

**GLOBAL
MISSIOLOGY
FOR THE
21ST
CENTURY**

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The Iguassu Dialogue

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Published by Baker Academic
A division of Baker Book House Company
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Global missiology for the 21st century: the Iguassu dialogue /
edited by William D. Taylor.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-8010-2259-2

1. Missions—Theory—Congresses. I. Taylor, William David.

BV2063.G56 2000

266—dc21

00-058583

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Contents

In appreciation	viii
Foreword	ix
<i>Ravi Zacharias</i>	
Part 1: Setting the stage	1
1. From Iguassu to the reflective practitioners of the global family of Christ	3
<i>William D. Taylor</i>	
2. The Iguassu Affirmation	15
Part 2: Establishing the macro context of the major issues	23
3. The global scenario at the turn of the century	25
<i>Samuel Escobar</i>	
4. Engaging Escobar ... and beyond	47
<i>Jonathan Bonk</i>	
5. Globalization and world evangelism	57
<i>Alex Araujo</i>	
6. Christ and the mosaic of pluralisms	71
<i>Chris Wright</i>	
7. Evangelical missiology: peering into the future at the turn of the century	101
<i>Samuel Escobar</i>	
8. Learning from Escobar ... and beyond	123
<i>Valdir Steuernagel</i>	
9. A Two-Thirds World evaluation of contemporary Evangelical missiology	133
<i>David Tai-Woong Lee</i>	
10. The Scriptures, the church, and humanity: who should do mission and why?	149
<i>Antonia Leonora van der Meer</i>	
11. Spiritual warfare and worldview	163
<i>Paul Hiebert</i>	
12. Rethinking trinitarian missiology	179
<i>Alan Roxburgh</i>	

Part 3: Grounding our reflections in Scripture:**biblical trinitarianism and mission 189**

13. God: the source, the originator, and the end of mission 191
Ajith Fernando
14. Jesus: the message and model of mission 207
Ajith Fernando
15. The Holy Spirit: the divine implementer of mission 223
Ajith Fernando
16. The church: the mirror of the Trinity 239
Ajith Fernando

Part 4: Addressing issues of globalized**Evangelical missiology 257**

17. Profiling a globalized and Evangelical missiology 259
Tokunboh Adeyemo
18. Evangelical missiology from Africa: strengths and weaknesses 271
Yusufu Turaki
19. Missiological challenges from the South Pacific region 285
Joshua Daimoi
20. Evangelical missiology from an East Asian perspective:
a study on Christian encounter with people of other faiths 295
Kang San Tan
21. Evangelical missiology from India 307
K. Rajendran
22. Ancient springs and sweet fruit:
missiological contributions from the Middle East 333
David Greenlee
23. Further contributions to missiology from an Arab perspective 347
Raed Abdul Masib
24. Mission and missiology from Latin America 357
Norberto Saracco
25. Younger generations and the gospel in Western culture 367
Stuart McAlister
26. Telling stories: contextualization and American missiology 377
Miriam Adeney

Part 5: Responding to the challenges	389
27. The Indian church and missions face the saffronization challenge	391
<i>Joseph D'Souza</i>	
28. The Hindu missionary movements and Christian missions in India	407
<i>Richard Howell</i>	
29. The complex spiritual mosaic of East Asia	421
<i>Ian Prescott</i>	
30. A vision from the world beyond: Islam	439
<i>Bertil Engqvist</i>	
31. Dry bones in the West	447
<i>Rose Dowsett</i>	
32. Let X = X: Generation X and world mission	463
<i>Richard Tiplady</i>	
33. From synthesis to synergy: the Iguassu think tanks	477
<i>Rob Brynjolfson</i>	
Part 6: Listening to mission that rises from community and spirituality	489
34. Celtic community, spirituality, and mission	491
<i>Clifton D. S. Warner</i>	
35. Nestorian community, spirituality, and mission	495
<i>Paula Harris</i>	
36. Moravian community, spirituality, and mission	503
<i>Richard Tiplady</i>	
37. Jesuit community, spirituality, and mission	507
<i>Bertil Ekström</i>	
38. Coptic community, spirituality, and mission	511
<i>Francis Omondi</i>	
39. Brazilian Antioch community, spirituality, and mission	515
<i>Barbara Burns</i>	
Part 7: Accepting serious commitments	519
40. The Iguassu Affirmation: a commentary by eight reflective practitioners	521
<i>Oswaldo Prado, John Wood, Cathy Ross, Jeff Fountain, Rudy Girón, Jim Stamoolis, Seth Anyomi, Met Castillo</i>	
41. Drawing to a close: inviting reflective, passionate, and globalized practitioners	549
<i>William D. Taylor</i>	
Index	557

In appreciation

I AM PROFOUNDLY GRATEFUL to many colleagues who joined me in doing missiology. First, there are the brothers Bertil and Leif Ekström, Brazilian-Swedes, who made the Iguassu Consultation happen administratively. Joining them in Brazil were Mark Orr and David Ruíz. The four were a quiet, efficient, and servant-hearted team.

Thanks too to my World Evangelical Fellowship Missions Commission staff colleague, Jon Lewis, and our Chairman, David Tai-Woong Lee, who understood the entire concept of our “process.” Together we envisioned a process that would flow from consultation to publication and then to further work on global missiological concerns.

Special thanks to the Iguassu Affirmation team. Nobody knows how many hours they worked, late at night and early in the morning, listening, writing and re-writing, editing and re-editing. Thank you, David Tai-Woong Lee (Korea) and Jim Stamoolis (USA) as co-leaders, Rose Dowsett (Scotland), Abel Ndjerareou (Chad), David Neff (USA), Kang San Tan (Malaysia), and Tonica van der Meer (Brazil).

Many Iguassu participants have encouraged me and made recommendations since Brazil, including: Paul, Rose, Bob, Cliff, K, Jim, Paula, Stewart, Richard, Stanley, Jonathan, Jason, Alex, John, Barbara, Jeff, David, Jorge, Stan, Hans, Kathy, Norbert, Francis, Rosifran, Gary, Dave. You know who you are.

Susan Peterson again has taken on the task as our technical editor. Her eagle eye has shaped all our Missions Commission books. This volume has been a special challenge, and without her patience, keen sense for language, and accuracy, we would not have the editorial quality we have sought over the years.

And finally, let me publicly express my thanks to Yvonne, my wife. Her conceptual thinking helped shape the Iguassu Consultation itself in many ways. Her editorial gifts clarified a number of the chapters, including my own. Called by vocation to the contemplative life, she has served unseen, quietly, and deeply as my “silent partner.”

To all of you, a thousand steadfast thanks.

— William D. Taylor



Foreword

I WILL NEVER FORGET the first missionary conference I ever attended. The year was 1966. My brother and I had just arrived in Canada as immigrants from India and happened to walk into a church that was beginning its week of missions emphasis. As it turned out, the opening speaker was an American missionary who had been serving in India for many years. I had never been at such a conference before. In a new church, in a new country, and experiencing a new theme, I sat there awaiting the missionary's address. When he was through, I was quite shaken, wondering if all of his descriptions of the land of my birth were exactly the way *I* had seen them. Both my brother and I left that service somewhat perplexed by it all. Not only was I a relatively new Christian, but I was now going through an identity crisis. I was not sure if I was inside looking out or outside looking in. It took a few years for me to realize what had happened.

When I made my first trip back to India five years after this event, its sights and sounds caught my attention in a way that had never registered with me before. Yes, there was the nostalgia and the thrill of using the language in which so much of my cultural memory was enshrined. But there was the staggering experience of surprise, even shock. I was reminded of the old Chinese proverb: "If you want to know what water is, don't ask the fish." The point is well taken. When we are immersed in an environment, we do not see it for what it really is. It takes an outsider's glimpse to bring a visceral response to that for which proximity only brought familiarity without emotion.

But something fascinating happened as a sequel. Years later, when I was preaching in India alongside that very missionary who was hosting my meetings, he made a comment

that brought laughter to all of us. When I told him of my initial reaction when I heard him years ago, he told me of his memory of seeing us walk into the sanctuary. It gave him a great deal of unease, he said. Not knowing who we were—friend or foe—he had held back from many things that he had wanted to say.

This simple episode may well capture our fears and agonies in finding a meaningful response to a world in need of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Many of us have become so immersed in our present contexts that we are not able to be objective judges of our failures and our shortcomings. At the same time, cultural sensitivities are running so deep that we are fearful of saying the wrong thing and bringing unwarranted offense. How do we understand the need, the demands, the methods, and the commitments that will be needed to bring the message to the whole world? Change is in the air.

For that alone, I am deeply grateful to the men and women who gathered at the Iguassu Missiological Consultation to share from their hearts and their convictions for the cause of Jesus Christ. Listening to this diversity of voices and having our eyes opened to the vastness of the need are the first steps to grasping the urgency of the response. I for one will always be grateful to the Lord for the missionary call and burden that brought the gospel to my native land. Because of the passion of William Carey, the devotion of Amy Carmichael, and the sensitivity of the missionary I just mentioned, there are millions today who call the Lord Jesus their Savior. They were missionaries who loved the people and lived the message.

One of the key sentiments voiced at this historic consultation was that of *kairos*—the timing of God's working. I believe this is real, not just imagined. May I add another slant to this? An English writer years ago penned an essay that he titled, "The

Candle and the Bird," in which he contrasted the light of a candle with the song of a bird. If you extinguish a candle, he said, the light goes out. On the other hand, if you chase a bird away, "it just goes and sings its song on another bough." The gospel as carried by the Holy Spirit, he mused, is not just a candle. It is also akin to a bird's song. At times, it has seemed as though the bird were silent in a land because it has been frightened away. But, he said, if you follow the bird, you will find that it is just singing in a different land.

What a wonderful metaphor that is for the proclamation and timing of God's work around the world! It was not accidental, for example, that in the late 18th century, at the very moment that the French mob was tearing the cross off Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, France, William Carey was setting foot on Indian soil. No, the bird had not been silenced. It had just moved its music elsewhere. If we track the history of missions, we will see that just as one nation seemed harder to reach, another one was opening its arms. The writer summarizes that theme by saying, "There is a divine element in the church—an element that no persecuting fires can devour and that no convulsion can destroy." That is a glorious reminder that the light never goes out and the song of the soul set free is ever being sung in some land somewhere. We must be in tune with the *kairos* of God for such music.

I commend this book to you who long to know what you can do to hear these strains. I commend it to you who may be getting weary in well doing. I commend it to the Christian who needs to get a glimpse of the convulsion in some parts and the exultation in others. Oh, that we might hear his voice and say, "What will you have me to do, Lord?" When the famed missionary Robert Jaffray was offered an enormous sum of money by an oil com-

pany to work for them rather than as a missionary, he answered, "Your salary is big, but your job is too small." How marvelous is the example of those who knew what the real cost was and what the real inheritance is. Are we surprised at the result of such commitment?

Let us who are immersed in familiar air breathe in these thoughts. I have no doubt that we will be stirred within by a counter-perspective impelling us to capture the moment with eternity in sight.

When our task is done, with the hymn-writer we can beckon:

Let every creature rise and bring
Peculiar honors to our king
Angels descend with songs again
And earth repeat the long Amen.

— *Dr. Ravi K. Zacharias*
President
Ravi Zacharias
International Ministries



Part I

Setting the stage

WE BEGIN WITH AN INVITATION to the global Evangelical “reflective practitioners.” These are women and men of both action and study; rooted in the Word of God and the church of Christ; passionately obedient to the fullness of the Great Commandment and Great Commission; globalized in their perspective, yet faithful citizens of their own cultures.

This book emerges from the Iguassu Missiological Consultation, held in Brazil in October 1999. The World Evangelical Fellowship Missions Commission leaders convened this strategic event because we perceived the need to pause at this historical hinge of both century and millennium to examine our missiological foundations, commitments, and practices. That event and this book initiated an ongoing process that purposes to release further serious and practical global missiology at the service of the borderless church.

The structure of this publication in part parallels that of the Iguassu Consultation. Of the 41 chapters, only 13 were commissioned after Iguassu, primarily to fill in some gaps and address other major global challenges that Christians face. Only two of the 41 writers were unable to attend the consultation itself—Howell and Engqvist. Escobar had to cancel at the last moment due to his wife’s health, but his papers played a central role in the Consultation.

The Iguassu Affirmation “began” months before the consultation, when the WEF Missions Commission leadership



asked David Tai-Woong Lee (Missions Commission Chair) and Jim Stamoolis (WEF Theological Commission Executive Director) to coordinate the composition of a document that would reflect the Consultation itself and point to new directions of our globalized Evangelical missiology.

Lee, who had read many of the papers prior to Iguassu, began structuring the missiological concerns in a draft form. By the time it was given to the Team of Seven, the document had gone through six initial revisions. The Team of Seven members were drawn Europe, Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, North America, South America, and Africa. Together they crafted a broad-based document, carefully studied two cycles of written and oral suggestions from the participants, and presented the final copy for participants to affirm. The Iguassu Affirmation comes as a working document, forged in the warmth, collegiality, and discussion of a very intense week of doing missiology in Brazil.

The Iguassu program was designed to be rooted in worship and prayer, followed by the models of mission that flow from spirituality and community, then Fernando's expositions; from there we transitioned into the missiological themes during morning and afternoon sessions. These in turn led to group interactions and discussion, further prayer and worship, with the evenings primarily open for networking and relationships.

One mid-week highlight came with Steuernagel's poignant introduction to the movie *The Mission*, followed by viewing the film. Many scenes from that movie had been filmed at the Iguassu Falls, and hence when we visited them the next morning, they had been transformed from a natural wonder of the world into missiological waterfalls of historic significance for the church in mission.



OUR NEW CENTURY and millennium present a *kairos* moment of unparalleled magnitude and opportunity for the borderless church of Christ. However, the global *chronos* moment will not make it easy for the Christian movement. Externally and internally, we grapple with a spectrum of significant and unrelenting challenges: globalization with its mixed blessings and curses; the global AIDS tragedy; the information technology revolution; unrelenting urbanization and the economic crises it presents; the massive refugee highway movement; and a new pluralism that challenges our Christian concept of truth, our hermeneutic of Scripture, our Christology, and our understanding of what it means to be human. Multifaceted persecution unleashes its violence against Christians in many areas of the world; yet, ironically, we discover that we have a deficient theology of suffering and martyrdom. The worldwide worldview transformation—pre-modernity to modernity to post-modernity—does not allow us to rest on our past accomplishments.

The church struggles to define truth and the authority of Scripture. It also grapples with the nature of the transforming gospel of Jesus, with what it means to be “Christian” and “Evangelical,” with what it means to “be” and “do” church, with the international anemia that characterizes the church, and with what it means to be obedient to the kingdom of God regarding our mission in the world and within our diverse mission movements. We still have not understood how modernity has misshaped our church and missions “enterprise.”

In light of these challenges, many insightful and courageous observers of the international arena felt it vital that we as Evangelicals pause and gather together a group of women and men who, as reflective practitioners, could consider how

From Iguassu to the reflective practitioners of the global family of Christ

WILLIAM D.
TAYLOR

these complex trends and realities affect us as we project mission and missions into the century before us.

In light of this *kairos* hinge-moment of history, therefore, the World Evangelical Fellowship Missions Commission convened an international missiological consultation held in the historic city of Iguassu, Brazil, October 10-16, 1999. There 160 church, theological education, and mission leaders met for an intense week of worship, prayer, relationship-building, and missiological reflection. We had six stated purposes:

1. A call to international reflection in order to identify and carefully evaluate the radical global and cultural changes which have shaped our contemporary world history as well as the church and its mission.

2. An occasion that allows us to begin the process of identifying and seeking definitions of the key concepts and terminology of globalized Evangelical missiology, faithfully representing the diverse and biblical perspectives from West and non-West, North and South. From one or two dominant centers of Christianity, the Spirit has now created a rich panoply of centers of globalized Christianity.

3. An initial creation of a mosaic/profile of this international Evangelical missiology, and then the effective communication of its content and import to the borderless church and mission community.

4. An opportunity to help shape global missiological foundations which are both biblical and culturally appropriate and which will undergird us for the long-term future.

5. An occasion that encourages us to broker and invest in a process of globalized missiology that returns us to our grassroots, to our cultures, to our home churches, and to our ministries and networks.

6. A “moment of time” that allows us to evaluate/critique the prime missiological emphases and currents that influenced the missionary movement in the last 50 years of the 20th century.

The Danger of Over-Simplification of a Complex Assignment

Following up on the last item above, we realized that during the last decades of the 20th century, an unfortunate over-emphasis on pragmatic and reductionist thinking came to pervade the international Evangelical missionary movement. Whether we wish to recognize it or not, we must acknowledge that this emphasis has seeped into the church around the world. The results have not been healthy or encouraging (see Engel & Dyrness, 2000).

What are some of the over-simplifications that have been made? They include the following:

- The crippling omissions in the Great Commission—reducing it to proclamation alone—which lead to only a partial understanding of the mission of the church, resulting in spiritual anemia and a thin veneer of Christianity, regardless of culture or nation.

- The absence of a robust gospel of the kingdom which calls us to radical commitment and discipleship to Christ.

- An inadequate theology of suffering and martyrdom.

- The use of emotive slogans to drive the missions task, leading to a false understanding of both task and success in our mission.

- The application of simplistic thinking and methodologies to the Great Commission, which are guided too much by marketing strategies and secular concepts of what it means to be effective and efficient.

- The reduction of world evangelization to a manageable enterprise with an over-emphasis on research, statistics, quantifiable objectives, and desired outcomes.
- A focus on a limited geography of the world and an excessive emphasis on the year 2000, generating unrealistic expectations and leading to profound disappointment.
- An over-emphasis on short-term missions that minimizes longer-term service, and an inadequate biblical theology of vocation.
- The illusion by some that mass media is the final answer to world evangelization or the suggestion that “the church finally has the technology to finish the Great Commission,” whether the Internet, mass communications, publication, or other media. The danger is obvious, for it disregards the sacrificial, incarnational calling of God into our world of profound personal, familial, socio-economic, cultural, and environmental crises.

Inviting the Reflective Practitioners of the Evangelical World

The search for “reflective practitioners” guided us in formulating the roster of participants who were invited to the consultation. These women and men of both action and reflection are committed to God’s truth; obedient in the power of God’s Spirit to the Great Commission in all its fullness; servants who are globalized in perspective; citizens of their own culture but also of the world; leaders who are passionate of heart and who also reflect the heart of Christ. Of the 160 participants at Iguassu, half came from Latin America, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and the Islands; the other half came from North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. This balance of West and the “Great Rest of the World” contributed

to the spice and diversity of Iguassu. All of us were challenged, even forced, to listen to and engage with perspectives that graciously and at times sharply questioned some missiological presuppositions. There were lively discussions and even disagreements between colleagues of West and non-West, East and East, South and South. It was a free-flowing and dynamic week.

The venue of the consultation was selected by our Brazilian colleagues, the city of Iguassu, Brazil, a few short kilometers from the majestic falls of the same name. Those who have seen the movie, *The Mission*, will remember well the scenes filmed on site at the falls. Halfway through our consultation, Valdir Steuernagel presented an eloquent talk on the historic and contemporary significance of that film; then we viewed the movie on a large screen. It was a powerful evening. The next morning, we took a break from heavy discussions and traveled the short distance to the falls themselves. We saw them not only as one of the seven natural wonders of the world, but also in missiological context. Steve Sang-Cheol Moon, one of our Korean colleagues, came up to me in the spray of the falls to say with a touch of Asian humor, “Bill, Niagara Falls is a modernity worldview cataract—one huge flow in the same general direction. But Iguassu Falls is a post-modernity cataract—three kilometers of 265 different falls, flowing in so many directions!”

This publication has been written by and for the global community of reflective practitioners—men and women engaged in the trans-cultural mission of God, whether students or veterans, female or male, younger or older, activists or missiologists, regardless of geography or culture. Samuel Escobar’s definition of missiology (see page 101) has been very helpful in the shaping of this book. For him, missiology is “... an interdisciplinary

approach to understand missionary action. It looks at missionary facts from the perspective of the biblical sciences, theology, history, and the social sciences.” The consultation as well as this book flow in the strength of this definition, and we intentionally emphasize a globalization dimension.

The borderless body of Christ in recent years has experienced a massive epicenter shift—from the centers of the North to the many centers of the South. No single center from now on will dominate the agenda of our dialogue and reflection. Nobody knows for certain, but estimates suggest that 75% of the family of Jesus is found in the non-Western nations (Asia, Africa, Latin America, South Pacific, Caribbean, Middle East). This transformation does not spell the end of the West as a center of God’s church and its leadership. It simply means that the Spirit of God has created many centers where he is at work, and it provides rich soil from which new kinds of strategic thinking and long-term commitment to service will germinate, flower, and transform the global church.

We are all familiar with the historic three “selves” of the church: self-supporting, self-propagating, self-governing. But today’s reality is more complex, richer, and more challenging, for there are really five “selves.” These include the known three, plus self-theologizing and self-missilogizing. These latter two by definition will challenge the established verities of older theology and missiology, including theological and missiological approaches and categories and the historic ways of conceptualizing and doing theology and missiology. Guided by the Spirit, faithful to Scripture, within the community of faith, and graciously reflecting the marvelous diversity of culture and church permutations, the future is bright and encouraging. However, the outcomes may be

radically different from those that are currently known.

Learning From Valuable Missiological History

Further background for the Iguassu Consultation came as we read our missiological church history. As far as we in the WEF Missions Commission knew, this consultation, coming upon the eve of the year 2000, was the primary Evangelical global event of such a theological-missiological nature. This realization was disturbing, for it seemed that the major Evangelical international structures, networks, and theological institutions were focusing on their own particular tasks and were perhaps more concerned about their own projects, programs, curricula, and organizational future. There was relatively little interest in substantial theological and missiological reflection or in a sober self-evaluation that would lead to a revised way of going about our task in the world—a revitalized praxis.

Looking back to the historic World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh (1910) at the beginning of the 20th century, we realized there were lessons we needed to heed. That international event, the fourth of its kind in the West, had been very carefully conceived and prepared “... in its character as an assembly for careful and scientific thought and not merely for the edification of the faithful and the expression of Christian enthusiasm; and in the steps which it took to secure the permanence of Christian cooperation in the future ...” (Neill, 1986, p. 393).

Edinburgh’s driving slogan, coined and given currency by John Raleigh Mott (1865-1955), was, “The Evangelization of the World in This Generation.” Actually, as Neill (1986, p. 394) reports, “The slogan was based on an unexceptional theological principle—that each generation of

Christians bears responsibility for the contemporary generation of non-Christians in the world, and that it is the business of each such generation of Christians to see to it, as far as lies within its power, that the gospel is clearly preached to every single non-Christian in the same generation.”

Edinburgh’s leaders understood the continual growth of missionary outreach in the world and the hope that it would increase. Neill lists 12 great achievements in the preceding century, and the conference convened serious men and women for a landmark event. However, most significantly, he notes:

“There had been little discussion of theology at the Edinburgh Conference of 1910. There had seemed to be little need for it, when all were at one on all the fundamentals. All were agreed that Jesus Christ the Son of God was the final and decisive Word of God to men; that in him alone is the certainty of salvation given to men; that this gospel must be preached to every living human soul, to whom God has given the freedom to accept or to reject and who must stand by that acceptance or rejection on the last day. The delegates differed somewhat in their attitude towards the non-Christian religions, but all were agreed that, as the Lordship of Christ came to be recognized, these others religions would disappear in their present form—the time would come when Shiva and Vishu would have no more worshippers than Zeus and Apollo have today.

“But in these years of rapid missionary expansion, a very different gospel had been growing up and taking hold of the minds of a great many Christians, especially in America. The liberal was not by any means so sure that Jesus Christ was the last Word of God to man. He was repelled by the exclusive claim to salvation

through Christ alone. He tended to take a much more favourable view of the other religions than his more conservative colleagues, and to look forward to some kind of synthesis of religions rather than to the disappearance of any of them. The real enemy is secularism. Adherents of all the great religions should stand together in defence of the spiritual reality of man’s life. There should be no hostility between them, the spirit of proselytism being replaced by the willingness to learn from one another” (Neill, 1986, pp. 454-455).

As we approached the Iguassu Consultation, at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, we members of the international body of Christ recognized that it behooved us to listen to and learn from our history. We did not want to repeat the errors that have come from not revisiting the theological and biblical underpinnings of our mission. For that reason, we felt it imperative to engage in serious and substantive reflection and analysis. For our own good as reflective people of God in global mission, we must strive to be thoughtful and grounded practitioners and visionaries.

Revisiting a Relevant and Poignant Gospel Narrative

Having studied the various papers prior to the consultation and pondering the issues and trends with which we would be grappling, I felt the Spirit of God calling me to Matthew 11:1-12 as a reference point for our days together in Iguassu. During the last decade, I have pondered this story, mining it time and time again for its richness and finding its application so relevant for our lives and ministry. Following are some of the reflections that flow from this narrative, with its power to shape our lives and ministry.

Matthew 11:1-12

[1] After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.

[2] When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples [3] to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"

[4] Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: [5] The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. [6] Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."

[7] As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? [8] If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. [9] Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. [10] This is the one about whom it is written: 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'

"[11] I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. [12] From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it."

Mission is carried out in the context of change, crisis, and the unexpected turns of life.

In the time of Jesus

We observe our Lord in the previous two chapters encountering the swelling

wave of opposition that would soon explode against him. We contemplate his heart for the sick and the dead, the aged and the children, the oppressed and the demonized, the helpless and the shepherdless. We see his commitment to prayer. We note his selection and commissioning of the Twelve to a first-time, strategic, short-term mission project. Now, in chapter 11, Matthew introduces John the Baptizer into the story. Jesus uses that occasion for penetrating and enigmatic statements about the times of opportunity and violence, about true meaning in life and ministry.

Little could the disciples have imagined what Jesus was referring to as he spoke of personal and ministry significance and of the future. But they would discover and experience those realities very soon. And then the task would be theirs, empowered by the Spirit, to impact their own historical moment.

In our times, today

We stand at the start of this uncertain new century, this new millennium. New language and categories have entered our lives. We speak of globalization, and we witness the worldview transitions from pre-modernity to modernity to post-modernity with their respective blessings and curses. Regardless of our culture, our gender, our geography, and our ministry, the times have radically changed, requiring a serious re-evaluation of why we do the things we do in ministry—whether personal or organizational.

Mission is worked out in the context of questions and doubt.

In the time of Jesus

The Baptizer's existential crisis has become painfully real. He had no idea that his prophetic ministry would land him in jail or of the kind of death that would

come to him with such violence. Grappling from prison with profound doubts (“Did I misunderstand history, God, and you, Jesus?”), he sends a delegation of his last disciples to ask Jesus that very hard question. However, our Lord sends him an oblique answer, inviting the disciples only to report to John what they had heard and seen of the signs of the kingdom. It’s only *after* they leave that Jesus gives his verdict—an unprecedented accolade—of John as a person with a mission. Why did Jesus not encourage John more by sending word of his now public evaluation and affirmation of John? Notably, Jesus did not condemn John for his doubts.

In our times, today

We must feel free to ask each other, and God, the dangerous and presuppositional questions: Where is the power of the gospel and the church today? Has something gone wrong with the harvest? What kind of gospel have we transported around the world? Why Rwanda, Ireland, Bosnia? Why such a post-Christian and anti-Christian Europe and North America? What does it mean to see the presence of the kingdom of heaven today in our world? Has there been an excessive export/import business of theology, missiology, and church and educational structures, primarily from the West to the rest of the world?

On a more personal level, why are we followers of Jesus the Christ? How have we uncritically allowed our own cultures to shape and misshape our worldview, our relationship with the supernatural God, our theological structures, and our missiological reflection and action? What would it mean to become practicing supernaturalists today?

Mission must be carried out in the context of downward mobility, not upward success.

In the time of Jesus

The great Forerunner would soon face a stunning and ignominious death. What’s more, he never heard what Jesus had said about him on that occasion, for Jesus talked about him after John’s disciples left. John apparently died without explanation and without comfort from God. But then, Jesus himself would die a brutal and seemingly pointless death. In time, all of the apostles except John would be subsequently martyred. Worldly success, triumphalism, and popular acclaim were definitely not written into the contract of their spiritual journey.

In our times, today

The majority of Christians—whether in the West or the non-West—do not have an adequate theology of suffering, much less of persecution and martyrdom. But we must develop one soon! The Iguassu Consultation purposefully did not convene the powerful, the network controllers, the wealthy, or the high-profile people. Those present were primarily lower-profile servant-leaders. And if we don’t place ourselves in the category of the powerless and the nameless, we need to revisit what we think it means to walk with Jesus on the path of downward mobility.

Perhaps the late Henri Nouwen (1989, p. 62) says it best, with direct application to our Evangelical world and its fascination with leadership and power: “The way of the Christian leader is not the way of upward mobility in which our world has invested so much, but the way of downward mobility ending on the cross. This might sound morbid and masochistic, but for those who have heard the voice of the first love and said ‘yes’ to it, the downward-moving way of Jesus is the way to

the joy and the peace of God, a joy and peace that is not of this world.”

Mission is worked out in the bipolar context of gospel advance and persecution.

In the time of Jesus

Matthew’s narrative notes how the kingdom of heaven had advanced forcefully through the life and ministry first of John (Matt. 3:5-8) and then of Jesus (Matt. 4:23-25). Yet we note the enigma of verse 12, an ambiguity that is reflected in different translations. The first part is clear: the kingdom of heaven would advance forcefully, as in the ministry of John and Jesus. But the second part is simply unclear. The Greek text allows us to translate it two ways. One idea is that some would forcefully want to get into the kingdom. The second possibility is a very different idea, that others would forcefully attack the kingdom itself. The account in Luke 16:16 emphasizes the first option. In the time of Jesus, some people were pushing their way in, even tearing up the roof-tops of homes to get to Jesus. But at the same time, the opposition to Jesus would grow into the plot to eliminate him. Ultimately, the converged adversarial forces would kill both John and later Jesus. Was our Lord playing with words, preparing the disciples (and us) for both options?

In our times, today

World population stands today at about the 6 billion mark. We saw the addition of 2 billion in the 20th century alone. This is the global arena of the church of Christ. The task is almost overwhelming!

We are encouraged as we witness and read of the advance of the gospel. We rejoice in each report—assuming the information is verifiable—that marks the advance of the kingdom message. We live in the remarkable day of the globalization of both the church and the missions move-

ment—from every nation and every continent to every nation and every continent. This is good news and challenging news. We also live in a day of instant communication through the Internet. Not every report is truly true. So we must ask hard questions: What does it mean to be the church? What kind of gospel have we exported and communicated around the world?

We rightfully must be wary of the “Christian numbers game,” such as this statement which I recently read in a fundraising letter: “More than 100,000 people a day are choosing to follow Christ in Asia, Africa, Latin America, East Europe, and the former Soviet Union.” Where does this number come from? How do we acquire and believe rounded-off figures? Is the truth being told, or are we being sold a successful package of guaranteed religious projects and programs? More significantly, have we assumed that God promises that a majority of the world’s population will be found in the church?

Even as we celebrate the growth of the Christian faith, we also witness the revival and expansion of a well-funded and intensely expansionist Islam, the new missionary vision of Buddhism and Hinduism, as well as the plethora of smaller evangelistic religious groups. The New Age networks have spread throughout the world, offering an especially appealing religious soup that allows one to be both spiritual and materialistic at the same time. These religious alternatives have joined the forces of anti-Christian secularism, modernity, and post-modernity to challenge Christians today as never before. It is the best of times and the worst of times for the church. And this is the arena into which the Spirit invites Evangelical reflective practitioners to serve, suffer, and die.

While some of the opposition is subtle and non-violent, we have documented the growing wave of persecution against

Christians. Significantly, the theme of suffering and martyrdom emerged many times during the Iguassu Consultation. Ajith Fernando's expositions, plus reports from specific geographies—the Middle East, India, and other areas—were a sobering reminder of the suffering church.

Ironically—and sadly—we know that some of the persecution of Christians is precipitated by Christians using language and missions metaphors that rely heavily on military terminology: target, conquer, army, crusade, mobilize, beachhead, advance, enemy, battle, spiritual warfare, capture the city for Christ. Thankfully, the movement to eliminate inappropriate language is growing, but much damage has been done (see *Mission Leaders*, 2000).

How Might One Read This Book With Profit?

This book emerges primarily from the Iguassu Consultation, where the majority of the chapters were presented there in some form. Of the 41 writers, all but three were with us in Iguassu. Another 13 chapters were commissioned afterward to fill in missing themes. Three of the major papers, the two by Samuel Escobar and the one by Chris Wright, had been circulated by e-mail for the participants to read prior to our gathering.

How might a person work through this compendium? Some courageous ones might want to read from start to finish. Congratulations if you do so!

Here are some other possible approaches:

First, review the table of contents to get a sense of the overall flow of categories and topics. Note the structure of the book and its major categories:

- Establishing the global arena
- Setting the macro context and raising major issues

- Grounding trinitarian missiological reflections in Scripture
- Addressing issues of globalized Evangelical missiology
- Responding to major challenges
- Listening to mission that rises from community and spirituality
- Engaging the commitments flowing from the Iguassu Affirmation
- Concluding with final challenges

Second, read and evaluate the Iguassu Affirmation (chapter 2), for much of the book will echo these themes. This missiological statement summarizes the issues of the Iguassu Consultation. But keep in mind that not all of your concerns will emerge in this short document.

Third, remember that this book reflects a globalized missiology. Represented here are many voices speaking from within orthodox Christianity and the authority of Scripture, rooted in history and committed to serious contextualization of the gospel and church.

Fourth, trace some of the key themes of personal interest through the index. For example, note the references to trinitarian missiology.

Fifth, don't get sidetracked with things with which you disagree. Examine everything and attempt to read through the eyes of the writer. If what is said about managerial missiology irritates you, don't worry; you are not alone. At the same time, listen to the challenge, for it comes from your colleagues and friends. If you are concerned about what "should" have been said, fine. At the same time, listen to the godly and creative voices that may offer a healing critique to mission that flows from the worldview of modernity and is too dependent upon marketing techniques. Ask the Holy Spirit to allow you to listen and learn, even when you disagree.

Sixth, keep in mind the diversity of the writers: ethnicity, gender, age, perspective,

formal education, experiences in life and ministry, and style of writing. Almost half of the writers would not consider English their first language, and for many of them this was their first venture into print.

Finally, read away! Stretch your mind, your heart, and your theological and missiological categories. Read together and perhaps out loud with a group of reflective practitioners, whether younger or older, students or those experienced in ministry. In a spirit of receptivity, ask the Triune God what he has to teach you through this publication.

Metaphors That Draw to a Close This Invitation to Read

The Iguassu Missiological Consultation and this book remind me of my first trip to Singapore and a late-night visit to that city-nation's Newton Circus hawkers center—the open-air culinary feast at the intersection of Scott's, Bukit Timah, and Newton Roads. Surrounded by a dizzying array of food booths, we were invited to savor the unusual diversity of foods, textures, tastes (and after-tastes)—Chinese, Malay, Indian, and all of Southeast Asia. In a similar way, Iguassu and this book offer a feast of the globalized body of Christ. This book also allows participants and readers to share in the multifaceted exchange and contribution to the mission of the church that took place as we sat together around the table as equal partners in mission.

Likewise, Iguassu and this book offer us the gift of a tapestry, multi-colored and multi-textured, but all part of the same weaving. From below, the pattern may be confusing; but from above, one discerns the rich integration and harmony of the tapestry. What's more, there are key colors, fabrics, and designs. This book is complex and challenging. However, the key

elements reveal that all of the writers had a commitment to think Christianly about their world and the diverse challenges before us. The publication uniquely contributes to the robust Evangelical missiology we need for the future.

Finally, this book is like a prism refracting light. The resultant colors depend on the angle, but all come from a single beam of light focused on the prism. In a similar way, light emanating from God's full revelation is refracted through the prism of the magnificent diversity of culture, language, gender, and ministry of the writers of this book. All of the authors share a deep commitment to the authority of Scripture, and all are deeply involved in ministry, most of them in cross-cultural service. The result is a singular sample of Evangelical and global missiological reflection.

I close with the powerful prayer that has come to us from the heart of Jim Engel (Engel & Dyrness, 2000, pp. 24-25).

A Prayer for Renewal and Restoration

Heavenly Father,
our Lord and giver of life,
forgive us for the extent to which
we have naively succumbed
to the spirit of the age,
for our preoccupation with
false measures of success,
for a sense of triumphalism
which replaces
humble dependence on you,
and for our blindness in avoiding
those parts of your Word
which do not fit neatly
into our theology.
We humbly confess our total
dependence on you
as the Lord of life.
Let us see a lost world afresh
through your eyes
and give us discernment

through your Spirit.
 Share with us your priorities
 and give us the courage to be
 responsible stewards
 of our obligation
 to take the whole gospel
 to the whole world.
 Speak, Lord, for your servants
 are listening.
 To you we give all glory,
 honor, and praise.
 Amen.

So to our colleagues, sisters and brothers in the global task, may the blessing and empowering presence of the Sacred Three be upon you all.

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2

The Iguassu Affirmation

FROM IGUASSU, BRAZIL, to the missions movement around the world, October 17, 1999:

The WEF Missions Commission has just concluded the historic Iguassu Missiological Consultation in the city of Foz do Iguassu, Brazil, October 10-15. With gratitude to God, the Missions Commission leadership commends a crucial outcome of this singular week to the mission movement around the world, in particular the missions networks.

We are profoundly thankful to our Lord for those who in recent decades have sustained the passion for world evangelization. There are many women and men, organizations and movements which have done all in their power to focus our attention on the unfinished task, to understand the vast unreached world of peoples and cities, and to underscore the vital necessity of obedience to Christ's final charge to the apostles. For this we are grateful, and we are indebted to them. We are also grateful to God for the growing body of women and men who are seriously reflecting on just what it means to do biblical missiology in this complex world. Just as the epicenter of the global church has shifted from the North to the South, in the same way the epicenter of creating and doing theology and missiology is changing. We rejoice in the former shift and realize that the second one invites us to greater missiological partnership. The Triune God has many "centers" from which to work now.

