On the contrary he is accountable and should recognize this. Teamwork makes it virtually impossible to ignore the need for accountability.

It goes without saying that missionaries are primarily accountable to Christ himself. He is our commanding officer and we should practice an absolute obedience to his word. But this is not where accountability stops. If Jesus ministry is a model, then clearly there can be a defined team structure operating in mission with a leader. Paul and Barnabas clearly saw themselves as being in some way accountable to the church in Antioch. The leadership in Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to clarify teachings related to the doctrine of salvation, seeing it as a matter of mutual accountability to be discussed with the other apostles there. Furthermore Paul and his colleagues discussed matters together and made corporate decisions. Taking all of this evidence together we can conclude that missionaries should be accountable not just to God, but also to their sending church, their colleagues in the work, and also to any team structure within which they operate. To say 'I am only answerable to God' is not only unbiblical, it also smacks of false piety.

Definition of a Good Team?

Having established that teamwork is thoroughly biblical, we now need to ask the question, 'What is a team'? More than that we need to ask, 'What makes a good team'? If we can define what constitutes a good team, that is a team that works effectively, then we have a target to aim for. We can apply these pointers either to existing teams or we can use them as the model for forming new teams.

The following are some of the basic things that make for a successful team:

1. A good Team shares common goals.

Firstly a team is a group of people who share some common goals. It is one thing for a visionary to have some good ideas, it is quite another for those ideas to be owned by a wider group of people. When they are owned in this way, a team is being formed. Each member of the team will feel that the goals are good and that they need to be reached. They will not feel as if these goals are being imposed on them, but rather they are mutually agreed, and each team member is willing to play their role in assuring that these goals are achieved. As John Maxwell wisely comments, 'People who build successful teams never forget that every person on a team has a role to play, and every role plays its part in contributing to the bigger picture'³⁵⁹.

2. A good team comprises members who have different roles to suit their strengths and weaknesses.

Secondly a good team is a group of people who have the necessary gifting to accomplish their goals. When it comes to accomplishing a goal like church planting, no one person will have all the gifts necessary. We all have our weaknesses and limitations as well as our strengths. But the good team will be one where members will compensate for each other weaknesses. This applies not only to the gifts that team members have, but also to their personality traits.

Over a period of time the challenges that teams face will vary. Throughout these changes of situation, different personal qualities will manifest themselves in good teams. When new challenges arrive the more creative

³⁵⁹ John Maxwell, 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork, p.19.

members of the team will come into their own, when unpleasant challenges arise the highly motivated team members take the lead. If the situation in which the team finds itself becomes volatile and changeable the flexible team members begin to excel, and if the challenge becomes momentous, then the experienced and mature team members will find their contribution indispensable.

3. A good team is mutually supportive.

Good teams also offer mutual support. No man is an island. Even the Lone Ranger was never really alone; he always had the company of Tonto. There are times where every person experiences low points and discouragement. Sometimes in Christian ministry the discouragements can seem almost overwhelming. But where a good team exists, this discouragement can be dealt with. Team members can encourage each other and offer the kind of moral, emotional, spiritual and physical support that can only exist in a close knit group.

4. A good team gives priority to development and training, both on an individual and team basis.

They say that nothing remains static, all things change. This is usually the case, but sometimes Christian workers can go through times in their ministry when they do not move on or grow. When this happens in a team context, the work done by the team can become stale. Good teams try to develop and become better at what they do. This involves both training the team as a whole, as well as the individual members of the team.

5. A good team believes in a relationship of equality, although leadership is essential.

Another quality of a good team is that the members of the team are all equal. That is not to say that no distinctions are made in the team. On the contrary every team needs a leader, some one who will be a first among equals. But this leadership position is one of function not status. It is not that the leader is any better or more important than the other team members, he just has a different role, the role of leader. Whenever pride comes into the equation and leaders or members of a team think that they are more important than others, the spirit of the team will be lost.

6. A good team maintains a high level of mutual communication.

Good teams require good communication. Without this they are just a collection of individuals who are engaged in their own pursuits. With good communication, however, each team member will know what the other is doing. This will mean that their efforts will be coordinated and that they are not overlapping in their tasks.

This communication must take place in four areas³⁶⁰. Firstly there is the communication from the leader to the team members. This enables the team members to understand the direction that the team leader wants to go in. This communication should necessarily be clear, but also courteous. It should also be two-way and avoid a dictatorial attitude. Secondly there is the communication from team members to the team leader. A good team should not be filled with 'yes men'. Indeed if the team leader is a true leader, then the presence of yes men will just prove a frustration to him. Once again, however, the tone of this communication is very important. It should be firm but gentle and should be aimed at helping the team leader, not threatening him. Thirdly there is communication between team members. This should always be characterised by honesty and mutual respect. Finally there is the communication between the team and the public. In the context of a mission team the public could be the church being planted, or national believers, but equally it could be the wider Christian public back in the sending country. Whoever the public is, this communication should be unified.

7. A good team is constantly adapting to change in a dynamic way, not just carrying out policy from above.

Adaptation is of utmost importance. In any work conditions can change and with them the methodology required also changes. If a team is unable to change to meet the new demands then it will eventually become inefficient. But that ability to adapt to a changing situation means that the team will remain useful for much longer. This adaptation may mean new team members coming in and some existing members dropping out. This is never an easy process. But the true character of the team can be seen in its ability to cope with these changes and still remain motivated and working as a unit.

³⁶⁰ I have adapted these four points from those which Maxwell makes in his book on teamwork (John Maxwell, 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork, 201).

Different team models

When we think about teams it is important that we do not have a restricted view of how a team should be structured. Indeed the structure of a team will, of necessity, depend on several factors. These include the number of team members available, the geography of the area, the type of work being done by the team and the kind of people who comprise the team. There are a number of workable models of team life that we can apply. Here I will mention three of them³⁶¹.

Localized team

The first model I would mention is that of the localized team. By this I mean a team who all live within a close proximity of each other. They may live on the same mission station, or in the same housing estate, in the same part of a large city or in the same town. The idea here is that they are within easy reach of each other.

This type of team can have several advantages. Firstly, because of their close proximity to each other, they can offer each other a high degree of mutual support. Secondly, good communication can easily be facilitated by frequent team meetings. Thirdly, because they are ministering together in the same area they can have a high impact. Fourthly, this kind of team is less affected by illness or furloughs due to the fact that if one team member is away, there are others who can easily take over their role.

There are, however, some disadvantages to this type of team life. Firstly, people working within this kind of team structure, and in a cross cultural situation, will find it harder to integrate into the local culture. Because they are living and relating closely to others from a similar culture and outlook, they are in a greater danger of them forming a kind of foreign colony in their area. Secondly, although this kind of team can make a high impact, the impact will be confined to the small area in which they work and therefore it will be a work that is limited in its scope.

Dispersed team

³⁶¹ The models mentioned here are incorporated into the working practice of Gospel Literature Outreach and are described in the GLO Workers Manuel written by Ray Cawston.

The second model that I want to mention is that of a dispersed team. A dispersed team is one in which team members are scattered over a wide area, and although they are in the same team, they are all involved in different works. For example you could have a dispersed team that works in a rural area and is involved in planting or supporting churches in three or four towns or villages all at the same time.

Again there are some advantages in having a dispersed team. Firstly, team members will find it easier to integrate into the local culture because they will not be able to spend very much time together. Secondly, they will be in a position to minister over a large area because they are sufficiently spread out and will be involved in several different works. Thirdly, it is often easier to hand the work over to nationals where a dispersed team is being used because in each location where the team is working, there is less work being done by missionaries due to their lack of numbers.

But along with the advantages, there are disadvantages with a dispersed team. Firstly, communication is harder as team members will not be able to see each other very often. Secondly, life on a dispersed team is much more lonely than life in a localized team. Thirdly, sometimes the impact can be much less in any one area that it would have been had a localized team been in operation. Fourthly, due to the distances involved, team life can become hard to maintain, and this can have a negative effect on the team members attitude to the team.

Accountable Workers

Sometimes the situation might arise where an individual or couple are working in a situation on their own. This might be because they have been unsuccessful in attracting team members, or that the government has not granted visas to potential team members, or perhaps they are in a mission situation where having a full team would be too noticeable and not appropriate for the situation.

In such situations it is still possible to have some kind of team structure. This can be done by forging strong links either with other missionaries or mature national believers in the country or with the leadership structure of the commending church or mission agency. In this way it would still be possible to have a strong sense of accountability as well to offer support to

the worker on the field. Such a relationship would be enhanced by regular visits to the missionary and even the use of short term mission teams.

Leadership

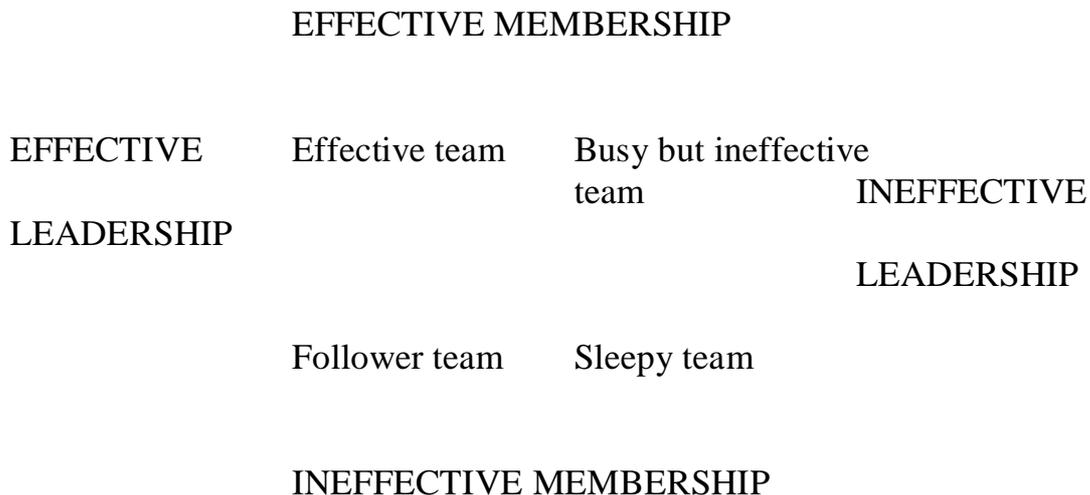
The single most important issue in teamwork is that of leadership. Good leaders can do an enormous amount of good while bad leaders can seriously hamper a work. Interestingly the Bible is full of encouragements towards active, humble, Spirit led leadership. However, without effective leadership it is impossible to make a team function properly.

A good leader will achieve at least four things. Firstly he should transfer the ownership of the work to his team members. If they feel a personal burden for what is being done then they will be willing to make all the necessary sacrifices in order to accomplish the work. Secondly the leader should create an environment in which team members will thrive. This is no easy task because people are different and therefore respond differently to various types of stimuli. Some people like a challenge, others function well when they are affirmed and encouraged, still others like to be given a direction to go in and then left to get on with it. The atmosphere in which the team works is the leaders responsibility and he must ensure that it is conducive to an effective working relationship. Thirdly the team leader should develop the potential of each member of his team. There is a sense in which there will be room for improvement with every team member. Most people, however, are satisfied with their present level of competence and so need to be encouraged to get better. The leader must see to this or his team will ultimately stagnate. Finally a leader should be a role model for his team. No team will ever rise above the level of its leader, either in productive ability or spirituality. If the leader is mediocre in his work and spiritual life, then the team will follow suit. But if he tries to excel in his work and grow in faith, then the team will follow his example.

Membership

The membership of a team is also vital. Irrespective of how good a leader is, if the team that he leads is not a good one, the effectiveness of the team will be limited. It is important when setting up a team, therefore, to ensure that good leadership is working in tandem with good membership. Likewise each team member should realise his/her responsibility as part of the team and endeavour to be the best he/she can for the sake of the work as a whole.

The following diagram demonstrates the relationship between leadership and membership in a team and its impact on the work.



It is obvious from this diagram that teams can work in any one of four ways. Firstly there is the follower team. Here you have a dynamic leader who is leading a team that is passive. This is not a good recipe for success. The team are so passive that they show absolutely no initiative. The leader is therefore taken up with the task of finding things for his team to do and then motivating them to do it. He is so busy doing this that he has no time to get on with his own ministry. The net result is that the leader exhausts himself but little gets achieved due to the passivity of his team.

Next there is the sleepy team. This team produces even worse results than the follower team. In the sleepy team, not only are the team members passive, the leader is passive also. Consequently there are no initiatives coming from any direction. And even if there were initiatives, the leader is so passive that he does nothing to motivate his already sleepy team. The end result is that nothing of consequence ever gets done.

Then there is the active but ineffective team. This situation is better than the other two, but still far from ideal. This type of situation occurs when you have a dynamic team, but one which is led by a passive team leader. The team members come up with plenty of initiatives, and because they are highly motivated they are very industrious. The problem is that they are

directionless. The job of leadership is not just to envision and motivate, it is also to guide. A good leader will not just ensure that his team are working hard, he will also ensure that their efforts are being channelled in the right direction. If each member of the team is just doing his own thing without fitting into a wider strategy then the overall work will have no focus and will lack efficiency. This, of course, is better than the previous two setups where nothing very much is being done, but the lack of direction that this kind of team produces is nevertheless a serious handicap.

Finally there is the effective team. This is where both the team members and the team leader are dynamic, and this produces by far the best results. In this set up the team members have initiative and are self motivated. That means that the team leader is freed up to do the two things that he must do. Firstly, he can get on with his own ministry and use his gifts to the full. Secondly he can channel the energies of his team into the areas where they are most needed. If this can be accomplished then the team will be successful.

Dangers of Team life

Having looked at what makes a team function properly, we would do well to think about some of the attitudes that can destroy team life. Firstly a team can be destroyed by members who are too independent. Team life should not, of course, destroy our personal autonomy. There is no sense in which being a member of a team should mean that you forget the fact that you are a unique individual. That having been said, a team will not function if the members just do their own thing and operate without either communicating with each other or seeking some kind of consensus.

