

Three Mission Eras

And the Loss and Recovery of Kingdom Mission, 1800–2000

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It is a huge intellectual task to give a brief but fair summary of the last two centuries. In this period more people by far lived, did more things and did more significant things for the Kingdom of God than in all previous history. These years display the roots of a contemporary world more subject to Biblical influence than ever in the human story. What actually happened?

Introduction

Most treatments of this period either leave out the Christian dynamics or the secular events. Putting these two together is the overriding purpose of this essay.

Jesus said, “I will build My Church and the gates of hell will not be able to resist it (Matt 16:18).” Down through history many great traditions, Orthodox, Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican and Presbyterian have, to some great extent in their actions (even if at variance with their theology), understood this verse to be primarily a call for the extension of the Church as an institution rather than the extension of the Kingdom of God and His will on earth (and much less the idea of a militant Church as God’s instrument in a war). There is a big difference. For one thing, while the Church must try not to incorporate unbelievers (although it often has), the Kingdom may at times involve reborn church people working together with people outside the Church who do not yet believe, but who may agree on evils to be fought.

We Evangelicals tend to overlook the New Testament phrase *Gospel of God*, which occurs even more frequently than *Gospel of the Kingdom*. By contrast, we seem to be more interested in a *Gospel of Man* whereby getting more members into the Church or more people saved becomes more important than all other ways of *glorifying God*. Today we have new opportunities and resources by which God’s Kingdom can be advanced and His Name glorified. Those opportunities do not replace evangelism but make it more credible.

In the last 200 years we see not only a great acceleration of global population, but also a still greater impact of the Biblical revelation, the expansion of the Church and the extension of God’s Rule—His Kingdom. Those who yield to the latter as members of His Church emerge in wildly new colors and dimensions, with new insights both good and not so good, and sometimes with conflicts of perspective. We want to see

Christianity as it really is. Otherwise we may be inconveniently surprised by the future.

We will see that new movements may be partial, off balance, perhaps heretical. Mission vision and strategy have also changed. The Bible, although interpreted differently, is nevertheless the one stable element.

Leading up to these last two explosive centuries there were certain epoch-making events that continue to be major factors in our understanding of mission today.

Significant Prior Events

For example, after 1450, due to the printing press, the Bible and other Christian literature became a flood of influence, undergirding the breakdown (called *The Reformation*) of the longstanding but incorrect assumption by most Mediterranean Latin-speaking believers, *that the expansion of the faith would and should continue to be clothed in a Mediterranean culture*. That of course did not happen. Although for many centuries the Latin language had helpfully united scholars over a huge territory, what had long been seen to be culturally “the seamless robe of Christ” became a much more complex checkered garment. At the same time, it has become a pluralistic reality capable of infusing any and every cultural tradition, a treasure capable of being carried in any number of “earthen vessels.”

Secondly, what Andrew Walls has called “The Great European Migration” expanded out into the entire globe. That began to happen at the moment Columbus, in 1492, “sailed the ocean blue.”

Thirdly, a phenomenon more important for our topic is the fact that, along with commercial expansion, the Latin branch of the faith (with both its strengths and weaknesses, newly reenergized before, during and after the Reformation) also expanded significantly between 1600 and 1800, plying the ocean waterways with its devout and determined troops—Franciscan, Dominican, and Jesuit.

Basic Concepts

Coming into view in the last two hundred years are *Three Protestant Mission Eras*, each reflecting new strategies in the global expansion of the Kingdom of God, or at least the Church of God. In order to describe these eras, and for the purposes of this chapter, I employ two phrases: 1) *Church Mission*, which I define as the winning of

people into the Church wherever in the world, and thus *extending the membership of the Church*, and 2) *Kingdom Mission*, which we define as the work of the church beyond itself, going beyond *Church Mission* to see that His will is done on earth outside the Church. This is *the extension of the Kingdom of God*. *Church Mission* is basic and essential but must not become merely a goal in itself. It must be seen also as a means of relentlessly pressing for God’s will to be done on earth, thus to declare His glory among all peoples.