As we face the unique turn of a century/millennium, the 160 participants at the Iguassu Missiological Consultation have also sensed the need for a serious analysis of the challenges we face in a radically changing world—in the sociological, cultural, philosophical, economic, and spiritual arenas. We came together to contribute to the development

and application of a biblical missiology which represents with authenticity the national and cultural diversity of God's people in mission. And then we came together to affirm the foundational commitments we make as mission practitioners, missiologists, and church leaders. We also worshiped and prayed together all through the week.

With this backdrop, we present to you the Iguassu Affirmation, a statement of context, declaration, and commitment as we look to the Spirit's empowering presence in our mission task, regardless of geography, culture, or ministry.

The Iguassu Affirmation emerged from the process of the week in Brazil. A "Team of Seven" was given an initial draft (based on the plenary papers already in distribution) for discussion, and then they went to work. The 160 participants were able to study three drafts of the document, giving scores of serious recommendations to the team. Friday the 15th found us meeting for a three-hour session to finalize changes and emerge with a strong consensus of the direction of the Lord on the Affirmation.

The Iguassu Affirmation is to be received as a working document to stimulate serious discussion around the world. We desire that it will become a point of dialogue that will help shape both missiology and strategy into the next century/millennium. The first phase of our work took place in Brazil, the second phase followed the consultation, and now the third phase begins—the release of this major book. We pray that this process—international and contextualized—will facilitate the flow of the Iguassu Affirmation down into our regional/national networks and organizations, and into the grassroots life of the churches.

This local, regional/national, and organizational contextualization invites discus-

sion, modification, and adaptation of the document for the diverse realities we live in mission. The invitation is to the global missions community, and that can also include mission societies, as well as theological and missiological training institutions. We will focus on Evangelicals whose roots are linked to the churches and whose members share our deep passion for serious world evangelism.

We invite each participating network and organization to communicate to us your discussion of this document. We release the Affirmation to you for translation into any language, and we ask that you send us a copy for our own records, verification, and information.

Respectfully submitted,
The Team of Seven and the
WEF Missions Commission
Executive Commission

The Affirmation team:

David Tai-Woong Lee (Korea), co-leader
Jim Stamoolis (USA), co-leader
Rose Dowsett (Scotland)
Abel Ndjerareou (Chad)
David Neff (USA)
Kang San Tan (Malaysia)
Tonica van der Meer (Brazil)

The Iguassu Affirmation

Preamble

We have convened as 160 mission practitioners, missiologists, and church leaders from 53 countries, under the World Evangelical Fellowship Missions Commission in Foz do Iguassu, Brazil, on October 10-15, 1999 to:

1. Reflect together on the challenges and opportunities facing world missions at the dawn of the new millennium.

2. Review the different streams of 20th century Evangelical missiology and practice, especially since the 1974 Lausanne Congress.

3. Continue developing and applying a relevant biblical missiology which reflects the cultural diversity of God's people.

We proclaim the living Christ in a world torn by ethnic conflicts, massive economic disparity, natural disasters, and ecological crises. The mission task is both assisted and hindered by technological developments that now reach the remotest corners of the earth. The diverse religious aspirations of people, expressed in multiple religions and spiritual experimentation, challenge the ultimate truth of the gospel.

In the 20th century, missiology witnessed unprecedented development. In recent years, reflection from many parts of the church has helped missions to continue shedding paternalistic tendencies. Today, we continue to explore the relationship between the gospel and culture, between evangelism and social responsibility, and between biblical mandates and the social sciences. We see some international organizations—among them World Evangelical Fellowship, the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, and the AD 2000 and Beyond Movement—that have begun a promising process of partnership and unity.

Increased efforts at partnership have been catalyzed by an emphasis on methodologies involving measurable goals and numerical growth. Flowing from a commitment to urgent evangelization, these methodologies have shown how our task might be accomplished. However, these insights must be subject to biblical principles and growth in Christlikeness.

We rejoice in diverse missiological voices emerging around the world, but we confess that we have not taken them all into our theory and practice. Old paradigms still prevail. Participation by and awareness of the global church, as well as

mission from people of all nations to people of all nations, are needed for a valid missiology in our time.

Our discussions have invited us to fuller dependence on the Spirit's empowering presence in our life and ministry as we eagerly await the glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the light of these realities, we make the following declarations:

Declarations

Our faith rests on the absolute authority of the God-breathed Scriptures. We are heirs of the great Christian confessions handed down to us. All three Persons of the Godhead are active in God's redeeming mission. Our missiology centers on the overarching biblical theme of God's creation of the world, the Father's redeeming love for fallen humanity as revealed in the incarnation, substitutionary death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and ultimately of the redemption and renewal of the whole creation. The Holy Spirit, promised by our Lord, is our comforter, teacher, and source of power. It is the Spirit who calls us into holiness and integrity. The Spirit leads the church into all truth. The Spirit is the agent of mission, convicting of sin, righteousness, and judgment. We are Christ's servants, empowered and led by the Spirit, whose goal is to glorify God.

We confess the following themes as truths of special importance in this present age. These themes are clearly attested to in the whole of the Scriptures and speak to the desire of God to provide salvation for all people.

1. Jesus Christ is Lord of the church and Lord of the universe.

Ultimately every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord. The Lordship of Christ is to be proclaimed to the whole world, inviting all to be free

from bondage to sin and the dominion of evil in order to serve the Lord for his glory.

2. *The Lord Jesus Christ is the unique revelation of God and the only Savior of the world.*

Salvation is found in Christ alone. God witnesses to himself in creation and in human conscience, but these witnesses are not complete without the revelation of God in Christ. In the face of competing truth claims, we proclaim with humility that Christ is the only Savior, conscious that sin as well as cultural hindrances often mask him from those for whom he died.

3. *The good news of the salvation made possible by the work of Jesus Christ must be expressed in all the languages and cultures of the world.*

We are commanded to be heralds of the gospel to every creature so that they can have the opportunity to confess faith in Christ. The message must come to them in a language they can understand and in a form that is appropriate to their circumstances. Believers, led by the Holy Spirit, are encouraged to create culturally appropriate forms of worship and uncover biblical insights that glorify God for the benefit of the whole church.

4. *The gospel is good news and addresses all human needs.*

We emphasize the holistic nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament demonstrate God's concern with the whole person in the whole of society. We acknowledge that material blessings come from God, but prosperity should not be equated with godliness.

5. *Opposition to the spread of the gospel is foremost a spiritual conflict involving human sin and principalities and powers opposed to the Living God.*

This conflict is manifested in different ways, e.g., fear of spirits or indifference to God. We recognize that the defense of the truth of the gospel is also spiritual warfare. As witnesses of the gospel, we announce that Jesus Christ has power over all powers and is able to free all who turn to him in faith. We affirm that in the cross, God has won the victory.

6. *Suffering, persecution, and martyrdom are present realities for many Christians.*

We acknowledge that our obedience in mission involves suffering and recognize that the church is experiencing this. We affirm our privilege and responsibility to pray for those undergoing persecution. We are called to share in their pain, do what we can to relieve their sufferings, and work for human rights and religious freedom.

7. *Economic and political systems deeply affect the spread of God's kingdom.*

Human government is appointed by God, but all human institutions act out of fallenness. The Scriptures command that Christians pray for those in authority and work for truth and justice. Appropriate Christian response to political and economic systems requires the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

8. *God works in a variety of Christian traditions and organizations, for his glory and the salvation of the world.*

For too long believers, divided over issues of church organization, order, and doctrine—such as the gifts and ministry of the Holy Spirit—have failed to recog-

nize each other's work. We affirm, bless, and pray for authentic Christian witness wherever it is found.

9. *To be effective witnesses of the Holy God, we need to demonstrate personal and corporate holiness, love, and righteousness.*

We repent of hypocrisy and conformity to the world, and we call the church to a renewed commitment to holy living. Holiness requires turning from sin, training in righteousness, and growing in Christ-likeness.

Commitments

We commit ourselves to continue and deepen our reflection on the following themes, helping one another to enrich our understanding and practice with insight from every corner of the world. Our hearts' desire is the discipling of the nations through the effective, faithful communication of Christ to every culture and people.

1. *Trinitarian foundation of mission*

We commit ourselves to a renewed emphasis on God-centered missiology. This invites a new study of the operation of the Trinity in the redemption of the human race and the whole of creation, as well as to understand the particular roles of Father, Son, and Spirit in mission to this fallen world.

2. *Biblical and theological reflection*

We confess that our biblical and theological reflection has sometimes been shallow and inadequate. We also confess that we have frequently been selective in our use of texts rather than being faithful to the whole biblical revelation. We commit ourselves to engage in renewed biblical and theological studies shaped by mission, and to pursue a missiology and practice

shaped by God's Word, brought to life and light by the Holy Spirit.

3. *Church and mission*

The church in mission is central to God's plan for the world. We commit ourselves to strengthen our ecclesiology in mission, and to encourage the global church to become a truly missionary community in which all Christians are involved in mission. In the face of increasing resistance and opposition from political powers, religious fundamentalism, and secularism, we commit ourselves to encourage and challenge the churches to respond with a deeper level of unity and participation in mission.

4. *Gospel and culture*

The gospel is always presented and received within a cultural context. It is therefore essential to clarify the relationship between gospel and culture, both in theory and practice, recognizing that there is both good and evil in all cultures. We commit ourselves to continue to demonstrate the relevance of the Christian message to all cultures, and ensure that missionaries learn to wrestle biblically with the relationship between gospel and culture. We commit ourselves to serious study of how different cultural perspectives may enrich our understanding of the gospel, as well as how all worldviews have to be critiqued and transformed by it.

5. *Pluralism*

Religious pluralism challenges us to hold firmly to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as Savior even as we work for increased tolerance and understanding among religious communities. We cannot seek harmony by relativizing the truth claims of religions. Urbanization and radical political change have bred increased interreligious and ethnic violence and hostility. We commit ourselves to be agents

of reconciliation. We also commit ourselves to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in faithfulness and loving humility.

6. *Spiritual conflict*

We welcome the renewed attention given in recent decades to the biblical theme of spiritual conflict. We rejoice that power and authority are not ours but God's. At the same time, we must ensure that the interest in spiritual warfare does not become a substitute for dealing with the root issues of sin, salvation, conversion, and the battle for the truth. We commit ourselves to increase our biblical understanding and practice of spiritual conflict while guarding against syncretistic and unbiblical elements.

7. *Strategy in mission*

We are grateful for many helpful insights gained from the social sciences. We are concerned that these should be subject to the authority of Scripture. Therefore, we call for a healthy critique of mission theories that depend heavily on marketing concepts and missiology by objectives.

8. *Globalized missiology*

The insights of every part of the church are needed, and challenges encountered in every land must be addressed. Only thus can our missiology develop the richness and texture reflected in the Scriptures and needed for full obedience to our risen Lord. We commit ourselves to give voice to all segments of the global church in developing and implementing our missiology.

9. *Godly character*

Biblical holiness is essential for credible Christian witness. We commit ourselves to renewed emphasis on godly living and servanthood, and we urge training institutions, both missionary and min-

isterial, to include substantive biblical and practical training in Christian character formation.

10. *The cross and suffering*

As our Lord called us to take up our crosses, we remind the church of our Lord's teaching that suffering is a part of authentic Christian life. In an increasingly violent and unjust world with political and economic oppression, we commit to equip ourselves and others to suffer in missionary service and to serve the suffering church. We pursue to articulate a biblical theology of martyrdom.

11. *Christian responsibility and the world economic order*

In a world increasingly controlled by global economic forces, Christians need to be aware of the corrosive effects of affluence and the destructive effects of poverty. We must be aware of ethnocentrism in our view of economic forces. We commit ourselves to address the realities of world poverty and oppose policies that serve the powerful rather than the powerless. It is the responsibility of the church in each place to affirm the meaning and value of a people, especially where indigenous cultures face extinction. We call all Christians to commit themselves to reflect God's concern for justice and the welfare of all peoples.

12. *Christian responsibility and the ecological crisis*

The earth is the Lord's, and the gospel is good news for all creation. Christians share in the responsibility God gave to all humanity to care for the earth. We call on all Christians to commit themselves to ecological integrity in practicing responsible stewardship of creation, and we encourage Christians in environmental care and protection initiatives.

13. *Partnership*

As citizens of the kingdom of God and members of Christ's body, we commit ourselves to renewed efforts at cooperation, because it is our Lord's desire that we be one and that we work in harmony in his service so that the world will believe. We acknowledge that our attempts have not always been as equals. Inadequate theology, especially in respect to the doctrine of the church, and the imbalance of resources have made working together difficult. We pledge to find ways to address this imbalance and to demonstrate to the world that believers in Christ are truly one in their service of Christ.

14. *Member care*

Service of the Lord in cross-cultural environments exposes missionaries to many stresses and criticisms. While acknowledging that missionaries also share the limitations of our common humanity and have made errors, we affirm that they deserve love, respect, and gratitude. Too often, agencies, churches, and fellow Christians have not followed biblical guidelines in dealing with cross-cultural workers. We commit ourselves to support and nurture our missionary workers for their sakes and for the gospel witness.

Pledge

We, the participants of the Iguassu Missiological Consultation, declare our passion as mission practitioners, missiologists, and church leaders for the urgent evangelization of the whole world and the discipling of the nations to the glory of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

In all our commitments, we depend on the Lord who empowers us by the Holy Spirit to fulfill his mission. As Evangelicals, we pledge to sustain our biblical heritage in this ever-changing world. We commit ourselves to participate actively in formulating and practicing Evangelical missiology. Indwelt by the Spirit, we purpose to carry the radical good news of the kingdom of God to all the world. We affirm our commitment to love one another and to pray for one another as we struggle to do his will.

We rejoice in the privilege of being part of God's mission in proclaiming the gospel of reconciliation and hope. We joyfully look to the Lord's return and passionately yearn to see the realization of the eschatological vision when people from every nation, tribe, and language shall worship the Lamb.

To this end may the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be glorified. Hallelujah!

Amen.



Part 2

Establishing the macro context of the major issues

THIS MEATY SECTION requires careful study. Escobar's two papers and Wright's one were circulated via e-mail prior to Iguassu, enabling participants to start reflection as they prepared for the event, and also provide feedback to the writers prior to the Consultation.

Escobar's double challenge was to read both the global scenario as well as current Evangelical missiology. Due to his absence, Bonk and Steuernagel were drafted at a late date to engage thought-provoking challenges. Hiebert's presentation was directed at the delicate yet crucial issue of spiritual warfare and worldview. In this section, four writers who were present at Iguassu—Araujo, Lee, van der Meer, and Roxburgh—were asked later to write chapters that addressed crucial issues.

Araujo presents a well-researched discussion of the controversial issues swirling around globalization. Even as I write these words from Malaysia, news from Melbourne, Australia, reports the organized protests against the World Economic Forum Asia/Pacific Economic Summit—sequels to the violent protests in Seattle in late 1999 and Washington, D.C. in early 2000. But globalization must be evaluated from a Christian perspective, for we cannot accept uncritically the



dictums of the dominant global financial institutions. How should thoughtful Christians respond to the journalist who declares, “That the world is moving towards globalization is as inevitable as the sun rises each morning”?

Wright presented a masterful exposition of the pluralisms before us—hermeneutical (Scripture), religious (Jesus), and ethical (humanity). His consultation draft had a “pregnant” footnote on the subject of eternal destinies, which fostered discussion and controversy in small groups and hallways. Due to the complexity of this subtopic, Wright’s final chapter does not explore the options that godly Evangelicals have taken on this theme, and it remains a future agenda item.

One element of Escobar’s second paper critiqued “managerial missiology,” and this generated another wave of discussions. In light of these issues, Lee was asked to write his own evaluation of contemporary Evangelical missiology, offering another perspective from the Two-Thirds World.

Van der Meer focused on the church and its mission, and Roxburgh offered another perspective on the vital subject of trinitarian missiology.

Iguassu reminded us that we live in a complex world. Some of our colleagues serve in the context of three overlapping worldviews: pre-modernity, modernity, and post-modernity. While some participants at Iguassu felt that too much emphasis was given to post-modernity, the fact is that this worldview has traveled at warp speed through the world—through modern media, the Internet, the arts world, and globalizing economies. While around the world the transition from pre-modernity to modernity to post-modernity is patchy, nevertheless it is taking place, whether we realize it or want it.



3

The global scenario at the turn of the century

SAMUEL
ESCOBAR

THE END OF A CENTURY and the beginning of a new one, which in this case is also the beginning of a new millennium, lend themselves not only to an inventory of opportunities and resources, but also to a balance of where things stand at the point at which we have arrived. As I try to sketch an outline of the way ahead for Christian mission, I am aware that as a Christian in 1999, I have a way of looking at reality grounded in the memory and the experience of my own Christian generation: I stand on ground that represents the sacrificial work of many missionary generations that have preceded us.

The balance of that missionary work has been positive, in spite of the paradoxes of this century. Unbelievable scientific and technological prowess has gone hand in hand with the regression to refined forms of cruelty and barbarism in totalitarian revolutions and wars. Rapid and efficient communication that has turned the planet into a global village has gone hand in hand with intolerance and tribalism that hinder the pacific coexistence of peoples that have been neighbors for centuries. In a relentless movement of urbanization, the cities with their accumulation of intellectual sophistication, wealth, and educational and medical services have attracted masses; but the same greed, injustice, and abuse that were the marks of feudal structures in the rural world have turned the hearts of these cities into a jungle of concrete and asphalt, where humans live in alienation and despair. However, in the midst of these processes that reflect so well the fallenness of human beings, Christian mission has advanced in this century, and the balance is positive for the cause of God's kingdom. I feel it is only appropriate that I try to express some convictions that come from the

reflection about this positive balance of the century that is coming to an end. These are some notes of what is involved in the way I look at the world from a missionary stance. These are the notes from what I might call an Evangelical outlook on mission from a Latin American missiologist.

A Translatable Gospel

I start with doxology, with thanksgiving to God for the mystery and the glory of the gospel. The missionary facts of our time make me pause in wonder. Jesus Christ, Son incarnate of God, is the core of the gospel that as a potent seed has flourished in a thousand different plants. We can name a place and a time on earth in which Jesus lived and taught. In other words, we can place him in a particular culture at a particular moment in history. "The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us" in Palestine during the first century of our era. After that, the story of Jesus has moved from culture to culture, from nation to nation, from people to people. And something strange and paradoxical has taken place. Though this Jesus was a peasant from Palestine, everywhere he has been received, loved, and adored, and people in hundreds of cultures and languages have come to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Moreover, they have come to feel that he is "theirs," so that they say, "Jesus is one of ours." At this end of the century, the global church stands closer than ever to that vision of the seer in Revelation: "A great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:9).

I cannot but wonder in amazement at the fact that the message of Jesus Christ is

"translatable." This means that the gospel dignifies every culture as a valid and acceptable vehicle for God's revelation. Conversely, this also relativizes every culture; there is no "sacred" culture or language that may be considered as the only vehicle that God might use. Not even Hebrew or Aramaic is "sacred," because the original documents of the gospel that we possess are already a translation from those languages to that form of popular Greek that was the *lingua franca* of the first century, the *koiné*.¹ Thus it is clear that the God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ intended his revelation to reach all of humankind, as Jesus stated it so clearly in the Great Commission, and Paul expressed it in sweeping statements: "... God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:3-4).

My Evangelical outlook starts with commitment to the authority of God's Word, and in the contemporary situation I have become aware that understanding of God's Word requires cultural awareness. The new global dimension of Christianity has brought this new sensitivity to the fact that the text of Scripture can only be understood adequately within its own context, and that the understanding and application of its eternal message demand awareness of our own cultural context. From a global Evangelical dialogue about this issue after Lausanne came this illuminating statement: "Today's readers cannot come to the text in a personal vacuum and should not try to. Instead they should come with an awareness of concerns stemming from their cultural background, personal situation, and responsibility to others. These concerns will influence the questions which are put to the Scriptures. What is received back, however, will not

¹ For a fascinating development of the theological consequences of these facts, see Walls (1996) and Sanneh (1989).

be answers only, but more questions. As we address Scripture, Scripture addresses us. We find that our culturally conditioned presuppositions are being challenged and our questions corrected. In fact, we are compelled to reformulate our previous questions and to ask fresh ones. So the living interaction proceeds" (Willowbank Report, 1996, p. 84).

An adequate training provides the Bible scholar with a working knowledge of the cultural world of the Middle East and the Mediterranean basin during the time span covered by the Old and New Testaments. It also must provide a high degree of cultural awareness to the evangelist or teacher in the church, who must move meaningfully from the questions of our post-modern culture to the answers that the gospel has for them.

A Global Church

Work in WEF activities and in several of the Evangelical organizations related to it that provide its capable international leadership have made me aware of the reality of a global church. At this end of a century, facilities for travel, the flow of information at a global scale through the media, as well as colossal migration movements caused by economic change allow Christians and churches in the West and everywhere else to see and experience the amazingly rich and diverse varieties of expression of the Christian faith. I have met with amazement wandering prophets of independent African churches, native storytellers from Latin American Pentecostal Movements, tireless missionary entrepreneurs spreading through the world from their Korean homeland, Orthodox priests regaining political weight in the lands which used to be part of the Soviet Empire. Their images fill the pages of our missionary books and the screens of our VCRs. They are also a living testimony to

the remarkable variety of human cultures and the uniqueness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the one seed of a thousand different plants.

Migration patterns and refugee movements have also brought the great variety of cultures from this planet, as well as the different forms that the Christian church has taken among them to Europe, the United States, and Canada. At the heart of European and North American cities, there are now growing pockets of Third World cultures, as well as varied expressions of the global church. From the missionary perspective, indigenous churches from faraway places have become sister churches down the street, and growing Muslim communities have become a new evangelistic challenge that put to the test the quality of our Christian lives, as well as our ability to communicate the gospel. In the case of the United States, while at the beginning of this century many churches and denominations were committed to the task of "Americanizing" the immigrants, today the same churches have to grapple with multiculturalism.

This phenomenon also has a consequence for Christians in these Western nations, because the form of Christianity that has grown more in the Southern hemisphere and has come now to the great Western cities could be described as a "popular" form of both Catholicism and Protestantism that we might well call "grassroots Christianity." It is marked by the culture of poverty: an oral liturgy, narrative preaching, uninhibited emotionalism, maximum participation in prayer and worship, dreams and visions, faith healing, and an intense search for community and belonging. Sensitivity to this form of Christianity is especially necessary for Evangelical leaders who have always emphasized the clear and correct intellectual expression of Christian truth and the rationality of the Christian faith.

A New Balance of Christian Presence

Through the reality of the global church, we have also become aware of the new balance of numerical and spiritual strength in the Christian world.² As we look at the religious map of the world today, we find a marked contrast between the situation at the beginning of this century and the present situation. Scottish missiologist Andrew Walls has described it as a “massive southward shift of the center of gravity of the Christian world.” He understands the history of Christian mission—and of the church, in fact—as a sequence of phases, each one of which represents the embodiment of Christianity in a major culture area, and the movement forward through transcultural mission in such a way that when that major culture declines, Christianity continues to flourish, now in a different setting. In our times, Walls (1996, p. 22) reminds us, “... the recession of Christianity among the European peoples appears to be continuing. And yet we seem to stand at the threshold of a new age of Christianity, one in which its main base will be in the Southern continents, and where its dominant expressions will be filtered through the culture of those countries. Once again, Christianity has been saved for the world by its diffusion across cultural lines.”

The new situation has been hailed by a Swiss missiologist who was a missionary in Africa as “the coming of the Third Church” (Bühlmann, 1986, p. 6). He points to the fact that the first thousand years of church history were under the aegis of the Eastern Church in the eastern half of the Roman Empire, and the second millennium the leading church was the Western Church in the other half.

Those familiar with the history of theology also perceive to what degree theological themes, language, and categories reflected this historical situation. Bühlmann (1986, p. 6) goes on to say, “Now the Third Millennium will evidently stand under the leadership of the Third Church, the Southern Church. I am convinced that the most important drives and inspirations for the whole church in the future will come from the Third Church.”

Drive and inspiration to move forward and take the gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth, crossing all kinds of geographical or cultural barriers, are the work of the Holy Spirit. There is an element of mystery when the dynamism of mission does not come from above, from the expansive power of a superior civilization, but from below, from the little ones, those that do not have abundance of material, financial, or technical resources, but are open to the prompting of the Spirit. It may not be entirely coincidental that the form of Christianity that has grown more during this century, especially among the poor urban masses, is that which emphasizes the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. It was by 1912 that Roland Allen first coined the expression “the spontaneous expansion of the church,” and in this year 1999 we can measure the incredible extent to which a Christian testimony among the masses of this planet has been the result of such spontaneous expansion, especially in China, Africa, and Latin America. In many cases, such expansion was only possible when indigenous Christians became free from the stifling control of foreign missionary agencies.

Another aspect of this reality is that while many non-Western cultures are very receptive to the gospel of Jesus Christ,

² Helpful data on which many statements of this paper are based can be found in Myers (1996).

paradoxically it is within the Western culture that we find less receptivity to it. Lesslie Newbigin (1986, p. 3), who was a missionary in India for 30 years and later on went back to minister among working class people in England, wrote, "The most widespread, powerful, and persuasive among contemporary cultures ... modern Western culture ... more than almost any other is proving resistant to the gospel." Patterns of church growth prove the validity of this observation in the case of North America and Europe today. Several of the old mainline denominations show decline and fatigue with significant numerical losses. We could well ask the question if here we are confronted with the resistance of Western culture or with the impotence of the Western churches. In many cases, ethnic churches of the same denominations are growing vigorously. This constitutes a tough challenge for partnership in mission.

Precisely at the point in which the influence of Christianity declines in the West, which turns into a hard mission field because its culture resists the gospel, the new global order has brought the so-called Third World into the heart of North America, Europe, and Japan. Within that environment, Christians from old and new churches are called to new partnerships. For the old traditional denominations, partnership with the new immigrant churches will bring the need for serious self-appraisal. This is not easy for respectable, middle class, Evangelical churches that have a more steady, institutionalized, well-mannered, predictable kind of church. "Mission at our doorstep" is the new training ground for the new partnerships that will also carry on mission around the world. Such partnerships will have as an aim the proposal advanced by

the Lausanne Covenant: "Missionaries should flow ever more freely from and to all six continents in a spirit of humble service" (LC, par. 9).

These are some of the missionary realities of today, which allow us to believe that the balance of mission in this century has been positive. It has been the result of God's initiative revealed in his Word, and human obedience that responded to that Word. They are the ground from which we peer into the future in an effort to figure out the special challenges to missionary obedience in the coming century.

Globalization and Contextualization

Empires have always been the sociohistorical frame for the development of Christian mission, as the Pax Romana was in the first century, the Pax Hispanica in the 16th, or the Pax Britannica in the 19th. Since 1955,³ the way in which we used to look at the world was influenced by the idea of three worlds: the Western capitalist world, the socialist world, and the emerging "Third World" of new nations. In many ways, this perspective affected missionary concepts and practices. Well into the 1980s, U.S. President Ronald Reagan referred to the Soviet Union as "the evil empire." With the collapse of the Soviet empire, bipolar thinking has become obsolete, and there is only one world power with several poles connected to it.

There is a growing awareness that the most recent form of capitalism is now embracing all nations in the planet through a sophisticated system of communication that takes the latest aspects of Western culture as merchandise to the most remote corners of the world. "It is every day more and more evident," said Jacques Attali (1991, pp. 8-9), "that the

³ That year during the Bandung conference of "non-aligned" nations, a French journalist coined the expression "Third World."

central organizing principle of the future, whatever happens at the margins, will be economic. This will become increasingly apparent as we approach the year 2000. The rule of military might that characterized the Cold War is being replaced by the reign of the market." Like an irresistible wave, the market is the main force behind this process of globalization. The market is even giving a new language to the way some Christians in the North speak about the church: "marketing your church." Howard Snyder (1995, p. 46) has very aptly summarized this trend: "Global integration and networking are now the driving force in business and economics. The world is becoming one vast marketplace, not a patchwork of local markets. Economic integration on a world scale is reshaping society in a process that will reach well into the 21st century." A key question to be asked is, Should Christian mission simply ride on the crest of this wave?

Missiologists who have reflected about this globalization process point to its ambiguities. Schreiter (1997, p. 9), for instance, analyzes the modern values of "innovation, efficiency, and technical rationality" that drive the global systems. But he states that though innovation connotes improvement, "without a clear goal [it] becomes change for its own sake, or change to create new markets or to stimulate desire." Think for a moment on how this kind of innovation may create havoc for missionary organizations that make computer technologies indispensable for their task. In the same way, "Efficiency can mean less drudgery; but efficiency without effectiveness can become narrow and abstract, even deadly. Technical rationality has the advantage of providing clear purpose and procedure, but it can become profoundly dehumanizing" (Schreiter, 1997, p. 9). I have observed this in missionary life: ideological pressure to make

numerical growth the only standard of correct missionary practice is destroying the ability of churches to develop pastoral responses to sweeping cultural transformations. My attention has also been called to another fact. Instant global communication through the Internet provides sometimes a selfish way of escape to a fictitious "global village," for missionaries who refuse to work in the difficult task of contributing to build up fellowship with those that live around them day after day.

If we trace back the globalization movement, we may connect it with the expansion of Europe that took place after Columbus came to the American continent in 1492. It accelerated in the 19th century, and in both cases Christian missionary work accompanied it. In the 16th century, Iberian Catholic mission transported to the Americas, some parts of Africa, and the Philippines the feudal medieval social and economic order that was disappearing in Europe. Two centuries later, on the wake of British imperialism and U.S. "manifest destiny" advance, Protestant missions had a modernizing component by their insistence on Bible translation, literacy, leadership training for the laity, and also by their use of modern medicine and the communication of basic technology. Aspects of globalization such as efficient communication at a global level or facilities for exchange within an increasingly connected economic system could be neutral factors from which Christian mission may benefit. Therefore, it becomes more difficult to review critically the past and present associations of mission to globalization.

The culture of globalization as it has been pointed out creates attitudes and a mental frame that may be the opposite of what the gospel teaches about human life under God's design. If mission simply rides on the crest of the globalization

wave, it might end by changing the very nature of the gospel. Coming from the experience of evangelistic movements that wanted to pattern their missionary activity according to biblical standards, in 1974 at Lausanne, René Padilla (1985, pp. 16-17, notes) criticized the total identification of modern Western values (the American way of life) and the gospel that was propagated in the name of Christian mission. He called it "culture Christianity" and commented: "In order to gain the greatest possible number of followers, it is not enough for 'culture Christianity' to turn the gospel into a product; it also has to distribute it among the greatest number of consumers of religion. For this the 20th century has provided it with the perfect tool—technology. The strategy for the evangelization of the world thus becomes a question of mathematical calculation."

The criticism is still valid today and a good warning against contemporary trends. Let me give an example. Precisely at the point in which religiosity has returned to be a mark of our post-modern culture, organizations in the U.S. have turned prayer for mission into an industry in which teachings and methodologies are packaged and marketed. The quantifying rationality of American technological culture has been uncritically applied even to the understanding of demonic activity. Nations that are at odds with the foreign policies of the United States have been represented in maps as "windows" in which we are told that through spiritual mapping it is possible to detect a more intense demonic activity than in other parts of the earth. Without any care for theological consistency, the warlike language of the Old Testament permeates liturgy and worship to an intolerable degree.

In tension with the globalization process, we have the rise and expansion of a movement that seeks to affirm local cultures in their search for autonomy and full

expression. This may be described as a contextualization movement, and Christian mission has also played an important part in it. Through Bible translation, Protestant missions have contributed to the preservation, recognition, and evaluation of native tongues and cultures. The historical significance of this movement has been the subject of research and writing by African scholar Lamin Sanneh (1989, p. 2). His thesis is that "particular Christian translation projects have helped to create an overarching series of cultural experiences with hitherto obscure cultural systems being thrust into the general stream of universal history." Conversely, Bible translation into the vernacular has been a decisive factor in the strengthening of a sense of identity and dignity of peoples and nations, thus preparing them to struggle against colonialism. On the basis of his research in Africa, Sanneh (1989, p. 138) says, "When we look at the situation, we are confronted with the paradox of the missionary agency promoting the vernacular and thus inspiring indigenous confidence at a time when colonialism was demanding paternal overlordship."

The great challenge to Christian mission at this point is for missionaries to be messengers of Jesus Christ and not just harbingers of the new globalization process. The biblical perspective on mission has a global vision and a global component that comes from faith in God the creator and his intention to bless all of humankind through the instruments that he chooses. The contemporary globalization process has to be evaluated from that biblical perspective. Missionaries will be caught in the tension between globalization and contextualization, and they also have to avoid a provincialist attitude that exaggerates contextualization to the detriment of a biblical global awareness.

The Growth of Poverty and Inequality

The economic side of the globalization process has accentuated social disparities in the world. On the one hand, it has generated new wealth and unprecedented comfort, placing the most sophisticated technologies within the reach of the average citizen in the rich nations and of the elites in the poor nations. On the other hand, figures indicate that a larger proportion of people are being driven into extreme forms of poverty. According to Schreiter (1997, p. 7), "This is caused partially by global capitalism's quest for short-term profit, a quest that precludes long-term commitment to a people and a place; and partially by the destruction of traditional and small-scale societies and economies by the centrality of the market."

This process has brought uncertainty, suffering, and decline in the quality of life for people whose welfare depends on public institutions, such as older and retired people, children, and poor students. Christian missionaries become conversant with the subject because of their firsthand experience with the victims of this process. Long-term Christian endeavors such as theological education and institutional development necessary for the fulfillment of the church's mission have been affected by the collapse of financial supporting structures in some Latin American nations, due to growing unemployment brought by privatization of health, social security, and education.

An analyst of the scene in the U.S. has stressed the social transformation that is taking place in North America. Peter Drucker (1994) describes this as the post-capitalist society in which "knowledge workers" are replacing industrial workers. He stresses the fact that this shift to knowl-

edge-based work brings enormous social challenges that will transform the lives of people—for instance, by the disappearance of old communities, such as family, village, and parish. For Drucker, neither government nor the employing organizations, the classic "two sectors" that hold power in post-capitalist America, are able to cope with the effects of this massive social change, what he calls "social tasks of the knowledge society." These tasks include "education and health care; the anomy and diseases of a developed and, especially, a rich society, such as alcohol and drug abuse; or the problems of incompetence and irresponsibility such as those of the underclass in the American city."

Drucker places the agenda of assuming those tasks in the hands of what he calls "the third sector" in U.S. society, which is made up of churches and of a myriad of voluntary organizations that he calls "parachurches," because they have modeled themselves following the non-profit pattern provided by the churches. He assigns to this "social sector" two responsibilities. One is "to create human health and well-being," and the other is "to create citizenship." Of course, a presupposition behind Drucker's scheme is the tremendous volunteerism that characterizes American society, and which has definitely Protestant roots, though its contemporary manifestations may be secular in outlook and intention. His formula, however, may not work in societies that have totally different structures, world-views, and attitudes.

From the perspective of mission, particularly in the Evangelical world, we have lately observed the mushrooming of holistic mission projects, in which a social component becomes indispensable.⁴ In

⁴ Agencies such as World Vision, MAP, Food for the Hungry, Habitat for Humanity, MEDA, and World Concern have grown significantly in recent years. Several volumes in the series *Cases in Holistic Ministry* from MARC (Monrovia, California) provide a helpful overview.

Latin America, for instance, the number of street children who are victims of all forms of exploitation is the result of family disintegration, loss of basic Christian values, and growing poverty. A good number of missionary projects have developed as a response, and there is now a network trying to give a measure of coordination to them. Services to the material needs of people are in some places the only way through which missionaries can obtain a visa to enter a country. Mission projects of this kind are not just the result of a new awareness among Christians about a biblically based social responsibility. They are also the inevitable response to worsening social conditions that have created many victims, becoming a new challenge to Christian compassion.

It will be a fact, however, that in the coming century Christian compassion will be the only hope of survival for victims of the global economic process. The challenge for missionaries will be how to avoid the pitfalls of missionary paternalism on the one hand and the failed secular welfare system on the other. Only the redemptive power of the gospel transforms people in such a way that it enables them to overcome the dire consequences of poverty. Sociological studies of Christianity in the 1960s and '70s were usually hostile against churches. The scenario has changed today. As social planners and city governments acknowledge the problems generated by the current economic system, sociologists in places as distant as the city of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Stafford, 1999), the urban world of Brazil (Mariz, 1994), South Korea, or South Africa (Martin, 1990)⁵ have come to see churches as the source of hope from which the urban poor gain strength, courage,

and a language to cope with poverty. Just as in New Testament times, even among the poorest the gospel brings a measure of prosperity. This prosperity is totally different from the kind of blessed consumerism known as "prosperity theology," which is being propagated from the United States, Germany, and South Africa. One of the main differences is that Christian prosperity goes always hand in hand with ethical responsibility and with an intentional solidarity: "He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need" (Eph. 4:28).

There is a related factor that seems a paradox from a purely human perspective. It is precisely among the poor where we find people open to the gospel and enthusiastic about their faith. Churches are growing with incredible vitality in this world of poverty, while churches in other segments of society tend to decline. In Asia, Africa, and Latin America, Evangelicals have found receptive hearts among the millions who have moved from rural areas to the cities. Even in North America and Europe, popular forms of Protestantism are growing. These churches of the poor have learned to respond to the urban challenge; they speak the language of the masses and offer fellowship in the impersonal city. The urban frontier presents a challenge for holistic witness. Neighborhood associations, the mass media, schools, medical services, and the war on drugs await the presence of Christians with a sense of mission.

Moreover, missionary initiative expressed in numbers of persons volunteering for missionary work seems to be passing from North to South at a time

⁵ Martin (1990) uses studies about Pentecostal growth in South Africa and South Korea for comparison with his massive study about Latin America.

when the South is increasingly poor. Within this context of poverty, two models of mission activity have developed that provide keys for the future. In the *cooperative model*, churches from rich nations add their material resources to the human resources of the churches in poor nations in order to work in a third area. Some specialized Evangelical organizations or ministries such as YWAM, OM, and IFES have experience with this model, forming international teams to carry on transcultural mission in very different settings. Several other missionary organizations are moving in this direction, but the model poses some practical questions for which there are no easy answers, one of them being the raising of support for non-Western participants. The traditional Catholic missionary orders such as Franciscans or Jesuits, which are supranational, provide the oldest and more developed example, facilitated by the vows of poverty, celibacy, and obedience. However, they presuppose concepts of missionary vocation, church order, and ministry which are totally different from the Evangelical ones.