Secondly, team life will be destroyed by cliques. Even in small teams the situation can exist whereby some of the members form a friendship with each other to the exclusion of others. There is an old adage 'two's company three's a crowd'. This has occurred on many teams. The result has been that a team member, or a couple of team members have felt isolated and lonely.

Thirdly a team can be destroyed by people who are combative. There are times when team members need to have frank discussions. This kind of honesty is helpful and will be constructive if the discussions are held in the right spirit and the relationships within the team are good. However if any of the team members are aggressive or if any of them are careless with their

tongues, a great deal of damage can be done. I have known of situations where team members have been very hurt and embittered by things that were said to them. This hurt was such that they could not function properly after that, and indeed they were intimidated by their colleagues. This cannot work, so team members need to be very careful that they do not destroy team life by their sheer strength of personality.

The fourth thing that destroys team life occurs when team members are so malleable and co-operative that they neither have strong opinions on anything nor express themselves vigorously. It might appear to be a gracious trait, but actually such a lack of willingness to stand by what you believe (if anything) is counterproductive. No team can operate satisfactorily with members who are highly aggressive, but neither do team operate well when they are filled with weak people who lack opinions. Some team members might need to learn to hold their tongues, but others need to learn to free them.

A fifth thing that can destroy a team is where the members are business orientated and not relationship orientated. When all is said and done, team members need each other, not just to get things done, but for friendship also. I talked recently to a team leader who stated that the thing that encouraged him most about his team was that they were all friends and interested in each other. These kind of deep friendships will make the team a pleasure to be a part of, and will motivate the members to do their best as they work together because they care about each other. Teams that do not care for each other, teams that do not learn to relax and laugh together, will be teams that become mechanical and routine.

Thinking in Numbers

One last thing that is worth a mention is the number of people that can operate effectively as a team. It stands to reason that if a team is too large, it can become unwieldy and difficult to manage, but there are also potential difficulties if the team is too small. In general, three is the minimum number of people who can work efficiently on a team. There are some special cases where a team of just two members can exist. It would be wrong to say that this situation is unworkable, after all marriage is a team of two people. However, where there are only two team members, it is hard to find a mechanism where disagreements and differences of opinion can be

reconciled. This impasse can lead to problems of conflict, and if the conflict is serious enough, outside help might be needed in order to find a resolution.

Chapter 12

Church Planting - the Goal of Mission

One of the key tasks in mission is that of church planting. Jesus told his followers to make disciples of all nations, and as groups of disciples in each locality came together, they formed local churches in their area. This pattern must be part of contemporary mission. It is as churches are planted that God's kingdom becomes firmly established. Furthermore it is through the church that God expresses Himself to the world. Missionaries could go to a country and set up hospitals, schools, agricultural centres and printing presses, but if no church is established then the work of mission would be unfinished.

Of course, not all the churches in a particular country will be established by missionaries. Indeed the majority of churches will not be. In pioneering situations missionaries will do the church planting because there are no national Christians to plant churches. However, most church planting comes as the result of an indigenous movement. Historically, if the missionaries have established a firm base, then the nationals in that country can take things forward and plant most of the churches. Nevertheless the process of church planting needs to be thought through, because only when a firm base has been established, will the national Christians be in a position to see the work reach its full potential.

The ultimate goal of church planting must always be to establish a church that will be governed, financed and developed by the national Christians. In that sense the church planter should aim to do himself out of a job. If this does not happen that the church will perpetually be reliant on missionary input, and this kind of spiritual colonialism will ultimately prevent the church from reaching maturity³⁶². From the very beginning of the process, therefore, the church planter must be conscious of the need to train up

³⁶² In his 3 selfs model, Henry Venn suggested that this process of making the planted church self governing, self supporting and self propagating should be done as soon as possible. While this is true some caution should be expressed as this type of model works best in a situation where large numbers of people are converted quickly. It does not work so well in situations where the conversion rate is slow, because it puts unreasonable pressure on the fledgling congregation too soon. Also this model has not always led to a truly indigenous church. While it has meant the national Christians have taken charge of their own affairs, often the church which they have inherited has been Western in style, due to the fact that this model does not implicitly strive for an indigenous expression of Christianity. The national Christians have often become no more than stewards of a Western form of church life. (Graham Cheeseman, *Mission Today*, p.134-136).

leaders who will succeed him and all that he does should be focussed on this ultimate goal. It is impossible to put any timescale on this handover, but it should be done in a measured way that challenges and motivates the national leaders without crushing them with an unreasonable weight of responsibility. The job of the church planter, however, is not just to hand over the responsibility of running the church to the nationals. He should also be conscious of the need to plant a church that is culturally relevant to the local situation. Again thought must be put into this area from the very beginning as churches can easily become calcified and inflexible, and so culturally irrelevant church traditions can prove very difficult to remove at a later stage in the churches history.

In order to plant a culturally relevant church, the missionary will need to have both a knowledge of New Testament teaching and an understanding of the local culture. In other words, from the very beginning the culture of the area where the church planting is being done, must be taken seriously. It goes without saying that a seasoned missionary who understands the culture well will find this much easier than a young and inexperienced missionary. The problem is, of course, that many missionaries who are involved in church planting are new to their host cultures and therefore have to feed in culturally sensitive structures as they go along, rather than at the beginning. However, this problem can be minimised if they are willing to take input and advice from more experienced missionaries and national believers (non Christians can also play a valuable role). The key here is to be able to listen and learn³⁶³.

Of course, no church will ever achieve a perfect balance between being thoroughly biblical and being culturally relevant. This, however, should not halt the work of church planting because getting churches established, however failing they might be, is an absolute priority. It must also be remembered that churches are living breathing organisms that should grow and develop in a natural way. Provided that the church planters instil an attitude of flexibility in the life of the fledgling church, then the church will increasingly be able to relate to its surrounding culture as it grows³⁶⁴.

363 Another potential problem with this indigenous model approach is that no two people interpret either scripture, or indeed culture, in exactly the same way. Often, if this model is used by a church planting team, there can be some dispute as to what is genuinely culturally relevant, as well as what is truly biblical. This tension has meant that humility, pragmatism and a willingness to compromise have become crucial qualities.

364 Another model which has been developed for church planting is the contextualized model (Graham Cheeseman, *Mission Today*, p.134-136). In this model the church planter is not just concerned about the

Learning to Plant

So how do you plant a church? In truth, this is a very big question, and one that can never adequately be answered in a book, no matter how large. Church planting is an enormously difficult calling, particularly in countries where people are not readily responsive to the gospel. It is a task that requires considerable spiritual gifting as well as determination and grit. The kind of mettle that is required to plant a church cannot be taught in a classroom or instilled in someone through simple encouragement. Rather it comes through experience on the field, God-given ability, and a huge capacity for coping with disappointment.

That having been said, there are some useful principles that should be applied to the work of church planting and will prove useful. These principles apply to the stages in which a church is planted and the responsibilities of the church planter at each stage. The stages could conveniently be labelled the; pioneer, parent, partner and participant stages³⁶⁵. We will look at each of them in turn.

Pioneer

The first stage that begins any church planting work is the pioneer stage. This is where a missionary goes into a new area and begins the initial work of evangelism. In some ways this is a fairly straightforward stage in that the objectives are simple. The missionary needs to ensure that people hear the gospel! But this is very challenging because how does he get an audience?

church being planted, but also the impact that this makes on the society as a whole. It ties the church closely with the community so that as the church seeks not only to bring individuals to personal faith in church, but also to see salvation being manifest in society. The church is therefore not to be a counter cultural movement in a fallen world, but rather a means by which the fallen ness of society can be reversed. While this model appears noble, it too has significant limitations. Firstly, the church planter can become so caught up with trying to change the structures of society that the church itself is neglected. Secondly, this model can, in practice, be naïve. While the transformation of society is a laudable Christian goal, the fact remains that the world is fallen and the only real hope for it is the personal transformation that the gospel brings in the life of the individual. Public problems require private solutions and these can only be fully realized when the focus is on forming a community of faith comprised of believing and regenerated individuals. In this way society can be positively impacted, but only one person at a time, and only when a definite and personal conversion is sought. The desire to transform society's structures be merely using the church as an influence for good, is a little like putting the cart before the horse.

³⁶⁵ Several works detail these four stages of church planting, however, one of the most succinct presentations can be found in Graham Cheesman's Mission Today, p.141,142.

Evangelism in a pioneer situation is very different to evangelism in an established church. Generally speaking, an established church will have a building, a service structure, a level of recognition by people who live in the area, and the manpower to do the job. All of these things may not be the best. For example, it is possible for an established church to have a building that is in terrible condition, or one that is impractical. Some established churches have a service structure and style that does not meet the evangelistic needs of the community. It may well be that the level of recognition from the community is less than the church would want, and that the manpower available is limited because of the age of the congregation or the unwillingness of church members. But at least in a established church these things exist to some extent. In a pioneering church plant, however, there is nothing. No building, no service structure, no recognition by the local community and no manpower other than the missionaries themselves.

The question remains therefore, how does the missionary get to meet people so that he can share the gospel? The truth is that there is no one answer to this question because each mission situation is so different. What is more, in many mission situations the missionary is still trying to learn the language. This makes his job very much harder as integration into a culture depends largely on the missionaries ability to communicate. It must be mentioned, however, that the process of language learning can in itself be a way of getting to know people and building meaningful relationships with them.

One Bible passage that is helpful is trying to get an insight into this question is Acts 17:16-30. Here Paul is in Athens waiting for his friends to meet up with him. As he looks around at the idolatry of the Athenians, he is greatly disturbed and begins to evangelize. As was his habit, his first port of call was the synagogue where he would meet likeminded people who would have a knowledge of the Old Testament. But he did not stay here long. Rather he went into the market place to mingle with the people there. As he did this, he learned more and more about the culture of the city. After a while he became so conversant with Athenian life, and raised so many questions in the minds of those he met in the marketplace, that he was invited to address a gathering at the Araepagus, which was at the very centre of cultural life in Athens. There he was able to proclaim the gospel and win converts.

The lesson of this passage is obvious. When entering into a pioneering situation, it is important to get to where people are, to get to the heart of a

particular culture, and to a place where you can naturally rub shoulders with people. From here you can establish a level of credibility with the local community and become part of it. The relationships that ensue from this kind of involvement in society will be crucial for evangelism.

It may well be that the starting point for such involvement will mean that the missionary will begin a children's club or some other structure through which the gospel can be proclaimed and relationships built with people, but not necessarily. I have known missionaries who have not begun any structure per se, but have joined local clubs and societies, got involved with local community action groups or even entered into some part time work and from here they have begun their evangelism. The point is not how you make contact with people, but that you integrate into the life of the community and become an authentic member of it. Once this happens the missionary will be in a much better position to witness to those people with whom he has developed a relationship.

Two things must be said in conclusion. Firstly, while the missionary is in a pioneer situation, he will have to deal with the issue of loneliness. Going to a new place and trying to befriend complete strangers is hard. It is particularly difficult when those friendships that are developed are with non-Christians whose outlook on life is completely different from that of the missionary. This loneliness has to be reckoned with. Secondly, pioneering missionaries lack good fellowship³⁶⁶. They have no church to go to because it has not yet been planted, and they have no fellow Christians to share with because they have not got any converts. This too requires a degree of preparation and readiness, as well as a depth of personal spirituality.

Parent

The next stage in church planting is the parental stage. This stage begins when the missionary has a few converts to care for. Often this stage will last for a number of years and great patience is required. When someone becomes a Christian, the Bible uses the analogy of them being a spiritual baby. It goes without saying that in the same way that a human baby needs a

³⁶⁶ This scenario relates to a situation where the missionary is an absolute pioneer in the sense that there are no churches in the area. Of course sometimes missionaries can be doing a pioneering work in an area where there are no churches, but they nevertheless have a church base in a nearby area where there is a church. In such a situation they have fellowship, but as they are pouring their efforts and time into an area where there is no church, loneliness is still a big issue.

great deal of care and nurture, so also do spiritual babies. They need spiritual parents to care for them.

Here again the situation in a pioneering church plant is very different to the situation that would exist in an established church. When a person becomes a Christian through the witness of an established church, they are immediately brought into contact with a whole group of mature Christians who can have a positive input into their lives. There is also a set service structure which, although sometimes confusing, provides the new convert with a spiritual timetable for the week. If anything goes wrong, there are people around who can care for the new Christian, and more often than not, they find themselves being almost overwhelmed by the hospitality which is shown to them by the church members who are delighted to see someone new committing themselves to Christ.

In a pioneering situation things are very different. Firstly, there are no mature church members to help with the discipleship of the new convert. Secondly, there is no set service structure because there are not enough Christians to have a full programme of services in the first place. If the missionary is in the early stages of a church plant then there will probably be nothing more organized than an informal house Bible study. Thirdly, from a human standpoint, it is all up to the missionary. He cannot sit back and hope that someone else will invite the new Christian round for dinner to encourage him when he is down, because there is no one else. To be blunt, the missionary has to give the same attention to new converts as parents would give to their own baby when it is born.

There are some important things to note at this stage. Firstly, it takes a long time for a new Christian to become spiritually mature. True spiritual maturity is not something that happens overnight, neither are there any shortcuts. If the new convert is to grow and become strong, he will need prayer, teaching and fellowship, as well as a great deal of time invested in him. This can also be a frustrating process in which he can take steps back as well as steps forward. For this reason the missionary needs to learn patience and needs to be doggedly determined.

Secondly, the missionary needs wisdom to know when to begin formalizing things as far as the church is concerned. For example, when should you start breaking bread? After you have a couple of converts? After five? Or should you wait until you have twenty converts? There is no easy answer to

this question and it will depend on the individual situation. But there is an even more basic question to ask. At what point does a church become a church? As the missionary is there to do church planting, this is obviously a vital question. The answer to this question will also affect the way in which the missionary builds a church program, and the timescale that he uses. So when can you describe a collection of believers as a church?

At a very basic level, where two or three believers are gathered together with Christ as their central focus, according to Matthew 18:20, Jesus is there with them. His presence gives their gathering a significance. However, there are other elements that define what a church is. At the time of the Reformation this same question emerged. The Reformers needed to determine the marks of a true church so that their worshipping communities could claim to be churches, even though they had broken off from the Roman Catholic Church. In the end they came up with two criteria that they believed made a worshipping community into a church. These were the faithful preaching of the Word of God and the right use of the Sacraments³⁶⁷. This was certainly a good starting point. Where even a small number of Christians are gathering in Jesus name, with the serious objective of living for him, and carrying out the sacraments, then a local church exists. However, a closer look at the New Testament sheds further light on the issue.