In light of these two coinages, *Church Mission* and *Kingdom Mission*, The Great Commission clearly includes both (not just “foreign missions,” or Kingdom Mission) for that is certainly what is meant by “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you (Matt. 28:20).” Granted that it is more common to distinguish between home and foreign missions, or between monocultural evangelism and the highest priority—pioneer, cross-cultural evangelism or *mission*. In this chapter, both *Church Mission* and *Kingdom Mission* must be involved both at home and abroad, both where the Church already is and where it is not yet.

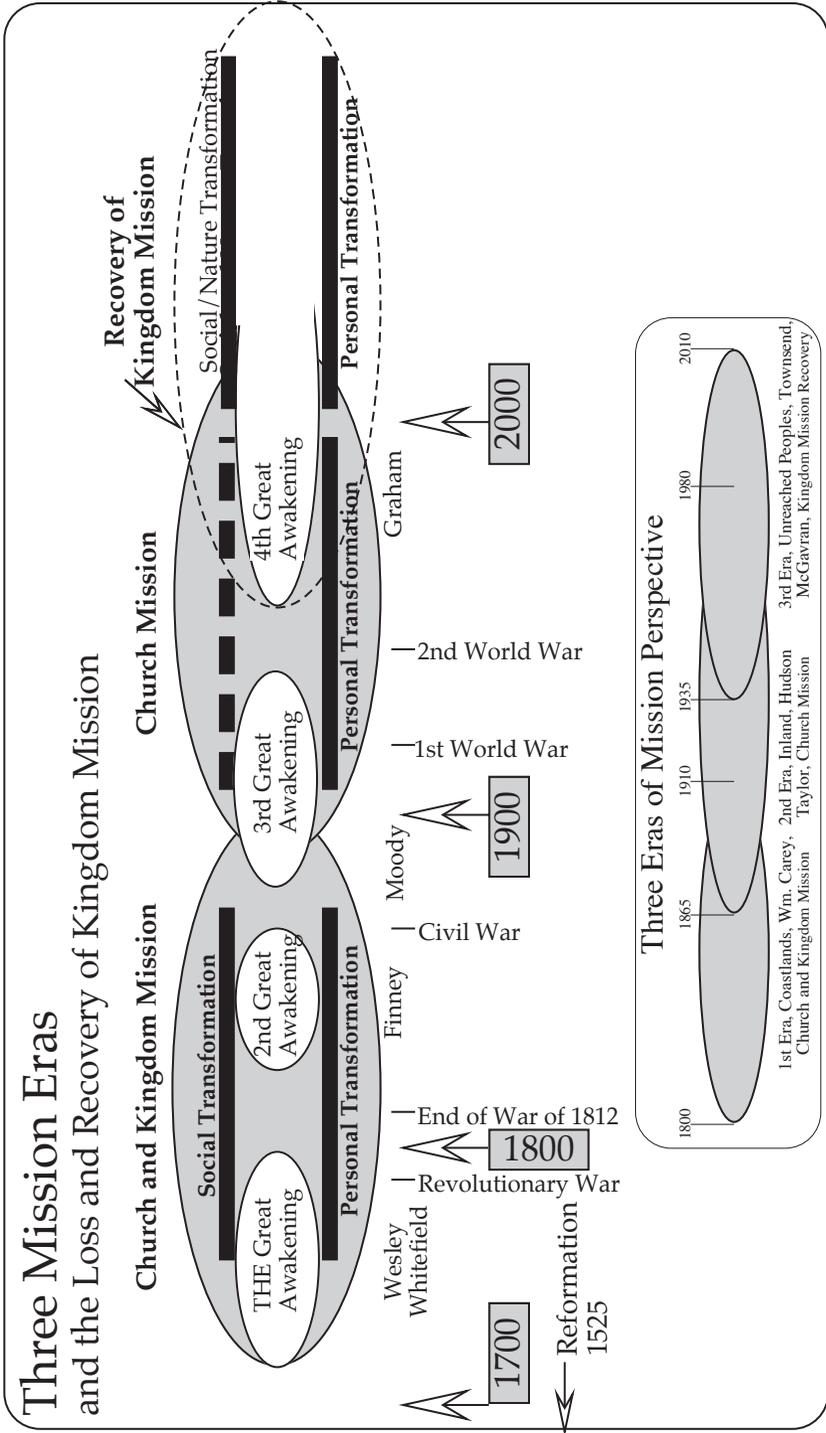
The Three Eras in Brief

The First Era, 1800 to 1910, followed the much-delayed conversion of Protestant Christianity to missions. In that conversion Protestantism went from being merely a profoundly religious and semi-political movement to a sudden awareness of global mission, both *Church* and *Kingdom Mission*. In a sense the conversion took roughly 300 years, from 1500 to 1800. However, in the last few years before the year 1800 Protestant mission awareness accelerated very rapidly on the surfboard of the Evangelical Awakening.

This accelerated understanding generated the First Era of Protestant missions, which was, in a sense, the William Carey Era. William Carey was, for Protestants, the one who both led the way out of Europe to the *coastlands* of the world, but also, as a true heir of the Evangelical Awakening, promoted a broad Kingdom of God approach. Those many who followed his lead reflected the same very wide spectrum of his concern for both evangelism and cultural transformation, for both *Church* and *Kingdom Mission*. (See the fascinating chapter on Carey by the Mangalwadis). Many missionaries in the remainder of the 19th century followed his example of founding a university to promote general knowledge and truth.

The *Second Era*, 1865–1980, introduced what became a distinct polarization between those concerned about personal salvation and those eager to see “the Kingdom come on earth.” The polarization was already evident by 1900, but especially so in the Fundamentalist/Modernist

controversies of the 1920s. In American missions and churches, in this period, we often see an unfortunate choice between 1) Kingdom Mission, which involved the Church being salt and light, glorifying God in all the earth, doing so by (what was called in those days) “civilizing”