The *migration model* has also functioned through the centuries. Migrants from poor countries who move in search of economic survival carry the Christian message and missionary initiative with them. Moravians from Curazao moved to Holland; Jamaican Baptists emigrated to England; Filipino Christian women go to Muslim countries; Haitian believers went to Canada; and Latin American Evangelicals are going to Japan, Australia, and the United States. This missionary presence and activity has been significant, though it seldom gets to the records of formal institutional missionary activity. Some denominational mission agencies as well as faith missions are trying to set up connections that will allow them to serve within the frame of this migration movement.

They will need to exercise much care to avoid stifling the lay initiative and spontaneity that characterize it.

The End of Christendom

I would venture to say that the unbalanced economic growth that has widened the gap between rich and poor may well be an evidence of the degree to which Western culture has lost the veneer of Christian values that it used to keep. The position of the church in society evolved from the time that Emperor Constantine made Christianity official: "The church was blended into a half-civil, half-religious society, *Christendom*. It has covered a whole civilization with its authority, inspired a politic, and had become an essentially Western reality" (Mehl, 1970, p. 67). Christendom presupposed the predominance of Christianity in Western societies and a certain degree of influence of Christian ideas and principles on the social life of nations and on their international policies. However, it is important to remember what historian Latourette (1948, p. 8) said: "No civilization has ever incorporated the ideals of Christ." Today the influence of Christianity has declined, and not even lip service is paid to elements such as compassion and fairness in the national or international policies of the rich and developed nations where Christianity still may be an established religion.

In the post-Christendom situation, Christians cannot expect society to facilitate through social mechanisms the kind of life that abides by the qualities of Christian ethics. Legislation in Western countries of Europe or North America continues to lose Christian values. Today the Christian stance in the West has to become a missionary stance in which the quality of Christian life goes "against the stream" to the point that to be a Christian is equiva-

lent to being a “resident alien”⁶ (Hauerwas & Willimon, 1989). The same qualities that were required of the pioneers that went to plant Christianity in mission fields have come to be required for the Christian who stays at home in a Western nation and wants to be a faithful witness of Jesus Christ. Missionaries have learned and have been inspired by the way in which Christians live their lives in the hostile environment where they are a tiny minority. Western Christians can learn much from Christians in situations of minority and hostility, where every day they practice an alternative lifestyle.

Within this situation, missionaries will have to expect less and less in terms of support or protection from their governments as they travel and engage in mission. At the same time, it becomes necessary for missionaries to go back to the fundamentals of the gospel and to disengage themselves from the Western cultural trappings that consciously or unconsciously characterized mission during the imperial era in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The Lausanne Covenant expresses this conviction forcefully when it says: “The gospel does not presuppose the superiority of any culture to another but evaluates all cultures according to its own criteria of truth and righteousness, and insists on moral absolutes in every culture. Missions have all too frequently exported with the gospel an alien culture, and churches have sometimes been in bondage to culture rather than to the Scripture. Christ’s evangelists must humbly seek to empty themselves of all but their personal authenticity in order to become the servants of others, and churches must seek to transform and enrich culture, all for the glory of God” (LC, par. 10).

Movements that minister among young people and students have been more open to take risks, creating models of sensitive multicultural missionary teams. Participants in them have been able to look at their own culture from a critical distance. This has been facilitated also by the mobility and simple lifestyle of the teams. Through experience and reflection in light of God’s Word, this has been an important training ground for mission. I believe that this type of experience gives participants a taste of some of the positive characteristics of the traditional monastic orders that have remained in the Catholic church as instruments for mission across cultural and social frontiers. Evangelical movements could have a systematic exchange of experiences along these lines. Much could be gained from the experience of movements such as Operation Mobilization, Mennonite Central Committee, YWAM, and IFES.

A Post-Modern Culture

Not only Christianity has lost a grip on contemporary Western societies. The rejection of Christian values could be understood within the larger frame of a rejection of ideologies and worldviews that had been shaped by the ideas of the Enlightenment, what is usually known as “modernity.” Now we see in Europe and North America the rise of a culture and attitudes that might be described as “post-modern,” because they express a revolt against some of the key points of modernity. Thus we have the predominance of feeling and the revolt against reason, the revival of paganism in elements such as the cult of the body, the search for ever more sophisticated forms of pleasure, and the ritualization of life. Sports and popular artistic shows take the shape of reli-

⁶ This is the title of a very helpful book that deals with the issue in the United States context.

gious celebration and substitute religious services to provide relief from the drudgery of routine work and duty.

An important aspect of post-modernity is the glorification of the body. Post-modern culture depicts the body in all forms and shapes and offers thousands of products to beautify, perfume, modify, improve, and perfect the body, even to the point of promising ways to overcome the inroads of natural decay. There are products, methods, and stimuli for enhancing physical pleasure in all its forms. This search for pleasure has become a mark of contemporary life that, coupled with the hopelessness brought by the collapse of ideologies, becomes pure and simple hedonism. Globalization through communications generates another imbalance here. The media portray this hedonistic way of life and thought and propagate it across the globe. Incitement to expensive pleasure fills the screens of TV sets in poor societies, and young people specially crave the symbols and instruments of a sophisticated hedonistic West, while not having met some of the basic necessities of their own material life, such as adequate housing and running water.

Another important mark of modernity was that its myths provided hope and a sense of direction to the masses. Some of us remember well how the Marxist dream of a classless utopia fostered political militancy in several generations of students that were ready to give their lives for the cause of the proletariat. When some of us attended high school, we were required to memorize the political liberal discourses of the French Revolution and the dreams of unlimited progress. Later on came Marxism, and the words of Argentinian medical doctor Che Guevara painted in the walls of the University of Cordoba in Argentina come to mind as an illustration: "What does the sacrifice of a man or a nation matter if what is at stake

is the destiny of humankind?" A mark of post-modernity is precisely the loss of those dreams. No one has a clue to the direction of history nowadays, and it does not matter anymore. For post-modern generations of students, the philosophy of life may be embodied in those words that Paul quotes from Isaiah to describe the materialism of his own day: "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die" (1 Cor. 15:32).

Such materialism lies behind the attitude that turns consumption into the main determinant value of the average citizen in the developed world. The incredible abundance of consumer goods generated by modern economy is met by the passion for buying and using, the ideology of consumerism. The great shopping malls that are open seven days a week have become the new temples of a post-modern religion, and it is not difficult to detect the vacuum in the lives of its worshipers. Jacques Attali (1991, p. 5) describes them as modern nomads with their Walkmans, laptops, and cellular phones that "will roam the planet seeking ways to use their free time, shopping for information, sensations, and goods only they can afford, while yearning for human fellowship and the certitudes of home and community that no longer exist because their functions have become obsolete."

Statements like this from secular sources about the human condition in the post-modern culture come close to the theological description of the symptoms of the fallen condition of human beings. Post-modern literature in both North and South evidences the cynicism and bitter disillusion brought by the end of modern myths and ideologies. This is the condition of the "unreached peoples" of affluent post-modern societies, which are also a challenge to Christian compassion. Prayer is required here, along the lines of what Jesus taught us when he looked at

the “harassed and helpless” masses of his day (Matt. 9:35-38). Compassion and prayer are needed, more than a kind of triumphalistic apologetics that seems to be saying, “I told you so,” from the distance of a self-righteous aloofness. Missionary obedience at this frontier is mandatory for Evangelical churches and is as urgent as missionary obedience to go to “unreached peoples” in exotic jungles or remote rural areas.

It is also important to reconsider the lifestyle of Jesus himself. Maybe our images of him and of what the Christian life is have been conditioned by the rationalism of modernity. We have made him look more as a somber and serious professor of theology than as a popular teacher and storyteller who was committed to his Father’s will but also able to enjoy creation, human friendship, good meals, and playing children. In contrast with the darkness of deconstruction and hopelessness that permeates what media moguls and intellectuals try to sell to young people around the world, how important it is to have in every level of society Christian fellowships that are communities of faith, love, and hope, able to express uninhibitedly the joy of salvation and new life.⁷ Those that go to work as missionaries among the poor confess that many times they receive back the gift of joy from Christians who have an abundance of it in the midst of dire poverty and persecution.

A New Religiosity

Modernity in both its liberal as well as its Marxist versions operated with the “enlightened” presupposition that religion was in the process of waning away. At this end of the century, however, we find ourselves in a more religious world. This trend started in the 1960s and surprised

alert missionaries, especially on the university campuses around the world. During the first part of the century, Christian thinkers were confronted in cultural circles by a hostile rationalism nourished by the three “masters of suspicion”: Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. From the perspective of Christian mission, the return of an attitude of openness to the sacred and the mysterious looked at first sight as a sign of improvement. Soon it became evident that Christians were being confronted with a new and more subtle challenge. Our apologetics needed serious refurbishing, and the plausibility, authenticity, and quality of our faith were now being questioned from a different angle.

As a student evangelist on campuses of different parts of the world, already in the late ’70s I had a chance to lecture or to dialogue with students who showed this new openness to the religious. In many cases, it allowed Christians to demonstrate in the open air a freer and uninhibited expression of Christian faith through prayer, song, and drama. I found myself engaged in dialogues with people whose language was strangely similar to the language of some forms of evangelicalism: joy in the heart, a feeling of self-realization, a sense of peace and harmony, a feeling of goodwill towards all human beings, including animals and planet earth. However, when I pushed some specific issues such as suffering, death, compassion, final hope, failure, and sin, this new religious mood became hollow and empty. And when I talked of the cross, evil, sin, redemption, and Christ, I could see hostility developing against what was considered my exclusivism and intolerance.

The new attitude towards religion and the proliferation of religious practices has to be understood as part of the revolt

⁷ For a well-informed and theologically based book on discipleship on North American campuses along these lines, see Garber (1996).

against modernity. The modern ideologies of indefinite progress and social utopia were actually myths that attracted and mobilized masses for action. Their failure and collapse have brought awareness of a vacuum and disillusionment about the ability of human reason to give meaning to life and provide answers for deep existential questions. This is at the root of the search for alternatives, for a contact with the occult, for an ability to handle mystery, for a connection with extra-rational forces that may influence the course of human events, both in individual lives as well as in communities and nations.

It is helpful to remember that in the days of the New Testament, the message of Jesus Christ confronted not only the challenges of Greek philosophy and Roman politics, but also the questions that came from the mystery religions that pervaded especially the ideas and practices of popular culture. Mystery religions in the first century claimed to help people with their daily problems, to give them immortality, and to enable them to share their lives with the god. They promised cleansing to deal with guilt, security to face fear of evil, power over Fate, union with gods through orgiastic ecstasy, and immortality (Green, 1970). The way in which the Apostolic message and practice developed in the New Testament was the response to these needs of the human heart, stemming from the basic fact of Jesus Christ.⁸

Missionaries today are being driven to restudy the New Testament teaching about religiosity, as well as about the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Communication technology and techniques, as well as an intellectually reasonable faith, are not enough. Spiritual power and disciplines such as prayer, Bible meditation, and fasting are necessary for mission

across this new religious frontier. Evangelicals must be open to the ministry of persons who are gifted to minister in these areas. On the other hand, the Apostle Paul, writing to the Corinthians, recognized also that there could be worldliness, abuses, and manipulation even within a context of spiritual gifts. Eastern European theologian Peter Kuzmic has said, "Charisma without character leads to catastrophe."

This warning has a particular relevance as we consider the phenomenon of new megachurches that have developed in the most recent decades. Some of them follow what we might call the Willow Creek pattern, in which the marks of classical evangelicalism are evident in doctrine and liturgy, in spite of the fact that they studiously avoid names that would indicate a denominational origin. Others, especially in Latin America, have come from Catholic charismatic movements and show in their preaching, lifestyle, and liturgy some of the marks of the middle class Catholic culture from which they proceed. What they have in common is the ability to respond positively to the needs, attitudes, and outlook generated by the market culture in a post-modern society. There are logical reasons to understand why prosperity teaching, developed within popular Protestantism in the U.S., attracts people to these megachurches that have developed adequate techniques to "market" their church.

While Protestants in general and Evangelicals in particular have emphasized *true doctrine* as a mark of the church, they have been weak in their understanding of *ritual and symbol* as well as *church structure* as equally important components in the religious life of people, and consequently in the formation of disciples of Jesus Christ. The new religiosity demands

⁸ Helpful at this point is the article by Drane (1998).

a better understanding of how these elements relate, that will allow for better pastoral and teaching practices. Mega-churches have learned how to use these elements, though sometimes they may cross the thin line that divides an adequate use from sheer manipulation. The fact that so many Evangelicals are attracted to Catholic spirituality in North America is another indication of the limitations of excessive concentration on correct doctrine at the expense of the other dimensions of the Christian life.

Old Religions and Fundamentalist Wars

Besides the new religiosity, there is the resurgence of old religions. In the streets of Western cities, you see now the shapes of mosques and Hindu temples being built not as exotic ornaments for casinos, but as places of worship for communities that sometimes outdo Christians in their missionary zeal. With the end of Christendom, many societies face the thorny issue of religious pluralism. The West with the Protestant ideals and practice of democracy and tolerance was intellectually prepared. Nations where Catholicism and the Orthodox church predominated have found it more difficult to come to terms with it. All Christians, however, are faced with the need to review their attitudes; a more alert form of apologetics must be matched by spiritual discernment.⁹

One of the most significant trends in recent years is the resurgence of Islam. Islam has become one of the greatest missionary challenges of today. It is now a rival faith in Indonesia, several African countries, the Middle East, and even at the heart of cities in Europe and the United

States. Islam's success turned it into a thriving, conquering faith that remained in the Iberian peninsula for eight centuries and could barely be stopped at the Pyrenees. Within the frame of a Christendom mentality, Europeans later organized aggressive wars called "Crusades." Christian mission at that time became a holy war against the Moors. Unfortunately, many Christians still operate within those categories. The rhetoric of some Christian mission promoters during the Gulf War in 1990-1991 reflected more the propaganda of the United States government than the spirit of Christ. Criticizing that type of discourse during the 1990 Urbana missionary convention, an IVCF staff wrote: "Foreign policy is couched in spiritual conflict terms, and militaristic attitudes are baptized in the name of Christ. Haven't we learned anything from history?" (Escobar, 1991).

There is, however, an alternative way to relate to Islam that reflects more the spirit of Christ. At the time of the Crusades, Francis of Assisi dared to cross the battle lines peacefully in order to share the gospel with the Sultan of Egypt, showing him a different Christian approach. The same attitude was exemplified by Raimon Lull, the Spanish mystic and missionary who made four trips to North Africa in order to preach the gospel and who died as a result of persecution in 1315. Evangelical missionaries I have known, such as William Miller, Dennis Clark, Margaret Wynne, and Phil Parshall, have taught me that the key to mission in the Muslim world is a spirituality of the cross, readiness for suffering, and a respectful acquaintance with the Muslim faith.

⁹ We are indebted to Vinoth Ramachandra (1997) for his excellent book *The Recovery of Mission*. It is an example of an Evangelical approach to other religions in a post-Christendom situation.

What is a more difficult reality to face is the phenomenon of fundamentalism. This term was coined to refer to the conservative reaction against theological liberalism among Protestants in the U.S. at the beginning of this century. What started as a theological effort to reformulate and defend the fundamentals of Evangelical faith became dominated by what Carl Henry (1957, pp. 43, 33) called "a harsh temperament, a spirit of lovelessness and strife." Its anti-intellectualism degenerated into "a morbid and sickly enthusiasm," and it became a reactionary cultural phenomenon associated with the defense of a conservative political agenda in the United States and with racism, nationalism, blind anti-Communism, and the arms race.

When in the 1980s a resurgent Islam came to power in Iran, the religious/political phenomenon that followed in several other countries of the Middle East and North Africa came to be known as Muslim fundamentalism. It was around the same time that Protestant Fundamentalists in the U.S. came again to political prominence through the Moral Majority. It is this reaction against modernity and secularism from a conservative alliance of religious conviction and political interests that today is known as fundamentalism. There is Hindu fundamentalism in India, Jewish fundamentalism in Israel and the United States, and Catholic fundamentalism in Mexico and Argentina. Other religions such as Buddhism have also fundamentalist forms. From a missiological perspective, the problem is the confusion this might create. Protestant fundamentalism in the form of religious/political alliances such as the media empires of Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell in the United States tends to mix evangelism with the promotion of a variety of political causes in different parts of the world. These fundamentalists seem committed to attract national Evangelical leaders from other

countries to their educational institutions in the U.S.

The Pentecostal Phenomenon

It is a well-known fact today that during this century there has been a relentless process of urban accumulation that has turned old cities into urban labyrinths and has given birth to new cities around the world. This has brought to light the emergence of new segments of population, especially those with low education or those that belong to ethnic minorities that in the past could be hidden in distant rural areas but now have invaded massively the streets of capitals in six continents. The expansion of popular Protestantism in the form of Pentecostal and Pentecostal-like churches among these emerging masses has been one of the surprising phenomena of our century.

These churches may be described as forms of "popular Protestantism" because they have taken roots among the *populus*, the social stratum at the base, which almost everywhere constitutes the majority of the population. During our century, the form of popular Protestantism known as Pentecostalism has become a new force to be reckoned with in the Christian religious scene. Some observers predict that this will become the predominant religious force in Latin America at the eve of the Third Millennium. These churches are indigenous in nature and inspired by a contagious proselytistic spirit. They show some of the marks of the early Pentecostal Movement in North America that Hollenweger (1997) also associates with indigenous non-white churches in other parts of the world, namely, glossolalia, oral liturgy, a narrative style in the communication of their message, maximum participation of all the faithful in prayers and worship, inclusion of dreams and visions in public meetings, and a unique under-

standing of the body/mind relationship applied in healing by prayer.¹⁰

In the case of Latin America, these Pentecostal churches grew especially among the most marginalized social groups in the urban areas, usually unnoticed during their first decades. However, in some cases political circumstances brought them to public attention, especially when governments had tensions with the Roman Catholic Church and looked for other sources of religious legitimation. When the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association sponsored the great Congress on Evangelism in Berlin (1966), one of the most difficult decisions that Graham himself faced was the admission of Pentecostals to the platform and the leadership of the congress (see Martin, 1992, especially chap. 20, pp. 331-335). Those of us who attended the congress will never forget that when reports about evangelization were presented, country after country and continent after continent, the story was frequently the same: "Pentecostals number more than all other Protestants put together."

At the middle of the 20th century, the great historian of missions, Kenneth Scott Latourette (1948, p. 147) presented a series of lectures assessing the state of Christianity at that point and trying to understand trends that could help foresee the future. As he drew the panorama with rough strokes, Latourette kept asking the question, "What forms will Christianity take in the far future?" His balance of facts and trends was mostly positive about the contribution of Protestantism and its future. He answered the question in this way: "The Protestantism of the future will not be the Protestantism of the past. We cannot yet clearly discern what that Prot-

estantism is to be. We can, however, perceive something of the direction which is being taken and from it may be able to forecast in part what is to come. The very fact that we cannot foretell the precise or even the general features of the Protestantism of the future is probably evidence of vitality in that branch of Christianity."

Latourette said almost nothing about Pentecostals. However, the marks of missionary Protestantism that he stressed, such as active lay participation in mission, indigenous leadership, poor ecclesiology, and a sectarian trend of separation from the world, are precisely the marks of Pentecostalism. Less than five years after Latourette wrote what I quoted above, Lesslie Newbigin (1954) was calling all Protestants to acknowledge the reality of Pentecostalism and the missiological and theological contributions it was making to Christianity. Recently, in a report about conversations between Pentecostals and Catholics, a well-known Catholic author stated clearly that the importance of these conversations was due to the fact that "Catholics and Classical Pentecostals [are] the two largest bodies of Christians in the world" (McDonnell, 1999, p. 11).

Latin American Pentecostalism has been studied intensely in recent years, partly because of its explosive numerical growth and partly because of its political significance. David Martin (1990) offers a massive summary of his own research and that of many others and compares American Pentecostalism with other forms of Pentecostalism in other parts of the world. It could be said that these popular Protestant churches have become alternative societies where urban poor people are accepted and become actors, not on the basis of what gives people status in the

¹⁰ This description comes from Walter J. Hollenweger, considered an authority in the missiological study of Pentecostals. His most recent book (1997) is a good summary of key points in a long-standing life of research around the world.

world, but on the basis of values that come from their vision of the kingdom of God. A new generation of social scientists working at the micro level have brought to light the transforming nature of the spiritual experience offered by these churches.¹¹ Martin (1990, p. 284) finds that the massive migration from countryside to megacity is the background for the religious transformation: "The new society now emerging in Latin America has to do with movement, and Evangelicals constitute a *movement*. Evangelical Christianity is a dramatic migration of the spirit matching and accompanying a dramatic migration of bodies."

Observers and scholars have had to come to terms with the fact that in spite of all good theory and good intentions, many actions in favor of the poor were tainted by a paternalistic approach. Social and political conscientization took the form of a struggle for the poor, trying to create a more just society *for* them rather than *with* them. Historical churches connected to world communities and denominational families had access to funds, foreign press, and even diplomatic ties that were used in an effort to help the victims of poverty or state terrorism. Incarnation among the poor has been many times the source of these movements, but they have failed in mobilizing the poor themselves. By contrast, the popular Protestant churches are popular movements in themselves. Their pastors and leaders do not have to identify with the poor; *they are the poor*. They do not have a social agenda but an intense spiritual agenda, and it is through that agenda that they have been able to have a social impact. As Martin (1990, p. 284) observes about the impact of the Pentecostal experience, "Above all it renews the innermost cell of

the family and protects the woman from the ravages of male desertion and violence. A new faith is able to implant new disciplines, reorder priorities, counter corruption and destructive machismo, and reverse the indifferent and injurious hierarchies of the outside world."

Any missiological outlook has to ask questions about the significance of what sociology has now described and interpreted. Both the redemptive nature of the Pentecostal experience and its indigeneity are key factors for mission in the future. They throw light on our understanding of what is the gospel and the mission of the church? I have also posed elsewhere (Escobar, 1996) the way in which these facts throw us back to understand the New Testament church as a model for mission in our times. For non-Pentecostals, and especially for those Evangelicals that have seen their task as guarding the integrity of a biblical gospel, a great question is how their own contribution to Protestantism will match the vitality and Spirit-filled sense of mission that Pentecostalism is contributing. They must learn to apply a "hermeneutic of charity" instead of a "hermeneutic of suspicion," as theologian Richard Mouw (1994, pp. 15-19) has so ably reminded us. The future demands a common walk of mutual understanding and learning for mission.

Recovery of Biblical Patterns for Mission

As we have moved through this quick overview, it has become evident that the new century will require a return to biblical patterns of mission. Radical shifts in culture, politics, and economics, as well as the growth of Christianity in the Southern hemisphere, have brought new sce-

¹¹ The conflicting approaches to popular Protestantism are studied in Escobar (1994).

narios. Traditional mission models inherited from the Christendom mentality and the colonial era are now obsolete. It is time for a paradigm change that will come from a salutary return to the Word of God. As South African missiologist David Bosch (1993, p. 177) said, "Our point of departure should not be the contemporary enterprise we seek to justify, but the biblical sense of what being sent into the world signifies."

The new perspective requires a firm commitment to the missionary imperatives that are part of the very structure of our faith and at the same time a serious work of biblical scholarship and interpretation. Here we have a key to understand the long-term impact of the Lausanne Movement. An antecedent of the Lausanne Congress (1974) was the Berlin Congress on Evangelism that I have already mentioned. It was called by Billy Graham to commemorate 10 years of the periodical *Christianity Today*. The vision for this periodical came from the desire to keep together the evangelistic thrust of Billy Graham with the scholarly work of leading Evangelical theologians. The revival of Evangelical scholarship in the English-speaking world, after the controversies of Fundamentalism, came from vigorous Evangelical student movements. It was not purely academical, but it had a missionary thrust, thanks to the connection with the missionary life of those movements.

Mission has to be acknowledged as God's initiative coming from God's love for his creation, and from his design of choosing some instruments to use them for the salvation and blessing of all of humankind. When the old way of doing mission needs to be reviewed, we can see to

what degree it had become just a human enterprise, maybe the religious side of the expansion of one culture and one empire. At the point at which we recover a biblical vision, we come to experience the awe and wonder of being invited to enter into God's plan, which is far more than choosing a career or going for a nice trip abroad. We experience what Moses felt before the burning bush (Ex. 3:11), and Peter when Jesus invaded his boat (Luke 5:8), and Saul when he was met by Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 22:8-10).

John Stott opened for us another dimension of the biblical agenda: "mission in Christ's way."¹² Already in 1966 he shifted our attention from the classic passage of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 to the almost forgotten text of John 20:21. Here we have not only a mandate for mission, but also a model of mission style: in obedience to the loving design of the Father, patterned by the example of Jesus Christ, and driven by the power of the Holy Spirit. In the cross, Jesus Christ died for our salvation and also left a pattern for our missionary life. Before any "practical" training for mission in the use of methods and tools for the verbal communication of a message, it is imperative to form disciples for *a new style of missionary presence*. Mission requires orthopraxis as well as orthodoxy.

This Christological model that was also the pattern under which Paul and the other apostles placed their own missionary practice could be described as "mission from below."¹³ At the beginning of the 20th century, a great missionary gathering such as the Edinburgh 1910 Conference represented the triumphant spirit of a church identified with Christendom and

¹² I refer here to the 1966 Berlin Congress on World Evangelism that preceded the Lausanne Movement. Stott presented there the Bible expositions about the Great Commission that became very influential afterwards.

¹³ For an excellent theological meditation about this point, see Tomlin (1997).

the rich and developed West; it was “mission from above.” The trends we have described make it necessary to consider a new paradigm, because the dynamism for mission is coming now from the periphery of the world, from the churches of the poor, as well as from Christians in the West that have to live as “resident aliens” in a post-modern culture. This Christological paradigm is only possible by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I think it is very important to remember at this point that Protestant missions came from the Evangelical movements in Europe. The missionary movement after Carey was more inspired by the Wesleyan revivals and the Moravian pioneers of mission than by the 16th century magisterial Reformers. The dynamism of missionary Protestantism came from the renewal movements of the 18th and 19th centuries. They had grasped truth about the Holy Spirit which then began to make sense. This, however, is not the whole picture. The readiness of men like John Wesley and Count Zinzendorf to abandon old church structures and their creativity in developing new structures for mission were made possible because they were open to the movement of the Spirit. Such an attitude of openness to the Spirit is what Brazilian missiologist Valdir Steuernagel (1993) calls for: “Mission understood in pneumatological language is one act with two steps. It is first to perceive the blowing of the Spirit and the direction from which it comes. And then it is to run in the same direction to which the Spirit is blowing.”

Conclusions

Contemporary trends place a demanding agenda for missionaries and mission organizations in the new millennium. The pace of change is such that we may better limit ourselves to think of the next decade. By way of conclusion, I would like to sug-

gest some notes about the direction to which we should be moving in light of the trends I have outlined.

As in the first century, when Paul engaged in mission in the context of the Roman Empire, mission today should use the means provided by globalization, without falling prey to the spirit of the globalizing age. Paul used the means provided by the Pax Romana without ever appearing in style, intention, or method as a representative of Rome. Paul also affirmed and defended the freedom of Gentiles from the burdens that the Judaizers wanted to impose on them. As missionaries today, we must be open to respect the many contextual expressions of the faith that are developing around the world.

Existing missionary models among Evangelicals have not been able to overcome the distances and barriers created by the comparative affluence of missionaries and agencies. The frequent tendency of Western mission agencies to bypass their indigenous partners and to perpetuate their own “independence” is an indication of failure, and growing poverty exposes that failure. The missionary dynamism of churches in the South could well be stifled and misdirected by an imitation of the expensive Western models of missionary organization. The future demands more models of non-paternalistic, holistic missions. An incarnational approach modeled by Jesus and Paul is the key. Gross inequalities make partnership impossible.

A church that lives comfortably in the post-Christian West is unable to respond to the pain and the spiritual need of post-modern generations. It is interesting to see how spiritual vitality can foster a missionary stance in Western societies that expresses itself also in an ability to partner with churches abroad. It seems to me that churches that look successful (because they give the people in North America the

kind of domesticated Christianity they are asking for) become the supporters of the most traditional forms of global mission, the ones that prolong the old colonial situation.

In the face of growing religiosity, mission in the next decade will require spiritual revitalization at the base. There must be a more humble attitude of dependence on the Holy Spirit and a renewed understanding of the gifts and the fruit of the Spirit as they manifest themselves in mission. The question is not so much to market "spiritual" packages that have no theological or biblical basis, but to walk alongside churches everywhere that engage in mission from the base of a simple but real spiritual vitality.

Traditional missionary practice among Evangelicals reflects a very weak and undefined concept of the church. This explains the sectarian trends, the competitive spirit, the waste of resources that we all know and lament, and the tendency to practice proselytism instead of evangelism. As missionaries and missiologists, we need to tackle seriously the task of understanding the church, in order to understand better what we expect as a long-term outcome of our mission activity. Not to do so is to content ourselves with irresponsible activism. Such understanding of the church is also indispensable in order to know better how to do mission in the face of the great traditional religions.

I have tried to outline the missionary challenge ahead of us in this century and the resources of our trinitarian faith for responding to this challenge. God's Spirit is at work in the world in many different ways. During the past half century, the Evangelical Missionary Movement has been an instrument of God to keep a biblical missionary vision alive within Protestantism. After Lausanne, the Evangelical Movement—or at least some sectors within it—were able to appreciate the

distinctives and the unique contextual identity of the growing churches in the world outside North America and Europe. At the same time, this new appreciation came from a firm stand on the biblical basis for understanding and articulating the Christian message. This combination of firmness and flexibility will allow the rise of creative partnerships that are required in order to respond to the new missionary situations around the world.

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4

Engaging Escobar ... and beyond

JONATHAN
BONK

ONE OF THE MOST CRYPTIC descriptions of the century just passed has been provided by Robert Conquest (1999), for whom the 100 years of life on our planet from 1900 to 1999 are reducible to three T's: total war, totalitarianism, and terror. For all of humankind's astounding technical accomplishments—indeed, to some extent *because* of them—the human slaughter that wiped out an estimated 200 million human beings, a majority of these civilians, may well be the 20th century's most enduring legacy. Samuel Escobar's 11-part discussion of themes which distinguish our globe as it embarks upon a new millennium constitutes a similarly sobering inventory. Because both the present and the future grow out of the past, these themes mark the contours of the macro context in which Christian missionaries are formed and in which they must function.

Escobar (page 26) begins with praise to God for the mystery and the glory of the translatable gospel. It is of course absolutely appropriate to begin with what Escobar refers to as “a potent seed” that has “flourished in a thousand different plants [soils?].” “Seed” is a wonderfully biblical metaphor, but it is sobering too, because it reminds us that fruit from any seed comes only with the death of that seed. This is one of the great themes in our Lord's teaching. One of the great missiological books of the past decade is Lamin Sanneh's (1989) *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, to which Escobar alludes. This book is notable because it offers an articulate, dissenting point of view to the commonly held notion that Christianity destroys culture, arguing rather that with its insistence on providing the Scriptures in the vernacular, Christianity has provided otherwise oral cultures with a means of recollecting their stories.

These stories—which would otherwise suffer obliteration by the inexorably homogenizing forces of modernity—thus affirm, strengthen, and enrich cultural identities in ways which Islam, with its insistence upon Arabic, cannot. The translatability of the gospel is an appropriate theme with which to begin any missiological discussion, but it must also be the last word, and I shall return to the theme in my conclusion.

Escobar next addresses the global church, the new balance of Christian presence, and globalization and contextualization, three naturally intersecting and overlapping themes. I begin with the reminder that this global church is diverse—so kaleidoscopic in its variety as sometimes to prevent one part of the church from recognizing its counterpart. Andrew Walls (1996, pp. 3-15) has steadily reminded us that the gospel is at once the prisoner and liberator of culture and that one will look in vain for an “historic Christian faith.” Walls takes his readers on an imaginary journey through Christian time, in company with a scholarly space visitor, a professor of comparative inter-planetary religions, who is engaged in the study of Christians over the centuries and whose research grant enables him to visit this planet every few centuries to conduct his research. After two millennia of study, involving field visits to Jerusalem in 37 CE, Nicea in 325 CE, Ireland in 650 CE, Exeter Hall in 1840, and Lagos in 1980, Walls’ imaginary scholar is able to distill several seminal continuities from the plethora of conspicuous discontinuities. These continuities are that Jesus the Christ has ultimate significance; the same sacred writings are employed; all use bread, wine, and water in similarly significant ways; and each group believes itself to be part of the same Christian continuity, which in turn is in some strange way linked to that of ancient Israel. Our professor concludes

that while each of these groups is “cloaked with such heavy veils belonging to their environment that Christians of different times and places must often be unrecognizable to others, or indeed even to themselves,” they must nevertheless be regarded as “manifestations of a single phenomenon” (Walls, 1996, p. 7). It is the presence of these elements which marks the faith community as Christian.

In terms of both demographics and evangelistic vigor, the Christian center (but not the money center) has moved from the North to the South, from the rich to the poor, from the centers of power to the slums of the periphery (see Barrett & Johnson, 2000). While the profound ramifications of this shift have yet to be adequately reflected in Euro-American missiological theory and practice, we are beginning to understand that European and North American churches no longer command the heights when it comes to theological, ecclesiastical, or missiological agendas. Their fiscal, organizational, and print resources are significant, but as the surprised and somewhat chagrined North American bishops attending the 1998 Lambeth conference discovered, there is a big difference between the agendas of the two hemispheres. While prim, politically correct bishops, presiding over their older, somewhat theologically agnostic, declining ecclesiastical domains might regard ordination of homosexuals and the blessing of same-sex marriages as central to the 21st century church’s task, to African and Asian bishops representing more youthful, vigorously reproductive churches, it was clear that evangelism was paramount.

Our Scriptures remind us that God has always found it difficult to work with or through comfortably secure people. There seems to be something spiritually corrosive about the kind of security to which we who inhabit the hemisphere of privi-

lege have come to assume entitlement. We Western theologians and missiologists have, to all appearances, become accustomed to thinking like the Laodicean church: we “have need of nothing,” and we think that the flow of missiological and theological benefits, insights, personnel, and agendas is a one-way flow, with *rich* churches providing out of their largess for the *poor* churches. Recognition that our relative affluence may have made us impervious to our wretched, poor, blind, and naked state is rare, despite the fact that of the seven churches described in St. John’s Revelation, the most desperately needy church was the Laodicean church—a “Christian” faith community with Christ on the outside, trying to get in. This being so, it can come as no surprise that the church in affluent lands, seemingly secure with its economies of plenty, its culturally driven entitlements to more and more of this world’s goods, and its participation in the Western engines of the global economy, desperately needs its materially poorer counterpart.

Escobar is right to warn us of the insidious effects of globalization upon those of us who actually benefit from it. “The culture of globalization,” he warns (pages 30-31), “creates attitudes and a mental frame that may be the opposite of what the gospel teaches about human life under God’s design. If mission simply rides on the crest of the globalization wave, it might end by changing the very nature of the gospel.” There can be no doubt that missionaries must inevitably be carriers of more than the gospel of our Lord! They are also powerful advocates of those values, orientations, and privileges which they themselves incarnate and value. I have written on this extensively (Bonk, 1991) and need not belabor it in this context. The awkward question which must be raised, but to which no sure answer can be provided, relates to the speed and

inevitability of the corrosive effects of secularism upon the emerging centers of Christian faith. This is something that our brothers and sisters in the South, not we in the North, will need to address on their own terms and within their own contexts.

Given the importance of evolving technologies in the global culture and the ease with which technological luxuries become technological “needs” in Western missiology, Escobar is right to remind us that technology will not save the world. Only the imitable gospel, incarnate at the level of person to person, will spare us from the pitfalls of propaganda and jingoism that sometimes substitute for genuine Christian mission. The extent to which we who are part of the Western mission establishment have embraced the power and the convenience provided by the new technologies, on the one hand, and the essentially relational nature of our faith and its transmission, on the other, make Ruth Conway’s (1999, p. 18) observations both apt and timely: “One much trumpeted feature of modern information and communications technologies,” she observes, “is their ability to span geographical distance.”

But we should not be fooled into substituting information exchange for genuinely Christian mission. Conway (1999, pp. 18-20) continues, “We can exchange a flood of information but remain aloof from the personal experience and feelings, the genuine hopes and fears of other people who are briefly ‘on line.’” Technology-reliant communication can thus become “... a distancing power that undermines real understanding, solidarity, and commitment one to another. Preoccupation with disembodied instantaneous messages prevents a fully sympathetic response to actual pressing human needs.... It is this distancing power that contributes a lethal element to globalization: it makes possible the gathering of

data, the transfer of capital, the control of markets, the bureaucratic communications within global institutions, and the management of structural adjustment programs, all without any 'feel' for the highly varied, unique local situations affected."

In anticipation of missiology's tendency toward Walter Mittyism, more needs to be said concerning the globalization juggernaut sweeping our globe. No one can avoid being swept along by this tidal wave. Like the proverbial "flies on a chariot wheel," we find ourselves "perched upon a question of which we can neither see the diameter, nor control the motion, nor influence the moving force."¹ Christian missionaries are at once caught up in and contribute to this irresistible force for change, and like virtually everyone else on our planet, they are deeply affected by the impact of values, images, goods, and weapons which emanate from the West and which are mediated through tourism, media images, Western-style education, global economy, the substitution of artificial needs for real needs, the generational and economic division of once coherent families and peoples, and the widespread and seemingly indiscriminate use of frighteningly destructive Western weapons against largely civilian populations all over the world. Missiology needs to ask deeply theological questions about prevailing notions of progress— notions whose roots extend to the old, discredited white man's burden, to a time when it was unabashedly assumed that a part of the missionary's task was to "civilize." The term's

metamorphosis into the word "develop" provides only the most threadbare of disguises, certainly not sufficient to conceal its fundamental Eurocentrism, and its effects are the same everywhere, with the West both its measure and its motor (see, for example, Norberg-Hodge, 1996).