Leadership

In the New Testament there were a number of components that seemed essential for the proper functioning of a local church³⁶⁸. The first of these was leadership. Throughout his ministry Jesus trained twelve men who would be the first generation of leaders in the church. These apostles had first-hand contact with Jesus, which gave them a unique insight into what God was doing. They imbibed Jesus' teaching and were then able to pass it on to others.

As time went by, elders were appointed. In places like Jerusalem they served alongside the apostles who were there, though as there were only 12 apostles, clearly there were many churches that were led by elders alone. There was no expected ratio of elders to members of a given congregation

367 JI Packer, Concise Theology, p.204.

368 Stephen McQuoid, A Guide to God's Family, p???

but we do read a lot about the qualifications of an elder. We also read that their role was primarily to care for the spiritual well being of church members.

There was also another level of leadership, the deacons. The apostles realised that there was a danger of being so busy caring for people in a practical way (however valid this ministry was) that they would have no time to minister the word of God and cater for the spiritual needs of the church, which was their primary function. The church was therefore asked to appoint deacons³⁶⁹. These deacons initially had the job of collecting money donated by Christians for the work of the church and ensuring that it was well distributed. But this role was undoubtedly expanded later on.

It is important to understand that Christian leadership is not the same as secular leadership, even though there might be some points in common. Christian leaders are primarily to be servants. They govern not by sheer force of personality, but by their moral and spiritual authority. Their desire is not for position, but self-sacrifice for the sake of the church. They should not be motivated by the desire for power or achievement, but simply by their love for Christ and their desire to serve him.

It is not clear whether it is essential for a church to have both elders and deacons in order to be a church. Bearing in mind that prior to Acts 7 there were no deacons, the balance of probability suggests that it is enough just to have elders. However, deacons become a necessity when the elders need the support of their practical ministry. Certainly a group of Christians meeting together cannot call themselves a local church until they have some kind of leadership structure³⁷⁰. Many churches today have opted to simplify their leadership structure and bring it under the one banner of a leadership team. This is certainly in order provided that the functions of leadership are being carried out.

One of the primary reasons for having a leadership structure is to enable the church to carry out discipline. The credibility of any church rests on the shoulders of its members and their commitment to holy living. If a member of the church conducts himself in a way that would bring shame on the

³⁶⁹ The term deacon comes from a Greek word which means 'to serve'.

³⁷⁰ For practical reasons a fledgling church might not, initially, have elders, but rather rely on the missionary, and perhaps even some mature local believer, for leadership. But there must be some kind of leadership in place, however tenuous, in order for a worshipping community to be a church.

church as a whole, and spiritual harm to himself, some form of discipline is necessary. This discipline is designed to restore the person not victimize him (Titus 1:13). Without a clear leadership structure it would be impossible for any kind of discipline to be carried out.

Sacraments

A second prerequisite of a church is that it practice the sacraments. The two sacraments that have traditionally been associated with protestants are baptism and communion. Baptism was instituted by Christ in Matthew 28:19 while communion was instituted through the Last Supper (Lu.22:15-20).

Both baptism and communion are practiced in a variety of different ways. Some churches baptize infants while others baptize only believers. For some sprinkling is adequate while others insist on baptism by full immersion. Likewise communion is celebrated in a whole variety of different ways. Some churches celebrate it every week, others just four times a year. In some churches it takes place in the mornings while in others at night. However these sacraments are practiced, they are unquestionably essential components of the church.

Scripture

A third necessary component is the centrality of scripture in the life of the church. Both the preaching of the word and doctrinal correctness are necessary. The two go together of course, because true biblical preaching will lead to doctrinal orthodoxy. When we look at the early church we see the apostles deeply committed to the preaching of the word of God (Acts 6:2). God has revealed himself in scripture and the first Christians recognized the need to ensure that the church was well taught.

Today churches often use innovative methods in order to teach biblical truth. In addition to the Sunday sermon, many churches have house groups where biblical passages can be discussed in a non-threatening atmosphere. Some set up mini Bible schools where church members can have intensive Bible teaching over a whole weekend or during week nights. The issue is not so much how the Bible is being taught, or even the extent to which it is being taught, but that it is being taught. Christianity is a faith founded on truths

which are revealed to us through the Bible. A true church must therefore be committed to the centrality of scripture.

As has already been stated, keeping the Bible central in the life of the church will also mean having correct doctrines. Of course many churches differ slightly in their interpretation of some passages of scripture which is one reason why so many denominations exist. On issues like the role of women, the regularity with which communion is celebrated, the mode of baptism and church government, there are numerous different opinions. But who is right and who is wrong? How will we know that a church is so wrong that it cannot be called a church?

Two errors can occur when answering these questions. Firstly, we can be so accepting of others that we make doctrinal truth a non-issue. Secondly, we can be so judgmental that we divide ourselves from other true Christians. Both of these positions are wrong.

A balance must be struck by asking the question: Is this issue one which will affect a person's salvation? If not, then graciousness should rule, and Christ's desire for unity in the church should be remembered (Jn.17:20-23). On the other hand, if there is a serious deviation from a major doctrine, then the response must be the opposite. For example a group like the Jehovah Witnesses do not accept the deity of Jesus Christ. This is a crucial doctrine which does affect a person's salvation. Groups like this cannot therefore be accepted as Christian and their gatherings cannot be considered to be a Christian church.

Commitment of members to body life

One last essential component that enables a group of believers to call themselves a church, is the commitment of members to the life of the church. It would be a nonsense if the membership were not committed to the upkeep of that church. It would simply cease to be. One could hardly call a group of Christians a church if they had no intention of being one. In the early church there was a great commitment to all that being a church involved (Ac.2:42-47). Whether it was to the church's worship, fellowship, doctrine or service, those Christians devoted themselves and therefore were able to sustain the life of the church. These then are the essential elements which constitute a church. It is hard to imagine how a group of people that do not demonstrate all of these elements could function as a church.

At this point an important caveat must be added. Though these are the essential components of church life, it does not automatically follow that if these are in place then a church must certainly exist. Indeed a group could quite conceivably exist that practices all these things in some measure, and yet not see itself as a church, or even be seen by others as a church. Life is not always as neatly packaged as this. In church planting things can become both messy and ambiguous, and the process of becoming a church can often be quite thorny. There can sometimes be a dichotomy between the theoretical or theological position, and the practical formation of a recognized church. In other words, all these elements may be in place in a new work, yet the church planter has not declared that a functional church has been set up, or there could be some other obstacle in place that hinders the road towards becoming a church. With this in mind it is hugely important that this stage is treated with great caution.

It should also be stated that the timing of a church being formed is almost as significant as the process by which it is formed. There is a real sense in which the decision to form a church is not taken by the church planter at all because as soon as there are converts, then a church in embryo exists. However, the church planter does need to build into the life of the church all those elements which have already been mentioned, and this should be done at a measured pace so that the new converts are fully aware both of that is happening, and also of their responsibility to this community of the church.

At this point a few random comments would be helpful:

- The most important issue in the long term process of planting a church is to find indigenous leaders. Ultimately the missionary will leave his field of service and return home. If he does not establish a strong and competent leadership before he returns home, the church will collapse.
- No new church comes into being in isolation. If a missionary goes into a completely new area where no church exists, he is nevertheless sent from his church back home, and is accountable to his sending elders. It would be unwise, therefore, for him to establish a new church without consulting and receiving input from his home church. If he is linked to a missionary organization or service group, he will be accountable to them also. They too will need to be consulted.

- It is also entirely possible that a church in the country where he is working may also be involved in the process. It has been the practice of many church planting missionaries to establish a base in an existing church, and then to branch out from that church into a new area to plant a church there. It goes without saying that the leaders of the church that is providing a base also need to be consulted about precisely when a new church should be formed.
- Sometimes the church in which the missionary has based himself, will be part of a wider, and even national church movement. The leaders of that movement also will need to be consulted. After all the missionary is not there to serve himself, but rather to build up the church in that country.

Partner

The next stage in the process of church planting is the partner stage. Arguably this is the most difficult stage both for the work as a whole and for the missionary himself. I am the father of two young girls. They are entirely dependant on me at the moment because they are simply too young to look after themselves. I really enjoy being a parent and I also like the status of being their 'father'. Whenever either of my daughters has a problem they come to me for help. They are not at the stage in life where they can solve them on their own. But that is what dads are for. There is nothing I like more than them saying to me 'dad I don't know what to do, please help.' Of course the day will come when they grow up and begin to make decisions for themselves. I am not sure how I will react when that happens, but I am sure I will find it hard. My wife keeps telling me that the first boyfriend to come into our house will get a hard time. I have no doubt she is correct, as a jealous father I will be watching him like a hawk. But there will be nothing that I can do to prevent my children from growing up. Indeed, I would not want to, because although I am naturally protective, it would be damaging to their development if I did not give them the space to make their own decisions, even if it means that sometimes they make mistakes.

When it comes to church planting, the principle is exactly the same. The missionary who plants the church is a spiritual parent to the people who make up the church. The missionary will therefore be naturally protective of the new church and even jealous in a good way. The time will come, however, when the missionary will have to be a little less protective and give the local Christians the freedom to make decisions for themselves. This will firstly involve appointing leaders in the new church and training them up. Secondly it will involve moving to the point where these leaders are partners with the missionary, having the same authority and influence in the life of the church.

This process, though essential, will at times be painful for the missionary. Inevitably once the local leaders are full partners in the leadership of the church, there will come a time when they disagree with what the missionary wants to do. It may also be that there is some practice that the missionary has established in the life of the church and the local leaders will want to stop it. Potentially there might even be a difference in theological perspective between the missionary and his fellow leaders. In these circumstances the missionary will feel a bit like a parent whose child is stretching his wings and choosing his own path. A difficult stage emotionally, but one that is crucial to the development of the new church.

In some situations local leaders will take a course of action, or a decision, that is contrary to what the missionary wants, and it might be the wrong decision or course of action. This scenario is almost inevitable because these new leaders will lack the experience of the missionary, even if they have been trained well by him. There are some lessons that you simply cannot learn by reading about them or being told about them. These can only be learned and mastered by experience, and that is precisely what new leaders do not have.

This kind of scenario places the missionary in a difficult position. Should he intervene and prevent any damage being done, or should he leave the other leaders to learn by their mistakes. In general I would argue that the later course of action is the better one. In many cases the ramifications of bad decisions are not in themselves disastrous. They are unfortunate rather than a real hindrance to the work. Furthermore the lessons learned by the local leaders will be invaluable for the future. The fact is that we do learn by our mistakes and the best leaders are the ones who recognize their mistakes and repair them. There may, however, be occasions where decisions taken by

local leaders could potentially be very damaging to the church. In such cases the missionary should step in and try to dissuade his fellow leaders from going down that road. If his relationship with them is strong and trusting, and if they know that his ultimate goal is to hand over the reins of power to them, then they will usually not object to his strong intervention. These kinds of decisions require great wisdom, and the missionary constantly has to ask himself whether intervention of this sort will be in the long term interests of the church.

Clearly the object of the partner stage is to develop local leaders who will then be able to carry the work forward. The missionary is trying to do himself out of a job. He should be motivated by the fact that the best legacy he can leave behind in the country, is a strong indigenous church run by wise and able leaders. All that he does at this stage should contribute to this eventual end.

I want to illustrate this issue with a couple of examples. These examples are of situations where the wrong thing was done rather than the right thing. In that sense they are negative models, but they serve to demonstrate the points being made. The churches that I will use as models are actual churches that I have either been associated with, or churches that I know and have visited. But for obvious reasons all the names I will use are fictitious, as are the locations.

Churches in Crisis

The first church I will mention is Kelongo Chapel, an urban church in East Africa. This church was planted several decades ago by a very dynamic and determined missionary couple by the name of Wilfred and Doris Smith. They came into an area where there was no Christian witness and where witchcraft and African tribal religions were the norm. Despite considerable opposition, this couple persevered and established a new church. The early stages of the work went well. The pioneering evangelism was done well and the parenting was both firm and gentle. But when the work came to the point where some kind of partnership was appropriate, here the progress ground to a halt.

The problem was that Wilfred struggled with the notion that the local Christians could make decisions about the future of the work without his help. He had experimented on a few occasions by allowing some of the

prominent members of the church to make decisions about the church, but he never seemed to like what they had decided. Eventually he stopped asking them for their opinion and just made all the decisions himself. Doris too was concerned about the nationals taking control of the church. She and her husband quite liked the traditions that had been built up in the church. This was because much of church practice was a copy of church practice back in the UK. This meant security for Doris, she was dealing with the familiar. Her big fear about the locals taking over was that they might make the church more 'African', to reflect African culture which Doris felt was intrinsically evil. After all they had come to Africa to free these people of their culture and make them more European and therefore civilized. Neither Wilfred nor Doris would have expressed themselves in these terms, but this is what they both felt.

The end result of all of this was that no proper leadership was ever appointed and no training offered in order to develop a generation of leaders. Instead, this church continued for many years, run by a white missionary couple who imposed their western values on church life. Kelongo chapel was a church in Africa, but culturally not an African church.

There came a time when Wilfred and Doris had to return home. A couple of years prior to their retirement they enthused a young couple in their home church about the work. They convinced this couple, John and Iris Young, that they could play a vital part in continuing the work that they had begun. Inspired, the Young's went out to replace Wilfred and Doris.

As they arrived in Africa, they realized that the local Christians had been deferring to the missionaries for so many years that they had given up any hope of being in control of their own church. They also realized there was little capacity for indigenous leadership as the training of leaders had never taken place. For their first couple of years on the field they were under the tutelage of the Smiths. This resulted in them picking up some of the bad habits of their more experienced missionary colleagues. When the Smiths retired, the Young's continued to run the church as if it were theirs, and again, little by little indigenous leadership emerged. To be fair they did appoint elders. But they continued to exercise such power over the church that the eldership was no more than a puppet parliament. When the Young's join the Smiths in retirement they will leave behind a sad legacy. A church that has been held back by bad practice, to the point where it has never become the true possession of the local Christians.