At the top of the page the three-century diagram begins with the 1700s, during which time the transformative Evangelical Awakening in both England and America began to demonstrate both a spiritual and secular impact. A direct result of that profound Spiritual Awakening was, first, the English Industrial Revolution, and a little later the symbolic beginning of Protestant mission awareness just before the year 1800. From that point on the three

“Eras” of Protestant mission strategy then correspond roughly to three phases of Evangelical insight into *Kingdom Mission*. *Church Mission* is the mission to extend the Church of Jesus Christ by an urgent, strategic, relentless campaign of personal conversion and church planting. *Kingdom Mission* goes beyond *Church Mission* to press for God’s will and His glory *beyond* the Church, in this world. Thus, when a whole series of bad things happened between the Civil

War and the Second World War, as described in this chapter, the expansive, optimistic, full-blown Biblical *Kingdom Mission* was extensively gave way to mere Church Mission, even on the mission fields of the world. Universities were no longer established, vast nationwide educational and medical schemes were less frequent. Mission still retained the all-important basic stress on personal transformation. Social transformation was not only

not as fervently pursued by missionaries, but those still seeking to change society often were labeled “liberals” or “modernists” whether or not that was true. However, this was not only a theological polarization it was a rarely mentioned social-level divergence. Just as soon as Evangelicals became college and university graduates, professors, members of Congress, etc., new, bigger and more optimistic forms of *Kingdom Mission* have reemerged.

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as well as Church Mission—evangelizing and expanding the church, and 2) Church Mission alone, which in missions became the activity of mission agencies mainly drawing on Bible institute graduates and other non-college people representing less influential families, primarily emphasizing a heaven-oriented, personal fulfillment gospel intended mainly to draw people into Church membership.