It is within this context of chronic uncertainty and endemic mayhem that Escobar's stress on the authority of the Word of God is significant, offering us an understanding of ourselves, our times, and our destiny within the context of humankind's individually short and sometimes brutal sojourn on this planet. The Word of God is both a compass and a handbook, providing reliable direction regardless of where its readers might be located in time, culture, or circumstance.

In his fifth section, accenting the growth of poverty and inequality, Escobar rightly reminds us of the fact that the prospect of material, economic, and technological progress—once thought to be an inevitable outcome of social and economic organization along capitalist lines—has proven to be an illusory and fundamentally false dream. The relative proportion of impoverished people around the world is increasing, not diminishing. At the same time, the relative proportion of very rich persons is diminishing, while the percentage of the planet's material resources which they control is increasing.

A recent *United Nations Human Development Report*² provides some perspective on just what this means:

¹ This image comes from the colorful Sydney Smith, in his 1823 counter-petition to the several emancipating bills brought before the British Parliament in the first quarter of the 19th century—bills which alarmed his fellow Anglican clergymen. Smith suggested an alternative petition, asking "for an inquiry into all laws affecting the Roman Catholics of Great Britain and Ireland," in the hope that "only those which were absolutely necessary to the safety of Church and State might be suffered to remain." The quotation above was a part of his speech in support of his motion. Despite his eloquence, his motion was soundly defeated by his fellow Anglicans (see Russell, 1905, pp. 106-109).

² As summarized in *The New York Times* (September 27, 1998, p. 16).

1. The world's 225 richest individuals, of whom 60 are Americans with total assets of \$311 billion, have a combined wealth of over \$1 trillion—equal to the combined wealth of the poorest 47% of the entire world's population.

2. The three richest people in the world have assets that exceed the combined gross domestic product of the 48 poorest countries.

3. The average African household is some 20% poorer today than it was 25 years ago.

4. The richest 20% of the world's people consume 86% of all goods and services. The poorest 20% consume 1.3%.

5. Americans and Europeans spend \$17 billion a year on pet food. This is \$4 billion more than the estimated annual total needed to provide basic health and nutrition for everyone in the world.

6. Americans spend \$8 billion a year on cosmetics—\$2 billion more than the estimated annual total needed to provide basic education for everyone in the world.

Even in the United States, the gulf between rich and poor is growing. In comparing the change in relative wealth of the wealthiest and the poorest U.S. citizens between 1977 and 1999, Congressional Budget Office figures indicate that the poorest 20% of the U.S. population earned 5.6% of all income in 1977 but only 4.2% in 1999. Their after-tax income averaged \$10,000 in 1977 but only \$8,800 in 1999, a 12% decrease. The richest 1% of the U.S.

population earned 7.3% of all income in 1977 and 12.9% in 1999. Their after-tax income amounted to \$234,700 in 1977 and \$515,600 in 1999, an increase of 119.7%.³

Evangelicals have responded to these realities by becoming more involved in "holistic mission projects," Escobar points out. This is appropriate, being the way of obedience, and it will need to be a continuing and growing priority if the gospel is to be comprehensible and meaningful. Partial obedience has always been lumped with disobedience in the Scriptures, and the line between "evangelism" and the so-called "social gospel" has always been an excuse for selective obedience. For Evangelicals, partial obedience is not an option.

The fact that the capacity for vital missionary initiative is passing from the North to the South at a time when the South's financial ability to engage in missions or theological education as modeled by the North is diminishing has serious implications, some of which we are just beginning to grasp. Escobar advocates an international model of mission which for many Western agencies will require a rethinking of their fundamental structures.

It has been common for missiologists and mission strategists to speak of "partnership." This is a useful term, but it has its roots in the cognitive domains of management and business and allows us to remain somewhat remote from the one

³ These figures appeared in *The New York Times* (September 5, 1999, p. 16). See also Zuckerman (1999, p. 108). Zuckerman, the Editor in Chief of *U.S. News and World Report*, points out that the U.S. itself is becoming two nations. "The prosperous are rapidly becoming more prosperous, and the poor are slowly getting poorer." Even though the American economy continues to experience dramatic growth, according to New York University economist Edward Wolff, "the top 20% of Americans account for more than 100% of the total growth in wealth from 1983-1997, while the bottom 80% lost 7%." Zuckerman cites another study that found that "the top 1% saw their after-tax income jump 115% in the past 22 years. The top fifth have seen an after-tax increase of 43% during the same period, while the bottom fifth of all Americans—including many working mothers—have seen their after-tax incomes fall 9%." The result is that 4 out of 5 households are relatively worse off than they were 22 years ago.

with whom we partner. As the social and economic disparity between erstwhile “partners” increases, partnership becomes more and more complicated and to some extent unworkable, since in managerial terms a partnership between unequals always favors the more powerful partner. The term is to some extent satisfactory, so long as our ecclesiology stresses the *independence* of individual churches, in consonance with the tried and true “three-self” formula. But when we begin to apply a more biblically satisfactory set of metaphors to the relationship—organic metaphors that will not allow us to think of being “independent” from one another, but as *interdependent* members of the same body with limbs, torso, head, eyes, ears, etc.—it becomes more difficult to use the term. After all, what does it mean for a hand to be in partnership with a leg or a foot or an eye? All members are a part of the same body, and *partnership* in that context surely requires as a minimum a permanent sharing of resources, experiences, and agendas. We need an ecclesiology and a missiology that more aptly reflect the language, the intent, and the reality of God’s view of the church as the body of Christ.

As a Mennonite, I heartily endorse what Escobar has written about the “end of Christendom,” his sixth point. The funeral dirge of Christendom is one at which Christians should join in lifting their voices in praise to God, since we humans so easily confuse self-serving ends with God-tolerated means. I can think of only one social aggregate that can be more mindlessly self-serving than the nation-state, and that is the ethnic group. The notion that any nation-state ever has or indeed *can* manifest the self-giving, self-sacrificing spirit of Christ has been one of the great delusions of Christendom and of much of its missionary expression. The idea that the West in particular has been

somehow more “Christlike” than those other expressions of collective ego that we have come to call “nations” continues to result in great confusion in its inevitable conflation of human culture with Christian gospel.

Escobar’s comments on post-modern culture and a new religiosity go naturally together, and I do not have time to dwell on them. I note only that resurgence of religious interest is not necessarily a hopeful sign, although it might be. To use a rather crude analogy, preoccupation with one’s body is usually a sign of ill health or old age, not a sign of health. It may be that Western interest in religion is simply a symptom of that fatal malaise marking the approaching end of life. On the other hand, the disillusionment and hopelessness of post-modernism are quite consonant with observations of God’s messengers nearly 3,000 years ago. The prophets were deeply disillusioned because they could see their societies as God saw those societies. If there is anything positive about the culture of post-modernity, it is that people now have the capacity to see themselves and their cultural contexts for what they really are—without God, hopeless, and in desperate need of redemption. This is a good starting point for conversion.

Jesus was no stranger to either old religions or fundamentalism, Escobar’s ninth point. In the end, it was those bent on protecting the “old religion” who arranged for Jesus’ execution. Jesus showed his followers the way to deal with this: the way of the cross, the way of the seed falling into the ground, the way of love for enemies, the way of forgiveness, the way of refusing to respond in kind. All of this takes place only at the level of everyday relationships with real people. It is risky, of course, but there is no other way.

The Pentecostal phenomenon is perhaps the most remarkable evidence that

the gospel is still good news for the poor and not simply a secret passage into Western consumer culture and, in the sweet by and by, a comfortable “middle class” existence. It is only natural that there should be a surge in the Pentecostal phenomenon, since its concerns and expressions have always resonated with the poor—and most Christians around the world are now poor.

Escobar’s conclusions begin with his appeal for a recovery of biblical patterns for mission. His four concluding observations—each of which suggests the “new” direction required if our missionary endeavors are to maintain or regain relevance—can be little improved upon within the confines of this short response.

That neither the present nor the future is very different from the past may be the most appropriate vantage point from which to contemplate the new century. Despite what appear to be remarkable changes at the turn of the century, the famous lament of the author of the book of Ecclesiastes provides a helpful perspective. After a lifetime in close pursuit of novelty, he observed that there is nothing new under the sun. This is at once comforting and disconcerting. Comforting, because we know that the eternal revelation of God transcends culture and time, addressing the sad realities of the human condition which, while expressing itself in various cultural contexts, remains essentially the same. We need peace with God. We need redemption. We cannot save ourselves. We need a Savior.

While it is not a little fascinating to look at the macro trends affecting persons, tribes, nations, continents, and the entire globe at the end of the century, it is entirely possible for us as missiologists and missionaries to become, in Walker Percy’s (1983) words, “lost in the cosmos”—so caught up in the big picture that we lose sight of the particular. Missionary action

always takes place at the micro level. The macro level is simply context. But the gospel is always mediated through and to specific persons, families, communities, and contexts. An understanding of global trends can be helpful only if it helps us to incarnate the gospel right where we are. If Evangelical missiology is to keep in touch with the really big issues, it must think small.

A theme implicit in much of what Escobar has written, but which we who fashion our livelihoods from thinking “missiologically” can inadvertently overlook, needs to be highlighted: God’s people are never instructed or urged to love the world or large segments of populations within it. God can and does love the world, but human beings are so constituted that they cannot. When we try, our expressions of love for the multitudes inevitably degenerate into pious posturing. We are called upon to love one another, spouse, neighbor, stranger, and enemy—whatever the cultural or cross-cultural context. This is challenge aplenty for even the most pious among us. Wherever the context of our missionary work, unless we fall into the ground and “die” at this personal level, our missiology means nothing. Given the ways in which we missiologists have come to envision and project the Christian task, this fact is of profound missiological import.

When God sent his Son to save the world, he sent him to live in a small back-eddy of the Roman Empire—in an occupied country, traveling on foot, never wandering very far beyond a 30-mile radius from where he grew up. It is good to recall that Jesus never even rode a bicycle, let alone flew in a jet! The Son of God, when he came to save the world, walked at three miles per hour (Koyama, 1980) and was constantly interrupted by the petty, intensely personal needs of individuals who could not realize what an impor-

tant agenda he had personally—to save the world.

The most significant discussion in which we can engage involves this question: What does it mean to do missionary work in ways congruent with biblical patterns and models? Are there some constants that transcend time and culture and society? I believe there are:

1. We need a missiology that recaptures the servant mode—not the servant with an *a priori* agenda, but the servant who lets his or her master set the tasks.

2. We need a missiology that recaptures the corn of wheat principle—the “he saved others, he cannot save himself” approach to mission modeled and mandated by Jesus.

3. We need a missiology that distinguishes between mere motion and actual accomplishment, between slick organization and costly incarnation, between believable propaganda and true communication, between self-serving career and self-giving service.

4. We need a missiology that moves us away from “efficiency” and teaches us to walk with the poor.

5. We need a missiology that forces us to think small, that encourages us to recognize that each human being lives at the level of micro-context, that this is the level at which the good news transforms and transfigures, and that this is the Great Commission.

6. We need a missiology that translates the good news—a missiology that recognizes that any gospel not made visible in the living flesh of another human being is no gospel at all. It is simply noise.

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Globalization and world evangelism

ALEX
ARAUJO

HOW CAN A BRAZILIAN ministry leader obtain funds from a multi-national corporation like Microsoft? Simple, according to an electronic message I received recently. Microsoft offered to send someone a reward for testing one of its software products, this person writes. All one has to do, he explains, is send a particular e-mail message to as many friends as possible, as a test of a new Microsoft product. This person claims to have received several thousand dollars already, and he encourages all of us to participate in this product test to raise funds for our ministries. Anyone anywhere in the world can participate through e-mail, at no cost and in only a few minutes. I have not been able to verify this message, but the amazing thing is that the message was written by a sincere Christian leader at all.

Globalization permits the merging of widely disparate interests from any place on earth by any person with access to modern technology. It permits, even invites, as in the real-life example above, the merging of world evangelization and the marketing plans of a multi-national corporation. For some, as with this Brazilian friend, globalization seems to be a welcome development, because it offers new ways to find and apply resources for ministry. Others have serious misgivings, suspecting that there is a hidden danger when such disparate interests as the profit strategies of a multi-national corporation and the evangelism strategies of a missions agency come together.

The difference of perspective between those Christians who are willing to seize the benefits of globalization for missions purposes and those who see or at least strongly suspect something wrong with this approach defines the essence of relevant discussions about globalization and missions.

Is there something inherently bad or practically harmful to missions in the globalization phenomenon? Are there safe ways to take advantage of elements of globalization without at the same time being exposed to its harm? Perhaps more important still, is globalization merely a neutral realignment of socio-economic mechanisms, or does it have inherent ethical errors and weaknesses?

These questions cannot be ignored, because globalization itself cannot be ignored. It is shaping how we think and function in missions. Either we know what it is and how to control what it does to us and through us, or we will simply be shaped by it according to its own impersonal forces and agenda. The missions movement today already relies extensively on electronic mail, for example, one of the more ubiquitous tools made available worldwide by globalization. E-mail has made it possible for Christians from very different countries and socio-economic contexts to participate in dialogue about the theology and practice of missions. It has also begun to divide us into those who have access to electronic mail and those who don't. Some precious believers, toiling under harsh conditions, blessing many by their sacrificial service, are excluded from the rich mission dialogue the rest of us enjoy because they do not have effective access to e-mail.

Globalization of information not only permits wider participation in the dialogue, but also provides avenues for worldwide dissemination of prevailing ideas and methods concerning missions. While on the one hand it gives Christians

of non-Western countries an opportunity to join the dialogue, it also provides new avenues for the better resourced Western Christians to promote and disseminate their own already-developed ideas through Internet-ready literature, courses, and activity reporting. These activities are extremely relevant to the question of better involvement of non-Western missions thinkers and practitioners in the worldwide missions movement, because they maintain and even increase the gap between the more affluent and less affluent churches, independently of spiritual worth and effectiveness of ministry.

Defining Globalization

How should Christians think about globalization?

Globalization is, at the practical level, a way of describing the manner in which socio-economic interaction is carried on. At this level, some would argue that it is ethically neutral. The rice I eat is just rice, whether it is produced by the local tenant farmer or by an international agro-business concern. At another level, globalization represents a way of thinking about the world, a worldview. It is a way of organizing priorities, thus establishing a scale of values for determining what is more important. "How is economic globalization likely to change our common future and particularly our view of what is important and of value?" asks Tom Sine (1999, p. 49).¹ Globalization, like any other worldview, has serious ethical implications. While it may not be a fully developed system of thought such as

¹ Sine's book *Mustard Seed versus McWorld* (1999) provides very practical approaches to understanding and responding to the pressures of globalization. The book is especially useful for American Christians, although non-Americans will also find it helpful as a tool for better understanding their American colleagues and their challenges. The book can also be used to identify some of the main issues of globalization that need to receive more specific treatment in each cultural context.

Marxism, socialism, or Western democracy, it does provide ethical themes, which we will discuss below. Christians eager to take advantage of the new tools of globalization must first reflect seriously about these less obvious ethical implications. My purposes in this essay are to identify and introduce for the larger discussion some of these themes and to suggest some questions Christians need to ask of one another concerning the implications of globalization for world missions.

What is globalization?

Globalization is a complex phenomenon that can be approached from many different directions. Thomas Friedman provides one of the best secular analyses in his book *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*. He offers the following as three key elements to a definition of globalization:

- Democratization of technology, finance, and information. "This means that it is now possible for hundreds of millions of people around the world to get connected and exchange information, news, knowledge, money ... financial trades ... in ways and to a degree never witnessed before" (Friedman, 1999, p. 45).
- Free-market capitalism as the organizing principle of world economics. "The more you let market forces rule and the more you open your [national] economy to free trade and competition, the more efficient and flourishing your economy will be. Globalization means the spread of free-market capitalism to virtually every country in the world" (Friedman, 1999, p. 8).
- A specific cultural bias. "... globalization has its own dominant culture, which is why it tends to be homogenizing.... Culturally speaking, globalization is largely, though not entirely, the spread of Americanization ... on a global scale" (Friedman, 1999, p. 8).

"The strongest advocates for a new global economic order," writes Tom Sine (1999, p. 50), "... have been schooled in a worldview that defines what is best largely in terms of economic growth and efficiency. And they have concluded that the best way to achieve those outcomes is through the creation of a borderless economic order."

Edward Luttwak (1999, p. 222) writes, "Everywhere the logic of turbo-capitalism [Luttwak's concept for what drives globalization] is that nothing should stand in the way of economic efficiency ... for nothing must hinder competition, which alone enforces efficiency by impoverishing less efficient individuals, firms, industries, local communities, and countries—and sometimes all of them at once." Another way to put this is that growth and change *must* occur because they *can* occur. The idea echoes the evolutionary view that a thing's existence is its own justification and that the possibility of growth and change is sufficient reason for that growth and change to occur. C. S. Lewis (1946, p. 295) anticipated this in the mid-1940s, when he put in the mouth one of his characters the following words: "... is justified by the fact that it is occurring, and it ought to be increased because an increase is taking place."

It seems, from these examples and from the writings of other students of globalization, that this complex reality contains the following key elements:

1. It is fueled primarily by economic considerations.
2. It is inspired by rapid economic growth and efficiency as the best foundation for solving humanity's problems.
3. It has a strongly Western, primarily American cultural imprint.
4. It is highly dependent on recent developments in communication technology.

5. It favors those who have a longer tradition in free-market capitalism and who lead in communication technology.

We will look at some of the implications of globalization to the Christian missions movement, but first we need to consider globalization in relation to the church.

Globalization and Christ's Church

The growth of the church around the world, in contrast to globalization, is an expression of eternal principles set in motion by God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. It is not a product of recent secular historical movements and trends.

The church was meant to become global even if the world remained forever provincial. Since Abraham, God has been speaking explicitly about the gathering of all nations into one people. The Psalmist writes, "The nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham, for the kings of the earth belong to God; he is greatly exalted" (Ps. 47:9).² And the writer of Revelation proclaims that the new Jerusalem, representing God's kingdom on earth, "does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.... The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it" (Rev. 21:23, 24, 26).

We often hear the question these days how we should face globalization. It seems that we feel the church may be left behind if it doesn't adapt and adapt speedily. Globalization, the experts tell us, is the only boat available for mankind today. If we don't get into it, we will be left behind. Globalization is this inexorable force that

is sweeping the world like a tidal wave. Those who learn quickly to ride the wave will survive, and those who don't will perish. This idea seems to have infected some in the missions movement, to judge by the optimism and eagerness of some mission agencies in adapting to globalization's hopes and promises.

The question of how the church should face globalization is misplaced. From a biblical perspective, it is globalization that has to face the church. We must judge the "pattern of this world" and decide under the counsel of the Holy Spirit what is good and what is not good about it. As the Apostle Paul puts it, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will" (Rom. 12:2).

The key principle for Christians looking at globalization, then, is to refuse to be lured, intimidated, or pressured by it. Globalization is the current strategy that a secular and lost humanity has developed to cope with an existence devoid of faith and hope in God. World evangelization is essentially the reality of which globalization is merely and ineffectively a shadow. In this sense, missions has the answer to the question that gave birth to globalization. The church does not need to learn how to adjust to globalization. It is called to speak to people caught up in globalization's tidal wave, just as it did with all the previous tidal waves in human history.

Jacques Ellul (1989, p. 4) has eloquently stated this point. Speaking of the church in society, he writes, "This 'light of the world' is that which gives meaning and direction to the history of the world, and thus explains it. In the succession of events which the course of history presents, there

² See also Gen. 12:1-3; Isa. 49:6; 66:18-21; Matt. 28:19; Eph. 2:15-19; Rev. 5:9-10; 7:9; 11:15.

is no logic, no certitude, but this logic is supplied by the presence of the church, however strange this may seem ... the Christian ... reveals to the world the truth about its condition." The Christian, Ellul (1989, p. 39) continues, "judges the present time in virtue of a meta-historical fact, and the incursion of this event into the present is the only force capable of throwing off the dead weight of social and political institutions which are gradually crushing the life out of our present civilization."

This view does not give us license to be aloof or proud, nor to ignore the significant and occasionally beneficial changes brought about by globalization. It simply establishes a right order of relationship between the church and the current "pattern of this world."

Understanding Globalization

With the above discussion in mind, we must set ourselves to the task of understanding globalization and its implications to the work of missions.

First, the balance between nation-states has changed. In the present globalization system, the United States is the sole and dominant superpower, and all other nations are subordinate to it to one degree or another (Friedman, 1999, p. 11). In some ways and in a parallel sense, the situation resembles for the current American missions movement the colonial days of William Carey and Hudson Taylor. Just as Carey and Taylor rode on the wings of the British economic empire, with all its facilities and power of projection, American missionaries today ride on the global expansion of American economic activities and accompanying cultural exports. This is not a criticism of American missionaries. In some ways, Americans have no choice, just as Carey and Taylor did not. In fact, Taylor fought hard to shed his

Britishness. Yet even to the degree that he succeeded, he had to direct a fair amount of energy to that issue. So, to the extent that globalization today carries a strong American flavor, American missionaries have to face similar tensions. Conversely, non-Americans on the field have to contend with this American cultural overlay as they seek to work in cooperation with their American colleagues. The sooner both sides recognize this reality and discuss it openly, the better it will be for truly cooperative missions work.

Second, the balance between nation-states and global markets has changed. These global markets are made up of millions of investors moving money around the world instantly through their computers and from the privacy of their homes. Friedman calls them the "electronic herd." This "herd" cannot be tightly controlled by national governments. The national economy can be severely affected by this activity, whether or not it fits national policy. Like swarming bees, this herd cannot be controlled by governments, because they gain access to a nation's economy from any place in the world through electronic transactions. And they can force governments to make decisions and adopt policies by the simple threat of taking their investments from one country and instantly placing them in another. This weakens national sovereignty and erodes democratic processes. Voters may elect their leaders, but the international economy may dictate the leaders' policies.

Third, the balance between nation-states and individuals has changed. Individuals and their wealth—particularly very rich individuals—can move across national boundaries with increasing freedom. That means that financially powerful individuals such as Osama Bin Laden and Bill Gates may find themselves negotiating directly with governments of sovereign states, striking deals that their own coun-

tries' governments may not approve, yet are powerless to prevent.

Implications for Missions

What are the implications of this turn of events to the missions movement? The challenge of globalization intersects with the Christian missions movement in a variety of ways.

The theology of the church

We need to reflect on the current state of our theology of the church and of missions. The church, to be true to its nature, must be distinct, separate from any current human trend and condition, so that it can speak to humanity and to its condition. The Apostle Paul tells us that "God placed all things under [Christ's] feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" (Eph. 1:22-23). And God's "intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:10-11). Unless we see the church as greater than the human condition at any point in history, it does not have a message. It must be "in" the world, in order to speak intelligibly to the world. But if it is "of" the world, it is part of the problem, however conscientious it tries to be in preaching the gospel.

The church is not supposed to cope with globalization, but rather to judge globalization and offer itself as the real global community. The church is what a globalized society can never be, "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pet. 2:9). Peter, along with Paul, helps

us understand how the church stands as prophet and priest to the world. But in order to exercise its prophetic and priestly role effectively, the church cannot be or act like a mere religious segment of the world. The church is not part of the globalization phenomenon, needing to learn how to ride its wave, as human institutions must, in order to survive.

As Peter puts it, we are "aliens and strangers in the world" (1 Pet. 2:11). It seems, at times, that our local churches resemble more and more a religious version of business enterprises. We compete for customers by improving the marketing of our Christian product. We look to the business gurus to help us recreate our churches and agencies in terms that make sense within modern economic trends. The more our ecclesiology resembles in practice the commercial world around us, the more it fits the terminology and worldview of global economic trends. Unless we review our ecclesiology and restore it to its biblical foundations and conceptual language, we will not be able to judge the trends that surround us, and the churches may in fact become simply one of the many sub-elements of that trend. We have already seen the development of a school of thought that promotes the marketing of the church. Soon we may see the next development, the globalization of the church, along the same driving concepts of economic globalization: rapid numerical growth and efficiency defined by return on missions dollars.

Non-numerical language

We must rediscover the non-numerical language of the gospel. Evangelicalism has flourished predominantly in Western and North American societies during the last two centuries. This flourishing coincides with the development of the free-market capitalism that is now both the driving force and the essence of global-

ization. It has given Western society a numerical language that is particularly suited to business transactions, but terribly poor to describe the worth and experience of the gospel. Recently I attended a missions consultation that focused on a region of the world where the growth of the church is modest in comparison to certain places in Asia and Latin America. At least in two instances, speakers described the success of the mission in a given area by indicating the percentage of growth of the church in the last 10 years. It was interesting that this growth was described in percentages rather than absolute numbers, which allowed them to say the church grew 28 times in 10 years—an impressive growth rate. This way of reporting growth has a much greater impact on the churches back home than if the growth were described in absolute numerical terms: from 50 to a few thousand in 10 years.

Would the disciples in the early church have thought in terms of numerical valuation of the church? After all, the Lord Jesus used very different language, perhaps shocking to our ears, when he said that there is more joy in heaven for one sinner who repents than for 99 righteous; and he considered the widow's mite a greater offering than the larger offerings of the Pharisees. He also gave us a very humbling picture of the growth of the gospel in the parable of the narrow way and the broad way. And he never promised that Christians were to become a national majority population.

I am not arguing for a total abandonment of numbers in assessing and reporting our missions work, but I suggest that statistics and numbers for the most part be presented as footnotes to our field reports, since they seem to be given only marginal significance in the Scriptures. The actual language with which Christ described matters of the kingdom was quite different, and we need to rediscover it.

Conceptual language is powerful in shaping how we think and eventually what we believe. I recently attended another regional-focused missions consultation. In the midst of field reports by various missionaries, a woman believer from the region was asked to give her testimony. She spoke from the podium about how the gospel came to her family. As she elaborated on the biblical metaphor of the light of the gospel shining to the darkness of her people, her testimony became increasingly an emotional expression of deep gratitude to the Lord and to the missionaries he had sent to her country. She finished unable to speak, her eyes flooded with tears of gratitude to her gracious God.

I was myself deeply moved by such a beautiful reminder of the reason for missions, which is precisely to make the wonderful light of Christ to shine and deliver people from darkness. In my heart I deeply hoped the moderator would interrupt the formal agenda with a time of praise to God. Instead, as soon as this sister finished, the moderator announced the next presenter, and we went on with the report. Where was the rejoicing in the church for the one sinner who had repented? Can it be that we have become so shaped by the pattern of this world that we don't even recognize the full impact of our own service to God in the lives of those we touch? Therefore, this matter of language is very important. How can we judge the spirit of the age, the "pattern of this world," if we do not have an independent, biblically based conceptual language with which to describe it?

Exporting distortions

The church in mission-sending countries must be careful not to export such culturally generated distortions to emerging churches. Yet the Western church may not be able to escape the strong grip of economic globalization without the help

of the emerging church. What does the church look like when it is not so heavily influenced by material affluence and driven by the mechanistic values of growth and efficiency? How do brothers and sisters who live at the margins of this worldwide globalization pattern experience communion with Christ and his family? We must learn to listen to and learn from them.

Redefining what it means to be human

Since globalization is essentially driven by economic forces, it must redefine what it means to be human in terms that are compatible to the structures, mechanisms, and outcomes of a free-market economy. We attribute to the economist Adam Smith much of the foundation of today's Western version of a market economy. Theologian Timothy Gorringe (1999, p. 30), discussing this point, writes, "Aristotle believed that speech was given us to form community, but for Smith speech was part of our 'property to barter, truck, and exchange one thing for another.' So for Smith it was not the polity [community] which came first, but the market. We see how the community that nourishes the virtues is displaced by this loose agglomerate of individuals in trade. Doubtless led on by the flow of his argument, Smith abandoned the elaborate cautions of his moral philosophy and famously observed that it is not to the benevolence of the butcher that we owe our dinner, but to the appeal to his self-interest."

Thus, Gorringe (1999, p. 30) goes on to say, "*Homo sapiens* is reduced to *Homo economicus*, the rational utility maximizer, of whom it is assumed that self-interest, expressed primarily through the quest for financial gain, is his main concern." Since globalization is primarily a globalization of the Western free-market economy, the market view of humans is that they are

consumers—buyers and sellers. Though people who are in the vanguard of globalization may deny that this is their view of human beings, in practice it really doesn't matter since they assume (whether implicitly or obviously) that in the end every consumer will eventually find space within the global economy and benefit from it.

The church, in contrast, must affirm the biblical view of human beings as *Homo spiritualis*, created male and female, in the image of God, not reducible to *Homo economicus* or any other variant.

Competition and Change

The free-market economic model is marked by the need for constant competition and change. Wealth, in this system, is created by competition and innovation. It is not a maintenance economy but a growth economy. "Today," writes Friedman (1999, p. 41), "there is no more First World, Second World, and Third World. There is now just the Fast World—the world of the wide open plain—and the Slow World—the world of those who either fall by the wayside or choose to live away ... in some walled-off valley of their own." Market economies have thrived for centuries by ruthless competition, in an economic Darwinism where the strongest survive by devouring the others. Globalization, says Friedman (1999, p. 41), "... put this process into hyperspeed in the 1980s, requiring companies and countries to move much faster in order to avoid disaster."

The reduction of humans to *Homo economicus* does not alleviate the anguish that a global free-market system driven by constant change at ever-increasing speed generates. Surely we must recognize that competition as a way of life is ultimately destructive and in contradiction to the life of the gospel. A socio-economic system that thrives only when there is fierce com-

petition may indeed generate better medical treatment and improved food production. But its longer-term implications need serious and continuous assessment. Its implicit moral tenet is that each of us must fend for ourselves because there is no one else who is for us.

Effects on American Culture

We have seen that globalization is not culturally neutral. It is heavily marked and shaped by American culture, as Friedman points out. Various authors have extensively documented this fact, and I will not elaborate on it, except as it relates to the Christian missions movement. In summary, all we have to do is to travel to any country in the world, including some small towns in under-developed countries, to see the presence of American culture, whether in the music coming out of radio boxes, the brand names found in sports shoes and tee-shirts (in fact, the practice of wearing sports shoes and tee-shirts merely as fashion is itself an Americanism), the long lines of applicants for visas in American consulates, and the billboards advertising American products. Again, globalization is not neutral. It has given all of us, regardless of nationality, the wonders of the portable computer. Yet, it is American-based Intel and Microsoft which make it possible for us to use it. This means that globalization provides a home-culture flavor for American mission personnel that is not experienced by missionaries of any other country. This reality says that the role of Americans in missions is not simply that of just another cultural group, but of a group whose culture and values have a major influence in shaping the trend and values of globalization.

More specific to our missions topic, we note the predominance of American authors in Christian bookstores throughout

the world, of American worship music CD-ROMs and tapes, and the trend toward “seeker friendly” services copied from America. While other societies have international projection and influence, none comes close to matching the extent of American influence. But does this projection of American Christianity worldwide result in the global church being enriched by deeper spirituality and more serious missiology?

I must make the following caution at this point. It is very important that the reader not conclude that this is merely a generalized criticism of American believers or specifically of American missionaries. It is simply a factor to take into account as we consider the impact of globalization on world missions. It would be unprofitable and unjust to fault all American believers for what obviously is not of their doing. Neither does their cultural locus disqualify them for effective participation in the international missions enterprise. My point is simply to say that the role of Americans in missions requires a more complex self-assessment in light of their society’s place in the globalization phenomenon.

Implications of Cultural Bias

What are the implications for missions of this cultural bias in favor of the United States? First of all, a missions movement so steeped in the dominant culture that drives globalization is bound to reflect, consciously or unconsciously, elements of the prevailing value system. It is easy to discern in American missions thinking certain traits that reflect the economic globalization mindset, things such as numerical thinking, pragmatism, efficiency, and continuous quantifiable growth, to name the more obvious.

Second, the American church has been predominant in leading and shaping the modern missions movement, at least since the end of World War II. That means that for much of the promising emerging missions movements from Latin America, Africa, Asia, and even Eastern Europe today, the most visible missions model is American. In this sense, American missions leaders have a burden that they may not have chosen to carry, but it is theirs nevertheless. They must pay particular attention to how globalization trends, so closely tied to American culture as it is projected around the world, shape their missions model and how this model is unwittingly reproduced.

Third, missions thinkers and practitioners from the emerging missions movements around the world, and even from Western Europe, can in good faith help Americans see beyond their cultural blind spots (all cultures have them). But Americans must be helped to divest themselves of undue valuation derived from the free-market globalization, values such as the primacy of efficiency, continuous quantifiable growth, excessive pragmatism, and numerical thinking as applied to the work of missions.

Unequal Distribution

Though signs of a global economy and accompanying value systems can be seen nearly everywhere, it is important to understand that globalization is not experienced equally by everyone. It is possible to believe that globalization has made us all equal in the face of the market forces that shape us. But this is not true. As we pointed out before, globalization has expanded the free-market economy into world scale. That means that those societies with a longer history of an innovative free-market economy have a decided advantage. They set the pace, and the oth-

ers must work very hard simply not to fall further behind. Americans, we have seen, are at the front of the tidal wave, with some European and Asian countries close behind and matching the pace. But the vast majority of the peoples of the world are lumped together in a very distant third place. Though people from all countries can experience globalization, not all can participate in shaping it or reaping its benefits.

Globalization is experienced differently by people near its front and people at the rear. Like the paralytic at the pool of Siloam, those in weaker and less stable economies are too far from the water's edge, and there is always someone who plunges in first whenever the angel stirs the water. That someone will most likely be an American, Japanese, or Northern European. It is easy to say that with globalization we are all part of the same reality. Yet some Christians live in a Western country with a negligible unemployment rate, while others live where unemployment reaches 50% to 60%. In countries near the front of the globalization tidal wave, the church parking garages are full of relatively new automobiles. Churches in countries at the rear may not even have paint on the walls, much less own a parking garage or have members who drive cars.

Implications for missions

For the missions movement, it is significant that most of the still unreached peoples of the earth belong to countries that bring up the rear of globalization. What are some of the implications of this reality?

First, we must discern this fact beyond superficial appearances. When I traveled through the rural communities of Chiapas in southern Mexico, I was intrigued by the extensive Coca-Cola distribution network. Coca-Cola signs appeared frequently along the roads, and occasionally I saw

Coca-Cola warehouses and trucks, reflecting a fairly extended distribution system. Signs of Western commercialism in places like Chiapas, Mexico, may give the impression that globalization is more evenly spread than is true.

In Chiapas, rural peasants still cultivate small plots of land for daily survival. In West Kalimantan, among the Dayaks I visited two years ago, the drink offered to us was not Coca-Cola but coconut milk, which our host obtained by climbing one of the coconut trees on his property, harvesting a few coconuts, opening them with a machete, and serving the nourishing, fresh, cool liquid to us. These people are a little farther away from the reach of globalization. With or without Coke, the least reached peoples of the world—with the exception of a small elite—still do not directly participate in the global economy. It can be argued that indirectly or not, they are part of it. But the fact that a Chiapas Indian may have become addicted to Coca-Cola does not mean that he is ready to understand the new language of globalization.

Second, failure to recognize the uneven impact of globalization around the world has implications for missionary training. The preparation and training of missionaries to reach the remaining unreached may not need to differ very much from the way pioneering missionaries were trained. Yet the pace of socio-economic development in mission-sending countries may pressure mission agencies into more sophisticated and complex models of ministry, which make heavy use of technology and may be less effective in the host countries.

Third, the unevenness with which globalization distributes resources and allocates control of decision-making, favoring those near the front of the trend, means that Western mission efforts will continue to have a disproportionately greater influ-

ence in the world missions movement unless we find a way to shift the weight away from globalization-generated values. What adjustments can Western believers make to minimize this imbalance?

The view from the rear

Significantly, globalization is predominantly a Western concept, and from there it spreads to other economically powerful nations. It was primarily born of a Western reality and shaped and defined by Western paradigms. Paradigms define the nature of problems and limit the range of solutions. It is not surprising, then, that it is the Westerners in the missions movement that seem more at home with the subject and more likely to engage it. What does globalization look like to those near the rear? What perspective can they bring to the missions movement and the remaining task of world evangelization? Perhaps they can help us see world evangelization as more than a task we must accomplish. They can help us to see where the competitive urge of free-market economics contradicts the Scriptures and can help us to correct our thinking. They may also help us, among other things, to see that things that seem like virtues for those living at the front end of globalization may not look like virtues at all from a biblical perspective. And the fact is that both in Scripture and history, most of the advance of the people of God has taken place in contexts of weakness, poverty, and uncertainty.

It is essential for the health of the missions movement that we really listen to Christians from the rear. Those at the front may not be able to see and value the wonderful things God is doing through his church elsewhere.

Missions as an Antidote

Missiologist, missionary, and anthropologist Don Richardson faced criticism from non-Christian anthropologists that

he and all missionaries are harmful to the culture of the people they seek to evangelize. Some secular anthropologists charge that the introduction of a new religion disrupts benevolent age-old beliefs and customs that define the values of persons within that culture, thus creating insecurity and leading to the breakdown of the cultures altogether. Richardson ably corrects the critics by pointing out that long before the missionary comes to a people, their doom is already sealed by the incursion of profiteers and adventurers (including the anthropologists who supposedly study these peoples in supposed neutrality), who introduce destructive new elements such as destruction of the environment, liquor abuse, and new forms of diseases. Missionaries, on the other hand, actually bring to the peoples of the world a set of values that are much more likely to enable them to resist the incursions of this incipient globalization. Though accelerated to the point where it covers the globe and is making itself nearly irresistible to any human culture, globalization has manifested itself to some degree for centuries.

One of my favorite books is the biography of John Paton, missionary to the New Hebrides more than a century ago. One of his frustrations was the fact that British colonial authorities did nothing to police the European merchants and profiteers who introduced the liquor, diseases, and firearms that caused irreparable damage to the indigenous peoples to whom he ministered. Over 100 years ago, Paton, like Richardson, worked hard to prepare these people for the growing, irreversible onslaught of globalization in its earlier expressions. As Richardson (1992, p. C-144) states: "There are reasons why missionaries had to go into isolated areas like Irian Jaya as soon as they could. History has taught them that even the most iso-

lated minority cultures must eventually be overwhelmed by the commercial and political expansion of the majority peoples."