The second account is of another church with problems, but for very different reasons. In this second instance, a church was forced to grow up too quickly and suffered as a result. The missionaries were a young couple whom we will call Bob and Nancy Goodman. They went to this European country shortly after the momentous days of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Unlike the Smiths, the Goodmans had little trouble handing the reigns of power over to the local Christians. But they had weaknesses in other areas. When it came to pioneer evangelism, they did a fairly good job. Though not quite as courageous and determined as the Smiths, they nevertheless communicated their faith effectively and were able to lead several people to faith in Christ. Then began the parenting stage. Here too they performed fairly well, but were probably not prescriptive enough. When their new converts went through periods of backsliding, they were not quick enough to correct the errors. Neither were they sufficiently insistent that their new converts developed a disciplined quiet time. The result was that some of these Christians led inconsistent Christian lives. The Goodmans were proving to be loving parents, but not disciplined ones.

On the positive side, the Goodmans knew from the beginning that this church would eventually revert into the hands of the local Christians, and they were very happy about this. They did not want a church that did exactly what they wanted, rather they wanted a church that would be truly indigenous and would be run by the local Christians themselves. In order to facilitate this they began to run leadership training classes. Such was their determination to produce a generation of leaders, they allowed all kinds of people to join their leadership courses, including church members who were clearly not suitable for leadership.

As time went on, the Goodmans felt that their job was done and their time in the country was coming to an end. Their feeling was that the church was strong enough to stand on its own two feet without being propped up by them. Indeed they felt that if they stayed too long then the church would become overly dependant on them and would never develop properly. Added to this motivation was the fact that their oldest daughter was on the verge of going to university and wanted to study back in England. They interpreted these various circumstances as God's guidance, bringing them home from the mission field.

The Goodmans were, of course, on the right track. Their fears about the church becoming dependant on them were valid. This often happens when missionaries stay too long in a situation. However, they erred in the opposite direction. The reality was that when they left the mission field, the church was not ready for their departure. Some of the believers they left behind were fairly mature, but not many. In addition, some of the leaders who were put in charge before they left had some leadership ability, but it was not sufficiently developed. It was a case of the new leaders being given too much responsibility too soon. Even a couple more years on the field would have made a significant difference. But it was too late.

Shortly after the Goodmans left to return to England, the church hit a crisis. The young leadership tried hard to deal with the situation, but they were too inexperienced and they themselves were divided. To compound the problem, many of the church members did not accept the authority of the new leadership. They used to listen to the Goodmans and saw them as the source of authority in the church, but not these hastily appointed new leaders. To cut a long story short the church had a split, and then both halves of the divided church ceased to exist. The members, by and large, are still following Christ and have gone to other churches. But the vision for a new church had died. The good work which the Goodmans did had come to an end primarily because of their premature departure

These two examples remind us that the business of church planting is a very difficult one. It takes great wisdom, not only to begin a work, but also to bring it to a satisfactory conclusion. Delegate responsibility to local Christians too soon, and the church is in danger of collapse. Take too long in delegating responsibility, and the church will never be able to grow up. The process of development will require the greatest care and attention.

Before we look at the final stage of church planting, I would like to add one caveat. There is a sense in which church planting is a risky business. There is so much that can go wrong! That having been said, risks have to be taken if we are to get anywhere. No church would ever be planted if church planters were a cautious breed. But the factor that we should never forget in all of this is that God is sovereign and can work even when the situation, from a human standpoint, does not seem to be very hopeful.

Let me illustrate this with a concrete example from Ethiopia, the country where I grew up. Brethren missionaries first went to Ethiopia in the 1950's

and a great deal of useful work was done. In 1974 a communist revolution rocked the country and the Marxist-Leninist regime that took over was very opposed to the Christian church. By 1978 all the missionaries had left the country, and all that remained of the Brethren work was two small churches with about 30 members each. One of these churches had only been established for 3 years and had a very young leadership including an elder of 18.

Despite the absence of missionaries, severe persecution, and the confiscation of church buildings, these young churches grew. Today the Brethren movement in Ethiopia numbers some 60 churches and preaching centres, and a total membership of more than 8,000. It is a well structured and well led. Risks had to be taken, and God in His sovereignty ensured that the work was blessed. That does not mean that we should be presumptuous in church planting, but it does mean that we should be trusting.

Participant

The final stage in church planting is the participant stage. This is when the missionary withdraws from the daily running of the church altogether, but is available when needed. The duration of this participant stage may vary considerably. Sometimes it will be as short as a few weeks, and other times a couple of years or more. A situation could exist whereby a missionary could hand over total responsibility to local Christians by stepping down from leadership, yet remaining in the situation for a month or two just to tie up loose ends. For this short period of time he would be accountable to the local elders and would serve them. Likewise it may be appropriate for the missionary to remain for a longer period as a church worker. But whatever the duration, there are two things that are key to this situation.

The first is that the missionary should be accountable to the local church rather than responsible for it. By this I mean that if he is in a leadership position, then he will always be tempted to take over again, and that would be counter productive to the work as a whole. The object of missionary work is to produce an indigenous and autonomous church. For this to happen, total control of the church must rest in the hands of local Christians. The missionary should therefore not hold any office within the church, but be accountable to the leadership and willing to follow their instructions.

The second thing that is required is availability. The missionary, though not a leader in the church, should nevertheless make himself available to the church for the duration of this stage of the work. After all he will be a spiritual parent, and the members of the church are his spiritual children. Children grow up and learn to run their own lives. Nevertheless a parent will never cease to be a parent, and will perpetually be available when needed for everything from babysitting the grandchildren to providing a listening ear. In much the same way, even when a missionary does step down from the leadership of a church, he still has this valuable role to play for as long as his help is needed.

Entering a later stage

Although some missionaries experience each of these stages as they plant a church, the reality is that this is the exception rather than the norm. Most of today's missionaries join existing churches or ministries often at the invitation of more senior missionaries who have been in the situation for some time. In such a situation there is always the danger of a dynasty being set up. Before the new missionary joins the church, therefore, some careful thinking has to be done so as to ascertain which stage the church is at.

Often the point at which new missionaries will join a church will be somewhere in-between the partnership and participant stages. This is a particularly significant moment in the church's history because it is a make or break time. Either the church will mature and take responsibility for itself, or it will remain perpetually dependant on missionary support. There will be a need for both the local leaders and the new missionary to play their roles wisely. The local leaders will need to lead with confidence despite the presence of a missionary in their midst. Meanwhile the missionary will have to serve humbly, supporting and building up the fledgling leadership structure without feeling the need for recognition or status. If this is done then the new missionary can have a vital role in the development of the church.

Summary

Though there are the inherent dangers mentioned in the different stages of this church planting model, it is nevertheless a useful one and one which has proved successful in many countries. The following chart summarises the model specifying both the missionaries role and that of nationals.

STAGE	MISSIONARY	NATIONALS	DANGERS
PIONEER	Becoming competent with the language and culture. Evangelising at his own initiative.	No leadership initially but helping the missionary and being groomed for future leadership.	The missionary never makes a deep enough entry into the culture.
PARENT	Sets up structures and functions in them all. Has a major voice and is accountable to the mission and not the church. Handles material support.	Leadership roles in the church but usually under the direction of the missionary. Being trained for leadership now and in the future.	The missionary becomes dictatorial and does not allow the nationals to grow.
PARTNER	Becomes more directly accountable to national leaders. Has a voice but it is not always listened to. Affirming the national leadership, being a key liaison between the	Taking on equal responsibility in the leadership of the church which means in practice that the nationals have more power than the missionary, including material support.	The missionary might struggle with the issue of devolution and therefore the relationship between the missionary and the nationals

	<p>local church and supporting countries, helping to handle material support in partnership with local leadership.</p>		<p>sours due to tension.</p>
PARTICIPANT	<p>Always available to help, but only under the direction of national leaders.</p>	<p>In charge of the church, it's finances and vision. Also giving leadership to any missionaries who still serve there.</p>	<p>The missionary feels he is not needed and therefore does not make himself available to the national church thus robbing it of his services.</p>

Chapter 13

Maintaining Relationships

Most missionaries work together with other colleagues in some form of team structure. The ability to work together and harness the skills and gifts of each member of the team will determine the success of the enterprise, so developing good and harmonious working relationships is imperative to achieve this goal. However relationship issues are among the main problems faced by cross cultural workers and frequently can be the main reason for early return from the area of service.

A major study conducted several years ago on missionary attrition, analysed the principal reasons for early departure from the field of service by missionaries.³⁷¹ The fifth most common reason for early return was problems with peers, i.e. in relationships. When old sending countries that had sent missionaries for many years and new sending countries, that had only just started sending cross cultural workers, were compared, similar problems emerged. This demonstrates that we are not dealing with theoretical possibilities but a real issue that can seriously undermine effectiveness.

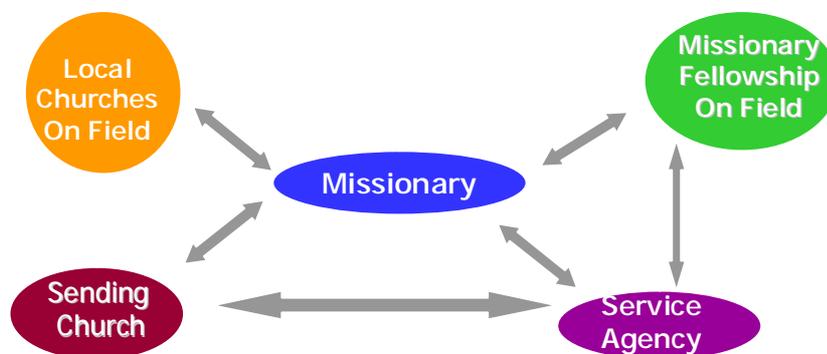
It is commonly said that missionaries are strong minded and determined individuals with definite goals and objectives. Reference is often made to heroes of the past who it is said, would never have achieved anything if they did not have this pioneer spirit. This may be true, for determination and endurance are necessary qualities in anyone who wants to serve God but it begs the question about the change of character produced in the life of the believer by the Holy Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit should be seen as much if not more in the life of a missionary, and a worker whom no one can work with or relate to does not seem to be showing these life transforming qualities. Relationships are important; in fact they are the visible witness to the world that we are the disciples of Christ.³⁷² If they are allowed to deteriorate then the effect can undermine the witness of the missionary workers or community.

³⁷¹ Too Valuable to loose; Ed Wm Taylor

³⁷² John 13: 35

The diversity of missionary teams can add to the stresses of working together. Now many teams are multinational, with members from differing ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Added to differences in personality, temperament, and church background this can create a potential minefield where misunderstandings can easily arise over simple actions. Some of this has already been covered in our chapter on culture.

The flow chart outlines various relationships which exist between the missionary and different groups of people. All need attention and provide potential for either good support and backing or potential problems.



With colleagues.

As has already been said most missionaries work as members of a team or mission community. In the past this team would normally have been drawn from the same country, church and ethnic background. They would most likely have lived on a mission compound, with many services being centralised, and also in a degree of isolation from the local community. The internationalisation of mission has brought a wide variety of people into mission, with different cultural and language backgrounds. This has produced a welcome diversity, but brings with it all sorts of possibilities for misunderstanding in the mission team.

Team members will all share the same goal of wanting to serve God by presenting the gospel of Jesus Christ, and planting churches, but to this mix now will include different cultural patterns of behaving, ways of making decisions, theological emphasises, and understanding of mission priorities.

One of us served initially in a mission team that included several nationalities, all of which had English as their first language and were of Anglo-Saxon roots. As new workers it was fascinating to observe the tensions that existed between the national groups and what caused the stresses. One very hard working and thrifty ethnic group wanted to run the whole operation as simply and cheaply as possible. Another, who probably had access to more resources were happy to invest capital to improve facilities and lifestyle for themselves and others. In general, compromise decisions were reached but each group usually acted true to type when certain issues arose.

A mission team therefore must place high priority on maintaining relationships, have mechanisms for dealing with problems when they arise and have a constant awareness that if serious problems are not dealt with this can have major consequences and lead to the loss of valuable personnel. As Kelly O'Donnell writes: "There are three ways to undermine a team- don't talk, don't share feelings and don't trust".³⁷³

Decision making

A process for taking decisions is necessary in any team situation, which allows team members to voice their opinion and a consensus to emerge. Leadership responsibilities have to be defined, regular team meetings held and when business or more formal sessions are planned it is important to produce some form of agenda and ensure that the proceedings and decisions taken are recorded. Any action delegated to others needs to be communicated and someone should be designated to ensure that decisions are carried out. Any process is better than none at all, and although it does not need to be excessively structured, team members should be informed how issues affecting the team and work can be discussed and resolved.

Team meetings should also provide an opportunity for Christian fellowship, prayer and relationship building, not merely business. Shared spiritual objectives will bind a team together, so that they can be an effective instrument in the work of God. Social occasions are also important, particularly in remote locations and it is good to remember birthdays,

³⁷³ Kelly O'Donnell Doing member care well p 391

anniversaries as well as the more special occasions such as Christmas, Thanksgiving etc

Finance

Finance is the most common area where problems and disagreements can arise. In most mission situations funds available are limited, and where there are funds held for common purposes or specific ministries then policies must be agreed which control and account for their use. Generally financial management is delegated to one member of the team, who will provide balances available and accounts of income and expenditure for all the team members. This requires diligence, transparency and a willingness to account for the use of the funds, so it is important to ensure that the person designated as treasurer has good financial acumen and can keep accurate records. When workers have their own personal income or support, then how they decide to use this is largely a private matter, and a reflection of their own personal stewardship of resources. Common funds for specific ministries and purposes need to be managed with even greater care than our personal funds.

Use of skills

Most missionary teams will include a variety of skills and people to fill different roles. It is always best to have a good job/ person match but knowledge of mission in many parts of the world, reveals that the right people are not always available and that some flexibility is necessary particularly when gaps have to be covered. However if a person who does not have the right skills has to continue long term in a role they are not qualified to fill, it can lead to stress or breakdown, and even eventual departure from the team. Filling a gap may work in the short term, but for maximum usefulness people need to be used where they fit best. Round pegs are designed for round holes, and should be placed in them whenever possible.

This may lead to conflict and relationship strain between different generations of workers. The older 'jack of all trades' has had a go at just about everything from car mechanics to pulling teeth. If questioned they would probably admit they did neither very well. However younger workers want a job match suited to their skills, and are less willing to tackle a job for which they have no training. The result can be misunderstandings with older

workers, an imbalance in workloads and stress all around.³⁷⁴ One of the most valuable characteristics of any missionary is flexibility. This means the ability to adapt, to learn new skills, to try the unfamiliar, for if you don't bend you will soon break. Any well functioning team will try to use all skills available in the most effective way yet also be flexible enough to provide cover when necessary.

Leadership

Leadership needs to be clearly defined, but will follow different styles depending on the age and cultural background of the team leader. Older generations are happy with top down leadership and accept authority structures. They will show respect for their leaders and obey orders and fulfil their delegated role. Those who come from what is called Generation X want consensus leadership, and will expect to be consulted. They will not automatically accept traditional leadership structures unless they respect those running them. They may also wish to negotiate about roles, and may not always accept the position to which they are assigned. A greater openness allows discussion of problems but the sense of entitlement and 'rights' can be the downside in a service context. Leadership can become a difficult task when the age range of the team, is wide.

With local Christians and churches

The relationships that cross- cultural workers develop with indigenous Christians and churches are as important as the relationships in the missionary team. It takes time, sometimes much more than anticipated, for these to be built and develop. This will involve developing cross cultural understanding, the development of trust, and mutual respect. Respect is not automatic for it has to be earned.

In many mission situations, the local people have little concept of a missionaries background or country, and may be suspicious of their motives. The new missionary recruit may have left home a 'mini-hero' with words of praise ringing and talk of sacrifice and courage in the air. Local people no nothing about that, and would not understand it. All some poor people

³⁷⁴ Kath Donovan & . This is an excellent review of different generations which have been defined and classified. Each has their core characteristics, strengths and weaknesses. When placed together, they often act as different cultures so to some extent crossing the generational gap is equivalent to crossing cultures. This is well worth study.

groups see is a strange person, who is obviously very rich, has all sorts of gadgets they do not have, can't speak, and makes some ghastly cultural and language mistakes. They are likely to ask the questions to themselves: Why have they come and how long will they stay? They are trying to be friendly but what is in their heart? A former colleague told of a local man who explained in the out patient clinic that all white people had sacks of money under their beds. This he believed was the salary they were being paid by the national government to work there, for why else would they come to such a remote area?

Those who grow up in western societies with their high level of individualism, develop relationships quickly, as people are accepted on their worth and taken at face value, for that is normally how individualistic cultures work. Thus we have many relationships, which may be professional or casual but few of these are at a really deep level. Many cultures particularly the poorer nations of the world are collectivist, for they are too poor to afford individualism and need an extended family to survive. In these cultures identity and security is provided by the group and through continuing to be part of it. Thus relationships are longstanding, not transient, and they develop over a long period of time, but last a lifetime. It is possible to form good and lasting relationships with people of another culture or people group, but the process takes time, as the receptor people assess the motivation, values and heart of the missionary. This is one of the major disadvantages of short term mission as far as local people are concerned, for they do not have sufficient time to really get to know and establish relationships before the person has gone again. Thus a succession of short termers can be quite destabilising to relationships with a community.

If this understanding is ignored it will damage the work, for if the missionary is sent into the world as Jesus was sent by his father 375, so identification and empathy with the people among whom we work, is a vital part of our ministry. A worker may make massive cultural mistakes, and speak the language very badly, but people will read the heart very quickly and see if they are motivated by love, or self interest. One worker gave hours of self sacrificing service to the people she served among, but had a problem with a short temper, which erupted on occasions with devastating effect. The local people who knew her well had a simple explanation: "Ah, they said,

375 John 20:17

she has two hearts!” We may call it the flesh and the spirit, but it was an accurate assessment of what was going on.

Building relationships which will last and serve the kingdom of God will involve humility, a willingness to be corrected, immediate turning from any form of colonial or racial attitude, and a genuine love for people. This attitude of heart can only be produced by God for it is the model of Jesus Christ himself, so anyone who wants to effectively serve others needs regularly to meditate on the life and ministry of Christ, and remember the words of Paul, ‘Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.’³⁷⁶

Relationships with local Christians will also include being part of the local church. The local church may be very different from home and in the early days before language learning has progressed far, sitting through long incomprehensible services proves a great trial. Sometimes even when what is going on is understood, there may not be little in the sermon or proceedings for the new workers. New service patterns, different music and instruments, worship styles and time keeping can all disorientate the new workers and make this an uncomfortable rather than a joyous experience.

The personality of some would want to change this to a more ordered and structured form, particularly one that keeps to time! Others, who are not so good at distinguishing between biblical and cultural patterns, want to make the pattern more like what they are used to. When things are taught in the church that are incorrect, the immediate desire is to sort these out; without taking time to understand why this teaching has developed. These areas can be potential minefields for new workers, and older workers too who move to new areas to work.

Several actions by the worker can help the relationship process. It is important first of all to be a member of the local church in your area of service, and sadly some whose work is not church based can neglect this. No long term trust will ever be created if you do not regularly meet and fellowship with local Christians at the meetings of the church. Then it is vital to respect the leadership of the local church. The Christian missionary does not have a supra-church status which exempts them from the authority or guidance of the church leaders. Sufficient time is necessary to understand why things are done in particular ways, and the reason for the patterns that

³⁷⁶ Phil: 2:5

are observed. Time and language skills will give understanding, and if there are things that do need to change then the worker who is patient, learns, asks and shows a humble spirit will achieve so much more than the dictator who must have things done in the familiar way. In many ways these relationships are among the most important for we can either build up the body of Christ and have a positive input, or else create disharmony by the wrong attitude and hinder the work.

With local and government authorities

Another area of relationships that should be considered at this point is the relationship with authorities. As visitors and guests in a foreign land, Christian workers must ensure that they act correctly towards local and government authorities. This means knowing any local regulations and obeying them. It clearly includes observing the laws of the land, and paying any taxes or revenue due, as a Christian duty³⁷⁷. It requires honesty, truthfulness and avoiding anything that would bring Christian witness into disrepute.

In some parts of the world bribery and extortion are commonplace, and official documents, clearance of goods and the ability to function can be held up for long periods in this system. In some societies the only way workers who are never paid by Government authorities can survive is by receiving a payment for their services. This can be very hard for missionaries in these contexts, and the answers are not always easy. The temptation to yield is real, but we must remember whom we represent³⁷⁸ and practice visible righteousness.

Missionary actions can affect local Christian witness, and any actions and activities undertaken by expatriate workers, should be checked out with local Christian leaders before they are carried out, not after. In one Islamic country local Christians can meet, plant churches and evangelise in certain ways, but the government prohibits the public distribution of literature and evangelism by every group, not only by Christians. The local Christians keep this law, but when overseas teams arrived and started giving out literature in public parks and streets, immediately the national Christian leadership was called to account by the authorities. They knew nothing of

³⁷⁷ 1 Peter 2
³⁷⁸ EMQ articles

this activity and had certainly not sanctioned it, but the actions of well meaning, but poorly informed short term teams, brought a significant problem to local Christians who remained to face these consequences long after the short termers had gone home.

Not every situation is as clear cut, and when there are restrictive regimes that either persecute Christians or attempt to eliminate Christian witness, then the response may have to be different. That was the case when the apostles were told by the Jewish religious authorities to stop preaching in the Name of Jesus. Peter boldly replies ‘We must obey God rather than men’.³⁷⁹ The command of Christ to proclaim the gospel is greater than the sanctions of authorities who try to stop this preaching. However, Peter who spoke these words later wrote about submission to authorities for the Lord’s sake.³⁸⁰ He recognised that Christians in society should live as model citizens (even of a godless Roman Emperor) for the purpose of authority and government was to maintain justice.

It seems clear that when human authorities conflict with God’s commandments, then our Christian response is to obey God. The Chinese church was forbidden to meet apart from in state registered groups, millions chose to obey God and the church grew remarkably³⁸¹. Iranians disillusioned with Islam have turned from the Shariah law of the civil state to embrace Jesus Christ and be governed by the law of God. Christians in Myanmar have quietly ignored restrictions of the state to evangelise and church plant throughout the country. But they still keep the law, obey the speed limit, pay their taxes and refuse to get involved in corruption.

With the sending church

Another area where relationships need to be maintained is between the workers and their sending church. This involves two way communication and both parties need to fulfil their obligations. The sending church not only releases to service, but commits to pray, financially support and provide care for the worker. The missionary has the responsibility to maintain regular contact, send information to keep the church updated and have material for prayer, and provide an appropriate level of accountability to the church. How this will be worked out depends on circumstances, but it has to be

³⁷⁹ Acts 5: 29

³⁸⁰ 1 Peter 2: 13,14

³⁸¹ Tony Lambert: China’s Christian Millions

given high priority. While on home leave reporting should take place to the whole church as well as a structured debrief taking place with the worker and the church leadership. This is vital and both parties should ensure this takes place. If funds are provided for specific projects then a financial report should be provided, detailing the use of these. Some members of the sending church should plan to visit the workers in their area of service. This is always valuable and gives a much deeper understanding of the work and conditions as well as building stronger relationships between the parties.

(Detail one person to be the contact, or some one for past care- check what is written in Ch2)

With the service agency.

There are a wide range of patterns of working in mission service and although some still work completely independently, most will have some relationship with an agency or mission. Whatever the relationship this also needs to be maintained and any obligations on behalf of both parties fulfilled. One of the common reasons listed for leaving the field early in the study already mentioned was disagreement with the agency³⁸², so problems can easily arise.

Some have a formal contact with their sending mission, and this will detail obligations and responsibilities in contract form, which both will agree and sign. Others will have a looser agreement and understanding but once again their will be obligations and expectations for both parties. Some are served by service agencies, who may merely act as a channel for funds and other services, and no contractual agreement may exist. But even here there is a responsibility to communicate, to acknowledge the receipt of funds, to report information and if services provided are used, to ensure these are used properly.

Possible areas of problems

Good relationships don't just happen: they must be worked out and developed. Just as a marriage needs maintenance and adaptation by both partners, so the ability of Christian workers to function effectively and fulfil their work for God depends on how team relationships are developed and

³⁸² Too Valuable to loose; Ed Wm Taylor

maintained. Work will always be necessary to prevent minor problems becoming major divisive issues which can ruin effectiveness.

Cultural

As missionary teams become more multicultural the possibilities for misunderstanding due to different background and understanding increase. Our earlier examination of culture dealt with many of these issues and secular studies have been particularly valuable in defining some of the differences that are at work. If we understand the cause of the differences, then we can begin to find ways of dealing with these.

Theological

Even among evangelical believers, who unite in the gospel of Christ and under the authority of scripture there is wide theological diversity. Differences in interpretation on some biblical doctrines and practices are potential traps for a mission team. It is much wiser to sort these differences out before members join rather than after and it may be necessary to have a clear position statement on issues that cause friction. This means that all team members know the position held on potentially controversial subjects before they join the team or work.

Personal

Difference in personalities is another area of potential conflict. Some personality types just do not get on together, and contain the potential for major fallout. There are now various types of testing for personality type, and perhaps the best known is the Myers Briggs Personality Inventory which can give each individual insight into how they react in different situations. While remembering this is only a tool, it can be a valuable indicator of potential problems and many agencies now use this as part of the selection process.

Another useful tool is the Belbin Team assessment, which tests how individuals function in a team situation. Eight types of team members are defined and most teams work best when they include a diverse range of skills, which can be united into a functioning whole. Others use the Hemler Social functioning score, which measures satisfaction and frustration levels with life and work. Comparing the results before and after a period of missionary service can be very revealing,

These are tools and it is worth stating that none are definitive or perfect, for the grace of God at work within the personality and character of any person can produce significant transformation, However they do have value and properly used can help in pre field assessments, and may indicate specific problems or potential areas of concern.

Workload

Most missionaries have a strong sense of calling and deep commitment to their work, consequently there are many who find it hard to maintain a balanced work load. They face many demands, there are great needs are all around and also supporters at home who want to hear of progress, achievement and tasks accomplished. Thus the missionary can easily become a workaholic and neglect adequate time for rest, relaxation, family, and friends and inevitably suffer for it. Burnout is not a theoretical possibility in missionary service, but a very real event for many who are overcome by demand and have not ensured adequate protective and balanced mechanisms in their lives.³⁸³

Stress and illness

Stress is an inevitable component of life in today's world, and seems to exist at higher levels for most missionaries and Christian workers. There are many stress factors we will encounter, some of which cannot be avoided, and others that lie more within our control³⁸⁴. Extra stress factors faced by missionaries include the cross cultural exposure, unfamiliar surroundings, language, colleagues from different countries, and issues with family children, education and distant relatives. In fact the list is potentially very long. The driven person, which is the personality type of many missionaries, is less able to deal with stress factors, and in time this can inevitably lead to some form of breakdown, burnout, or even physical ill health.

The development of coping mechanisms are important and many of these are life style adjustments that need to be made: ensuring adequate diet, sleep and time off. Regular breaks, a hobby or sport, a friend to off load to and time

³⁸³ Marjory Foyle: Honourably Wounded. This excellent book should be required reading for anyone who serves in a cross cultural mission context. Full of wisdom and practical insights it should help any worker to assess their life style and get a better balance.

³⁸⁴ Stress: Gaius Davis

out all need to be built into busy programmes to achieve some form of balance, or a reaction will eventually come.