Missions today still can perform a significant service to the nations by giving them a new set of values—God-given values with which they can judge all economic systems, including the alien incursions of global market forces. Are new believers resulting from our missions work becoming equipped to judge the pattern of this world, or is our missions work merely helping make them more compliant with it? This equipping of the new saints is not a peripheral by-product of missions, but central to it. But in order to equip effectively, we must ourselves:

1. Understand the nature and power of globalization, not merely separating the products that are beneficial from those that are harmful, but discerning the value system that is communicated by globalization's very existence and nature.
2. Recognize the degree to which globalization may have already begun to reshape our worldview and take steps to renew our minds through the Scriptures.
3. Reaffirm (for some of us, perhaps even rediscover) a biblical worldview that places Christ and his church above world trends, whether economic, political, cultural, or religious.

Mission Partnerships and Globalization

The face of the church today has changed dramatically since 100 years ago.

- The church has changed geographically: In 1900, most Evangelical believers were in North America, England, and Northwest Europe. Today, these regions comprise perhaps only 25% of the worldwide Evangelical church.
- The church has changed ethnically: The church the Lord sees from his throne today has many more people from Asia,

Africa, and Latin America than from North America and Europe.

- The church has changed intellectually: No longer are theological thinking and understanding coming predominantly from North America and Europe. Godly men and women from other continents are studying, researching, writing, and teaching on an equal footing with their North American and European colleagues.
- The church has changed dynamically: Today, most of the growth of the church worldwide is generated locally and nationally, rather than provoked and led by expatriates.

We would be seriously mistaken if we assumed that these factors are just another expression of some religious version of the wider globalization trend. They are, rather, the expression of the sovereignty of God in Christ, manifest in his church to fulfill his Great Commission.

Back to the Beginning

This encouraging state of the borderless church of Christ today offers us a marvelous opportunity to learn new ways of working together. We must abandon, through newly acquired mental and spiritual disciplines, any trace of paternalism, cultural resentment, or cultural blinders that might cause us to miss the blessing that comes from brothers and sisters from other cultures. Nigerians and North Americans, Koreans and Brazilians, Filipinos and Chinese, Swedes and Malays, and believers in every nation on earth form the one universal church, the people of the God of Abraham, “a holy nation, a people belonging to God” (1 Pet. 2:9). In contrast to the doomed Babel of our day, we live like strangers in a foreign country, looking forward together to the “city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Heb. 11:10).

Finally, we must return to the beginning. Globalization is a logical development of a secular world system. It is the best one can expect of a world resistant to the love and the kingdom of God. As such, it is grossly inadequate to answer the pressing deepest anxieties and despair of humanity. The church must be careful not to be too comfortable in the company of globalization. The church is the worshipping community of God, the one legitimate unifying structure for the peoples of the world. I believe the history of Babel was recorded precisely to help us understand this. It was humankind’s best effort to unite all peoples into one world community. God rejected it as unfit for the purpose. He offers instead a new community through the seed of Abraham, the church. We are the alternative. The church today must stand to globalization as Abraham stood to Babel (see Gen. 11:1-8; 12:1-3). Globalization is not the enemy, but it is a bad answer to the problem of the fall and fragmentation of humanity, and it will fail, just as Babel failed.

“Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom has come! The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes anymore ... articles of every kind ... and bodies and souls of men” (Rev. 18:10-13).

Our mission remains, as always, to bring to the stranded peoples of the world the invitation to join the community of the God of Abraham and become the kingdom of the Lord and of his Christ, who shall reign forever and ever in a truly universal kingdom.

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Christ and the mosaic of pluralisms

CHRIS
WRIGHT

IN JANUARY 1999, England reeled under the shocking news that Glen Hoddle, the coach of the England national football team, had been sacked. This was not for failure on the football field (though that would have been justified enough!) but because of remarks he made about the disabled. Hoddle had a Christian religious experience some years ago which led to his being called a “born-again Christian.” However, more recently he has embraced a form of New Age spirituality under the influence of a spiritual faith-healer, Eileen Drewery. He expressed the view that the disabled are as they are because of their karma from previous lives. It was, indirectly, their own fault.¹ This statement outraged public sentiment in Britain and produced a fascinating clash of cultural and ethical worldviews. Hoddle’s view, of course, comes straight from the Hindu roots of much New Age philosophy (though he did not go on to include women as also “suffering” the results of their karma, perhaps fortunately for him, even though that is also part of the re-incarnational Hindu worldview).

Interestingly, the response to Hoddle shows up a contradiction in secular pluralism. On the one hand, a “politically correct” ideology wants to affirm the validity of Hindu and New Age “alternative” spiritualities and reject allegedly “absolutist” and “arrogant” Christian claims. Yet on the other

¹ Hoddle’s words, in an interview with *The Times*, were, “You have to come back [in another lifetime] to learn and face some of the things you have done, good and bad. There are too many injustices around. You and I have been physically given two hands and two legs and half-decent brains. Some people have not been born like that for a reason. The karma is working from another lifetime.... It is not only people with disabilities. What you sow, you have to reap.”

hand, it is also very “politically correct” to affirm and defend the disabled (or more “correctly,” the “differently abled”).

What the Hoddle affair shows up is that in the latter case, the “politically correct” attitude itself is the legacy of a Christian worldview which affirms the value of every unique individual human being and denies the debilitating and imprisoning doctrine of karma. This contradiction within popular religious and moral belief was not much noticed, however. Pluralism does not foster clear thinking about the inconsistencies it is happy to live with. One version of popular pluralism says, “It doesn’t matter what you believe so long as you are sincere.” Another version seems to say, “It does matter what you believe if it means insulting the weak.” But those who so vociferously adopt the latter view would probably not like to be told that such a view is itself strongly indebted to the biblical and Christian worldview.

This example from recent British life illustrates how popular spirituality and opinions about ethical and social issues are profoundly influenced by a great plurality of religious worldviews, some being new forms of pre-Christian paganism, others being very ancient Oriental religious fundamentals re-packaged in Western forms.

The Task

My understanding of the task assigned to me in this paper is two-fold:

1. To survey some of the forms of pluralism that lie behind the pluralities of our world as we enter the new millennium.²

2. To suggest what will be key tasks for Evangelical missiology in relation to them. It is not my brief, as I understand it, to propose what new *mission strategies* may be needed in relation to global pluralities, but rather to focus on what will be the issues needing to be addressed by Evangelical *theological* reflection that should undergird our mission activity.

I have chosen three examples of pluralism that I see as particularly challenging to Evangelical missiology: hermeneutical, religious, and ethical.³ Part of the reason for this selection is that these three forms of pluralism directly challenge three of the defining marks of Evangelicalism—our concern for the authority of the Bible, for the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, and for transformed living according to biblical ethical standards. These three are also central to an Evangelical understanding of mission, which flows from our understanding of the scriptural mandate, proclaims that Jesus Christ alone is Lord and Saviour, and aims to produce transformed human lives and communities.

I fully realise that this is an inadequate selection—there is a plurality of pluralisms! Even pluralism itself is changing. However, it is hoped that those reading this sketch will helpfully fill out the gaps in my own presentation, and that other paper writers will address issues that I am well aware of but have not felt able to address in the confines of this paper. This would especially include the plurality of contextualized Christologies and the missiologies that flow from them. I have also chosen not to discuss the inner plurality

² I will use the term *plurality* to denote the empirical phenomena of social, political, ethnic, religious, etc. variety. *Pluralism* denotes the usually relativistic ideologies that support or respond to those phenomena. Plurality is simply an observable fact of life. Pluralism is a philosophy. I shall try to maintain this distinction.

³ In the first draft of this paper, I also included ethnic/political pluralism, but I have omitted that variety now, since some aspects of that phenomenon are discussed in Samuel Escobar’s paper (see chapter 3), under the heading “Globalization and Contextualization.”

to be found within Evangelical missiology itself (though I refer briefly to it under “Religious Pluralism” below).

An Age of Enormous Transition

Finally, by way of introduction, it is vital that we give full recognition to the transition from modernity to post-modernity that is taking place in a very patchy way around the world, together with the implications not only for the practice of Christian mission, but also for the task of missiology. This is not to ignore the fact that in some parts of the world, the transition is still more from pre-modernity into modernity itself. However, it is the case that some forms of pluralism that Christian missiology must address are the product of post-Enlightenment modernity, whereas others are the product of the post-modern reaction to modernity itself. Religious pluralism, for example, actually exhibits a variety of forms that have roots in the intellectual and cultural soil of *both* modernity and post-modernity. Missiological response, as we shall see below, must discern and distinguish these different roots when confronting different brands of religious pluralism.

By *modernity* I am referring to the epoch of Western civilization that began with the Renaissance, flourished in the wake of the Enlightenment, and has reached its zenith in 19th and 20th century cultures dominated by the triumphs of science and technology. Its dominant characteristic has been the exaltation of autonomous human reason and the application of reason to every realm of life. There are many excellent analyses of modernity’s characteris-

tics and history.⁴ Among the features of modernity that are particularly relevant to the Christian confrontation with various pluralisms are those listed by Andrew Walker (1996, ch. 5): the rise of the nation-state, the establishment of functional rationality, the emergence of structural (epistemological) pluralism, the emergence of cultural pluralism, a worldview dominated by science and the idea of progress, and the growth of individualism.

By *post-modernity* I am referring to the shift in Western intellectual and popular culture that began in the 1960s and 1970s. It is helpful to distinguish the intellectual and the popular forms of post-modernity and, furthermore, in each case to observe that there are negative and positive aspects to the form.⁵

Intellectual post-modernism

Intellectually, through the work of such as Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida, and Baudrillard, the whole Enlightenment project was exposed as having faulty foundations. The negative or “deconstructing” acids included the observation that so-called “objective and factual truth” depends on all kinds of assumptions, which are themselves relative and questionable. Foucault pointed out that these hidden assumptions also frequently functioned as an inherent ideology of Euro-centric power and hegemony. Language itself is no longer seen as referential (referring to real objects) but symbolic (a system of signs). The post-modern intellectual world is characterized by relativism, with all attempts at finding meaning doomed to being nothing more than arbitrary and changing social constructions.

⁴ See, for example, Sampson, Samuel, & Sugden (1994); Giddens (1990); and Walker (1996).

⁵ In the section that follows, I am dependent on the helpful outline that explores these distinctions provided by Craig Van Gelder (n.d.).

Not all intellectual post-modern culture is negative in this way, however. There are those who helpfully explore the *relativity* of all our knowing, without accepting utter *relativism*. The position known as *critical realism* accepts that there is an objective real world out there (physically and historically) which we can know, but it insists that we need to be constantly critical of our own capacity to know it with any finality or completeness. All our knowing is embedded in culture, history, and community, but that does not *invalidate* it. We may never be able to know fully or perfectly, but that does not mean we cannot know anything. So we need to be humble (shedding Enlightenment arrogance) but not despairing.⁶

In another way also, post-modernity returns to perspectives on human life and history which have been and still are held by substantial sections of the human race who have not yet been engulfed by the Enlightenment assumptions of Western-style modernity. I quote here from helpful comments made on the first draft of my paper by Miriam Adeney:

“Post-modernism has a number of aspects which may have positive dimensions. For example: (1) Subject and object cannot be disconnected. (2) Fact and value cannot be disconnected. (3) History is not necessarily progressing. (4) Cultures are not necessarily ranked. (5) Truth is experienced in multiple and incomplete ways, including paradox and ambiguity. (6) If there is a meta-narrative, it is not based on Enlightenment categories.

“Post-modernism is not really a problem for much of the world, who always have seen the sense of the above six perspectives and so are not disturbed by their rise in the post-modern period.”

It may well be, therefore, that Christian mission in the 21st century will find that some aspects of the post-modern worldview are more compatible with bringing the gospel to certain cultures than the values of modernity, which have unfortunately characterized much Western mission.

Popular post-modernism

Turning to the popular side of post-modernity, popular culture manifests the same ambiguity of negative and positive forms of post-modernity. Negatively, there is the brutal nihilism of some forms of art and cinema. Life is meaningless: so what? The failure and emptiness of so much of the promise inherent in the mythology of modernity have led to a great deal of pessimism in Western life, as well as a very shallow attitude of “get what you can from the present: there isn’t much future to look forward to.”

But post-modernity has its positive side in popular culture as well. There are the more vibrant forms of playfulness, collage, irony, and symbolism of much contemporary culture. Mix and match; switch images; plunder the past and mix it with the present and future; don’t look for depth but enjoy the surface; life is a carnival to be enjoyed, not a drama to be understood. Furthermore, post-modernity celebrates diversity of culture, whereas modernity pushes for uniformity and homogenization of human life into secular, scientific, and materialistic categories.

Again, Miriam Adeney in her comments on the earlier draft of this paper warned against regarding plurality as a bad or bewildering thing. She says, “I like to think of God’s glorious multicultural kaleidoscope. I view cultures as treasure chests

⁶ See Best & Kellner (1991, pp. 256-304). A helpful exposition of “critical realism” in relation to biblical history is provided by the outstanding Evangelical New Testament scholar N. T. Wright (1992, pp. 31-46).

of symbols for exuberant expression of the image of God. It's true that people (as sinners) create patterns of idolatry and exploitation in every culture. Equally, however, people (in God's image) create patterns of beauty, wisdom, and kindness in every culture."

I fully agree and would say that post-modernity's celebration of cultural diversity is a lot closer to the Bible's own affirmation of "every tribe and nation and language" than is the homogenizing anti-culture of modernity.

It is important, then, to be aware of the fact that we live in an age of transition—and it is not neat. People and societies do not go to bed one night "modern" and wake up the next day "post-modern." There is an inter-layering between modernity, late or hyper-modernity (the "Mc-World" phenomenon (Sine, 1999) of the globalized, multi-national, capitalist world), and post-modernity. At the same time, of course, large sections of humanity are bound to a religious worldview in which the philosophical issues of modernity and post-modernity are largely irrelevant or are treated with scathing dismissal as evidence of the poverty of "Western religion." The challenge to missiology is to know which world we are addressing in any given context, which world the church itself is identified with, and what challenges the gospel presents to each of the interwoven worldviews.⁷

Hermeneutical Pluralism

The transition from modernity to post-modernity is producing some fascinating effects in the world of biblical hermeneutics, which have knock-on effects in missiology, since so many missiological issues are hermeneutical in essence. This

is especially so for Evangelicals, because of our commitment to attaining a theology of mission that can be defended as "biblical." The problem is, what does it mean to be "biblical," and who decides when you are or are not being "biblical"?

Enlightenment modernity constrained biblical hermeneutics into the straitjacket of the historical-critical method and a form of "modern scientific exegesis" that excluded the transcendent from Scripture as sharply as autonomous rationality excluded it from the natural sciences. But, as Brueggemann and others have pointedly made clear, the myth of neutrality, of scientific objectivity, concealed a Western hegemony in biblical studies that tended to stifle all other voices or readings.

Post-modernity, with its rejection of all hegemonies and deep suspicion of all claims to "scientific objectivity," finality, and universality, has challenged the critical hermeneutical consensus on Scripture as well and has opened up a world of almost infinite plurality of readings and interpretations. At one level, this has had the exhilarating effect of giving a place in the sun to a great variety of contextual readings of the Scripture which are not bound to the historical-critical method. There is value in recognizing the *relativity* of all hermeneutics. A positive benefit of the post-modern shift in biblical studies is that you don't have to submit your interpretation of Scripture to a single accrediting agency—the Western critical guild of scholarship. On the other hand, the post-modern rejection of any foundation or grounds on which we might affirm a reading of the biblical text to be *right or wrong* opens up an uncontrolled *relativism*. The plurality of contexts in which the text is read and heard becomes a pluralism of approach that has no limits or con-

⁷ Helpful discussion of these interwoven phenomena is to be found in Van Gelder (1996).

trols in relation to the truth of the text. Indeed, such an approach questions whether the very concept of “the truth of the text” is meaningful. The text can have as many meanings as there are readers and contexts.

I believe 21st century missiology will have to wrestle with a *doctrine of Scripture* that moves beyond the way Evangelical scholarship has tended to defend the inspiration and authority of the Bible with the concepts and methods of modernity itself, towards a more dynamic understanding of the authority and role of the Bible in a post-modern world. And I think this will be one of the biggest challenges for Christian theology in the 21st century, since there is no mission without the authority of Christ himself, and our access to that authority depends upon the Scriptures. *So, a major missiological task for Evangelical theology will be a fresh articulation of the authority of the Bible and its relation to Christ’s authorization of our mission.*

Faced with the basic hermeneutical question, “What does this biblical text mean?” scholars have tended to focus on one of three possible locations for the real source of “meaning” in texts: (1) the author(s), (2) the text itself, or (3) the reader(s). I would like to look at each of these three focal points. First, I will very briefly describe each one and evaluate some key strengths and weaknesses. Then I would like in each case to explore not only how they relate to the contemporary plurality of cultures and religions, but also how cultural and religious plurality was actually a major factor in the *ancient biblical context* in which the text emerged and which it addressed.

Author-centred focus

This hermeneutical approach, which is common to Evangelical as well as more critical interpretation, assumes that the

meaning of any biblical text is to be found by going back to the origins of the text. Exegesis is fundamentally based on recovering the author’s intent. This then involves the grammatico-historical method. By means of textual criticism, lexical and semantic study, words, syntax, and grammar, the exegete seeks to answer the question, “What did this author actually say, and what did the words mean at the time?” A vital step in this process is to “set the text in its context” or rather, its contexts, which will include canonical, historical, social, and cultural contexts. Then, further, all the tools of critical study, sometimes collectively described as the *historico-critical method*, will be employed to explore the origins of the text before us. These include source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, etc. The common aim is to get as close as possible to understanding what the original author(s) of the text meant to communicate through its production, collection, and preservation.

There are several obvious strengths in such an approach:

- It seems to be the “common sense” approach. It assumes that meaning starts in the mind of the author; when somebody speaks or writes, he or she intends to communicate some meaning which the hearer/reader is meant to understand. This approach respects the priority of author-intent.
- Author-centred focus tries to take an objective approach, arguing for some core of stable meaning in each text, which is in principle recoverable by the exegete.
- This approach offers some control over the hermeneutical process by setting limits/boundaries to possible meanings. It enables some adjudication of legitimate and illegitimate interpretations. We may agree that a text could have several possible meanings but also agree that some meanings are impossible. This does not

guarantee “certainty”—there is always room for disagreement among readers. But there is an assumption that we *can* know enough to get a reasonably close approximation to what the author probably meant to say.

- The importance of paying attention to the authors of biblical texts also lies in their character as witnesses (directly or indirectly) to the story of salvation. It is assumed that biblical texts are referential. That is, they actually refer to real events in the real world—events in which God has acted for our salvation. The world of the biblical authors is the world where things happened that constitute the gospel. The biblical text is like a window to that world. Using the Bible among the religions must therefore mean telling the story which makes it good news, not merely treating it as a quarry of religious ideas and ideals for comparison, admiration, or exchange.

- This last point highlights the futility of the question, “Is there salvation in other religions?” Such a question overlooks the primary nature of salvation in the Bible, namely, as something that God has done in and through the story which the Bible relates. Other religions do not save, not because they are inferior as religions in some way, but because religion itself does not save anybody. God does. Other religions do not tell the story, this story. This is also why we cannot accept the substitution of the scriptures of other religions for the Old Testament.

But there are also some dangers if we focus exclusively on the search for the original author’s intent:

- Obsession with origins can obscure the purpose of the text. The expression “modern scientific criticism” reveals the fact that the rise of the critical approach to the text went hand in hand with Enlightenment modernity’s preference for explaining everything by finding causes at

the expense of teleology (i.e., at the expense of seeking the purpose of something). Science explains by reducing phenomena to their smallest parts and by seeking causes of how things have become what they are. It does not ask, “What is this *for*?” Similarly, some critical exegesis of the Bible breaks the text up into ever smaller sources and then explores the origins, history, and structure for the smallest possible units of the text, but it does not answer the question, “Yes, but what is this book as a whole actually *saying*? What is this text *for*? What does it *do*?”

- Author-centred focus treats the text as a window, through which we can gain access to the authors’ own world. However, exclusive attention to that world (“the world behind the text”) can obscure the fact that the purpose of a window is also to let the light shine into the room of the observer—i.e., it can overlook (or exclude) the revelatory function of the biblical text. The text is not there simply to shed light on the world of ancient Israel or the early church, but to be “a light to *my* path.” In other words, an Evangelical approach to the Bible recognizes that “author-intent” is not confined to the human author but must also include the intent of the divine Author whose message addresses every human context through these inspired texts.

In what way, then, does an author-centred focus relate to religious plurality? It is vital to remember that the biblical authors did not speak or write in a vacuum: religious plurality was often a factor in their contexts just as much as ours. Their “intended meaning” was related to their world. We do not just look for a sealed package of “original meaning” and *then* seek to apply it to our context of mission in the midst of plurality; we need to recognize that what they meant in their context was itself shaped by the missional

engagement of God and God's people with the world around them.

Here are a few examples in which religious plurality is clearly part of the context of the author's world and needs to be taken into account when interpreting the text in question:

- **Exodus 15**, the song of Moses. The polemical affirmation of the kingship of Yahweh is made in the context of a power encounter with Pharaoh's claim to divinity.

- **Joshua 24:14f.** "Choose today . . .," whether Mesopotamian gods of the ancestors or the gods of Egypt or of Canaan. The monotheistic covenantal choice of Yahweh was made in the context of acknowledged religious plurality which was part of the roots and background of the people of Israel.

- **Hosea**, confronted with the syncretism of Baal cults with Yahwism, takes the offensive by using the sexual nature of the former as a source of language and imagery to portray the "married" relationship of Yahweh and Israel. By presenting the covenant relationship as a marriage, he can then portray Israel's covenant unfaithfulness as adultery and prostitution. But in doing so, he is exploiting the sexual imagery of the very religious corruption he is attacking.

- **Isaiah 40–55**. The great affirmations of Yahweh's sovereignty over nations, history, and "the gods" are made against the background of the grand claims of Babylonian gods—especially the astral deities (40:26) and state gods (46:1–2).

- **Genesis 1**. Israel's monotheistic understanding of creation is affirmed against contemporary Ancient Near Eastern mythology, polytheism, astrology, etc.

- **John**. The conflict with elements of Judaism that rejected the messianic claims of Jesus and his early followers is portrayed.

- **Colossians**. The uniqueness and supremacy of Jesus Christ are upheld, in the midst of the surrounding mixture of paganism, early Gnosticism, Jewish rituals, and mystery cults.

- **Revelation**. Jesus is limned as the Lord of history, against a background of the sinister threat of emperor worship and the state cult of Rome.

So, it seems to me that we will get a closer understanding—a better understanding—of the author's original meaning when we actually take into account the worlds of religious plurality in which they lived and therefore *feel* the contrast, *feel* the way in which these words are being emphasised. Our use of the Bible in the world of modern religious pluralism will be greatly helped in its missional sharpness if we give more attention to the religious pluralism that was part of the world of the biblical authors themselves.

Text-centred focus

This approach believes that meaning is to be found in the text itself. The meaning is regarded as an artifact, that is, something of human construction—like a painting, a piece of music, or a sculpture, which can be appreciated for itself, no matter who produced it or why. The text is not so much a window that we look through to some world beyond itself as it is a painting that we look at. A painting can even be made to look exactly like a window, giving the illusion of some objective reality outside itself, but it is still merely a painting, a work of human artistry. So, as applied to biblical texts, this approach pays little attention to the author and his or her intentions (which we cannot know for certain anyway). The text now has an existence and a meaning of its own, to be appreciated for its own sake as a work of literary art and craft.

This approach has developed the use of many helpful tools of literary analysis

and tends to engage in close reading of texts, paying careful attention to all the fine detail of a narrative or poem, in the same way that an art connoisseur will appreciate every brush stroke of a master painter. Literary appreciation of biblical literature will include, for example:

- Genre identification – What kind of literature is this, and how is it to be read?
- Literary conventions – How do stories, poems, etc., actually work? How do they engage and affect us when we read them?
- Narrative art – Setting, plot, characters, suspense, irony, perspective, gap-ping, patterning, word-play, etc.
- Poetic art – Economy of words, imagery, metaphor, parallelism, poetic figures, chiasmus/concentricity, climax, contrast, symbolism, etc.

Literary approaches to the biblical text often bring out all sorts of layers of meaning and significance that have been embedded by the skill, the thought, the art, and the craft of the human author to whom God was entrusting the message that was to be conveyed by the medium of literature.

In evaluating this text-focused, literary approach to biblical hermeneutics, we may observe several strengths and values:

- The Bible *is* great literature: it can and should be appreciated at that level. There is no necessary conflict between believing in divine inspiration and appreciating human artistry.
- Literary approaches tend to be more wholistic (that is, they tend to treat passages or books as a whole), yet at the same time they pay very close attention to the fine details of the text. This is consonant with an Evangelical commitment to

verbal inspiration; the choice of words matters.

- A literary approach helps us to understand how meaning is carried by the form of a text and not just by its content. We need to look not only at *what* is written, but also at *how* it has been written.
 - Paradoxically also, a text-centred approach respects the author, not so much on the assumption that we can recover the author's intended meaning, but that we can admire the author's artistry.
 - Such an approach can go along with the conviction that, strictly speaking (e.g., 2 Tim. 3:16), inspiration is a property of the *texts* of Scripture, not of the authors or of the pre-canonical sources, etc. Therefore, indirectly, a close literary reading of the biblical texts is a compliment to the divine Author as well (on an Evangelical understanding).
 - A text-centred approach treats the great variety of biblical texts with integrity by genuinely listening to their plurivocality—i.e., the internal dialectic of views and perspectives, which often seem in uncomfortable opposition to one another. It resists flattening everything out or squeezing everything into a univocal system. This is a major emphasis in recent post-modern hermeneutics.⁸
- But there are also, of course, dangers in a literary approach which focuses exclusively on the text itself without concern for the identity or the world of the author. ("Never mind the history; feel the art.")
- Literary approaches to the text can sometimes totally ignore history. If the fascination with literary art leads us to dismiss the historical question, "Did it really happen?" then we have problems with the biblical faith, which is actually rooted in

⁸ Cf. especially the later work of Brueggemann (1997a, 1997b), who rightly highlights how the Bible itself has counter-pointing voices and traditions (exodus and exile, covenant and judgement, hymn and lament, etc.), which need to be given their full expression and not explained, excused, or excluded.

history. Now we may make allowances for “narrative liberty”—that is, we may be willing to accept that not every single detail in the way a story has been told mirrors precisely “what actually happened if you’d been there.” But it is possible for real history to be told as a good story and for a good story to be grounded in real history. The “having-happenedness” of the biblical story is very important and should not be lost sight of when we look at the art by which that story was written.

- A purely literary approach can lead to texts being read without reference to their place in the canon and therefore in the story of Scripture as a whole. One can focus on a text and appreciate its literary qualities and even be moved by it, yet remain untouched by its significance as part of the whole word of God to humanity.

- Unbalanced commitment to unresolved plurivocality of the texts (favoured by post-modern interpretation) results in the loss of any real finality or normativity: all we have is a constant oscillation of perspectives. This seems to me an abuse of the plurality of the Bible’s texts. It is the opposite danger to the tendency to flatten the whole Bible out into a single monotone message. This is the tendency never to allow the Bible to say anything with finality at all.

Now, what about the religious plurality aspect of this focus? It is important to recognise—and I think sometimes Evangelical scholarship does *not* adequately recognise—that the biblical texts themselves do use religious language, metaphors, and symbolism that are drawn from the plurality of religions that surrounded the authors, yet without sharing the polytheistic worldview that supported such religion.

- As noted in the previous section, **Hosea**, confronted with the syncretism of Baal cults with Yahwism, takes the offensive by using the sexual nature of the

former as a source of language and imagery to portray the “married” relationship of Yahweh and Israel. By presenting the covenant relationship as a marriage, he can then portray Israel’s covenant unfaithfulness as adultery and prostitution. But in doing so, he is exploiting the sexual imagery of the very religious corruption he is attacking.

- Some **Psalms** make use of Canaanite mythology. For example, Psalm 48:1-3 uses the mythological “city of the great king,” which in Baal epics was situated in the far north, to describe the historical city of Yahweh, Jerusalem. Other psalms employ Canaanite poetic metres, such as Psalm 93, which also portrays Yahweh as triumphant over the mighty mythological enemy, the sea.

- **Isaiah 51:9-10** and **Ezekiel 29:1-6** make use of Ancient Near Eastern dragon/monster mythology to describe Yahweh’s judgement on Egypt, both in the Exodus and in the defeat by Babylon.

- **Ezekiel 1** uses familiar Ancient Near Eastern religious art and statuary, but he transcends these objects in portraying the dynamic sovereignty and glory of Yahweh (e.g., four-headed, bull-legged, winged creatures who held up the thrones of gods or rode on wheeled chariots were well known in Ancient Near Eastern iconography).

- **Paul in Athens** uses Greek poets, yet subverts their religious worldview (Acts 17:24-31).

- **John’s Logos** was a familiar term in Greek philosophy, but John harnesses it to full-scale Christological and incarnational significance (John 1).

Such examples raise the age-old missiological question of whether or how far biblical texts can be preached and taught, making use of contemporary religious concepts and symbols in our day. Can we re-contextualize the biblical text from an ancient to a modern religious

milieu, without dissolving the text into syncretism? If the Bible itself could utilize a plurality of pagan words, symbols, myths, etc., to communicate its monotheistic and saving message, why should not the church in mission, and in translation, do the same? But what are the limits and controls? Again, the hermeneutical task is fundamentally a missiological one, and pluralism is the operating context at both ends of the task, for both the biblical text and the modern world.

It needs to be stressed that biblical texts emphatically reject idolatry in all its forms, throughout a very wide span of historical and cultural contexts: Egyptian, Canaanite, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman idolatry are all condemned in the course of biblical history. In fact, although biblical texts obviously do describe the religious practice of God's own people (i.e., of Old Testament Israel and of the New Testament church), there is a strong textual tradition that is "anti-religious." The Bible undermines the idea that religion itself is the solution to human problems. More often (in the prophetic perception), it was the most virulent form of the problem itself. (cf. Isa. 1, Jer. 7, Amos 5, Hos. 6, etc.).

Some biblical texts make remarkable universal claims, in the midst of surrounding religious plurality, in relation to the revelatory and salvific significance of particular key events (e.g., Deut. 4, Psalm 33, Psalm 24, Isa. 40–55, John 1, Phil. 2, Heb. 1, etc.). The great claim made for Jesus, for example, in Philippians 2:10–11, was made in its own context, against the worship of Caesar (Caesar is not Lord; Jesus is). But it is made on the basis of quoting a text from Isaiah 45:22–24 which is actually a claim for *Yahweh* in the context of *Babylonian* pluralism: "I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me

every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. They will say of me, 'In the Lord alone are righteousness and strength.'" So, the Philippians 2 passage is affirming the uniqueness of *Jesus* in the context of *Caesar* worship (religious plurality of the first century) and building it on the foundation of the uniqueness of *Yahweh* in the context of *Babylonian* religious plurality in the sixth century B.C. Both texts derive their sharpness and significance from the plurality of the contexts in which and against which they were uttered. From a missiological perspective, we need to see their monotheistic meaning as sharply defined because of the pluralism that they so vigorously deny.

Reader-centred focus

Let us move on finally, then, to the third main focus—a reader-centred focus. This is a more recent approach, in which people bring into the foreground the role of the reader(s) in active interpretation of the Bible.

Under an author-centred approach, we looked at the text as a *window* through which we have access to the other world—the world of the ancient author. Under a text-centred approach, we looked at the text as a *painting*—that is, as a product of human art and skill, which needs to be appreciated and understood for its own sake. Here, under a reader-centred approach, we are thinking more of the text as a *mirror*. What can be seen in a mirror depends on who is standing in front of it. The "contents" of the mirror, in a sense, reflect who is looking into it or what objects are before it. And so, in this view, the *meaning* in the text is not something fixed and final in the text—some sort of objective reality. The meaning of the text actually only arises in the act of reading. It is when the reader *reads* that the text *means*, just as it is only when you look in a mirror

that the mirror reflects you. So meaning is the interaction between text and reader.

Now this approach also reflects the shift from a modernity paradigm of exegesis to a post-modernity paradigm. Under modernity, the reader, rather like a scientist, was simply the neutral observer of a fixed reality which was external to himself or herself. An objective “real meaning,” like the “real world,” was assumed to exist; the task of the interpreter, like the task of the scientist, was merely to uncover the meaning. The more post-modern view is to say, “Well, actually, even in science the subjective observer is part of the reality under observation and, indeed, may change it in the act of observing it.” And so the myth of the “objective neutral observer” has been somewhat demoted in newer forms of science and is similarly also being lost in hermeneutics. The *reader* as subject also is a significant part in the whole process. There is no independent, final, fixed meaning. And of course, we are not the only readers of the biblical text. There are also the original readers to whom the text was first addressed; the later biblical readers who collected these texts, edited them into books, built the books into collections, and built the collections into a canon; the whole long chain of Jewish and Christian readers down through the centuries since the Bible reached its final form; and finally, modern readers in multiple global contexts around our world today.

So, a reader-centred focus urges us to take all these readers seriously. We need to recognise that the meaning of the text does relate to and cannot ignore *who* is doing the reading and *what* they bring to their reading from their own cultural background, presuppositions, assumptions, and so on. (Nobody reads just as a blank sheet; we always read with something else in our minds.) We also need to take note of *where* readers are reading—that is, their

position geographically (where they live); their culture; their position within the culture (whether at the top or the bottom); their social, economic, and political interests, and so on. All of these aspects of the readers’ contexts will affect the way in which the meaning is articulated and applied. There is no such thing as “contextless, presuppositionless” exegesis or interpretation.

How do we evaluate this reader-centred approach? As before, there are positive things to be said, first of all:

- There is no doubt, I think, that focusing on the reader has facilitated fresh ways of discovering the relevance of the text in many modern contexts. The reality of “contextualised theology” is now taken for granted, provided we recognise that we are *all* interpreting contextually, because all of us interpret in a particular context! Western biblical interpretation has no right to assume that all its insights are “the standard,” while those from other continents are “contextualised.” The West is also a context—and not necessarily a better or a worse context for understanding and interpreting the text of the Scriptures than anywhere else on the planet.

- Recognizing this fact has led somewhat to the demise of Western hegemony over exegesis and hermeneutics. We recognise the relativity of all hermeneutics and the fact that we all need one another. In fact, for Westerners to hear the Bible interpreted, understood, and preached by African, Latin, or Asian brothers and sisters in Christ, and vice versa, and then to see the perspectives that others are bringing are often very enriching experiences.

- Attention to the context of the reader(s) has unleashed the power of the biblical text into contexts of human need, conflict, or injustice—e.g., in liberationist, feminist, and other “advocacy” hermeneutics. We may not always agree with where such readers want to take us, but we can-

not deny the validity of reading the text in and into such contexts and issues. Meaning *is* affected by who you are and what agenda you have. As Anthony Billington once put it, “If you are a feminist, pacifist vegetarian, the text may show up different meanings as *you* read it than if you are a male-chauvinist, war-mongering carnivore.”

There are, of course, dangers in an unbalanced emphasis on the role of the reader in determining the meaning of the biblical text:

- A reader-centred approach can degenerate into pure subjectivism if it is not carefully watched. It reverses the priority of author intent as the determinant factor in a text’s meaning. In fact, in some cases, reader response theory goes so far as virtually eliminating the author altogether: “It doesn’t really matter who said this or what they meant by saying it; what matters is what it means to me. That’s all that really counts.” So the reader is prioritised over the author, and the *authority*, therefore, lies not with the author or with the text but with the reader, the reader’s self—and that, again, is very reflective of a post-modern kind of worldview. One has to say that it is not far removed either from some popular forms of Evangelical Bible reading, which arrogantly exclude any tradition of scholarly study of the text and are content only to ask, “What does this text mean for me?”

- A reader-centred approach also means, of course, that all sense of objective or external controls is lost. If there is *no* assumption of some fixed or stable core of meaning in the text itself deriving ultimately from the author’s intention, then pluralism rules: there is no such thing as a “right” or a “wrong” reading, a “legitimate” or “illegitimate” reading—some may be better than others, but it is difficult to know who has the right to say so.

Effects on interpretation

How then is the interpretation of the Bible affected by the religious plurality of contemporary readers? How do the multiple cultural and religious contexts of people reading the Bible today affect how they understand its meaning? This of course is a question as old as the Bible itself. The Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek long before the New Testament was written, so that culturally and contextually Greek-speaking people could read them. A few examples will suffice to illustrate how the reading of the Scriptures is affected by the cultural and religious pre-understandings of the readers.

The Islamic world

There are obvious difficulties in the Bible for Muslims: God as Father, Jesus as the Son of God, the story of the Conquest, and the treatment of Ishmael. More subtle difficulties include the biblical record of the “sins of the prophets,” such as Abraham’s lies, Moses’ murder, and David’s adultery. These human failings—things which Jews and Christians accept as encouraging evidence of the humanity of the Old Testament saints—are for Muslims further proof that Christians have tampered with the Bible.

Positive aspects of interpretation in the Islamic world include the Arab/Islamic appreciation of stories (cf. the work of Kenneth Baillie). Parables are quite powerful in this culture, and the parabolic method is helpful in circumventing certain theological objections and blindspots.

The Hindu world

Some biblical language and imagery is very open to misunderstanding within the Hindu worldview, such as “born again,” avatar/incarnation, “abide in me,” etc.

The apostles could freely use pagan words that had different connotations in the Greek world, such as *theos*, *kyrios*,

logos, *soter*, and *mysterion*, in order to re-shape and use them for Christian purposes. But there is the danger of liberal Indian theologies that syncretise biblical categories into the Hindu worldview and then dissolve the vital distinctions.

African Independent Churches (AICs)

Because of their practice of reading the whole Bible “flat” (i.e., assigning equal authority to all parts, with no regard for historical development in the canon), some AICs have picked out some very odd and exotic aspects of, for example, Old Testament ritual. They have then not only continued these practices, but also exalted them as “biblical.”

Sometimes, as an indirect result of translation policies, young churches have had only the New Testament for almost a generation before the Old Testament becomes available. The Old Testament, coming later, is viewed as *superior* (like *secondary* education), so some Old Testament practices are regarded as privileged. Furthermore, the long delay in translating the Old Testament means that sometimes the underlying worldview of the traditional religion has not been challenged or replaced by a fully biblical one encompassing creation, the fall, the history of salvation from Israel through Jesus, and the eschatological hope of a new creation.