Physical health

Many people serve in less healthy environments and at some point are likely to suffer ill health. This is not the place to delve into the possibilities, but ill health means that the worker cannot function and will cause stress to other members of the team affecting work load and possibly relationships. Now everyone will get sick at some point, and most understand and sympathise, but it is key that before workers go to serve in new situations and environments they get the best health advice, tailored to their situation and any health issues are dealt with before they leave³⁸⁵. In remote locations with poor services there is less ability to cope. Valuable manuals are available that can help in remote contexts, particularly if medical back up is poor.³⁸⁶

Families

Families bring their own particular problems and needs. Usually the mother of young children has to devote much of her time to their care and may not be able to participate fully in the work as her time is limited. This can lead to tension developing with single team members who may feel that they have to do more. When education needs arise, families face new pressures, depending on how they decide to meet these. Opinions are strongly held either for or against boarding schooling, for and against home schooling and for the use of local schools. These can be major areas of tension in a team situation and need to be worked at.

Goals

Most workers set their goals, and it is important to ensure that these fit in with the rest of the team or work force, the goals of the local churches in the area of service and the agency. It is important to have targets and some

³⁸⁵ Interhealth and Care for Mission are two UK based organisations set up for this particular purpose. They should be consulted by all new missionary candidates

³⁸⁶ E.g. Ted Lankester: Good Health Good Travel; Richard Dawood: Travellers Health; Where there is no Doctor

means of measuring achievement, but our personal goals may have to give way to the greater needs of the work we are associated with. It is according to Psalm 133 'Good and blessed for brothers & sisters to dwell together in unity'. Some cynic has said it is also unusual, but when we put the glory of God first, and seek to serve our Lord Jesus Christ in humility, then effective service with others is possible and can lead to the advance of the work of God throughout the world.

Chapter 14

Contemporary Issues in Mission

Any attempt to write a chapter on current issues on mission runs the major risk of being quickly outdated, as today's talking points and problems are overtaken by new debates. However some of the issues raised here are likely to be around for a considerable time. So if we want to think seriously about mission, it is important to have some understanding of the questions, even although we may not yet have clearly defined answers. Our aim is not to be exhaustive but to raise some of the current areas of concern and point the reader in the direction of where they may read and explore these issues in greater depth.

1. Globalisation.

We have already looked briefly at this phenomenon in our world overview, but what does this unstoppable force mean for world mission? Like most new phenomenon, it presents both significant opportunities for the work of God and real dangers. It certainly is all around us and last night I received yet another phone call from India, asking me if I wanted to change my telephone supplier. Last Saturday we bought some goods manufactured in Indonesia, sold by a Swedish multinational store and were served at the check out by Amin, a Somalian living in the UK!

We also know that this effect is being seen in missions as multinational teams work together, and new recruits come from every corner of the earth to work for God. A few months ago in Angola I met not only workers from the UK, but from Brazil and Argentina, who had crossed the Atlantic to work alongside Angolan Christians. Short term teams are increasingly international and many short term mission movements have seen a increasing number of their team members coming from Asia, Latin America and Africa. The South Korean thrust into mission is well known and there are now several thousand Korean Christian workers serving in many countries of the world, with approximately 1000 new missionaries being sent out each year from Korea.³⁸⁷ We have already commented on the emerging

³⁸⁷ Inter Bulletin of Missionary Research : Vol .27, No 1 Jan 2003 p.11 This article by Steve Moon gives a total of 10.745 missionaries sent from Korea by the end of 2002.

Chinese thrust and their commitment to send 100,000 new workers across the old silk roads back towards Jerusalem.³⁸⁸

This should make the heart of any downcast Westerner sing, for as the number of missionaries sent from western countries has declined this is being matched by increasing numbers from new sending nations. It is difficult to get totally accurate figures but certainly the numbers of non-Western missionaries are increasing faster than those from the West and according to some they have already been overtaken.³⁸⁹ It also needs to be recognised that many national workers, who may be based in their own country are working as cross cultural missionaries, having left their home area and moved to evangelise among new people or language groups.³⁹⁰ When this force is added the numbers are encouragingly large, although realistic assessment of what is being done is needed and this new movement has its weaknesses, among them poor support and pastoral structures, so help from experienced workers is still necessary.

But what has the effect of globalisation been on the church of Jesus Christ and does this phenomenon despite its positive opportunities, represent a threat to the vitality and future growth of the church of Jesus Christ? David Smith articulates the issue well: “Has the acculturation of the churches to a culture shaped by fundamentally materialistic values resulted in an eclipsing of the authentic message of Christ, leaving believers incapable of pointing towards an alternative vision for the future of humankind and the world?”³⁹¹

The answer would seem to be mainly in the affirmative, as in the West, there is little difference now between Christian and secular lifestyle for the majority of Christians.³⁹² As the market now dominates the whole globe, so these forces determine our values, spending priorities and use of our leisure

³⁸⁸ See: Back to Jerusalem: Paul Hathaway

³⁸⁹ Stan Guthrie: Missions in the Third Millennium p 137

³⁹⁰ India is perhaps the best known example of this process, with its huge cultural diversity and many tribal and ethnic groups. An Indian church planter I met served for 10 years among a tribal group without seeing a single convert but in the past 10 or more years has seen hundreds coming to Christ and many churches planted, scriptures translated and made available to the people. He is only one of many like him in India and other parts of the world.

³⁹¹ David Smith: Mission after Christendom p90

³⁹² When we write about the West we are reflecting on our experience mainly in the UK, where the situation has become critical and church attendance across the board continues to plummet. We are not really qualified to analyse what is happening in North America or other traditional ‘Western’ Countries, but enough has been written by authoritative commentators, to confirm that this is a generalised Western phenomenon.

time. Declining church attendances³⁹³, even among the ‘committed’ and a profound biblical illiteracy among Christians complete the gloomy picture.

These effects are not just being seen in Western democracies, but as globalisation affects all parts of the world, so everyone begins to chase the Western or American dream of improving economic prosperity, the accumulation of wealth. The result is that many traditional societies begin to disintegrate. Emigration to Western countries with the prospect of improved prosperity follows, and economic migrants are found everywhere. No blame can be attached to any who wants to find a better life for themselves and their family, but often in the Christian context this means that the best people and leaders are drained away from where they are needed most, and rarely do they return.³⁹⁴ The serious question is what effect this process will have on the spiritual vitality and zeal of emerging missionary sending nations. It may well give greater economic prosperity and ability to support missionaries and mission, as has been seen in Korea where there has been a larger than expected increase in the number of missionaries sent from that country³⁹⁵. But others share concern that the secular capitalist system which is orientated to accumulating of wealth and not the meeting of human needs, will undermine the spiritual priorities of Christians and dull their enthusiasm for mission and evangelism.

David Smith argues that the effects are already being seen in mission organisations where “an older language of faith and dependence on God has been reduced to a minority tongue, in danger of extinction.”³⁹⁶ This is being replaced by what Samuel Escobar has called “Managerial Missiology”, which reduces missions to a project that can be managed by the right application of resources, with a good business plan. As he says, “The strategy for the evangelisation of the world thus becomes a question of mathematical calculation”.³⁹⁷

How we respond to contemporary culture is undoubtedly the greatest challenge facing Western Christians today, and as the early church had to debate and define their position³⁹⁸ on key issues, so our response is also

³⁹³ Religious Trends 4 (2003) P Brierley

³⁹⁴ A report in the International Bulletin of Missionary Research stated that 45% of Africa’s engineers now work in Western Europe.

³⁹⁵ Ibid. The rate of growth from 2000 to 2002 was 32.6%

³⁹⁶ David Smith: Mission after Christendom p92

³⁹⁷ S Escobar in Global Missiology p 31

³⁹⁸ Acts 15: 1-31. The result of the debate on how to deal with Gentile culture coming into the church, led

critical. We can either retreat into a separatist position, and become irrelevant in the task of communicating the gospel or adopt the opposite extreme of being so accommodating that there is no difference and no message to proclaim, because we no longer know what the gospel is! How to be distinct as the people of God, yet relevant is the problem faced by every generation, for as someone has said, “*The only way to say something that is always relevant is to say something that is eternal.*”

Quoting Ajith Fernando, David Smith makes another telling point. “Fernando observed that Christians from the churches in the West appear to be finding it increasingly difficult to cope with the demands of life outside a culture which offers them wealth, pleasure and comfort. ‘Missionaries from the affluent parts of the world’ said Fernando, ‘may be loosing their ability to live with inconvenience, stress and hardship, as there is more stress on comfort and convenience’”.³⁹⁹

2. The Challenge of Islam and Islamic Contextualisation

The advance of Islam and its growing strength has been examined already (see Ch 4). The big issue, which is being debated in the world of mission particularly among those working with Muslims, is how to respond to this. For many decades the Muslim world was largely neglected and received far fewer resources and workers than many other parts of the world. Muslim peoples were regarded as unresponsive and resistant to the gospel and the brave souls who served there saw little in the way of lasting results.⁴⁰⁰ Investment in sub-Saharan Africa, or Latin America seemed to produce a much better rate of return and more positive feedback to the sending and supporting nations. The consequence was that these and other areas received a greater proportion of resources and personnel.

The situation began to change particularly after 1973, when the war in the Middle East and subsequent oil embargo alerted the West to the financial muscle and political clout of the many oil producing countries which were largely Muslim. This global spotlight was used by God to refocus Christian minds and with the help of others who had recorded their spiritual needs, interest in mission to Islamic peoples began to grow. However the results

to a great forward thrust in missionary outreach
399 Ibid; p114

400 Too Hard for God?; Charles Marsh. This is one of several titles that recount years of experience among Islamic peoples. The road was hard and little was seen in the way of results in his lifetime, although now in the area where he served there has been a significant response to the gospel among the indigenous people.

and response were much the same as experienced by previous generations, with very few responding to the gospel of Christ and those who did facing the fierce opposition and persecution of their people. Many Christians who lived in the countries of the Middle East have found it increasingly hard to continue there and have left the area, and this has meant there has been a steady decline in traditional Christian populations. In other parts of the world, tolerance that had existed between Christians and Muslims was replaced by discrimination, then active persecution.⁴⁰¹ The events and wars post 9/11 have only increased these pressures and made mission in many parts of the Islamic world increasingly difficult, particularly for workers from Western sending countries.

The lack of response led many to question the traditional methodology used and some experienced workers began to ask the question, “Could things be done in a different way?” The experience of many Muslims converts was that they became targets for persecution or even death by the inevitable hostility of the majority population. This led to converts having to be extracted from their community, relocated and losing any ability to witness to their own people. So the question was raised, ‘Can we find a better way to evangelise and contextualise the gospel to Muslim people? ‘This has led to new approaches that were more sympathetic to the cultural context, but attempted to remain faithful to the gospel.

A more contextualised approach is now accepted by virtually all who serve in the Islamic world, but there is an intense debate among workers serving with Muslims as to how far one can go with this process. John Travis described 6 levels of Muslim contextualisation⁴⁰², and it is at the level of C4 and C5 that most of the differences of opinion arise. Phil Parshall has served in an Asian Muslim country and has a great depth of experience in evangelising Islamic background peoples and a deep understanding of their thought patterns and world view.⁴⁰³ As Stan Guthrie writes he “hopes to reach more Muslims by removing Western cultural impediments to the

⁴⁰¹ The Rim of Fire; Glenn Myers. This briefing details the dramatic growth of the church in Indonesia and more recent conflict and anti-Christian persecution in some parts.

⁴⁰² Travis, John 1998 EMQ 34:407-408 He describes the spectrum as follows: C1: Traditional church using outsider language (language unfamiliar to local Muslims). C2: Traditional church using insider language; C3: Contextualised Christ-centred Communities using insider language and religiously neutral cultural forms; C4: Contextualised Christ-centred communities using insider language and biblically permissible cultural forms; C5 Christ centred communities of “Messianic Muslims” who have accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour; C6 Small Christ-centred communities of Secret/underground believers.

⁴⁰³ Phil Parshall: The Cross and the Crescent. This is an excellent introduction to the Muslim attitude to critical issues that must be confronted as the gospel is presented.

gospel, since the gospel is transcultural. They tried to create identifiable Christ-centred communities using religious language (such as “Allah” for God) and cultural and religious forms (such as kneeling, Muslim style, in prayer) permitted by the Bible. However the converts were not encouraged to remain a part of the Islamic mosque or to call themselves Muslims.”⁴⁰⁴ This is the position taken by those who are C4 contextualisers.

Other, such as Travis have been prepared to go much further (C5 level) by encouraging Muslims who become followers of Jesus to go to the mosque, and to continue to call themselves Muslims.⁴⁰⁵ The goal is that in their society, they will be able to reach their friends and community more effectively. According to Guthrie⁴⁰⁶, some missionaries who adopt this approach would even call themselves Muslims, basing their practice on Paul who became all things to all men.

This has led to debate between the two camps. Parshall calls this a step too far with the inevitable danger that “a legitimate strategy could tumble into syncretism if great care is not exercised”⁴⁰⁷, and compromise the uniqueness of God’s revelation in Christ.⁴⁰⁸ He has argued that there are characteristics of Islam that make such a Jesus sect impossible. These include the exaltation of the prophet Muhammad; the centrality of the mosque to religious expression, the denial by Muslims of the Christian view of Biblical authority, and the desire of both Christians and Muslims for an exclusive community. ⁴⁰⁹

However others who practice the C5 level approach respond that experience in some Muslim communities demonstrates that this is happening, and that there are many Muslims who have read the bible, accepted its truth and become devoted followers of Jesus Christ. They have had no exposure to Western formulations of orthodox truth developed over the centuries of church history, but even so many would acknowledge God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Joshua Massey writes that “a growing number of Muslim followers of Jesus have chosen not to follow the way of the Jewish proselyte. They want to follow Jesus as Muslims.”⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁴ Stan Guthrie *Missions in the Third Millennium*, p 107-110

⁴⁰⁵ *ibid*

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁷ Phil Parshall *EMQ* (2004) 40, p.288-293

⁴⁰⁸ Phil Parshall: *EMQ* (1998) 34: 404-410

⁴⁰⁹ Don Eenigenberg: *The Pros and cons of Islamic Contextualisation: EMQ* July 1997 p310-315

⁴¹⁰ Joshua Massey: *Misunderstanding C5: EMQ* 40 (2004) 296-304

As can be seen this is a complex debate that will continue to run, and may not provide a tidy answer. As Phil Parshall wrote,⁴¹¹ many are following a C5 strategy and seeing significant numbers of Muslims coming to believe in Jesus. Others with a C4 strategy are seeing similar results, yet he does raise serious issues about the C5 approach that need to be faced, and highlights a looseness of thinking and exegesis of particular scriptures. As in all matters relating to the work of God, time will tell and although it is wonderful to realise that God is at work significantly in many parts of the Islamic world, we will watch this area with interest and concern.