Conclusion

The thrust of my argument in this section is that Evangelical missiology will have to take as a major task in the 21st century a fresh articulation of our doctrine of Scripture. In doing so, we shall have to take more account of the plurality (cultural and religious) that is to be found at every level of the hermeneutical process—in the world of the author; in the language,

idiom, and imagery of the text; and in the contexts of the readers.

Religious Pluralism

Features and roots

It is not the facts, statistics, and challenges of the plurality of religions which are at issue here. Obviously, it is a task for practical mission strategy to address the multiplicity of specific religious contexts in which ambassadors for the Christian gospel must witness. What the missiologist must address is the challenge of the philosophy of pluralism which presents itself as a powerful and dominant response to that religious plurality. Pluralism, briefly defined, is the view that “salvation/enlightenment/liberation is said to be a reality in all major religious traditions, and no single religion can be considered somehow normative or superior to all others. All religions are in their own way complex historically and culturally conditioned human responses to the one divine reality” (Netland, 1991, p. 26).

Elsewhere, pluralism is defined as “the belief that there is not one, but a number of spheres of saving contact between God and man. God’s revealing and redeeming activity has elicited response in a number of culturally conditioned ways throughout history. Each response is partial, incomplete, unique; but they are related to each other in that they represent different culturally focused perceptions of the one ultimate divine reality” (Race, 1982, p. 78).

Religious pluralism of the variety that has emerged from the cradle of modernity is primarily an *epistemological* pluralism. That is, it has to do with the question of how we can (or cannot) *know* the truth-value of religious claims. It is based on a key feature of the Enlightenment transformation of Western thinking—namely, the cleavage or gulf that was

inserted into human knowing in the wake of Descartes and Kant in particular. The whole sphere of Western life and culture was divided into two hemispheres—public and private. The public world is the world of so-called objective facts, which are discovered by empirical enquiry and by the application of reason by a detached, neutral observer. The private world is the world of subjective beliefs, personal morality, family values, religion, etc. In this structural dichotomy, one can only really “know” what is in the public hemisphere, because knowledge has to be based on “scientific” proof. Only that which can be empirically proved can be taken as true and therefore can be known. Everything else is a matter of opinion or faith, but it cannot be a matter of truth and knowledge. Any appeal to authoritative divine revelation is ruled out as a source of truth and knowledge. Therefore, religion, since it cannot be “proved” empirically and rationally, is removed from the arena of public truth and relegated to the zone of private belief.

Western culture thus embraced a dualism. On the one hand, there was a kind of secular monism—a commitment to the sole objective truth of all things scientific and rational. In that “hemisphere,” intolerance ruled: you don’t argue with the objective facts of science. On the other hand, there developed religious pluralism—the refusal to accept that any single set of religious beliefs could be proved to be solely true. Since religious beliefs cannot be known or proved by the exercise of reason alone, we have to allow for a variety of opinions. It is important to understand that this is an epistemological form of pluralism. It does not assert that there is no such thing as truth at all (that is the more post-modern brand of *onto-*

logical pluralism). Rather, it limits the boundaries of what can be known to be true to the realm of materialistic science and applied rationality. Then, by excluding all religious belief from any valid claim to knowable truth, it argues that the only valid stance in relation to conflicting religious beliefs is to allow the possibility of some truth in all of them and to exercise a tolerant pluralism.

Along with this epistemological pluralism goes that other fruit of modernity—a consumerist, supermarket approach to everything at the popular level. In a supermarket, you don’t look for the breakfast cereal that is “right” or “true.” You just choose what you like. The same goes for religion and morality and all the values that go with them. Since they fall into the hemisphere in which objective knowledge is said to be impossible in principle, you just choose what suits you best.

Missiological response

The missiological task in relation to the kind of pluralism that stems from modernity roots has to be to attack those roots themselves. That is, we must carry forward the critique of Enlightenment modernity assumptions that have made pluralism the dominant philosophy of Western culture, both intellectually and in popular plausibility. Easily the most pioneering voice in this task has been that of Lesslie Newbigin. Along with other participants in the Gospel and Culture Movement in Britain, he has exposed the fallacies and false trails of modernity’s epistemological dichotomy and arrogance.⁹ He has shown that the task for the church in Western societies, where religion has been privatized and marginalized by the dominance of scientism and materialism, is to re-affirm the gospel as “public truth.” By that he means

⁹ See Newbigin (1989, 1991, 1995). Another key work from the Gospel and Culture Movement is Walker (1996).

that Christians must assert their claim that the biblical story of God's redemptive engagement with the world he created is the universal story, that it can be known and affirmed as truth, and that it constitutes a valid starting point for other truth-seeking and knowing. We must reject the narrow, shallow reductionism that tells us we can only "know" what we can discover with our senses and demonstrate with our rationality. We must get the claims of Christian truth back into the public hemisphere from which modernity banished them. Furthermore, we must point out more aggressively that even scientific knowing also starts out from some enormous faith commitments. As Newbigin says, all knowing starts from believing something—in the world of science as much as religion. The Enlightenment dichotomies of objective-subjective, public-private, and knowledge-faith are built on very shaky foundations.

Ironically, in confronting the falsehoods of modernity, Christian missiology now has an ally in the post-modern critique that has arisen from the contradictions of late modernity itself. Post-modernity attacks the presuppositions of modernity, just as many Christians do (though many Evangelical Christians, including many mission strategists, still operate within paradigms profoundly shaped by modernity). However, while post-modernity certainly helps us to dispense with the arrogant claim that scientific truth is the only truth worth knowing or capable of being known at all, it throws up what is probably an even more serious challenge to the Christian worldview—that is, the assertion that there is no ultimate or universal truth to be known about anything

at all, science included. When this post-modern mindset comes to deal with religions, it moves beyond the epistemologically based religious pluralism we have just considered ("we cannot *know* which religion gives us the real truth, so we must allow for something true in all of them and seek the truth in dialogue together") to a more ontological religious pluralism ("there is no universal truth, in religion or anywhere else; what matters is not what may or may not be universally true, but what is locally or temporarily true for *you*; religion is little different from therapy for the self—if there is such a thing").

It seems to me that Evangelical missiology will have to continue to tackle both kinds of religious pluralism—modernity based epistemological pluralism and post-modern ontological pluralism—well into the 21st century, since both forms will co-exist during the era of cultural transition we have entered.

What's Wrong With Pluralism?¹⁰

Superficially, pluralism can seem plausible and attractive. After all, it still talks about God and is willing to keep Christ in the picture somewhere, so what more do you need? You are allowed to keep Christ as the focus of your own religion, so long as you make room for the other "planets" in the religious solar system. Isn't that fair enough? It also seems to relieve us of all that worry about what will happen to those who never hear the gospel of Christ. They have their own religion which puts them in touch with God, so that's all right then too. And most of all, it fits so perfectly with the "supermarket mentality"

¹⁰ This section is substantially an extract from Wright (1997). In that volume, I seek to define and critique the three major Christian responses to the reality of religious plurality—exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism—and to provide further biblical reflection on the uniqueness of Christ in that context.

that characterizes the modern and post-modern Western mind. However, underneath all these attractive features, pluralism has some major implications that set it totally at odds with biblical Christianity and make it actually a particularly dangerous philosophy for Christians to toy with. My dominant criticisms are directed at what pluralism does to our understanding of God, Jesus, and the worship of Christians themselves.¹¹

Pluralism reduces God to abstractions

John Hick is one of the leading pluralist theologians. He has argued for what he calls “pluralist theocentrism”—that is, we should no longer put Christ or the church at the centre of the religious universe, but only God. “God” is like the sun at the centre of the solar system, and Christianity along with all the other religions are like the orbiting planets, all attracted by the gravity of the sun, but each in its own unique orbit. However, one marked feature of this “Copernican revolution,” as Hick called it, is that the *theos* (“god”) who is finally left at the centre becomes utterly abstract. Clearly “he” cannot be identified or named in terms of any particular deity known within the different world faiths, for they are all only partial responses to this mysterious being. In fact, Hick is quite insistent on this. Names like Yahweh,

Jesus, Vishnu, Allah, Brahman, etc., are simply human cultural constructs by means of which people within a particular religious community give expression to their experience of the divine. Whatever those believers may think or claim, the names of their gods are not to be identified with the actual divine reality. (It is important to realize that what pluralism does to Christianity, it also does to all religions; none of them has access to the ultimate truth about God as God really is.) Those names or concepts found in the various religions are like humanly constructed “masks”¹² by which the divine reality is thought to be encountered by devotees of those religions. But none of them is ultimately true in the way their worshippers claim. Thus, for example, Hick (1992, pp. 130-131) says about the Jewish view of God: “The concrete figure of Jahweh is thus not identical with the ultimate divine reality as it is in itself but is an authentic face or mask or *persona* of the Transcendent in relation to one particular human community.” He then goes on to say that this is how he regards the ultimate names of deity in other religions: “For precisely the same has to be said of the heavenly Father of Christianity, of the Allah of Islam, of Vishnu, of Shiva, and so on.”¹³

So one finds that the “sun at the centre” is given other “names,” which are in

¹¹ I am confining myself here to some fundamental theological issues raised by pluralism. There are many other aspects in which pluralism is open to profound criticism and which are tackled by other scholars (cf. Newbigin, 1989; Netland, 1991; Kirk, 1992; Carson, 1996).

¹² Hick uses the term *personae* for this, which originally in Latin referred to the mask that ancient actors wore. Thus, what the worshippers of a particular deity “see” as they contemplate their particular god is not the divine reality as it really is in itself (the actor), but only the “mask” as a kind of interface between the hidden divine reality (the actor) and the worshipper (the spectator). This assumes, of course, that although the different religions have manifestly different and grossly contrasting “masks,” it is the same actor behind all of them. Then Hick goes on to suggest using *impersonae* for the non-personal understandings of the ultimate as found, for example, in philosophical advaita Hinduism and Buddhism.

¹³ A fuller explanation of Hick’s thinking in this area will be found in Hick (1989, especially part 4, pp. 233-296).

fact not names at all but abstract “undefinitions.” “Ultimate Divine Reality” is Hick’s favourite. Then you will often read of “Transcendent Being” or even simply “The Real.” And if you ask what this “Being” is like, you will be told that you cannot know. It is beyond description or knowing as it is in itself. But all the religions have some partial view of it through the “lens” of their culturally particular religion.

By using this kind of language, you can also avoid having to decide whether this divine being is personal or impersonal. This is very convenient, since that is precisely the point of conflict between, say, Hinduism and Christianity, and even within different schools of Hinduism. But the language of the pluralists certainly tends towards an *impersonal* view of deity. There is little of the living warmth of the biblical language of the personal characteristics of God. Most ordinary people find the abstract concepts of philosophers rather difficult to understand and even more difficult to believe in for their salvation. As Newbigin (1995, pp. 165-167) has put it so strongly, why should we have to believe that an impersonal, indefinable abstraction has any better claim to be the centre of the religious universe than a known person who stands revealed in recorded history? Why should such an abstract philosophical concept be regarded as a more reliable starting point for discovering the truth and finding salvation than commitment to a personal God in Christ?

Pluralism diminishes Jesus *God or Christ at the centre?*

The pluralists want us to be theocentric (God-centred) but to give up being Christocentric (having Christ at the centre). The trouble is that it seems impossible to do this and stay within the framework of New Testament faith. There are some scholars, however, who try to drive a wedge be-

tween the fact that Jesus preached the kingdom of *God* (i.e., a theocentric proclamation) and the fact that the church preached *Jesus* (thus shifting the focus to a Christocentric proclamation, which then became the church’s dominant position). However, this will not do. Certainly Jesus preached the kingdom of God—a very theocentric thing to do. But the kingdom of God, as preached by Jesus, centred on himself—who he was and what he had come to do. In fact, it was precisely because he so persistently put himself at the centre of his teaching about God and about God’s kingdom that Jesus aroused such hostility.

There was nothing at all scandalous about simply being theocentric in Jewish society! God was at the centre of everybody’s religious “universe” in one way or another. But for a man to claim that scriptures concerning the future work of God were fulfilled in himself, that he had power to forgive sins, that he was Lord over the Sabbath, that he was the Son of Man to whom eternal dominion would be given, and many other such claims was simply blasphemy—and these claims were indeed reckoned to be blasphemous by his contemporaries. That was why they crucified him—not for being theocentric, but for putting himself in that centre where they knew only God should be. Blasphemous it certainly was—unless, of course, it was true.

In the same way, the first Christians, who were Jews and therefore strict monotheists, already lived in a thoroughly theocentric universe. They were shaped to the core by the central affirmation of Jewish faith: “Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:4-5). But with considerable struggle and often at great personal cost, these believers deliberately put their contemporary, the man

Jesus of Nazareth, right at the centre of that majestic Old Testament faith. They did so every time they made the crucial affirmation, "Jesus is Lord." That did not mean they had given up or diluted their theocentrism. On the contrary, their faith in God at the centre of the religious universe was as strong as ever. But now it was filled out, re-defined, and proclaimed in the light of their encounter with God in the person and action of Jesus, the Christ. So Paul could write what is virtually an expansion of the great Jewish creed to include Jesus Christ alongside the creator God: "For us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live" (1 Cor. 8:6).

The New Testament writings are a constant reflection of the struggle by which the God-centred faith of the Old Testament was seen to be Christ-centred in reality. This was not a perversion nor an exaggeration born out of human hero-worship. It was the calm conviction that Jesus of Nazareth, in the light of his life, death, and resurrection, was indeed the centre and key to the whole redemptive work of God, past, present, and future. He was at the centre of their theocentric religious universe because he was Immanuel, no less than *God with us*.

A relativized Jesus?

Following from the above point, it seems to me that the pluralist view cannot be reconciled with authentic Christianity, because to relativize Jesus Christ is to deny him. By "relativizing Jesus," I mean regarding him as only one among many great religious figures through whom we can know about God and find salvation. It means regarding him as one of the orbiting planets of world religions, not as the one and only absolute source of life

and light as, for example, John 1 presents him.

However, if the New Testament is taken even as a reasonably reliable source, then it is unquestionable that Jesus made some astounding and absolute claims for himself. It is equally clear that his immediate followers in the early Christian church made similar claims concerning him, both explicitly in their preaching and implicitly in their worship and prayer through his name. So since biblical and historical Christianity makes such affirmations about Jesus, it follows that whatever kind of "Christianity" is put into orbit around the "sun of ultimate divine reality," it is not the Christianity of Christ and his apostles.

Jesus only for Christians?

Now pluralists will reply that Jesus still remains central *for Christians* and that nothing need change that. As such, they say, Jesus is the distinctive Christian gift to the inter-religious dialogue. But, we are told, we should only come to the dialogue table once we have renounced those absolute claims to the uniqueness or finality of Christ, for those claims are regarded by pluralists as arrogant and intolerant and therefore out of place in genuine dialogue. Jesus may be decisive and authoritative for those who have chosen to follow him (Christians), but he need not be imposed on others as unique or universal. Thus Race (1982, p. 136) says, "Jesus is 'decisive,' not because he is the focus of all the light everywhere revealed in the world, but for the vision he has brought in one cultural setting.... Jesus would still remain central for the Christian faith." In other words, the great New Testament affirmation, "Jesus is Lord," is reduced to meaning, "Jesus is Lord for us because we have chosen to regard him as such; his Lordship is relative to our acceptance of him." It no longer means, "Jesus is objectively and absolutely the universal Lord to whom

alone we submit and to whom ultimately all creatures in heaven and earth will bow.”

***A deluded Jesus
or a deluded church?***

But even supposing we were to go along with the pluralists at this point and accept that Jesus is unique only in the sense that he is relatively special for Christians but not the supreme Lord of all, we then have to ask what kind of “gift to interfaith dialogue” this relativized Jesus actually is. If Jesus Christ was not God incarnate, if he was not the final revelation of God and the completion of God’s saving work for humanity, if he is not the risen and reigning Lord, then we are faced with two possibilities: The first is that Jesus himself was mistaken in the claims he made concerning himself, in which case he was either sadly deluded or an arrogant boaster. Certainly, if his enormous claims were actually false, he would not be a worthy religious figure whom we could bring to the dialogue table with any confidence. We would need to apologize, not evangelize.

The second possibility is that the church from its earliest period (including the generation of Jesus’ own contemporaries, who were the first witnesses to him) has grossly misunderstood him, inflated his claims, and exaggerated his importance. Pluralists require us to accept that the church throughout its history (until its rescue by late 20th century pluralist Enlightenment) has propagated, lived by, and based all its hope upon a massive, self-deluded untruth. A deluded Jesus or a deluded church or both—this seems to be the unavoidable implication of the pluralists’ insistence on relativizing Jesus.

The dismal results of this view are quickly clear. A. G. Hunter, for example, argues that Jesus was, in fact, not more than human but was elevated to divine status only by the church and was installed

in the Trinity only at the Council of Chalcedon. Somehow, Hunter (1985, p. 55) simply *knows* that it was “psychologically and religiously impossible for Jesus [to have claimed divinity], and it is historically false to say that he did.” When you can be so confidently and dogmatically negative about the “historical” Jesus, you have to be equally negative and uncertain about what value he has for faith. Hunter (1985, p. 76) concludes: “What emerges is that though we are agreed that Jesus is at the heart of our faith as Christians, it is hard to find any clear consensus as to the precise delineation of his importance.”

If such paralysed agnosticism is all we are left with, is it worth contributing to religious dialogue at all? Is that what representatives of other world faiths want to hear from us? If, as pluralists say, we have to relativize Jesus before we can come to the dialogue, then we had better not come at all. All we have to bring with any integrity would be a repentant confession that we belong to a worldwide faith which throughout the whole of its history has had an illusion and a falsehood at its fundamental heart and core.

**Pluralism renders
Christian worship idolatrous**

Religious pluralists say that Jesus cannot stand at the centre of the religious universe. He cannot be equated or identified with the God (however described) at the centre. We must not look at Jesus “from above,” so to speak, as God incarnate, but rather see him as essentially one of us (which he was, of course) and do our Christology “from below.” There are many shades of opinion among scholars who prefer this approach, but in the end what it means is that, whatever else Jesus may have been, he was ultimately not more than human. Certainly he was not God incarnate in any ontological sense. He may have been a vehicle or agent of

God's activity for revelation and salvation, but only as a man. That is, he may have been one of those exceptionally special human beings through whom the rest of us can come to a deeper and clearer understanding of God, but the language about his being "of God, with God, or from God" is simply the understandable exaggeration that gives voice to faith and adoration and gratitude.

Many who take this view would agree that Jesus was unique in some sense: for example, in the depth of his own relationship with God and the extent to which he mediated God to others, including ourselves. But they would see this as a uniqueness of degree, not of essence. God may have been very specially present and active through Jesus of Nazareth, but Jesus was not (and therefore is not) God. He cannot stand at the centre of the religious universe. Even in his uniqueness as defined, he must go into orbit around the

centre along with other great religious figures who all have their own unique features also.

The more I reflect on this view, the more surprised I am at how reluctant its advocates seem to be to draw the ultimate conclusion from it, which seems quite inescapable—that is, that Christianity is and always has been the worst form of idolatry ever practised on earth.¹⁴ The most serious charge which Jews and Muslims¹⁵ have levelled against Christians all through the centuries would actually be true: we have elevated a human being to the place of God and have worshipped him there. For that is what we do and what we have been doing ever since the book of Acts. We ascribe to Jesus honour and glory that belongs only to God; we call on his name in prayer as God; we call him Lord and refuse to acknowledge any other; we claim that through Jesus and Jesus alone God has acted to save humanity and there is

¹⁴ Some pluralists are indeed prepared to say that the worship of Christ is actually idolatry, though they carefully re-define idolatry in a positive light and tend to be very dismissive of how the Bible talks of it. Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1987), for example, in a carefully argued re-assessment of what, based on a pluralist understanding, actually constitutes idolatry, says that it should only be used negatively when describing religious positions which regard themselves as ultimate and then negate the value of others. On such grounds, "For Christians to think that Christianity is true, final, or salvific is a form of idolatry," if by that they mean to deny that God has also inspired Islam, Hinduism, etc. Smith goes on to ask whether "the figure of Christ served as ... an idol through the centuries for Christians?" and essentially answers that it has, but there is nothing wrong with that, since the best meaning of idols in all religions is something earthly or material in itself, which becomes the channel of transcendence. See Smith (1987) and also the comments of Tom F. Driver in the same volume: "I think it necessary to say that the idolization of Christ—let us call it 'christodolatry'—is not only possible but in fact frequent. Indeed I would go further and say that there is even such a thing as an idolatrous devotion to God" (pp. 214-215). I still prefer to maintain a biblical understanding of the category of idolatry as meaning the action of giving ultimate and divine status to anything or anyone that is not in reality the living God—meaning the God as revealed in the Bible, not the characterless abstract "Transcendent" of the pluralist hypothesis. According to this understanding, the worship of anything or anyone other than God as revealed in Christ *is* idolatry, but the worship of Christ himself as not merely the one through whom we can "see" God, but ontologically God-in-humanity, is assuredly *not* idolatry.

¹⁵ Muslims are well aware of the implications of the pluralist developments in Christian theology. A friend from Singapore has told me that *The Myth of God Incarnate* (Hick, 1977) is required reading for Muslim missionaries. I was told by Indian Christian missionaries in India that even in remote rural villages, Muslims can counter the Christian gospel with the riposte that even bishops in the Church of England now believe what Muslims have always believed—that Jesus was not really God and did not really rise again.

no other way; we apply to him the most solemn scriptures that Israel used concerning Yahweh; we sing to him songs of worship and praise that were originally sung to Yahweh and have made up book-fuls of our own. All these things we have done for 2,000 years but with no justification at all, if the pluralists are right. For, no matter how remarkable he was, no matter what God did in and through him, if Jesus was not more than a man, then the whole Christian faith and all the generations of Christian worship have been a monstrous idolatry.

Conclusion

So we arrive at the end of the pluralists' road. At best, "Christ" becomes so universal as to be of no real value except as a symbol. At worst, he is exposed as an idol for those who worship him and as dispensable by those who don't.

The discussion above has been limited to the internal Christian debate about the plurality of religions and has not even begun to focus on the challenges presented by the great world religions themselves to Christian mission and missiology. Each of them would need a separate paper, since the contexts they represent are so unique. Obviously, Christian missiological response to each of the great faiths will remain a major challenge in the 21st century. But Evangelical missiology will have to continue to confront that brand of Christian pluralism which undermines the uniqueness of Christ and subverts the challenge of the gospel from within.

Ethical Pluralism

Features and roots

We live in a world of ethical plurality and confusion. Even in the West, it seems a long way, both historically and culturally, from the apparent "self-evident truths" of the American Declaration of In-

dependence, which included basic statements about human equality and proclaimed ideals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Universal statements of ethical rights and duties, such as the various United Nations declarations on human rights, command less respect, in spite of continued lip service and the moralizing of Western politicians.

On the one hand, such universal declarations are challenged by countries and cultures whose moral views come from a radically different religious worldview from the broadly Christianized context out of which the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights, for example, arose. Islamic states have protested at being judged by moral standards which they see as not founded in the principles of Islam, especially since the very nations which "preach" those standards at Islamic countries are guilty of manifest hypocrisy in their own moral failures. Similarly, in India, militant Hinduism sees no ethical hindrance to its exclusion of lower caste and non-caste Indians from social participation or political rights; the caste system, allied to the religious philosophy of karma and reincarnation, provides plenty of ethical justification for the status quo. This philosophy, which turns up in the West as somewhat outlandish but malice-free views on the lips of Glen Hoddle, is the religious worldview that undergirds the oppression currently resurgent in the largest democracy on earth.

On the other hand, universal moral declarations are under challenge in the cultures which produced them in the first place—within the West itself. In the post-modern, post-imperial climate, any claim regarding universally valid morality is rejected as cloaked imperialism. To say that something is an absolute human right or duty is simply to impose our cultural values on others. If there is no transcendent authority behind morality, then we have

no right to choose one set of values that appeal to us and insist that the rest of the world abide by them. This is a problem faced not just by Christians. Some Western secular companies with a concern for business ethics are conscious of the following dilemma, which I read in a secular business magazine on an international flight: When you are operating in a non-Western country where accepted practices clash with your own ethical standards (e.g., as regards human rights violations in working conditions, etc.), do you adopt the view, "When in Rome do as the Romans do," and call it "cultural sensitivity and respect for others" (in which case you will have a struggle with your own integrity and conscience), or do you make a fuss and insist on certain ethical standards as a precondition of doing business at all (in which case you may be accused of neo-colonial imposition of Western cultural values or, even worse, of missionary arrogance and intolerance)?

Again, the roots of ethical pluralism can be traced both to modernity and to the post-modern reaction.

Modern ethical pluralism

We recall that Enlightenment modernity introduced structural dualism—the division of life into public and private hemispheres. This had the effect of consigning ethics as well as religion to the hemisphere of privatized belief, as distinct from public knowledge. Even if some moral absolute did exist (as Kant continued to assert with his "categorical imperative"), it could not be *known* by the only mechanism capable of knowing anything, autonomous *reason*. It could only be *recognized and responded to* through the *will*. But what if human wills differ? Morality becomes merely a fragile matter of social consensus, for as long as it lasts. And if the consensus of will breaks down, then morality will be determined, for good or

ill, by the most powerful will, or the more sinister "will to power" that Nietzsche envisaged. Since "God is dead," then there is no transcendent, revealed, and authoritative basis for ethics. In such a climate, ethics either fragments into private value preferences or succumbs to the tyranny of "might is right."

Part of modernity's attractiveness, however, was its optimism. The myth of inevitable progress that would follow on the heels of scientific advance led generations to believe that somehow things were getting better and better. Human beings could eventually achieve sufficient ethical consensus to engineer a future that would be both good and happy. The trouble was that autonomous reason seemed capable of generating widely conflicting ethical visions, depending, it seems, on what scientific approach one regarded as primary or, to be more precise, what particular scientific reductionism governed one's view of the fundamental essence of humanity.

What is the essential nature of human life? Different life sciences and social sciences came up with different answers—all of them partially true but inadequate as full explanations of what it is to be human. These answers then became the basis for similarly inadequate ethical theories. Thus, biology produced a version of ethics based on evolution. This itself bifurcated into a positive form, which enthused about our ability to control our own evolution as a human species for good, and a more cynical form, which asserted that if survival of the fittest is the game, then everyone should try to be among the fittest and, if possible, engineer the genetic or genocidal non-survival of the least fit. Biology also produced the behaviourist ethic of the human zoo: ethics is nothing more than socialized and rationalized animal instincts. Psychology reduced ethics to health or sickness of the

mind and replaced repentance with therapy. Sociology reduced ethics to a function of social interaction; Marxism, to economic determinism, and so on.

Such ethical reductionisms stem from modernity's insistence on analysing and describing *human* life by means of the same kind of allegedly neutral scientific tools as were applied to the rest of the *material* universe. They then tried to come up with some account of the "laws" governing human behaviour that would be as universal as the laws of physics, chemistry, or biology which appeared to govern the universe.

Post-modern ethical pluralism

The post-modern reaction has been to reject the idea of any absolute and final explanation of human reality, of any universal moral framework that can be epistemologically grounded in some objective or scientific "truth." Not only is there no transcendent authority to provide ethical universals (a denial common to modernity and post-modernity); neither is there any universal truth to be found in modernity's pursuit of scientific objectivity—in the human and social sciences any more than in the physical sciences. Modernity rejected transcendent authority but tried to preserve some universal moral criteria. Post-modernity rejects both transcendent authority *and* the possibility or even desirability of universal moral grounds. So no ethical stance can be deemed final and universal on the basis of any allegedly scientific description of the human being. Historical and cultural relativism pervades human ethics as much as human religion.

As we noticed in the earlier discussion of post-modernity, there are negative and positive aspects of this feature of ethics in a post-modern context. On the one hand, there is a cynical nihilism at the more intellectual end of the post-modern cultural

spectrum: If no culture has the "right" answer to ethical questions, then why bother wrestling with the questions at all? All that counts in the end is the will to power. It seems sometimes that ethics, not just power, comes out of the barrel of a gun. Or if we are too refined to impose our will by might, there is always manipulation by propaganda, persuasion, and image-massaging. Never mind the ethics; watch the spin.

On the other hand, there is the more cheerful celebration of plurality that comes at the popular end of post-modern culture: let's not only respect, but also enjoy the wide divergences of values that are to be found in today's multi-cultural society. Western "soap operas" often tackle ethical issues in their story lines. The most popular British "soap," *Eastenders*, in recent years has included racism, homosexuality, AIDS prejudice, adultery, incest, wife-battery, alcoholism, child abduction, and murder. But the dominant impression in responding to many of these situations, especially the sexual ones, is a non-judgemental individualism ("you just do what is right for you; nobody can tell you otherwise"). The trouble is that "multi-culturalism" as espoused, for example, in Australia and Canada, generates an ethic of political correctness which can be oppressive in its hidden absolutisms. It also has no means of dealing with (or even actually recognizing) the kind of paradoxical clash of values illustrated by the Hoddle case above. As another British commentator has said, "We're all ethical pluralists now ... until we meet a paedophile."

Missiological response

The Christian missiological response to ethical pluralism needs to start from the same place as for religious pluralism—namely, by identifying and attacking the roots. We must follow the same agenda of

critiquing Enlightenment modernity's relegation of ethics to the hemisphere of privatized belief, as Newbigin has so effectively done for religion. This has two effects. First of all, we must firmly challenge the epistemological arrogance that claims to outlaw all ethical matters from the realm of genuine knowledge, on the grounds that only scientific "facts" can be regarded as objectively true. This "reality filter" needs to be exposed as the deception it really is. Secondly, those ethical stances that are based on the variety of scientific reductionisms in relation to human life also need to be challenged—whether biological evolutionism or behaviourism, psychology, sociology, economics, or more recently, geneticism as preached by Richard Dawkins. Whenever we are told that human ethics is "nothing but ...," we should be on the alert and expose the poverty of all attempts to reduce human life to partial and materialistic explanations.

In fact, I would urge that Evangelical mission theology must address afresh the question of our doctrine of humanity. At the heart of so much of the fragmentation in human societies today lies the loss of human identity or the struggle (often violent) for identity to be recognized or recovered. Where is it to be found? Modernity located human identity in the autonomous rational self. Post-modernity dethrones reason and goes on to de-centre and dissolve the self. What is there left that is distinctly human, or are we left with only the kaleidoscopic relativities of cultures and histories? Culture and history enrich human life and identity, but according to Christian understanding they do not constitute or exclusively define it. I believe that 21st century Evangelical missiology must address the question of *what it means to be human* and must seek to give a genuinely biblical answer. As we observed in the section on religious plural-

ism, the 20th century battle over Christology and soteriology will doubtless continue. But if God became incarnate in Jesus in order to save humanity, what was it that he became in becoming truly human, and what is it that is saved through his death and resurrection?

Returning to ethical pluralism, post-modernity will certainly help us to challenge the dominance of scientific reductionism, but unfortunately it also presents an even more dangerous kind of relativism at the ontological level. How should we respond to the post-modern assertion that there are simply *no foundations* for any common human morality? Must we accept that uncontrolled ethical variety is inevitable because of the plurality of cultures and perspectives and that there is no possibility of any "standing ground" outside all cultures, from which anyone can have the right to adjudicate ethically between them?

A very interesting attempt to address this problem from within the religious pluralist camp has come from Paul Knitter (1992, pp. 111-122). Recognizing the strength of the "anti-foundationalist" case, as expressed in the last paragraph, Knitter asks if there is any way that the different religions can overcome the impasse of utter relativism, any way in which they can find some "common ground" (even though the term is out of favour). He believes it is important to do so, because of the dangers of succumbing too easily to post-modern relativism. He pin-points two dangers: First, full-blown relativism gives you no grounds to criticize even your own culture, let alone other cultures, and it produces an "ethical toothlessness brought about by the lack of any basis on which to validly and coherently resist what appears to be intolerable in other cultural-linguistic systems." Secondly, it offers no basis for moral resistance to naked power: "In arguing that we must simply rejoice

in plurality without ever allowing the possibility that some truth claims may prove to have intrinsic or universal validity, post-moderns allow the warning of Michael Foucault to become reality: the verdict on differing truth claims will be decided not on any mutually reached judgments (since they are impossible) but on the basis of who has the economic or military power.... The criteria will be determined ... by those who have the dollars or the guns" (Knitter, 1992, p. 114).

Knitter's answer to the dilemma is to suggest that rather than looking in vain for common *ground* at the start of the dialogue, the different religions should get stuck into making a common *response* to human problems. Then, hopefully, in the process and praxis of making that response, some patches of common ground may emerge between them. He then identifies what he regards as the two most urgent problems facing the world: *human poverty* ("the millions who because they are deprived of such basic needs as food, drinking water, shelter, and medical care are prevented from living a human life") and *ecological damage* ("the victimized planet earth which, as its life-giving and sustaining gifts of air, water, and soil are devastated and drained, becomes the domain of ever more human victims"). He goes on, "I am suggesting that the reality of suffering due to oppression and victimization—both human and ecological—calls for a common response that can become a common ground for cross-cultural and inter-religious understanding" (Knitter, 1992, p. 118).

Knitter seems almost embarrassed by the glimpse of an ethical universal lurking in such a proposal. So he backs off it somewhat: "One must be careful of speaking of an ethical imperative to confront such issues, since morality is so culture-bound. And yet, it does seem evident that today followers of almost all the religious

paths—from Eastern to Western to so-called primal spiritualities—are recognizing that their own spiritual traditions require them to respond to the reality of human and planetary oppression" (Knitter, 1992, p.119). But do they? It is seriously questionable, I would argue, whether most religions would take the same view of human and planetary suffering as Knitter does, and even more questionable that "within all religious traditions there seems to be a "soteriocentric core" of concern for human well-being *in this world*" (Knitter, 1992, p.119, emphasis added).

So the weakness of Knitter's proposal is that it wants to find common ground, while simultaneously denying that any ground can be or has been provided by a transcendent or trans-cultural source—such as the biblical revelation. Yet the issues he chooses to see as primary and the response he sees as needing to be made to them are actually only *ethical* issues and responses within certain worldviews (such as Christianity). Even identifying the issues to which we call for a response requires standing on *some* ground.

Missiologically, however, in my view, we can turn Knitter's weakness into a strength. We can certainly agree with his identification of two major evils in today's world—poverty and ecological destruction. And we can certainly also challenge and invite the wider non-Christian human community to address them. However, in doing so, we ought to make prominently clear the *Christian* "ground" on which we do so. That means telling the story, which in the Christian worldview both *explains* the problems in terms of humanity's rebellion against God and consequent fracture of all relationships, including that with the planet itself, and also *proclaims* the redemptive action that God himself initiated in the history of Israel and the saving work of Christ. Indeed, we can go

further than a liberationist response, because the full biblical story illuminates wider aspects and deeper roots of the problems than the presenting symptoms themselves. At the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit, it was said that the intense “green” concern for ecological action was “an ethic in search of a religion.” Yet the Christian voice was muted, leaving the “religion” to be provided by the New Age Movement.

Human and planetary oppression are major examples, but they are only part of the total spectrum of ethical issues that societies will face in this new millennium. The missiological challenge to our ethics must be:

- That we seek to show how a *bibli-cally* grounded ethic is valid in theory and works in practice.
- That we also tell the story in which that ethic is grounded and without which it is empty moralism.
- That we ensure that the telling of that story preserves the central focus of Jesus Christ.

We need, in other words, a *missiologically framed and motivated ethical engagement with the world*. Such is the plea of Andrew Walker (1996, p. 170) as he urges Christians to remember and retell the story of the biblical gospel, which modernity has marginalized by its epistemological arrogance and which post-modernity threatens to swamp by the way it relativizes and equalizes all narratives: “Christian activism is not a question of creating a programme for government: it is about standing up in the public square to be counted. Do the public know what the Christian story has to say about moral behaviour? Have we taken the time to tell the story often enough so that people can see that from it flow economic and social consequences? Lesslie Newbigin appears to be right about Christian witness. It is

because we have grown timid, lost faith in the gospel, or even forgotten it, that we do not rush forward for our voices to be heard amidst the clamour of competing interests. We must avoid the vain temptation to build another Christendom; but equally we must not shirk our duty to stir the conscience of our nations for as long as they last.”

Finally, the missiological challenge of ethical pluralism is, of course, practical. If we proclaim that the Christian ethical vision is distinctive and that it is grounded in the true story of God, the universe, human history, and salvation through Christ, are we able to demonstrate that it is so? The church, as Newbigin again so effectively argued, must be the “plausibility structure” for the gospel and the ethic that flows from it.

Concluding Challenges

What are the major issues for our missiological reflection and work? Here are some suggested questions arising out of each of the main sections above.

Hermeneutical pluralism

1. How can a missiologically framed reshaping of the Evangelical doctrine of Scripture better equip us to discern, articulate, and apply the authority of the Bible in the cultural plurality of the 21st century and especially in a world increasingly affected by post-modernity?

2. How can we make room for the multiplicity of readers’ contexts in the global hermeneutical community and especially climb down off the pedestal of Western dominance, without either surrendering to subjectivism, relativism, and the loss of any commitment to a stable core meaning in biblical texts or substituting the authority of readers/contexts for the authority of the biblical text itself?

Religious pluralism

1. Are there ways in which Evangelical Christians can harness the energy of post-modernity in its critique of Enlightenment modernity's arrogance, without submitting to the ontological relativism that comes with post-modernity?

2. Are there positive and gospel-friendly categories/symbols/perspectives within post-modern consciousness that can be harnessed in order to re-conceptualize and communicate the uniqueness of Jesus in the midst of religious plurality and in polemical engagement with religious pluralism?

Ethical pluralism

1. What will a missiological approach to ethics look like? How can we demonstrate (intellectually and existentially) that the Christian ethic is actually "best," because it most closely relates to the "way things are," according to the biblical story and revelation?

2. Is it our Christian task in the 21st century with its post-modern perspectives to work out fresh ways to enshrine and advocate our understanding of biblical ethics, rather than simply repeating the classical formulations of Western universal declarations?