3. A new theology of prayer

A phenomenon that has appeared in recent years is a theology of prayer, where prayer is seen as an offensive weapon that can be used to bind demons and allow the kingdom of God to progress. This theology which is backed by Peter Wagner and Charles Kraft focuses on the activity of ‘territorial spirits’ which they believe are active in the world, controlling nations and particular geographic territories. The advocates of this approach believe that these evil forces need to be effectively bound through aggressive prayer to allow the work of God to progress. Stan Guthrie comments that “Prayer used to be directed to God, today, as often as not, it seems to be directed against demons”.⁴¹²

This has produced a whole movement where prayer is regarded as a means to bind strongholds held in the power of specific demonic forces. It has led to spiritual mapping, an attempt to identify the controlling power over specific areas and led to ‘prayer walks’, ‘prayer journeys’ and a variety of movement with this particular emphasis. Some major concerns have arisen among many who are unhappy with this approach and seriously question its biblical and theological basis and the animistic approach it suggests towards spiritual life. Guthrie states that the Intercession working group of the Lausanne committee for world evangelisation says that spiritual warfare emphasis carries the risk of leading us “to think and operate on pagan world views.”⁴¹³

⁴¹¹ Phil Parshall: Lifting the Fatwa EMQ 2004 40 p288-293

⁴¹² S Guthrie ibid p 75

⁴¹³ Ibid p 78

There always has and probably always will be a divergence of approach on these issues, and as with the other matters that have been discussed in this chapter, a position of balance needs to be found. There have been those who have had such a strong view of the pervasive sovereignty of God that they have neglected the influence of Satan and his demonic servants. Thus reports of spiritual forces and manifestations are almost regarded as superstitions or old wives tales and the spiritual forces and realities that lie behind these are minimised. Holding this position can lead to a failure to recognise the reality of satanic activity in this present age, and the presence of demonic forces that lie behind much animistic practice or manifest themselves in many of the world's religions. This position is unbalanced and needs to be modified.

The opposite extreme sees the activity of Satan in every event and circumstance, and demons present at every corner. They virtually inhabit every place and affect every circumstance, causing sickness, ill health, mental illness and every negative event that happens to people. This worldview does not take account of the victory of Christ at the Cross, the superiority of the Divine Power now resident in the life of the believer, and the promises of scripture that we will be kept by the power of God. In fact it diminishes Christ and exalts Satan to a status that he should never be given.

Having worked for several years in an animistic background culture in Africa, we experienced these tensions. My reading of the situation was that the first generations of missionaries encountered a frontal attack from the forces of witchcraft, and the demonic power that lay behind these. Yes, there may have been a bit of trickery and sleight of hand operating at times, but real spiritual forces were at work. When African people began to turn to Christ, they publicly acknowledged their conversion by burning their fetishes and charms as they became followers of Jesus. The break was clear and seen by all. In time with colonial rule in many parts, public practice of witchcraft was prohibited, so much traditional practice went underground, and with the external Christianising of society became unfamiliar to a new generation of expatriate workers. Repentance was less frequently marked by the abandoning of these objects and many Christians still held on to these things in private, in fact they became Christianised animists, with a layer of Christian belief and an animistic world view. Thus their faith was weak, if indeed saving faith was present at all, they had no true understanding of the

nature of God or salvation and when in difficulty resorted to old practices.⁴¹⁴

The solution lies in a deeper understanding of their world view, for to most African people God may be transcendent, but he is not immanent or present in everyday life. That everyday world is inhabited by the spirits of ancestors and demonic forces that have to be manipulated by various practices. Generally evangelism using Western methods frequently assumes a basic understanding of the nature of God and some level of biblical understanding. However we often fail to teach a fuller doctrine of God, his nature and his power emphasising his power and superiority over any other spiritual being. When eventually belief comes it must be marked by repentance and turning from the old and abandoning them with a clear commitment to Christ. Thankfully there is now a deeper understanding of this issue and good literature available to help those engaging with the forces lying behind animistic belief.⁴¹⁵ Some attempted to deal with this by introducing practices that had little biblical foundation and were really a Christianised form of cultural practice. Sadly this syncretistic approach did not advance Christian maturity but led to fragmentation.

One of the best and most balanced responses on this matter was produced by Mike Wakely.⁴¹⁶ He examines the whole concept of this new approach to spiritual warfare, a term that Christians have used for centuries, but is now being presented in a different way as ‘ Strategic level spiritual warfare.’ In his discussion he examines the biblical basis for this position, which seems to be very weak and comments that even Peter Wagner, the main proponent of this strategy acknowledges that there is not a single undisputable instance of strategic-level spiritual warfare in the New Testament.⁴¹⁷ In a thorough way he examines the various biblical passages used in support of this position, as well as the practices without finding any solid justification for any of these. The conclusion is that this approach seems to work and produce results, so the method becomes accepted even although there is no theological base for this. We recommend you read this important work as it provides a deeper understanding about this issue and its background.

⁴¹⁴ I worked in a mission hospital and saw many patients who were members, even leaders of the local church. A surprising number showed the evidence of a recent visit to the witchdoctor before they came to consult, with the ‘machata’ marks made to release the spirits over the site of the pain or disease. It actually was a good diagnostic pointer to where the problem was located!

⁴¹⁵ Marvin Wolford: Free indeed from Sorcery and bondage.

⁴¹⁶ Mike Wakely: Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation

⁴¹⁷ Ibid. p26

We will all acknowledge the importance of prayer and how poor most of us are at the practice, so we must be glad that a reemphasise on prayer has emerged. However good things can have the wrong emphasise or focus and our 'success' in work for God will come when we understand more clearly what God wants us to do and carry this out in full obedience. God has chosen to reveal this in his word and without a firm biblical foundation, we too will be building on the shaky foundation of relativism. As Paul said to the Thessalonians we have to 'test everything, hold fast what is good.' 418 We recognise that evil forces are at work in our world, in nations and in people, but we are never commanded to go out and aggressively confront these, in fact we are called to be vigilant, and to "take the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one."419 The one aggressive weapon in the armour of God is "the Sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"420, that is our main weapon of attack for the kingdom of Christ in our age and any age, if we abandon that, then we have nothing of any consequence to put in its place.

4. Partnership and Inequality in mission

A few years ago, while visiting a Latin American country, I was asked a penetrating question by a national worker. "How could we justify sending expatriate workers and their families to that country where it costs \$30,000 per annum to support them and keep them on the field?"421 The monthly living costs for a local family at that time were around \$150 -200 per month, yet the questioner had to spend 2 days a week driving a bus to supplement his income, as he received inadequate support from the local church.

This situation encapsulates the problem. Western workers are expensive, require higher levels of financial and logistical support and now as we have already noted, have a higher drop out rate in addition. In many parts of the world national workers can live at a fraction of the cost and are normally much more effective in their evangelistic ministry as they do not have significant cultural barriers to cross and do not need to learn a new language. Thus some have argued that the better way forward is to divert our support

418 1 Thessalonians 5:21

419 Ephesians 6:16

420 Ephesians 6 : 17

421 The figure now would be a lot more!

to indigenous workers as a way of ensuring more effective work and a better return for our money!

Although much of this analysis can be supported, it does not present the whole picture. We do need to question the role of the expatriate worker, particularly those coming from Western countries, while at the same time we also need to find better mechanisms of support for indigenous work, which shows true partnership with them and doesn't create a new form of economic colonism with its dependency. Emerging from the poorer part of the world is a band of workers willing to make immense sacrifices in their service for God. As David Smith writes, "Many of the most faithful and effective practitioners of mission in globalised world are to be found among the poor and disenfranchised peoples... This completely reverses the received expectations concerning the flow of mission within Christendom, undermining the assumption that Western Christianity possesses the spiritual, theological and materials resources needed by the rest of the world".⁴²² However there are significant problems and the answer is not simply to switch support from one to the other. This would create massive problems in the use, allocation and management of resources and an even greater potential for abuse.

First of all we need to ask and try the answer the question; 'What place do Western workers have in the 21st century?' The history of past efforts is an honourable one, and the need for pioneering workers to new areas and unreached peoples is still great. While the world missionary force has an increasing proportion of recruits from new sending countries, and this number will grow, yet they often lack the knowledge and accumulated experience of many years. They have tremendous enthusiasm and commitment, but often lack the necessary resources to sustain them in service and this may lead to an early return from the field. ⁴²³ So the role of workers from the west remains as important as ever, but the way this calling is pursued will have to change. This will involve a willingness to listen and not just direct, it means an ability to create partnerships and work as part of multinational teams and requires handling our resources with much greater care.

⁴²² David Smith: Mission post Christendom p 97

⁴²³ See Too Valuable to Loose, Ed Wm Taylor p 91

Don Smith in a review of the role of Western Missionaries in the 21st Century makes the telling point that “while finance is essential, too much money may actually hinder missionary service... Wealthy missionaries may cripple the church they bring into being. Their wealth almost inevitably creates either resentment or dependency.”⁴²⁴ This highlights a recurring problem in mission, the problem of resources. There are those who have too much and regard mission solely as an exercise in resource application, and those who have too little and struggle to eke out what they have.⁴²⁵ How we use and apply resources is critical for the increased spending power of Western Christians is also being transmitted to many workers, whose resources are greater than they were before, but may not always be matched by the same level of spiritual insight and discernment. To quote Don Smith again as he answers his question on the place of Western workers in this century:” It must be a place of service, rather than domination, because of money skills or history. As ambassadors for Christ, we have the same instructions as missionaries from the Two Thirds world... to demonstrate Christ’s life by doing the most lowly of tasks, or the most glorious.”⁴²⁶

How can indigenous work and workers be best resourced? How can we effectively partner with those at the cutting edge of evangelism in their own countries yet who are resource poor? We have a responsibility to do so, it is a biblical principle,⁴²⁷ but there are many pitfalls along the way, and as has already been stated the potential for resources to be abused or jealousy to be created. There has been a proper emphasis on accountability in missions on recent years and donors and supporters want and need to know that their funds are being used properly.

Support may be sent directly to individuals who are working for God, and many choose to do this. It is a good and time honoured way of supporting workers and can demonstrate care and partnership, especially if we support the individual in our prayers. There is however a danger of jealousy if one worker is supported from outside the country and others are not. If gifts of foreign currency are exchanged into large amounts of local currency, this

⁴²⁴ Donald K Smith; Reviewing the place of Western Missionaries in the third Millennium. EMQ Jan 1999 p.56-61

⁴²⁵ A colleague told me of an encounter with a house church leader in China. When he knew he had contacts with the West he sent a unique request: “Tell them to stop sending money” he said, “ for it is creating jealousy and division.” We need to hear this message!

⁴²⁶ *ibid*

⁴²⁷ 2 Corinthians 8:13,14

may even greater. This may be why some individuals and churches prefer to support specific projects.

Alternatively it may be possible to transmit support through local agencies, who can distribute to a number of workers serving in the area or country, leaving the decision making to the local service group. Many bodies like these now exist and more are coming into being and when they are well established, with clear statements of practice and good financial accountability, this can prove a valuable means of helping at grass roots level.

Western workers and agencies can help to stimulate local churches to support their own workers, and feel their responsibility to do what they can to help them in their work for God. While recognising that many may be poor, much more can be done and even in the poorest areas there are those who have resources that can be used to support their own national evangelists and missionaries, until this happens then the work will never be truly indigenous and independent. Expatriate workers with the experience, wisdom and standing can do a great deal to create vision and advice on appropriate structures and mechanisms. What is put in place has to be right for the country and culture, for western mission structures are expensive and not exportable to most of the rest of the world. Keep it simple and ensure it is acceptable and not another foreign import. The role of tent making needs to be reemphasised and the self supporting missionary⁴²⁸ or at least partially self supporting may be the only workable model for many workers who come from the two thirds world.

In many parts of the world the majority of the missionary work force is now almost entirely indigenous. This is certainly true of countries in Asia such as India and in large parts of Africa. Wealthy Western Christians need to find ways of showing their care for these workers, without becoming their pay masters, or creating a new dependency mentality. The more indigenous the work is the better, but we can work together in the progress of the gospel and show our support for those on the outer fringes of mission.

⁴²⁸ In some parts of Africa when local Christians gave themselves to the work of God, they were generally encouraged to keep their fields cultivated so they would have adequate source of food and others continued to use other skills, such as carpentry to provide some level of support. This was because the churches were so resource poor they could not afford to provide all the support necessary.

5. Holistic mission.

Certain words enter our everyday speech and become the ‘buzz’ word of the moment. The term ‘holistic’ has been around for quite a while in both secular and Christian contexts and remains very popular. We are aware of the call for holistic medicine, that is, medicine that treats every part of the patient, body, mind, personality, social circumstances etc. So in Christian mission we have heard a similar call not just to see people as disembodied souls to be saved, but complete people with physical and social needs that have also to be met. Inevitably there are polarised positions and much debate, so it is important to be aware of the issues and not just swallow the jargon without engaging our minds.

This a fascinating debate for to a large extent it has been fashioned by history and attitudes developed over much of the 20th century. There is no doubt that at the beginning of the modern missionary movement and really though all of missionary history there has been deep concern for the whole person. So Carey spoke against ‘suttee’ 429 in India, and Livingstone against slavery in Africa. Missionaries carried medicines, built schools, taught reading, produced literature, developed agricultural and training projects and cared for the social as well as the spiritual needs of the people they served. Above all they presented the gospel and many responded. The early 20th century saw the emergence of what was called the ‘social gospel’, with the denial of the supernatural and saving work of Christ, so reducing the gospel to a socialising and civilising project. The general evangelical reaction was to reject this and often retreat from social and political involvement, which became regarded as deeply suspect. Those involved in mission were affected to a large extent by this attitude and frequently work was divided into ‘spiritual work’ which by definition was of much higher value and ‘social work’ of lesser importance. This world view of course is more typical of Greek philosophy, which regarded spirit as good and matter as bad, rather than the more integrated Hebrew world view presented in the Old Testament, which saw all of life as God’s creation.