3. What is a more biblical understanding of *humanity*, which can go beyond the reductionisms of modernity but avoid the narcissism of post-modernity? What theological understanding of human/ethnic identity can provide a missiology that then generates appropriate missional responses to the fragmentation, anger, and despair that seem likely to afflict increasing numbers of human communities in the 21st century?

And finally...

In training people adequately for mission in the 21st century, we shall be handling young adults who are themselves

culturally and probably intellectually shaped by *post-modernity*, yet whose education and worldview has largely been shaped by the paradigms of *modernity*, and whose future ministry may well be in cultures that are as yet effectively *pre-modern*. How can we prepare them adequately to understand the cultural identity crisis they themselves are living through, as well as the one they are heading into? Missionaries in the 21st century will need to be the Christian and cultural equivalent of Olympic triple-jumpers.

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7

THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN mission during the 20th century could be summarized in the words of Latourette as the story of “advance through storm.” Thinking especially about Evangelical missions, Ralph Winter has used the expression “unbelievable years” for the explosion of American missionary activity during the 25 years that followed World War II. As we come to the start of a new century, there are clear signs that a new age of missions has come, to be marked by the new face of global Christianity and the engagement of the churches of the Southern hemisphere in the fulfillment of the Great Mandate and the Great Commission. There was an old way of doing mission developed during the age of the European empires and the United States era of “Manifest Destiny.” It has become obsolete, even though its patterns endure to the point of being imitated by Third World agencies. At the close of my first paper (see chapter 3), I outlined the missiological recovery of biblical patterns for mission that will be developed in this paper.

I define missiology as an interdisciplinary approach to understand missionary action. It looks at missionary facts from the perspectives of the biblical sciences, theology, history, and the social sciences. It aims to be systematic and critical, but it starts from a positive stance towards the legitimacy of the Christian missionary task as part of the fundamental reason for the church’s “being.” A missiological approach gives the observer a comprehensive frame of reference in order to look at reality in a critical way. Missiology is a critical reflection on praxis, in light of God’s Word. One could say that in that regard a significant portion of the writings of the Apostle Paul is missiological in nature. Think, for instance, of 2 Corinthians and the way in which Paul refers

Evangelical missiology: peering into the future at the turn of the century

SAMUEL
ESCOBAR

to his own missionary practice, pointing to Old Testament teachings as well as the living revelation of God in Jesus Christ through the Spirit. The Spirit-inspired missionary acts of Jesus, Paul, and the apostles, as well as their Spirit-inspired reflection on their practice, are authoritative for us in a way in which no other post-apostolic missionary practice or reflection is authoritative.

As the Spirit drives God's people to missionary obedience today, we have the light of God's inspired Word to continually check and evaluate our actions. David Bosch (1993, p. 177) has very aptly referred to the critical spirit in which the missiological task is to be approached: "... if we wish to reflect on 'biblical foundations for mission,' our point of departure should not be the contemporary enterprise we seek to justify, but the biblical sense of what being sent into the world signifies." I would add that theology, history, and the social sciences are useful as tools for a better understanding of God's Word and of contemporary missionary action, but only the Word is inspired and always fertile to renew the church in mission. Moreover, there is another proviso from Bosch (1993, p. 177) which we must take into account: "... however important single biblical texts may [seem to] be, the validity of mission should not be deduced from isolated sayings but from the thrust of the central message of Scripture."

During the last quarter of the 20th century, Evangelical missiologists embarked on a concerted effort to reflect on the massive experience of Evangelical missionary activity. Honest evaluation of missionary activism in light of God's Word, theological truth, and new missionary challenges becomes an effort to envision new models of missionary obedience. In this paper, I will summarize developments in Evangelical missiology during the second part of the 20th century, outlining

three trends that have developed during this period. I will then outline a trinitarian direction in which I think the missiological agenda should be pursued in order to meet the challenges posed by the kind of developments in the church and in the world that I have outlined in my first presentation.

Two cycles of Protestant mission developed during the 20th century. Before World War II, mainline Protestant denominations played a key role both in the practice of mission and in the theologizing about it. It was a period still marked by significant activity from European as well as North American churches and by theological debate about the nature of the Christian mission and the identity of the young churches that were growing in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. After the War, there was a decline of traditional Protestant activity and a marked growth of activity and influence from conservative Protestant agencies in the United States. There was also an explosive growth of faith missions and parachurch agencies that spread missionary concepts, along with methodologies that reflected American cultural values and mores. Through massive use of Christian media, theological institutions, and missionary conferences, its influence was felt not only in countries receiving missionaries but also in the old sending countries of Europe.

I think it is important to acknowledge the fact that new generations of missionaries without an adequate historical awareness or biblical training were condemned to repeat the mistakes of the past. It became necessary for theologians to embark anew in the search for a missiological reflection. This is what historian William H. Hutchison (1987, p. 176) has called "familiar debates in an unfamiliar world." As an Evangelical, I find comforting the fact that the explosion of Evangelical missionary activity after 1945—criticized by mis-

siologists from the previous half of the century—provided a bulk of new practice, on the basis of which it was possible to reflect and formulate new theories. Commenting on critical remarks from missiologist R. Pierce Beaver, Dana Robert (1994, p. 146) has described the situation in which a renewed effort has come at the level of scholarship from the missionary activity of conservative Evangelicals: “The ‘sectarian’ evangelicals that Beaver had excoriated in 1964 reached such a level of institutional maturity and ecclesiastical dominance that critical historical analysis became possible and necessary.” At the same time, I also find sobering the remark of Joel Carpenter (1990, p. 131) pointing to the Evangelical isolation from previous missionary practice and experience: “When a post-fundamentalist, ‘neo-Evangelical’ theological movement appeared in the 1950s and 1960s, it virtually had to reinvent Evangelical missions theology.”

Missiological reflection has experienced sustained growth in both quantity and quality because of the widening and deepening of its agenda, the growing dialogue of different traditions, and the emergence of missiologists from the younger churches of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Evangelicals kept a very focused missionary activity, even at periods in which such activity declined in other sectors of Christendom. Their reflection was made possible in part by the new developments in theological scholarship within the Evangelical camp and by the growth towards maturity of Evangelical churches in those lands that used to be called mission fields. Towards the end of the third quarter of the 20th century, Evangelical missiological reflection gathered momentum, and the 1974 Lausanne Congress became a rallying point to promote Christian mission but also to reflect about it. The Lausanne Covenant became at the same time a summary and an agenda.

Background of Missiological Developments Among Evangelicals

Within the second half of the 20th century, we can place events such as the birth of World Evangelical Fellowship, the growth of an American Evangelical missionary vitality, the development of the World Council of Churches and its eventual merge with the International Missionary Council, the Vatican II Council, and the increasing growth and recognition of the Pentecostal Movement. I will refer specially to the Lausanne Movement because of the missiological trends it synthesized and sparked.

Lausanne was preceded by three vigorous Evangelical Movements following World War II. First, there was the renewal of mass evangelism that reached public notice with Billy Graham in Los Angeles in 1949. Some classic elements of revivalistic Protestantism, combined with the use of mass media, shook the dormant religious routine of people, especially in the big cities, first in North America and then in Europe. The type of evangelistic organization represented by Billy Graham put in evidence the fact that in those countries there was a new awareness of spiritual needs and a religious vacuum that was not being filled by the routine life of institutionalized Christianity. Second, there was a renewal of serious Evangelical scholarship in biblical studies and theological reflection, following a renewal of Evangelical university life in Europe and especially Great Britain. This was related to the Evangelical student work of InterVarsity, that had managed to keep together missionary zeal and concern for theology and scholarship. Third, strong Evangelical churches and movements had emerged around the world, connected to Protestant missionary work of the pre- and post-World War II streams of missionary fervor

and activity from Europe and North America. Independent “faith missions” had played an important role in this emergence, representing a new generation that threw itself with great vigor into the task of planting churches, translating Scripture, and reaching the restless masses of the Third World through evangelism.

These three movements exemplify the type of Evangelical churches, missionary organizations, and denominational renewal groups that find a way of expressing their concern for Christian unity and cooperation in alliances such as WEF or the Lausanne Movement. Their variety also explains the tensions that develop within those alliances or umbrella movements, which sometimes are unable to contain them. The volunteerism which is the genius of Evangelical life and mission is a key factor in understanding these developments. The “faith mission” type of missionary activity contributes to the rise of vigorous Evangelical churches in the Third World, which are independent and have no connection with the historic Protestant denominations. Ecclesiology is undefined in these independent churches. Their participation in Evangelical alliances brings them into contact with Evangelicals inside the mainline churches. The encounter is mutually enriching, but it also accounts for a long and difficult process of theological dialogue and definition. There is a dialectical interaction between the vitality that comes from these movements at the grassroots and the direction and stimulation that the alliances themselves provide. In order to understand Evangelical missiological developments, both the promise and the precariousness of this interaction have to be appreciated, and its historical significance has to be evaluated theologically.

The three movements mentioned above converged in the Berlin 1966 World Congress on Evangelism, convened under

the leadership of Carl F. H. Henry, to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the magazine *Christianity Today*. Henry was a theologian and journalist who had articulated with clarity the theological agenda for an Evangelicalism that wanted to distance itself from the Fundamentalist trap. As editor of *Christianity Today*, he was in contact with a new generation of Evangelical scholars that were not afraid to dialogue in the academic world and had gone beyond the narrow anti-intellectualism of fundamentalists. This scholarship, however, was matched by an evangelistic and missionary thrust and a global perception that Billy Graham’s ministry had made possible.

The vision of the Berlin congress was summarized in its motto, “One Race, One Gospel, One Task.” One important fact about Berlin is that Evangelicals acknowledged and accepted the validity and significance of the Pentecostal Movement. The follow-up congresses after Berlin were platforms of convergence not only for reaffirming Evangelical truth, but also for sober consideration of the spiritual needs of the world. The pragmatic concerns of Evangelicals from North America and the theological and missiological acumen of European Evangelicals were matched by the restless sense of mission of Evangelicals in the young churches of the Third World or among the oppressed minorities. The agenda of the ongoing reflection had to make room for the burning questions of those who were witnessing to their faith in Jesus Christ within situations where the ferment of nationalism, social upheaval, and ideological conflict were testing the theological depth of both Evangelical and non-Evangelical missionaries and churches. The Berlin follow-up regional congresses in Singapore (1968), Minneapolis (1969), Bogotá (1969), Ottawa (1970), Amsterdam (1971), and Madrid (1974) were steps in the building-up process that culminated

in Lausanne 1974. Because of this preceding process, Lausanne was not the missiological and theological monologue of European or North American Evangelicals, but a brotherly global dialogue of a community that had grown beyond expectations all over the world: a dialogue in search of ways of obedience to the missionary imperatives of Jesus, our Savior and Lord.

The Lausanne Covenant expresses this unique missiological moment. Precisely at the point in time in which Evangelical Christianity was joyfully aware of its global dimension, it also became painfully aware of its serious shortcomings. Liberated by its missionary thrust from the bonds of sterile fundamentalism, Evangelicalism was able again to rediscover the holistic dimensions of the Christian mission that are clearly presented in the Bible. The Lausanne Covenant restates convictions that are characteristic of Evangelicalism. It starts with a trinitarian confession, a statement about the authority of the Bible, and an expression of Christological conviction (LC, par. 1-3). At the same time, the Covenant expresses repentance for what was wrong or missing in the way in which Evangelicals had been accomplishing their missionary task.

I think it possible to summarize in four points the direction of the process of the Lausanne 1974 event, as well as the content of the Covenant it issued. They express a forceful challenge to adopt a new form of missionary practice for world evangelization and a corresponding call for new theological formulation.

First, there was a commitment to a concept of *holistic* mission that retains the Evangelical emphasis on proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ while also describing the kind of missionary presence it requires, and the call to discipleship and incorporation into the church (LC, par. 4). Inherent in this is self-criticism of the type

of dualistic spiritualization that had come to be prevalent in the practice of Evangelical missionaries. Mission relates to every area of human need. For the majority of Evangelicals, however, holistic mission has evangelism as a key and primary component: "In the church's mission of sacrificial service evangelism is primary" (LC, par. 6).

Second, there was the call for *cooperation* in the mission task—between church and parachurch, mainline and Evangelical, Pentecostal and Reformed—based solely on the missionary passion shared in the Lausanne event and the basic theological consensus reached in the Covenant itself. The sheer magnitude of the task of world evangelization, along with the scandal of sterile division and competition among missionary agencies, demanded a new attitude. The sense of urgency of reaching those still unreached even makes room for the type of concern that had been underlying the call for a "moratorium" (LC, par. 7, 8, 9).

Third, and closely related to the previous point, was the awareness that in the post-imperial era in which we live, the missionary and the theological tasks have a *global* dimension. Christians and missionaries from the European and North American regions, once strongholds of Evangelical faith in the past, had to acknowledge the spiritual decline in those regions and the rise of new thriving churches in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Thus, neither imperialism nor provincialism could be tolerated.

Fourth was the commitment to consider seriously the *context* of mission. Issues such as culture, education of leaders, spiritual conflict, and persecution were addressed (LC, par. 10-13). The need was recognized for an evaluation of the social, ideological, and spiritual struggles that surround and condition the missionary

enterprise, in order to design a relevant type of discipleship for our own times.

From Lausanne I to Lausanne II in Manila

After the Lausanne Congress, Evangelical missionary action was more visibly accompanied by a process of reflection and clarification. A series of consultations was sponsored by the Lausanne Committee, with the participation of missionaries, pastors, mission executives, and missiologists from World Evangelical Fellowship, Latin American Theological Fraternity, Fuller School of World Mission, World Vision International, Evangelicals for Social Action, and many other Evangelical bodies. These gatherings became the platform in which practitioners and theoreticians of mission engaged in the task of “doing theology” together, at a global scale. In one of the first of those consultations, an agreement was reached and a commitment expressed: “We should seek with equal care to avoid theological imperialism or theological provincialism. A church’s theology should be developed by the community of faith out of the Scripture in interaction with other theologies of the past and present, and with the local culture and its needs” (Willowbank Report, 1978).

Some Evangelicals (notable among them is Johnston, 1978) became very critical of the kind of missiological and theological agenda expressed by the Covenant. Others tried to narrow and reduce the Lausanne Movement to a fundamentalistic program. For some, it was impossible to accept the commitment to globalism and

respect the legitimacy of Third World concerns and challenges.¹ In spite of all these objections, between Lausanne I in 1974 and the second conference sponsored by the Lausanne Committee, Lausanne II in Manila in 1989, a good degree of missionary activity and reflection was sparked, encouraged, oriented, or fostered by the Lausanne Movement. The balance of cooperation and global dialogue achieved was very delicate and fragile, and in many instances it almost came to breaking points. However, it was kept, thanks to the maturity and diplomatic ability of Evangelical statesmen such as John Stott, Leighton Ford, Emilio Núñez, Bishop Jack Dain, Gottfried Ossei-Mensah, Dick Van Halsema, and others like them. As the date for Lausanne II approached, several missionaries and theologians, especially in the Third World, expressed apprehension about the direction that the movement seemed to be taking. They detected a mood of retreat from the territory gained in 1974 to narrower and “safer” positions. They perceived what appeared as an effort to avoid controversial issues and speakers, and a tendency to use Lausanne II as a marketing launch for missionary packages devised in North America.²

Lausanne II was held in Manila, Philippines, July 11-20, 1989, 15 years after the first conference. Chris Sugden and Valdir Steuernagel (1990) have interpreted this second event in the pages of *Transformation*.³ Robert T. Coote (1990) wrote an excellent interpretative chronicle of the event in the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*. From my own perspec-

¹ The best study of this aspect of the post-Lausanne process is the Ph.D. dissertation of Brazilian missiologist Valdir Steuernagel (1988).

² As an example of this perception, René Padilla, who was a speaker at Lausanne I, did not accept the invitation to Lausanne II. See his editorial comments in Padilla (1989).

³ This issue also contains the text of several presentations and documents from the Lausanne II Conference.

tive, in Lausanne II we had a clear demonstration that at grassroots level, across the world, significant progress has been made in the practice of mission following the agenda of Lausanne I. Voices like those of Caesar Molebatsi from South Africa, Valdir Steuernagel from Brazil, Peter Kuzmic from Yugoslavia, and Jovito Salonga from the Philippines could not be barred from the platform. But there were also hundreds of practitioners of holistic forms of mission sharing their experience, their joys, their pain, their frustration, and their hope in seminars and workshops. However, this progress in the application of Lausanne I has come in tension with Evangelical forces that seem committed to pull the movement backwards, towards mission styles of the Cold War era and imperial marketing of theological and missiological packages created within the frame of the present North American society.

Three Missiological Trends

I think that in the Lausanne II process through the most recent years we have seen the development of three different missiological schools or approaches currently present in the Evangelical world. They have gone their own parallel ways within the Evangelical Movement, and it would benefit greatly the cause of mission if they could interact adequately. This is especially important as a new missionary thrust develops in the churches of the Third World, which are in search of models for their participation in the global missionary task of the coming decades. However, the Lausanne consensus has been a fragile platform, and constructive interaction has not been easy and sometimes seems impossible. Coexistence has not developed into cooperation. Given the urgency of the tasks ahead and the growing scarcity of resources, we should try our best to have a real dialogue and come to

new forms of cooperation. Here I offer an outline of the three missiological approaches that I see at work.

Post-imperial missiology

This is the missiology coming from Evangelicals in Great Britain and Europe, and it is characterized by a clear post-imperial stance. By this I mean an awareness that the imperial domination they used to exert is gone and new patterns of relationships have developed. For this missiology there are two sources of serious questions about mission: on the one hand, the decline of Christian churches in Europe and their loss of influence on shaping values and attitudes in their societies, and on the other hand, the emergence of new forms of Christianity in the Third World.

The practice and the theory of mission have to deal with these facts as part of the new frame of reference for mission. Consequently, missiological research and reflection have moved in at least three directions. First, there is a renewed search for biblical patterns to correct and illuminate contemporary mission activity. The field was pioneered by John Stott (1967, 1975) in his biblical studies about the Great Commission and his definition of key words such as salvation, conversion, evangelism, dialogue, and mission. Another systematic contribution that focused on evangelism came from Michael Green (1970), in a book that summarized the findings of contemporary scholarship from the perspective of an evangelist. Other Evangelical contributions exploring the New Testament material have important missiological consequence as they clarify the relevance of New Testament ethical teaching (especially Yoder, 1972) or social practice (a good summary is given in Tidball, 1983). Missionary practice, especially its social and political dimension, has been the source of the questions

brought by these scholars to the exploration of the biblical material, and there has been a significant growth of scholarship around the world.⁴

The second direction taken by this missiological approach has been the critical work of writing and interpreting the history of missionary activity, taking very seriously the ambiguities of the Western imperial enterprise and trying to detach missionary obedience from it. This view of history uses critical insights from the sociology of knowledge and the sociology of religion. However, it does not reduce missionary history to a form of class struggle or imperial advance, as some liberation theologians do.⁵ Missiologists from the Ecumenical Movement that are taken seriously by Evangelicals, such as Max Warren (1967) and Stephen Neill (1966), pioneered this effort of missiological clarification. An excellent methodological introduction was provided by Roger Mehl (1970, especially chaps. I, II, and 8), himself a theologian and a sociologist, and some valuable Evangelical contributions have been added recently.⁶

One important consequence of this approach has been to clarify the degree to which missionary ideas and practices were influenced by the social context from which missionaries came. In this way, it is possible to distinguish the biblical content of their teaching from the trappings of their class attitudes and their national idiosyncrasies. This is especially helpful as a generation of leaders in the younger churches give themselves to the theological task of contextualizing the Christian

faith in their own cultures. The contribution of Max Warren (1967) in his analysis of the British missionary movement was very valuable in this regard. American missionary anthropologist Jacob Loewen (1975) has been one of the most consistent scholars in his use of insights from anthropology to evaluate critically the missionary enterprise from North America.

The third direction of this missiological exploration is the visualization of the future of mission as a global task in which the churches of the North Atlantic world enter into creative patterns of partnership with churches in the Third World. In relation to this, Andrew Walls (1996) has explored the missiological significance of what he calls “the massive southward shift of the center of gravity of the Christian world,” and the theological consequences that such a shift has for the self-image of churches in both North and South. Excellent introductions to mission from this perspective have been written by Maurice Sinclair (1988) and Michael Nazir-Ali (1991). What is distinctive of the partnership proposed by this missiology is that the Third World churches are seen as agents and originators of a missionary effort and a missiological reflection that is valid in its own right. They are not simply being asked to join the missionary enterprise devised in a mission center of North America or Europe. This point becomes especially important because the missionary agenda in the Third World cannot avoid the issues linked to Christian mission and social transformation—issues such as human rights, the socio-political

⁴ The field was pioneered by E. A. Judge (1960) and followed by authors as diverse as Wayne Meeks, Alan Kreider, and Derek Tidball.

⁵ This kind of reductionism was expressed, for instance, in the WCC-sponsored “Declaration of Barbados,” which caused an uproar in the 1970s. See *International Review of Mission*, July 1973, and my discussion of this matter in Escobar (1978).

⁶ See Stanley (1990) and Carpenter & Shenk (1990). These books are truly historical essays and go beyond the naïve chronicles or memories that we commonly call “mission history.”

consequences of missionary action, the ideological use of the Christian message for political aims, and the religious sanction for contemporary forms of economic or cultural colonialism.

What characterizes this missiology is that the traditional Evangelical missionary zeal is matched with a disposition to take courageously the lessons of history and explore God's Word using the best tools of biblical scholarship at the service of mission. More than a closed package that is to be protected from the tough questions that come from life, mission theology is grounded on basic convictions, but it is also an open enterprise so that missionary practice is open to correction. One could also say that missionary practices of British and European agencies tend to express these convictions and that agencies like Tear Fund, South American Missionary Society, Overseas Missionary Fellowship, or Latin Link try to shape their policies according to biblical principles more than mere pragmatic considerations.

Managerial missiology

The distinctive note from the missiology that has developed especially around the cluster of Evangelical institutions in Pasadena, California, connected to the Church Growth School and movements such as the AD 2000 and Beyond Movement, is the effort to reduce Christian mission to a manageable enterprise. Every characteristic of this missiology becomes understandable when perceived within the frame of that avowed quantifying intention. Concepts such as "people groups," "unreached peoples," "10/40 window," "adopt a people," and "territorial spirits" express both a strong sense of urgency and an effort to use every available instrument to make the task possible. As a typical school of thought coming from modern United States, the quantitative approach is predominant and the pragmatic

orientation well defined. One way of achieving manageability is precisely to reduce reality to an understandable picture and then to project missionary action as a response to a problem that has been described in quantitative form. Missionary action is reduced to a linear task that is translated into logical steps to be followed in a process of management by objectives, in the same way in which the evangelistic task is reduced to a process that can be carried on following marketing principles.

Movements that express this approach proliferated as we were approaching the end of the century. Organizations and strategies using the year 2000 A.D. as a date to complete evangelization were given prominent publicity during the Lausanne II gathering, in which an array of "arresting but mystifying statistics" were offered in highly promoted packages (see Coote, 1990, pp. 15-16). The use of statistical information in order to visualize the missionary task, as well as of key dates in order to motivate missionaries, is not something new in the history of missions. The famous "Enquiry" written by William Carey in 1792 in order to promote Protestant missions devoted a good number of pages to statistical charts about the population of the world and the religious affiliation of the peoples. In preparation for some of the great missionary conferences of our century, similar statistical information was compiled in order to communicate the nature of the missionary effort that was required and to promote a sense of urgency about it.

Within managerial missiology, statistical analysis was used first as a way of measuring the effect of missionary action, in an effort to reduce the lack of clarity that surrounded it and the fuzziness in the traditional way of defining and evaluating it. This evaluative methodology was at the service of a narrowly defined concept of mission as numerical growth of the

church, coupled with an insistence about the unfinished evangelistic task among those that had not yet heard or accepted the message of the gospel. Donald McGavran was the champion of this position, which he presented in contrast to more inclusive definitions of mission that were predominant, especially in the conciliar Ecumenical Movement. In one of his last writings, McGavran (1989, p. 338) posed the dilemma very clearly: "In short, is mission primarily evangelism, or is it primarily all efforts to improve human existence?" His choice is clear: "Winning many to the Christian life must be the dominant concern of all Christians. All those engaging in missiology need to be all things to all people in order to lead some to believe in Christ and receive everlasting life. Once that is done, then limitation of population, feeding the hungry, healing the sick, developing just forms of government, and other steps toward the better life will become much more possible and more permanent" (McGavran, 1989, p. 340).

Extreme forms of managerial missiology as we know it may have not been what McGavran intended to develop, but it came to happen in any case. Some acts of verbal communication of the gospel, such as distribution of the printed page, hours of broadcasting through radio or TV, massive gatherings for evangelism, and groups of new believers organized into churches, are all activities that can be counted and registered. It is not difficult to see how such a narrowed-down concept of mission has given birth to a managerial approach to the missionary task. It is at this point that this missiology has been subject to severe criticism, because it has yielded to the spirit of the age. It is interesting that as the influence of market economy ideas becomes pervasive in society, authors from this movement are writing now about marketing the church.

Anyone who has engaged in mission in the Third World or among the poor in the First World knows that the neat distinction established by McGavran is artificial. It was good for debate against exaggerations, but it does not function in practice. In the United States or in Europe, middle class churches can keep a neat distinction between "spiritual" needs and "social" needs, and they can specialize in the former. In most African American or Hispanic churches of the U.S. or in churches of immigrants in Europe, such distinction is impossible. On the other hand, there are some aspects of missionary work that cannot be reduced to statistics. Managerial missiology has diminished those aspects of missionary work which cannot be measured or reduced to figures. In the same way, it has given predominance to that which can be reduced to a statistical chart.

The second important note that reflects managerial missiology's origins is the pragmatic approach to the task, which de-emphasizes theological problems, takes for granted the existence of adequate content, and consequently majors in method. An enterprise that presupposes that the theoretical questions are not important will be by force anti-theological. It is the kind of process that demands a closed view of the world, in which the tough questions are not asked because they cannot be reduced to a linear management-by-objectives process. This system cannot live with paradox or mystery. It has no theological or pastoral resources to cope with the suffering and persecution involved many times in mission, because it is geared to provide methodologies for a guaranteed success. However, only categories like paradox, mystery, suffering, and failure can help us grasp something of the depth of the spiritual battle involved in mission. In this way, an important aspect of the history of missions is either

silenced or underestimated, because it would not fit the mathematical categories of so-called “church growth.”

The pragmatic bias accounts also for the reductionist theological foundation of this missiology. If the missionary effort is reduced to numerical growth, anything that would hinder it has to be eliminated. If the struggle for obedience to God in holistic mission involves costly participation in the processes of social transformation, it is simply eliminated. The slow process of development of a contextual theology for a young church tends to be considered inefficient and costly, and it is easy to substitute prepackaged theologies translated from English. Efficient educational techniques like “extension” have been developed within the frame of managerial missiology, but there has not been much success in the production of contextual textbooks. Charles Taber (1983, p. 119) points to the Evangelical origins of the theological presuppositions of the Church Growth School, but he proves that its foundation is a “narrowed-down version of the evangelical hermeneutic and theology.”

In the third place, the strong influence of the American functionalist social sciences on managerial missiology accounts for an important deficiency when we come to the transformative dynamism of the gospel. The structural-functional model of cultural anthropology is based on a static view of the world for which, as Taber (1983, p. 119) says, “‘Cultural givens’ take on permanence and rigidity; it suggests that whatever endures. This cannot help but undermine the hope of transformation which is central to the gospel.” Peruvian missiologist Tito Paredes (1986) has developed this critical point, showing how the way in which managerial missiologists read Scripture is affected by this socially conservative approach, which takes them to reductionist understanding of the gos-

pel and Christian mission. Harvie Conn (1983) has studied the development of the missiological thought of Donald McGavran in relation to this area, especially the concepts about discipling and perfecting as phases and moments of the missionary process.

Proponents of this missiology that entered in a global dialogue after Lausanne 1974 have worked critically to develop the best of its insights. On the other hand, Conn suggests that McGavran’s evolution and self-correction have not been always adequately noticed or followed by his students and defenders. As an insider in the movement, Arthur Glasser (1986) provided a brief and clarifying evaluative chronicle. Some anthropologists of this school, especially Alan Tippett (1987), Charles Kraft (1979), and Paul Hiebert (1986), worked patiently in a clarification of methodologies from the social sciences as they are applied to missiological work. Missiologist Charles Van Engen (1991) has worked systematically in an effort to incorporate key concerns from the Church Growth School into a full-fledged theology of the church in mission.

A more recent movement that embodies in an extreme form all the characteristics we have outlined above is the so-called Spiritual Warfare Movement. While no one would deny the reality of spiritual life and the spiritual battles involved in missionary work, this American-based movement provides maps and statistics of demons in cities and regions. It majors in offering methodologies for which there is no biblical or theological basis, and it handles Scripture in an arbitrary way. It comes in packages of literature, video, songs, and methodologies that are being propagated with the best use of marketing techniques. The Evangelical Missiological Society has provided a careful theological and biblical evaluation of this movement (Rommen, 1995).

The enthusiastic fervor and the militancy of some proponents of managerial missiology, as well as the great amount of material and technical resources with which they promote their cause, has created a suspicion about motivation, especially in the Southern hemisphere. The idea that an accumulation of material resources is bound to produce certain effects has reflected itself in the constant preoccupation with augmenting the missionary force quantitatively, without much debate about the quality of that missionary action. The suspicion of some Third World Christians is that they are being used as objects of a missionary action that seems to be directed to the main objective of enhancing the financial, informational, and decision-making power of some centers of mission in the First World. The first rule of missionary life is that embodied in the model proposed by the Lausanne Covenant of emptying ourselves, and there is a right to suspect motivation. However, that is precisely the aspect that cannot be grasped by simple statistical analysis. Properly speaking, more than a missiology, this is a methodology for mission, and if it limits itself to that realm, accepting the need to enter into dialogue with theology and other missiologies, it could make its valuable contribution to mission in the third millennium.

A critical missiology from the periphery

From the lands which used to be missionary territories, a new missiology has started to develop and is letting its voice be heard. Lausanne I was characterized by the openness to hear from that new reflection, at the same time contextual and engaged. We could say that the basic thrust of this missiology is its critical nature. The question for this missiology is not *how much* missionary action is required today

but *what kind* of missionary action is necessary. And the concern with quality links naturally with the questions about the social dynamism of the gospel and that transformative power of the experience of conversion to Jesus Christ.

What characterizes Evangelical churches in the Third World, especially in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, is their evangelistic and missionary dynamism. And that is clearly reflected in the missiology that comes from them. None among the pastors, missionaries, and theologians from the Third World that spoke at Lausanne I or Lausanne II proposed a moratorium of evangelization or a concept of mission that would deny the priority of announcing the message of salvation in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Most of them, however, would agree about the need to distinguish between the gospel and the ideologies of the West, between a missionary action patterned by the model of Jesus Christ and one that reflects the philosophies and methodologies of the multi-national corporations. Probably the Latin Americans René Padilla and Orlando Costas are the theologians that have done more to provide a solid biblical foundation to the two-fold missiological approach of Evangelicals from the Third World: the criticism of existing patterns of mission and the proposal of a missiology that corresponds to the missionary challenges of the day.

Costas' (1983) approach was Evangelical in its inspiration and emphasis, and he tried to formulate basic missiological concepts that would incorporate some insights from liberation theologies as well as others from church growth methodologies. His holistic concept of church growth is an excellent summary of his efforts towards a synthesis that could be communicated and implemented at the level of the local church. His missiological exploration into biblical themes is specially valuable in his posthumous work, *Liberating*

News (Costas, 1989). His study of the significance of the ministry of Jesus in Galilee and from Galilee provides a paradigm for mission from the Third World that he describes as “a model of contextual mission from the periphery.” In light of it, Costas (1989, p. 67) believes that, “The global scope of contextual evangelization should be geared first and foremost to the nations’ peripheries, where the multitudes are found and where the Christian faith has had the best opportunity to build a strong base.” Many historical examples as well as the tremendous dynamism of churches in Africa and parts of Asia and Latin America today prove his point and mark some guidelines for the future of mission, not so much as churches adopt managerial plans from the North, but as they develop their own missionary projects that express their genius and ethos.

Padilla also offers a missiological reflection that is especially committed to take seriously the biblical text. His most complete proposal thus far is in his book *Mission Between the Times* (Padilla, 1985). Padilla finds in the biblical text solid ground for a concept of the gospel and Christian commitment, in which the socially transformative dimensions are unavoidable. Conn (1983, p. 85) thinks that Padilla’s dealing with issues like the “homogeneous unit principle” provides “a powerful model of exegetical interaction with the church growth paradigm” and “an articulate example of the way in which these questions ought to be approached from a biblical-theological perspective.” What this example offers to missionaries is an exploration into the depths of the social significance of the basic Christian truths. Precisely it is this kind of Evangelical depth that is missing in managerial missiology and that makes sense to those who minister in the name of Jesus Christ, in the midst of poverty and with the pain of social transitions.

Three collective volumes contain some of the missiological contributions from Evangelical theologians of the Third World to the ongoing dialogue, with special reference to the relation between mission and social transformation. A careful consideration of their content will show that this missiological concern is not something added artificially to what otherwise would be purely evangelistic emphasis. It is a concern that comes from the demands of both the evangelistic and the pastoral activity which these practitioners of mission cannot avoid. What is at stake every day and every week in the ministry of these men, be it in the ghettos of North American cities or in the dusty roads of Latin America, Asia, and Africa, is their credibility as messengers of Jesus Christ. Thus a renewed Christology is essential for their mission (Samuel & Sugden, 1983), as well as the way in which churches can respond to human need (Samuel & Sugden, 1987) or proclaim Christ among those that have not come to saving knowledge of him (Samuel & Hauser, 1989).

Contributions from missiologists like Kwame Bediako and David Gitari in Africa or Vinay Samuel and David Lim in Asia to the above-mentioned volumes posed special questions in the area of the relationship between gospel and culture and the way in which Evangelicals rooted in the context of non-Christian cultures will deal with their historical memory and their own religious past. From the Catholic context of popular religiosity and syncretism in Latin America, these questions have a different twist in the work of men like Tito Paredes and Key Yuasa. In all these contexts, the religious experience cannot avoid reference to its social conditioning and its social impact. As militant social scientists put missionary work in the Third World under the microscope of their research, missiologists have to come to terms with the lights and the shadows of

a missionary enterprise made up of human frailties and ambiguities. The missiologist in the Third World cannot avoid the evaluative questions not only for the defense of missionary work as it stands today, but also for the formulation of a missionary strategy for the coming decades.

Trinitarian Missiology

In the final section of this paper, I want to outline some notes of a trinitarian missiology that may give us clues in relation to the challenges of the future. Evangelical missiological reflection has been strong in its Christology, because Evangelicals in mission have usually been Christocentric in their spiritual life and their concept of mission. I have the conviction that the times call for a new understanding of the Triune God as we think about mission in light of God's Word. This is not to detract from a Christ-centered stance but to look at our Lord the way Scripture presents him in relation to the Father and the Spirit. I will refer to several documents that have been produced by conferences and consultations, because many times they reflect the consensus of practitioners and missiologists as a result of exercises in dialogue. Missiology is the reflection of the people of God, not only of bright, specialized scholars.

God's mission in all of Scripture

Because Evangelicals have the highest regard for the Word of God, they see the Bible as the norm for faith and practice. It is therefore the norm for our way of thinking and acting in mission. Documents such as the Lausanne Covenant and those produced by working groups and consultations of the World Evangelical Fellowship in dialogue with different Christian interlocutors reflect this biblical conviction (Stott, 1996; Meeking & Stott, 1986;

Schrotenboer, 1987). In all these documents, the concept of mission is grounded on Scripture, both Old and New Testament: "Mission arises from the self-giving love of the Triune God himself and from his eternal purpose." From Scripture comes the conviction that "the arrival of the messianic Kingdom through Jesus necessitates the announcement of the Good News, the summons to repentance and faith, and the gathering together of the people of God."

This effort to find the missionary imperative in the great lines of God's revelation in both Testaments is part of an ongoing rediscovery of the missionary theme that runs through the Bible. Here we come to a point Evangelicals must acknowledge: they themselves have a long way to go in terms of deepening their understanding of the biblical basis of mission, in order to establish its validity not on isolated sayings but on the general thrust of biblical teaching. As an Evangelical from Latin America, I have found especially significant the fact that Catholic scholars have produced books that have become standard works in the field of the biblical basis of mission. South African missiologist David Bosch (1993, p. 178) referred to this reality in an eloquent comment: "One might even say that by and large, Catholic biblical scholars are currently taking the missionary dimension of Scripture more seriously than their Protestant counterparts."

In the WEF Perspective (Schrotenboer, 1987) there is also a note of self-criticism about this point: "We must acknowledge that often we have also set our Evangelical traditions above Scripture. In many instances our lip service to biblical authority contradicts the predominant place we give to our denominational and historical baggage." With this note comes also an important commitment to enter into a global inter-Evangelical dialogue to better under-

stand the biblical teaching on missions: "The time has come for Evangelicals around the world to work together in a contextual hermeneutics that will benefit from the rich expressions of Evangelical faith that are now taking root in so many nations and cultures."

Some of the more difficult dialogues and debates within the Evangelical Movement are related to the corrective role of Scripture in relation to missionary practice. I have referred to the missionary strategy known as Spiritual Warfare developed in relation to the Church Growth Movement. At a time in which there is a resurgence of religiosity in many parts of the world, Spiritual Warfare has contributed to a renewed awareness of the spiritual dimension of the missionary task. The Lausanne Covenant had a clear reference to it: "We believe that we are engaged in constant spiritual warfare with the principalities and powers of evil" (LC, par. 12). However the Spiritual Warfare Movement has taken extreme and confusing directions. The Lausanne Committee (1992) issued a statement warning about this development and recommending some antidotes: "There is a danger that we revert to think and operate on pagan worldviews or on undiscerning application of Old Testament analogies that were in fact superseded in Jesus Christ. The antidote to this is the rigorous study of the whole of Scripture always interpreting the Old Testament in the light of the New."