A restatement of the position was made in 1974 by the Lausanne Commission for World Evangelisation where the social responsibility was restated alongside the evangelistic imperative. “We affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty, for both

429 The immolation of widows on their husbands’ funeral pyre.

are necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and man, our love for our neighbour and our obedience to Jesus Christ.” 430 John Stott has defined mission as “everything the church has been sent into the world to do”⁴³¹, and although probably not his original intention, this is a wide definition that can encompass all sorts of activities. This has started a debate which continues to the present and as in many areas of divergence among Christians there is a spectrum of opinion, which needs to be understood.

David Hesselgrave believes that the pendulum has swung too far and making “holistic mission the focus” has led to a neglect of “Jesus final and most complete statement on the subject.”⁴³² He continues that “there is a great need to focus on the most needed and neglected requirements of great commission mission - discipling the *ethne* by teaching them to obey all things (Christ) has commanded.” He argues strongly for a clear recovery of New Testament mission and placing evangelism, discipling and church planting right back at the centre of the agenda: “We can feed some of the hungry, but we cannot feed the whole world. We can help heal some of the sick, but we cannot heal the whole world....But we can evangelise the whole world and no one else will do it unless we do.”

Bryant Myers has responded to this and while accepting the imperative of evangelism, and agreeing that discipleship is the key, argues that “we need holistic disciples that live the gospel seven days a week in every area of life, and who refuse a truncated view of mission that suggests God is only interested in saved souls and the life hereafter. The God of the bible is unwilling to leave our economic, political and social lives to the devil.”⁴³³ He also states that “the whole story of the bible is about loving God and loving neighbour until Jesus comes.”

These respected leaders come from both sides of the argument, and much more has been written from a wide variety of sources, in fact you can hardly pick up a missions publication today without encountering the word ‘holism’ several times. Are both really focusing on the same thing with a different emphasis or is there a genuine reason for concern that with the pressures of pluralism and multiculturalism, evangelistic emphasis can very easily and perhaps already is being diluted? After all if I go to help in a

430 J Stott; Making Christ Known p.24

431 Stott J. (1975) Christian Mission in the Modern World

432 David Hesselgrave: Redefining Holism EMQ July 1999 p378-384.

433 Bryant Myers: Another look at holistic Mission EMQ July 1999 p 285-287

famine, or care for HIV sufferers, (and both of these are valid causes) what am I doing that is different from the many Non Governmental Organisations set up for similar purposes, unless I also share the gospel of Christ. In fact even in parts of the Christian world aid is much more acceptable and less liable to be questioned than going to evangelise and plant a church among an unreached people group. Enthusiasts see the holistic model as the only way to act, while others see real dangers ahead.

Stan Guthrie writes; “This emphasise on Holism, as good as it is, carries a danger that traditional notions of church planting and evangelism will be neglected”⁴³⁴. This is a serious issue and how it is decided will determine future directions in world mission. We need to understand and re-emphasise the biblical priorities.

6. The challenge of the West

Leslie Newbigin, who died a few years ago, was regarded as one of the most original and creative mission thinkers of the past 50 years. Before he died he formulated a key question for mission in the 21st Century.⁴³⁵ That question he asked was, ‘Can the West be won?’

It is certainly interesting and provocative, but behind it lies a deep understanding that although the majority of the world’s Christians no longer live in Western countries, yet the economic and particularly the Western Cultural dominance would inevitable permeate these other nations. With this, through the process of globalisation would come secularism and unbelief. Thus the re-evangelisation of the west, perhaps particularly Western Europe, must have high priority in mission thinking.

What is happening to our society?

As the West prospers, and sees an inexorably rising standard of living as it amuses itself to death, it is at the same time failing to reproduce itself. ‘The greying of Europe’ is a well described phenomenon, but not many really realise how dramatically our populations are expected to drop in the next 40 years. Quite simply Western populations are not replacing themselves, and are either static or beginning to suffer negative growth. If it were not for

⁴³⁴ Stan Guthrie: Missions in the Third Millennium, p 128

⁴³⁵ International Bulletin of Missionary Research: L Newbigin: Can the West be converted?

immigration the picture would be much worse.⁴³⁶ Many choose not to marry or if they do, may have no children or only one child. This means the traditional inhabitants of most of these nations, who largely make up the middle classes are not reproducing themselves. As populations continue to fall there is now a demographic time bomb which will seriously affect the ability of many European nations to sustain themselves, run their economies and pay for their pensions in the long term. The problem of dropping birth rates is not confined to Western Europe but also afflicts North America, Japan and Australasia. There are many causes, among them abortion, freely available and effective contraception, postponement of marriage, hedonistic lifestyle and family breakdown. The list is long but the effect is serious.

So we are an aging society with growing immigrant communities, many of whom are Muslim. There are fewer young people about, at least young people of our ethnic group, and more old, who will live longer and of course also have spiritual needs that can too easily be neglected in our outreach programmes.

What is happening to our churches?

When we look at the picture we encounter a nation of ex-church goers, of those who used to go to church but no longer feel any need. Quoting Scottish social historian Callum Brown, David Smith writes how in Scotland, ‘ the cycle of intergenerational renewal of Christian affiliation has been permanently disrupted with the result that a formerly religious people have entirely forsaken organised Christianity in a sudden plunge into a truly secular condition.’⁴³⁷

Recurrent church surveys conducted over succeeding decades have demonstrated a continuing drop in church attendance. There have been some who have bucked the trend, but the overall picture as detailed by Peter Brierley is that the church is haemorrhaging to death.⁴³⁸ Those of us who are blessed enough to be in growing congregations may be cocooned to what is really happening out there but the situation is bad. We are certainly a post-Christian society; we may be now mainly a pagan one.

⁴³⁶ Meic Pearse : Why the West hates the rest p 152- 172. Appendix 1 contains a fuller analysis of this important chapter

⁴³⁷ David Smith : Against the Stream p 35

⁴³⁸ Peter Brierley: The tide is running out.

For many local churches survival, not expansion is their main concern, and mission interest is not their number one priority. Thus mission support, mission prayer, mission sending is very low on their agendas. Thankfully there still is a generation who are committed to mission, mainly older in most cases, but as they die out who will replace them? There are still local churches that place high priority on their mission support and actively encourage their members, particularly their younger members to engage in short term mission, summer teams or even longer periods of service aboard. Some are having considerable impact in this area, but they are the minority and the general picture is not nearly so healthy.

Then as has been covered earlier, the pluralistic environment in which most western churches are operating can sap the will for mission, particularly when it majors on evangelism and church planting. Sadly the theological foundations of many evangelicals in the West are not very deep and these need to be strengthened. Unless there is a movement of God's Spirit and a true revival, then the present decline will inevitably continue.

What is happening to mission?

As the church in the west and particularly Great Britain passes through an age of deep uncertainty and decline, the golden years of missionary sending seem a long time ago, when from a strong base workers left for every corner of the globe. It has not disappeared completely, for a valuable contribution is still being made, but the foundations are crumbling. As David Smith writes; "Far from being a region immersed in the truth of the gospel, the Western world constitutes one of the supreme missionary challenges of this or any other age."⁴³⁹

Andrew Walls would argue that this movement achieved much of its goal in that strong and growing churches have been planted in many parts of the world where missionaries served so there should not be excessive despondency⁴⁴⁰ The western missionary movement has reached old age he states, and it could well be that the lands evangelised in the past will be sending missionaries to our countries to carry out the same task. He writes "It would be easy to adapt some of the nineteenth-century descriptions of the

⁴³⁹ David Smith: Mission after Christendom p 9

⁴⁴⁰ Andrew Walls: The Missionary Movement in Christian History p255-261

need of the heathen – the ignorance of religion, the immorality, the proneness to warfare, the inhumanities and injustice widely accepted in society – as a stirring call to Christians of the Southern continents to undertake the salvation of the west.”⁴⁴¹

To some extent this has already taken place in parts of Europe as the number of African Christians said to be living in Europe exceeds 3 million, and they have managed to plant many churches in their lands of adoption.⁴⁴² The problem is that frequently they find it difficult to break out of their own church model and contextualise to their new environment, and have to learn in reverse what the western workers needs to discover too.

It is sometimes difficult to maintain optimism when constantly immersed in this environment, but to prevent excessive discouragement we need to see the big picture. We live in an unprecedented age of gospel response, the number of Christians throughout the world expands daily, and new nations are fulfilling their part in the missionary task. The vision that John had of the multitude surrounding the throne will be fulfilled, and those “from every tribe and language and people and nation” ⁴⁴³will ensure that heaven will be filled according to God’s plan.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid p 258

⁴⁴² International Bulletin Apr 04

⁴⁴³ Rev 5: 9

Appendix A

European Demography & its Missiological Consequences

One of the key issues that will affect Christianity in the West over the next one hundred years is that of demographic change. The entire western world is beginning to undergo a huge change, and we are only just beginning to wake up to. It is a change that will profoundly affect the very character of western society and might potentially lead to a kind of new world order. This change is not being brought about by war, technology or even a natural catastrophe, rather it is being brought about because the west is simply not producing enough babies.

The sustainability of a population is dependant on either children being born, or immigration. Most demographers think that for an average western country where life expectancy is high, there needs to be a birth rate of 2.1 children for every woman to sustain present levels of population⁴⁴⁴. This however is not being sustained thus putting huge demographic pressures on western countries. The areas where this decline is apparent are North America, Australasia, Japan and Europe [though the trend does not exist in Albania which is Muslim].

Reasons for 'demographic meltdown' appear to be linked with western cultural values.

- The separation of sexual activity from childbearing.
- The widespread use of contraception and its acceptability.
- The phenomenon of career women either to fulfil feminist expectations or to enable couples to enjoy a higher standard of living.
- Prolonged educational experience which means that couples get married later in life.
- Cultural pressure to marry later in life.
- The widespread use of abortion [if the abortion act of 1973 had not been passed in the USA, its population would be 40 million more than it is now].

The decrease in population is only one side of the coin. Another problem is that as people in western countries are living for longer, the ratio of people

444 This and other statistics mentioned in this appendix come from, *Why the West Hates the Rest*, by Meic Pearse, p.152-178.

who are of working age is decreasing relative to those who are retired. For example when Bismarck introduced a retirement age of 65 into Germany, the life expectancy at the time was 45. Clearly things are very different now, and this difference puts huge pressure on western economies. Ultimately this situation is unsustainable and western nations will not be able to support their pensioners without radical change⁴⁴⁵.

The problem can best be understood when looking at individual nations:

- Germany has a birth rate of only 1.4 children per woman. This gives them just a 60% population replenishment rate. This means that if they do not let in any more immigrants their present population of 82 million will fall to 38.5 million by 2100.
- In the UK the birthrate is 1.69 births per woman. This means that without immigration the population will fall from 60 million to 30 million over the next 150 years.
- Italy has a birth rate of only 1.19 births per woman, and Spain of only 1.07 births per woman. The crisis in these countries is even worse.
- An EU report in 2002 stated that in order for Europe to maintain its present population, it would need to import 1.58 million immigrants per year until 2050 (a total of 75 million immigrants).
- If the former Soviet Union were to be included in Europe it would have a population of 728 million. At present levels of decline, with no immigration the population would fall to 207 million by 2100.

It is interesting to note that within the West the USA is unique in that it has a birth rate of 2.1 births per woman. This is exactly the population replacement rate. Undoubtedly this is because the USA, unlike Europe, still maintains traditional values due to its strong religious heritage. However the statistics in the USA vary greatly. In Vermont, which is predominantly white, middle class, liberal, secular and European, the birth rate is only 1.57 births per woman – whereas in Utah which is deeply religious due to the presence of the Mormon church, it is a very healthy 2.71 births per woman.

Of course this stark decline will not be allowed to happen. It cannot happen for it would be economically suicidal, not to mention socially, politically and

445 Interestingly Time Magazine reports that western governments have tried to combat the crisis with pension and labor reform but have shied away from urging people to have more babies (November 2004, p.44).

militarily weakening. But as the birth rate in the west is unlikely to grow without a seismic change in its social ethic, the only way to replenish the population will be through mass immigration.

It is at this point that our missiology and evangelistic strategy is affected. Assuming that Europe does allow a significant number of immigrants to enter and become 'Europeans', we then need to ask who these immigrants will be. If present immigration trends continue, most of these 'new Europeans' will come from the developed world and will come from another religious background, mostly Islamic.

If the above scenario occurs, it is highly possible that by 2100, the Muslim population in some European countries could be 40% and above⁴⁴⁶. Muslims could become that largest and most powerful interest group in Europe. That is not to say that the Muslim population will be unified. Today's European Muslims come from a variety of backgrounds and cultures. Most British Muslims are Bangladeshi or Pakistani, whereas most French Muslims are North African. Germany's Muslims come from Turkey and Holland's Muslims from Indonesia. But their significant presence will be felt throughout Europe.

How should this affect our missiological thinking? The following are a few tentative suggestions:

1. All European Christians should be taught how to witness to people from other religions.
2. Church leaders should ensure that their congregations have access to a robust apologetic against Islam and other world faiths. * Missionary organizations are ideally placed to offer the above as a service to churches.
3. Given the introspection of Islamic communities, European Christian missions need to develop church planting teams that will focus on Muslims and other religious groups. This will involve living in Muslim clusters in urban areas and planting churches relevant to that particular cultural setting.

446 Already there are 3 million Muslims in Germany, 2 million in France, 1 million in the UK and perhaps 750,000 in Italy (Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, Oxford, p.97).

Another point that needs to be made is that the locus of Global Christianity is changing. Europe can no longer be considered Christian in any meaningful way. That title can still be used of the USA, though its influence in the world has arguably peaked. There are now several centres of Global Christianity but these are primarily in the developing world in places such as Africa, Latin America and the Far East. This will mean that in the future the bulk of the world's missionaries will come from these emerging nations. If western Christianity is to have a swansong, it will be in the extent to which we have adjusted ourselves to the changing global scene and supported the maturing of 'developing world' Christianity.

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