The return to Scripture in Evangelical missiology, especially to the New Testament patterns, means a continual rediscovery of how mission was carried on by the pre-Constantinian church. Sometimes the understanding of this may not give adequate regard to historical developments. This lack of historical awareness mixed with Evangelical zeal may account for some ways of doing mission that may well be labeled as proselytism. Dialogue

has to make room for understanding this, as one of the joint groups working on the issue of proselytism came to acknowledge, affirming that most persons engaged in proselytism "do so out of a genuine concern for the salvation of those whom they address" (quoted in Robeck, 1996, p. 6).

The Christological center and model

McGrath (1995, p. 65) has reminded us recently that the Evangelical stance is radically Christ-centered. He relates this to the high view of Scripture to which Evangelicals are committed: "Christology and scriptural authority are inextricably linked, in that it is Scripture and Scripture alone that brings us to the true and saving knowledge of Jesus Christ." One could describe the development of Evangelical missiology after Berlin 1966 as the search for a new Christological paradigm. Traditionally, the Great Commission of Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:18 had been the motto of Evangelical missions, stressing the imperative of Jesus' command to go and evangelize the nations. In Berlin, John Stott started his Bible expositions with the Gospel of John and emphasized that in it we have a model for mission ("As my Father hath sent me"), as well as a missionary imperative ("even so send I you"). Many came to agree with Stott (1967, p. 39) that "although these words represent the simplest form of the Great Commission, it is at the same time its most profound form, its most challenging and therefore its most neglected."

The Christological paradigm of mission found in the Gospels is incarnational and is marked by a spirit of service. Its roots are in the message of prophets such as Isaiah as well as in the theological elaboration of the Christology of Paul, Peter, John, and other apostolic writers. It came to be understood as a corrective to Evangelical triumphalism, and consequently

taken very seriously by Evangelicals around the world (see, for instance, Padilla, 1976; Samuel & Sugden, 1983). From the shift of attention to the Johannine version of the Great Commission came a new appreciation of the humanity of Jesus Christ and the importance of his incarnational style of mission. This may be an adequate source for evaluation and self-criticism within the Evangelical missionary enterprise. One finds it as a theme in the Lausanne Covenant and as a hermeneutical key in several documents produced later on by the Lausanne Movement and WEF.

René Padilla (1982) has expressed well an Evangelical perspective recovered from a fresh reading of the Gospels: "Jesus Christ is God's missionary par excellence, and he involves his followers in his mission." As we find it in the Gospels, Jesus' mission includes "fishing for the kingdom," or, in other words, the call to conversion to Jesus Christ as the way, the truth, and the life. It is this conversion to Jesus which stands as the basis upon which the Christian community is formed. Mission also includes "compassion" as a result of immersion among the multitudes. It is neither a sentimental burst of emotion nor an academic option for the poor, but definite and intentional actions of service in order to "feed the multitude" with bread *for* life, as well as bread *of* life. Mission includes "confrontation" of the powers of death with the power of the Suffering Servant, and thus "suffering" becomes a mark of Jesus' messianic mission and a result of this power struggle and of human injustice. Through creative contextual obedience, Jesus' mission becomes a fertile source of inspiration. It contains the seeds of new patterns being explored today through practice and reflection—patterns such as simple lifestyle, holistic mission, the unity of the church for mission, the pattern of God's kingdom as

missiological paradigm, and the spiritual conflict involved in mission.

Within the Evangelical missionary stance, the theme of *imitatio Christi* was given a missiological dimension, and one could say that in the case of Latin America there were in this process some convergences with certain forms of liberation theology. For Evangelicals, however, it is clear that biblical Christology also includes an unequivocal reference to the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross and the need of every person to respond to it. There cannot be an imitation of Christ in the biblical sense without a new birth. In response to liberation theologians who would stress the socio-political dimension of the death of Jesus, Padilla, for instance, accepts the truth based on examination of the texts of the Gospels that the death of Jesus was the historical outcome of the kind of life he lived, and that he suffered for the cause of justice and challenges us to do the same. But a warning is necessary, because: "Unless the death of Christ is also seen as God's gracious provision of an atonement for sin, the basis for forgiveness is removed and sinners are left without the hope of justification ... salvation is by grace through faith and ... nothing should detract from the generosity of God's mercy and love as the basis of joyful obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ" (Samuel & Sugden, 1983, p. 28).

Here we can appreciate better an Evangelical conviction that distinguishes Evangelicals from others (Catholics, for instance), as we see in the section on the biblical basis of mission in the ERCDOM Report (Meeking & Stott, 1986). First we find a summary of agreements and disagreements in a crisp sentence: "While both sides affirm that the pilgrim church is missionary by its very nature, its missionary activity is differently understood." It goes on to explain the Vatican II definition of the church as "sacrament of

salvation ... the sign and promise of redemption to each and every person without exception." It then states that most Evangelicals have a contrasting position: "The church is the beginning and anticipation of the new creation, the first born among his creatures. Though all in Adam die, not all are automatically in Christ. So life in Christ has to be received by grace with repentance, through faith. *With yearning, Evangelicals plead for a response to the atoning work of Christ in his death and resurrection.* But with sorrow, they know that not all who are called are chosen" (emphasis added). This conviction is then reflected in missionary activity: "Evangelization is therefore the call to those outside to come as children of the Father into the fullness of eternal life in Christ by the Spirit, and into the joy of a loving community in the fellowship of the church."

This call to conversion is crucial for Evangelical mission. Personal encounter with Jesus Christ changes people radically, and there is a component of moral transformation in this concept of conversion. As an historian observed, in the Evangelical revival of John Wesley we could see both the pessimism about human nature characteristic of Calvin's biblical anthropology and the optimism about divine grace from Evangelical Arminianism that matched it (Rupp, 1952). I would say that this balanced but tense vision has been one of the marks of Evangelical missionary and evangelistic efforts. There is power in the blood of Jesus Christ to regenerate persons by the power of the Holy Spirit. This conviction was forcefully restated in 1988 by a joint group of WEF and the Lausanne Committee (Hong Kong Call, 1992, p. 264): "Conversion means turning from sin in repentance to Christ in faith. Through this faith believers are forgiven and justified and adopted into the family of God's children and heirs. In the

turning process, they are invited to the crucified and risen Christ by the Holy Spirit who prompts them to die to the sinful desires of their old nature and to be liberated from Satanic bondage and to become new creatures in him. This is their passage from spiritual death to spiritual life, which Scripture calls regeneration or new birth (John 3:5)."

Because mission involves frequently a transcultural action, it is important to be alert against forms of evangelism and conversion that appear more as the imposition of foreign cultural patterns on the receptors of the gospel. The Lausanne Covenant had a warning reminding us that, "Missions have all too frequently exported with the gospel an alien culture, and churches have sometimes been in bondage to culture rather than to Scripture" (LC, par. 10). The Hong Kong Call (1992, pp. 264-265) offers a more specific reminder: "There is a radical discontinuity in all conversions, in the sense that the convert 'turns from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God' (Acts 26:18)." However, it also tries to make clear that: "Conversion should not 'deculturise' the converts. They should remain members of their cultural community, and wherever possible retain the values that are not contrary to biblical revelation. In no case should the converts be forced to be 'converted' to the culture of the foreign missionary."

The radical Christocentrism of Evangelicals accounts also for their stance in relation to other religions. The WEF Perspective (Schrotenboer, 1987) uses strong language when it criticizes syncretistic practices. At Lausanne II in Manila (1989), Canon Colin Chapman, who had been a missionary among Muslims, acknowledged the fact that Evangelicals had still much to learn in their understanding of how the Bible deals with the issue of religion in general. The question has become

more urgent in recent times, in view of the increase of religiosity in the West and the tension between growing pluralism on the one hand and fundamentalisms on the other hand in many parts of the world.

The way ahead is being opened by the work of theologians from those parts of the world where the encounter with other faiths is part of the daily life of the missionary and the Christian community. Asian and African Evangelicals are contributing to a better understanding of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. There is firmness in their Evangelical conviction, but there is also an awareness of the dangers of Western triumphalism that may have tainted Evangelical positions in the past. Thus, for instance, Vinoth Ramachandra (1996, p. 275), an Evangelical from Sri Lanka, examines critically the missiological approach of three Asian Catholic theologians: Samartha, Pieris, and Pannikar. Then he offers a careful development of orthodox Christology in dialogue with religions and modernity. From his Christology comes a position that avoids arrogance: "This kind of theological position, which seeks a biblical balance of confidence and humility, defies classification under the customary categories of exclusivist, pluralist, and inclusivist, where Christian views on the world religions are concerned."

During the most recent decade in Latin America, there has been much pastoral and theological work (and very little dialogue) in the area of popular religion among both Catholics and Evangelicals. On the one hand, there is the effort of the Catholic Church to understand critically the syncretistic forms of Christianity, especially among the indigenous peoples, what is now being called "the Indian face of God." On the other hand, there is the existence of popular forms of Protestantism that have grown beyond all expectations. Anyone familiar with the situation

of the continent knows that the question of popular religiosity does not only have a pastoral angle but also a political one, which may be the source of most serious disagreements.

A Methodist theologian who has insisted on affirming his Evangelical stance, José Míguez Bonino (1997, p. 120), has written recently, challenging Latin American Evangelicals to take seriously the issue of other religions. He believes that a trinitarian Christological focus can serve as our guide. "We must not separate the Jesus Christ of the New Testament from the Word 'that was from the beginning' 'with God and was God,'" and he invites us to see in human experiences the presence of that Word and that Spirit. This is not "to 'give in' to paganism but rather to confess the One 'without (whom) not one thing came into being' (John 1:3)." His Evangelical warning comes then loud and clear: "It is no less true, however, that Christian theology cannot disengage the Word and the Spirit of God from the 'flesh' of the son of Mary—of his teaching, his message, his life and his death, his resurrection and Lordship. It is there where we can find the marks of the authentic Word and Spirit of the God of the covenant. By the yardstick of the presence of God in Jesus one measures all presumed presence of that God in human history."

The power of the Holy Spirit

Since Anglican missiologist Roland Allen, former missionary in China, published his book *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church* in 1912, the question of a return to New Testament patterns of mission has been pursued in Protestant missiology. Allen started with methodological questions but soon found that he also had to give serious consideration to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in mission. Actually, he was returning to a key point in the practice and theology of

both Pietists and Revivalists in the history of missions. It was an important theme for Evangelical champions of missions linked to the Holiness Movements, with persons such as A. B. Simpson, A. J. Gordon, and A. T. Pierson. In the second part of the 20th century, the growth of the Pentecostal Movement, which had had a strong missionary thrust from its inception, eventually forced the question from the missiological level into the realm of historical and biblical studies. The Pentecostal Movement in itself became a vast field for research (Dempster, Klaus, & Petersen, 1991).

The understanding of the initiative of the Holy Spirit in relation to mission has been enriched by the contributions of several Evangelical scholars. Their works provide a solid foundation for a better understanding of the Evangelical practice of mission.⁷ In his book *Pentecost and Missions*, Harry Boer (1961) reminded us that the use of the “Great Commission” as the imperative motto for Evangelical missionary work was actually a relatively recent development. The biblical pattern stresses the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church as the source of missionary dynamism—not a new legalism, but the free and joyous expression of a renewed experience of God’s grace. Here we have a better key to understand what may be the source that inspires the spontaneous missionary thrust in Evangelical missions and churches around the world.

As has already been noted, there are many types of Pentecostals within the Evangelical ranks of both WEF and the Lausanne Movement. However, the acknowledgment of their specific contributions as movements inspired and empowered by the Holy Spirit was not easy to accept by

other Evangelicals. In this area we have witnessed significant advance in recent years. An important section in the ERCDOM Report (Meeking & Stott, 1986) is given to the work of the Holy Spirit in mission, and it is one of the sections in which there are also significant points of agreement among Catholics and Evangelicals. At the same time, it is surprising how very little space is given to the work of the Holy Spirit in the WEF Perspective (Schrotenboer, 1987). In contrast with this, the Summary Reports of the 1995 consultation of the WEF Theological Commission about “Faith and Hope for the Future” are permeated by a trinitarian affirmation and confession of faith and hope in the work of the Holy Spirit (WEF Theological Commission, 1997).

At the end of my previous paper, I recalled the fact that Evangelical missions in our century were more inspired by the Wesleyan revivals and the Moravian pioneers of mission than by the 16th century magisterial Reformers. The dynamism that nurtured missionary Protestantism came from renewal movements that emphasized personal, living faith and disciplined life rather than confessional conformity. Not that intellectual understanding of orthodox faith was not important. Men like Wesley or Zinzendorf were theologically articulate. But it was their living experience that enabled them to abandon old church structures that were obsolete and gave them creativity in developing new structures for mission. In this they were open to the movement of the Spirit. After Lausanne, Howard Snyder has been the missiologist who has contributed more to our understanding of this relationship between spiritual renewal and new patterns of missionary action which is part of our Evangelical heritage.

⁷ I think of Harry Boer (1961), John V. Taylor (1973), several works by James D. G. Dunn, and, more recently, Gordon Fee (1994).

I quote again Brazilian missiologist Valdir Steuernagel (1993): "Mission understood in pneumatological language is one act with two steps. It is first to perceive the blowing of the Spirit and the direction from which it comes. And then it is to run in the same direction to which the Spirit is blowing." Some Evangelicals like myself think that discernment of the blowing of the Spirit requires an open attitude and sensitivity, which acknowledge that behind those things that appear as something new and unusual, the strength and vigor of the Spirit may be at work. The act of obedience demands creativity in order to shape new structures that will be adequate instruments for missionary action in a particular historical moment.

In Pauline missionary practice we find this pattern. Paul's Christology is the development of pastoral, doctrinal, and ethical teaching that stems from the fact of Christ. Paul elaborates his Christology as he responds to the needs and the questions of churches which were born from the Spirit and which showed evidence of new life, but which had not yet articulated their belief in a meaningful way. The recipients of these letters were people who had grasped the Lordship of Christ and whose eyes had been opened by the Spirit to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, but they did not have yet a clear Christology. What we have in the world today are churches in which people may repeat weekly the minutiae of a Christological creed but who do not have the new life in Christ that the Spirit begets. On the other hand, we have growing churches where there are the signs of the power of the Spirit at work, but where a basic theological task is necessary, along the lines of what Paul did in his ministry.

Evangelical theology has been an effort to keep both a missiological thrust and faithfulness to revealed truth. Our empha-

sis has not been in a continuity expressed by an earthly hierarchical institution, but in a continuity made possible by God's Word revealed to human beings. In all the crossing of missionary frontiers, and in all the efforts at contextualization, Evangelical missiology has stressed a continuity of faithfulness to the Word. In the contemporary situation, we also need to pay heed to what Emil Brunner (1953, p. 47) wrote at the middle point of the 20th century: "It is not merely a question of the continuity of the word—the maintenance of the original doctrine—but also of the continuity of a life; that is life flowing from the Holy Ghost. The fellowship of Jesus lives under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; that is the secret of its life, of its communion and of its power."

I hope and pray that this missiological conference called by the Missions Commission of WEF may become one of the foci where Evangelicals looking at mission in the 21st century may experience an encounter of the continuity in truth and the continuity in life, for the glory of God.

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8

Learning from Escobar ... and beyond

VALDIR
STEUERNAGEL

I T WAS MY FIRST TRIP ABROAD, and I was about to turn 22 years old. Catching a bus in Southern Brazil, at a city called Porto Alegre, and aiming to reach Buenos Aires, I had 24 hours to become acquainted with some words in Spanish. With a dictionary in hand, I tried my best.

Arriving in Buenos Aires, I still had before me an overnight train journey. I spent the night sitting on the floor of a crowded train car. But reaching that small town called Villa Maria was exciting, and I was looking forward to the month-long training program. It was there that I first met that smiling character and loaded “book man” called Samuel Escobar. As I respond to Escobar’s paper, I would like for us to keep a mental image of him before us. His ready smile would call us to participate in the present reflection and discussion. And his long bibliographical notes would tell us that he continues to be a loaded book-man who certainly does his homework!

At his age, Escobar no longer needs to carry all those books along, throwing them on the table, as he did in Villa Maria and quite impressing a young fellow like me. And I can tell you, he did impress me! More than that, he helped to “transform” me. From that time on, my eyes and ears have been wide open to learn from him and to try to follow in some of his footsteps.

A few years had passed by, and Villa Maria was a distant memory. Now I was about to turn 25. This time I was in Lima, Peru. To me, Samuel Escobar had become a more familiar figure and had grown in stature. After all, he had spoken at that “Mecca” event called Lausanne 1974. He had done it meaningfully, and those of us from Latin America were proud of him. And there I was, close to this “statesman.” It

was there that Samuel departed from his notes for a while and did some personal sharing of life experience. Profound life sharing, I would say.

Emerging from Lausanne as a world-wide Evangelical figure, he was also a beaten human being. He had been applauded and criticized, and he saw himself being evaluated and judged from here and there. Looking at those Evangelical tendencies and pressures, he was asking the key questions about the really important and substantial things in life. And there he was, telling us that he had known the Evangelical machinery from within. He had seen it, so to speak. And after having seen it, he concluded that this was not what he wanted, what he was dreaming about! His desire, he told us, was to be known by the Lord. To have his name written in God's book, as Scripture tells us.

Can you imagine the scene? Can you picture our lost and puzzled faces, usually hungry to receive yet one more bibliographical reference? But here we were witnessing a very human confession and sharing a very real moment in life. Samuel, I suspect, did not imagine how much he impacted me that day by his open and vulnerable life-sharing. There I was being confronted with the really important things in life! That experience I've never forgotten.

And there is a third vignette. Not a story really, but an observation. The fact is that Samuel knows my wife's name. He recognizes her and calls her by name. The other day he sent me a picture of the three of us when we were together in Guatemala. It's something small, but actually quite important. Do we know one another's spouse and children's names?

Starting With Conclusions

As I looked into the task of responding to Samuel Escobar's paper, I began to

remember him and some of the opportunities I had to get to know him and to be influenced by him. And this I would say is very important: By approaching the themes of his paper, "Evangelical Missiology: Peering Into the Future," I suggest that besides sharing ideas, it is equally important that we also tell stories and share our lives. Therefore, I'd like to outline some conclusions at the beginning of this response.

The important things should come first. We might somehow be well known, and some people at Iguassu might be quite important. A few books might have been translated into several languages, and someone might be a "must" author of today. His/her name may be in every bibliography and in the program of every missiological consultation. But all of this means so little if God has difficulty knowing how to spell our names and if our friends don't know our spouse's name. They might not even know if we are married or if we have children.

If the truly important things come first with us, then our greatest desires will point us in the direction of God: "Please, Lord, write my name into that book of yours!" And if Jesus tells us that yes, our name is there, let's walk away smiling and embrace one another, sharing those things that matter the most in life.

I have seen some of Escobar's older friends calling him Sammy. But this is not something for me. I cannot step in and say something like, "Come on, Sammy." But I do consider him a friend. If he ever comes to Curitiba, I would like to host him at my home. My wife and I would open the kitchen door for him, invite him to have a cup of coffee at the kitchen table, and ask the boys to clean their room for him to sleep there.

Good missiology is made at the kitchen table. Meaningful missiology is made in

the context of relationship. Should we not confess that so much of our missiology is library-made, and so many of our consultations are head-encounters? Relationship-building is an essential part of our journey towards tomorrow.

Have you had the opportunity to meet Samuel a few times? It looks as if he is always “humbly smiling.” First, it must be said that it is not easy to find a good smile in some of our consultations. We might find some smiling, but so often it is a kind of “well behaved” smiling. And what we find very often is “bibliographical seriousness” in an attempt to show off our intellectual achievements.

Is it possible to look into the challenging issues of our times with a sense of grace? Is it possible to smile while walking towards our *gegenüber*, enriching our lives and task? And would it be possible to do some laughing as we look into the mirror, not taking ourselves too seriously? Our aim should be to be known for “humbly smiling” while embracing our task and walking together into the future. We should be enjoying life and building up meaningful relationships.

I still remember how excited and challenged I was when I returned from my first meetings of the Latin American Theological Fraternity. And I must tell you that I was quite impressed by some of those fellows’ knowledge, by the number of books listed in their bibliography, by the depth of their discussions, and by the size of their “behind”—after all, it was not in vain that they sat for so many hours. With them, I learned that to be a responsible Christian, a meaningful citizen, and a somewhat “good theologian” meant hard work. There is no other way to do missiology today and tomorrow. But I noticed also that they were good friends and enjoyed a good meal together.

Advancing Through Storm Once More

At the beginning of his paper, Escobar recovers Latourette’s expression “advance through storm” by describing the history of Christian mission in the 20th century. And by using Eric Hobsbawn’s categories, we could say that it was mission in a short century in between the two world wars. Escobar also recovers Ralph Winter’s expression “unbelievable years” when he describes the growing presence of the North American missionary movement, especially after World War II. But even though Winter looked specifically at the increasing impact of the North American missionary movement, I could say the same about the Brazilian church, which is my church. Especially the latter decades of the 20th century were, to us, unbelievable years that were characterized by three trends.

First, we saw the emergence worldwide of a strong evangelistic focus and advance. This movement generated, in some places, substantial church growth. Thus, the church became significantly bigger and stronger.

Second, we saw the church not only grow in numbers but also become much more universal. The church can now be found on every continent and every political nation. It is a global church whose numbers are expressive, for we have created a worldwide movement. One of the consequences of this development is that the church is less white and more like a mosaic of colors, races, tastes, and languages. Another consequence has been the emergence of a new and heterogeneous missionary movement. Some decades ago, according to Andrew Walls, every missionary was North American until identified differently. But today the missionary movement is much more international in its outlook, if not yet global in its philosophy.

Third, there has been the emergence of a theological trend that tries to say that our particular cultures and geographies will help to determine our perception and understanding of reality and truth. Therefore, every theology must be contextual and should reflect its own local flavor. As a consequence, the import/export business of theology must be questioned, and in its place we must create an open arena where we all share in the creation of Christian theology.

Creative Tensions

Those were unbelievable years, and so many of us had the privilege of being active witnesses to them. Yet this was not a clean and straightforward process. The tensions and difficulties could be seen in different places. I had the opportunity of seeing them as I did my research on the Lausanne Movement. It would even be possible to outline some of the tensions that were building up during that second half of the century.

First, it could be said that mission had to be re-worked, as it moved away from the old colonial era and point of reference. What then emerged was a heavily dominated North American mission initiative. Escobar will say that in later years that trend could be called managerial missiology, strongly determined by the cultural values of North America: practical and efficient, technical and result oriented. And the motto “let’s just do it” became a key slogan of this initiative.

However, as the church experienced growth, visibility, and activity outside of the North American and European setting, new theological and missiological voices began to emerge. And, in Escobar’s words, “a critical missiology from the periphery” began to question the system, raising its hand and wanting to be a part of the mission awakening and initiative.

But it has to be said, secondly, that this tension and development cannot be understood apart from the North-South paradigm. And the poor South, when it saw that the rich North was calling all the shots and controlling the game and playing field, said that it also wanted to play in the game and not serve the role of the “ball boy”—the one who chases after the ball when it goes off the field but who never plays on the field with the team. This tension, which could very often be seen ideologically along political and theological lines, became quite evident in the prolonged discussions on the tension of evangelism vis-à-vis social action. A lot of people were hurt, walls were built, paper was used up, and adrenaline was expended in a discussion that so very often impoverished the gospel itself.

Thirdly, we could say also that our divisions along ecclesiastical lines were quite evident. Old churches were struggling to survive, new churches were emerging, and competition was the name of the game. The movement surrounding the issue of the Holy Spirit, labeled Pentecostal or charismatic, brought such new and necessary life and vitality, while at the same time generating too much division and misunderstanding in too many places.

Those were, in fact, unbelievable years! And they also became equally unbelievable when viewed from the opposite side. At the latter part of the century, Lesslie Newbigin began to ask the puzzling but legitimate and necessary question: “Can the West be converted?” The former harvest place for mission had become profoundly secular and was crying out for new and meaningful ways to communicate the gospel. Some stormy resistance could be seen there, and it was “raining” heavily on our heads. We again need to say, “Let’s advance through storm!” That is, after all, the only way to do mission.

As we move into a new century, I share the conviction that we need to reposition ourselves and to work once again on the agenda. Let's celebrate the unbelievable things God has done, recognize the open doors and the heavy storm all around us, while we search for paths of obedience in our generation.

Facing This Generation With Joy!

Returning to Brazil after four years of study in the U.S., I thought I had by then filled up a good deal of my mental "storage room." After all, I had been studying for four years and should have learned something! But then I noticed that while I was gone the agenda had changed, and I was left alone with my already-filled mental storage room. Moving one step further, I came to the conclusion that even I was getting tired of my own discourse. I had worked on the relationship between evangelization and social responsibility, and I should have grasped the issue at some depth. But examining the challenges of my new time, with the emergence of a new generation, a new environment, and new questions, I felt somehow empty handed and realized that I had to go back and do my homework.

Samuel says in his paper that missiology is an "honest evaluation of missionary activism in light of God's Word," and we would all agree with him. But he also alludes to the fact that new models of missionary obedience should be a result of a good and necessary perception of new missionary challenges. Samuel himself has been addressing that issue as he talks about the new missionary frontiers.

I would stress that one of the tasks of missiology is to read the signs of the times. When describing the "men armed for battle who came to David at Hebron" (1 Chron. 12:23), the writer describes the

men of Issachar as being those "who understood the times and knew what Israel should do" (1 Chron. 12:32). From within the church and looking into the always-present, new missionary challenges, missiology should be able to help us to understand the times and respond with a sense of vocation and service.

I return to my own story in this moment of my life. I had to recognize that I had done my doctoral studies in the twilight of that high season of the study and hermeneutical centrality of ideology, and of the dreams of social and political revolutions. Coming back to Brazil in a time of significant and worldwide changes, I had to face a new reality: the Berlin wall had come down; the ideological situation was changing; the Enlightenment crisis was overwhelming society. The younger generation was asking different questions and using a new language; meanwhile, the church was becoming much more pragmatic and market oriented. Doing my homework again, I had to try to understand my new times and try to spell out some of the frontiers that I saw emerging.

It is impossible here to address fully the challenges of our times. First, because they are quite complex and multiform. Second, because the task of doing this goes beyond one person's capacity, and the job needs both a team and an interdisciplinary approach. Third, because to do that goes far beyond the limits of this paper. But Evangelical missiology has to spell out the key distinctives, characteristics, and challenges of this emerging era. Therefore, by simply highlighting some of those distinctives, I want to say that I am impressed by their magnitude and concerned with the map of challenges of our time. May I try to outline what I see emerging and, in part, what I see that is already among us?

The map of challenges

- Is there a friend around? The search for relationship in an environment of loneliness.

- I am all alone, without “a father or a mother.” The crisis of the state.

- Democracy with disenchantment. The political crisis and the imposition of chaos and disintegration.

- Is there any work for me, please? The emergence of professional Darwinism. The changing work market.

- The security crisis in an environment of fear. The absence of frontiers.

- Tell me what your price is! The supremacy of the market.

- Let’s buy a new one. A discarding mentality.

- The nature of today’s conflict. The fight over resources and the law of destruction.

- The savage urbanization process and the absence of sanctuary. Urbanism is a mindset.

- From communication to propaganda. Everything, after all, is a question of good marketing.

- Instant poverty and the intensification of vulnerability. Destitution can happen in hours.

- Ethics and the new challenges. Are there any limits for bio-ethics?

- How do you feel about it? The predominance of the subjective and intuitive.

- The re-emergence of idolatry. The irruption of the religious and of mysticism.

- Christendom is dying. Should we cry or laugh?

Just to enumerate those characteristics and challenges is overwhelming. And I would not even begin to comment on any of them. But we cannot just stop at those dimensions. We also have to look at the church as a part not only of our own reality but also as a cultural and even political factor in so many of our societies. We should start first with a prophetic analysis

of our own culture and ecclesiastical home. In prophetic terms, it is impossible to look “out there” and not look at what we are as the church.

The Mirror Called Our Church

But the church is quite complex and varied as well. It can be so different from one cultural setting and tradition to another. However, I don’t want to pass over the difficult task of looking into the mirror and sharing a little of what I see. What I want to share are some of the yellow and red lights that I see as I look into that mirror called “our church.” In fact, we should try to build a bridge between some of the characteristics of our time and some of the present marks of the church. We will conclude that the church is also a child of our times, struggling with the call to be distinctly different as it faces the pressure to conform to the surrounding culture. Let me, once more, share a mere outline of concerns about the direction I see the church heading into. And I can only do this from my own perspective, which is shaped by a Christianized environment and a growing church.

1. The church is being viewed through the lenses of progress and success. Within this view, the church must always grow and be bigger tomorrow than it is today.

2. The church is understood according to the criteria of numbers and a political as well as marketing perception of “space to be occupied.”

3. The church tends to be managed from a business and bureaucratic approach. The church is being run as a corporation—small or large.

4. There is a tendency to view worship according to a “showtime” mentality.

5. There is a challenge and an invitation to communicate the gospel as a propaganda tool in a “war of communication.”

6. There is an insistent presence of the theology of prosperity, as a by-product of the law of the market, with an emphasis on individualism, well-being, and success.

7. The school of spiritual warfare is prominent, with its mystifying and magic emphasis of reality and of the Christian faith itself.

8. There is danger of the emergence of a new type of charismatic Constantinianism, as well as of an Evangelical syncretism.

Finding Ways to Walk Into the Future

As we proceed with an analysis of the present and some of the tendencies and challenges of tomorrow, it is important to remember that we must resist the temptation to dream nostalgically about a romantic past that has never existed. There should be a sense of peace and celebration about the privilege of being called by God to live today. We are challenged to walk today, stretching out towards tomorrow, seeking to obey God's calling, and also drinking from the fountain of service.

In his address at the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch, Paul finds himself heavily involved in a mission enterprise. He obviously wants people to believe in Jesus. In his contextual discourse, Paul goes through the history of salvation and mentions King David on two occasions. At one point he says that David "served God's purpose in his own generation" (Acts 13:36). This word has been a source of challenge and encouragement to me, pointing to the task of serving God in one's own generation. In fact, every generation is called by God to serve him in his or her own moment of history—rejoicing in God's calling, understanding the times, and facing the challenges as they create conflicts, hardships, and opportunities.

At another reference to David, Paul mentions him as a man according to God's heart and obedient to his will. He refers to God, saying, "I have found David, son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do" (Acts 13:22). This is a very caring and touching statement. It is worthwhile to seek to follow and aim for David's example.

We have transformed missiology into a science and mission outreach into an activity. There is high value in these accomplishments. We have to have a good foundation, based on necessary and accurate information. We also have to be practical, knowing how and when to do mission. But let's never forget that the voice of God wants to reach our heart. Knowing and doing must be surrounded by a spirituality of the heart whereby we know to whom we belong and what God wants us to do. The voice of God gives meaning and direction to our life. By conquering our heart, God enables us to walk out into the world with the conviction of being embraced by God and, therefore, embracing others.

By going back to Acts 13 and encountering Paul and his companions at the synagogue, it is possible to hear the rulers of that synagogue calling to them and meaningfully saying, "Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak" (Acts 13:15). To be involved in mission is not only to speak. It also refers to the art of positioning oneself and waiting for the right questions to come. The right questions echo the search for meaning and a longing for salvation. In our days, we certainly need a "message of encouragement for the people."

Road Signs to Look Out For

Therefore, to be continuously working on an Evangelical missiology of today and

tomorrow means to intentionally follow the heart of God, to willingly serve him in this generation, and to sensibly hear the verbal and non-verbal questions of today. In order to do these things, I would like to try once more to outline an agenda that will address some of the road signs of today, as I see them.

1. We need to rescue the centrality of the Word of God based on a “hermeneutics of enchantment.” To value and stress the centrality of the Word of God is part of our tradition. In the recent past, we have even developed some fighting skills concerning the nature and character of the Word of God. Today, however, it is possible to notice that the reference to God’s Word becomes a kind of hermeneutic of cosmetics, whereby the important thing is to feel good and to have fun. We need to rescue the centrality of God’s Word. This, however, has to be done based on a hermeneutic that will take us to God’s heart and captivate our own hearts.

2. We must constantly look out of the window and face the missionary task of the church. Being constantly challenged to be involved in mission is a part of the task of the church and a sign of its health. But let’s not forget that this is the task of the whole church called to serve Christ in the whole world. Therefore, the church is called always to be involved in mission. Look out of the window; witness what is going on, hear the cry for help, and discern the questions of salvation in order then to share Christ.

3. We must always emphasize our commitment to evangelism and must re-invent how we do it. Isn’t there always the temptation to skip over evangelism in the agenda? The trend of accommodation is always one of the church’s key temptations. Evangelism, therefore, must be the conscious decision of each group in each generation at every place, because evan-

gelism is the entrance point in the open door of salvation.

4. We need to rediscover the role of the community in the life of the church. It looks as if the church is becoming bigger in so many places. It is even fashionable to be part of a megachurch. And the risk of anonymity always surrounds such a church; people will come and go without being noticed (and they sometimes don’t even want to be noticed!). Some of these groups are trying to break the cycle by talking about home churches or by embracing other attempts to put people together in small groups. These days, the word “community” is not used very much, but the church has to help recover it. It is at the level of community that people and situations become real. God always wants to know about the real things. To experience community is, therefore, part of the nature of the church.

5. We must not avoid the path of martyrdom. “Sacrifice” is an absent word in the vocabulary of our days. Well-being is a “must” category in our consumer society and mentality. The church runs the risk of being an extension of such a mentality. But we need to recover the conviction that there is no Christian life without sacrifice, and martyrdom is always a possibility in a witnessing context. But martyrdom is not a category in itself. It goes hand in hand with a search for meaning that overcomes a traditional sense of belonging.

6. We must commit to relationship rather than hierarchical submission and administration. The church needs to be relational, and mission involvement and practice need to be born out of and to point to relationality. Hierarchy and even administration are being put under some level of suspicion and need to be understood as being instruments of service. We need hierarchy and we can use good administration, but the aim is to

build relationships with God and with each other.

7. We need to relearn how to say “NO” and how to spell out the word “justice.” I come out of a tradition where I was taught to say “NO” and to spell out a clear claim for justice. An indifferent and silent church was seen as a weak church, a compromising church. But when the Berlin wall fell down and everything became so monolithically capitalist and pragmatic—so market, success, and image oriented—the word “justice” seemed to disappear from our vocabulary. The process of doing theology was affected. The church followed the market so much that it did not know how and/or did not want to say “NO.” But it is time to breathe deeply, to practice saying “NO” again, and to search for justice intensively. There is no other way to be the church than by serving God and people, and by doing so with justice.

8. We need to be part of a reshaping process of state and politics, as a step of missionary obedience. Even as the word “justice” tended to disappear from our vocabulary, all of us witnessed the state running out of ideological motifs and becoming utterly pragmatic. The political system fell into a deep credibility crisis. Many had the clear perception that the state and the political system were having a very hard time adapting to another time and to new challenges. They even continued to dance to the melody of yesterday. But the young people, many poor communities, and part of the intelligentsia were asking for another tune in order for their dance to find some rhythm and meaning to life.

This is a dangerous time of philosophical and political emptiness, where the church does not have the luxury of being silent or simply following the dance of the marketplace. The church must be a creative force in society, joining efforts with

others who want a political system that is able to hear and to respond to the claims of today, especially the claims of the poor.

9. We need to allow local initiatives to replace centralized activities. Not only is the state dancing according to the tune of another time, but the church with its structures and traditions is also. It has not been easy for the church, including mission agencies, to acknowledge structural crises and the weakening influence of centralized pronouncements. Sometimes the church continues to embrace a mega-discourse, issuing pronouncements here and there, without noticing that there are so few people paying attention to what is being said.

One of the signs of our times is that this is a season of local initiative. People want to own and personally participate. They don’t want, for example, just to give money to some distant agency. They want to go where their money goes and want to know the people they are helping. This is a time of partnership and participation—which should be celebrated.

Poetry Walking Alongside Prose

I had never suspected that I could and would, someday, write some poetry. This wasn’t me, I thought. I was only trained to write prose—logical and systematic sentences. So I studied and did theology, borrowing the framework, concepts, and language from philosophy and later from social sciences. But in the process we all became too abstract, elitist, dry, and discursive.

However, in the recent years of my life journey and accompanied by friends, I discovered that I could write some poetry. Even if it was only poor poetry, it was very important. It challenged me to do theology with my heart and take my soul, my feelings, and my intuition seriously. I still

write prose as you can see, but not only prose and not only as I once did.

I share the awareness that we still need good theology written in prose. But we need more poetry in order to become more human, to take our soul seriously, and to talk meaningfully in our days and to our people and cultures. In order to do that, we need not only to do our homework in systematic ways. We need to learn how to do poetry and to recover the art of telling stories.

Never forget the small things, because life goes on. I first dealt with the idea of smallness when looking into the Anabaptist tradition, where purity and commitment were more important than numbers and growth. Largeness was even put under suspicion. Then economy came into the picture with Schumacher's (1975) famous book *Small Is Beautiful*, with a whole new setting of possibility coming into view. But lately it was Eugene Peterson who brought it to my attention by once again pointing out that life consists so much of the small things. Small things that make such a significant part of our everyday life. Washing, cooking, greeting, and that same meal-time table talk that occurs everyday: "How was school today? Mom is still sick!" A good theology knows how to integrate the small everyday aspects of life, and a good spirituality is for table talk.

The end of all things is near. Let's not forget it. Not too long ago we were inundated by sermons about eschatology. I was even running away from that issue and from a tendency to be categorized in this or that eschatological box. But today it is difficult to find someone talking about the end of all things. Now we are much more concerned about giving people tools for well-being and success in the here and now. Much of our eschatology has become materialized; one measures God's blessing by getting a new car.

I share the conviction that we need to recover the eschatological dimension of the gospel. We must re-visit our approach to hope that is shaped today mostly in material terms. By recovering eschatology, we allow it to shape our life in such a way that we see ourselves and are recognized by others as incarnational citizens of God's future, the first fruits of the kingdom to come.

As I come to the end of this conversation with Samuel Escobar, I would like to thank him for his paper and to walk with him in the way he concludes it:

- Missiology is inspired by the Triune God.
- All Scripture is pregnant with God's mission.
- To do mission is to focus on Christ ... and to be inspired by his model.
- Let's be blessed and challenged by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- And let's receive God's hug as we peer into the future.

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