The enforced choice of this polarization was then an artificial tension between saving souls and saving souls *plus* saving people, society, and nature. This divergence extended well into, and became virulent in, the 20th century. Note, “civilizing” in those days did not mean fostering etiquette but helping people become literate and make a living, plus ending cannibalism, foot binding, widow burning, and female infanticide.

For example, Hudson Taylor, representing roughly the evangelism-only pole of the controversy (*Church Mission* alone), began bravely and indefatigably penetrating the *inland* territories of China, not only creating what was eventually the largest mission to China, the China Inland Mission (now Overseas Missionary Fellowship), but encouraging into existence fourteen other inland-emphasizing missions—against considerable opposition. Incidentally, opposition to his going *inland* died down much sooner than the polarization between “civilizing” and evangelism, between Kingdom Mission and mere Church Mission. Other significant missionaries to China worked along very different lines, as we shall see.

The Third Era, 1935 to present, is characterized in two ways, 1) Townsend and McGavran’s discovery, respectively, of the need for Bible translation in tribal groups, and the importance of creating a “Christward movement” within a specific “ethne,” especially those already penetrated by “a Bridge of God” (one or more believers within an otherwise unpenetrated group). A further development was the additional concern for all the world’s smaller, by-passed ethnic groups—those not already penetrated, “Unreached Peoples.” Note that the concern of this Era is not just the winning of numbers of individuals, and not just thinking in terms of geopolitical definitions of countries, coastlands or inland territories. The Third Era also began to reflect, 2) a gradual and welcome, crucial healing of the heaven vs. earth polarization inherited from the final years of the Second Era.

These two dimensions are still unfolding. However, Kingdom Mission, and thus the idea of a Kingdom Era, is coming to the fore, potentially uniting the two.

It is important to realize that what is happening in no way should be allowed to obscure the priority for the evangelization of Unreached Peoples. Indeed, rightly understood, evangelism in word, if supported by “demonstration” in deed, is actually empowered evangelism. It seems obvious that the highest priority should be to go where the darkness is deepest. That, in turn, means clearly to go to those places where Jesus is not yet known. That, then, means we are still talking about the priority of reaching out to the thousands of remaining “Unreached Peoples.”

THE FIRST ERA: 1800–1910

Coastlands, Kingdom Mission

Protestant missions began about the time Catholics pulled back for other reasons. By roughly 1800 the French Revolution and its Napoleonic aftermath left Europe in shambles, cutting the roots of the global European commercial and Catholic missionary exploits. What saved both England and America from the European fate was the powerful, earlier, transatlantic Evangelical Awakening (in America called “The Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies”). By the end of the era at the great World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh of 1910 there was no longer any doubt about the legitimacy of Protestant missions.

However, the next, Second Era, had already begun years earlier in 1865. In the 45-year overlapping period (1865-1910) significant tension existed due to the divergent missiologies (understandings of mission) appropriate in older fields of mission work and what was appropriate to new beginnings where there were no churches. In this transition there was also the beginning of the polarization between Church Mission alone and Church Mission plus Kingdom mission, as we shall see.

Revival, Diversity and Hostility

It is important to recognize that religious advance, whether in the Western or the non-Western worlds, may indirectly produce undesirable results. Note, for example, that the ominous and ghastly French Revolution had been largely triggered by the American Revolution. Both revolutions released people from authority. But the

revolution in America, by contrast, was largely sparked and fueled by the momentous Great Awakening. This seaboard awakening vastly expanded the number of both Baptists and Presbyterians, extending the latter as a single, democratic structure reaching from Boston to Charleston. In 1789 the U. S. Constitution and a revised Presbyterian constitution were being written two blocks apart by many of the same men and with much of the same wording. Little did the Americans of the Great Awakening realize that their wonderful dreams would become French nightmares in a few short years. Why? French society had not been honeycombed by local democratic congregations as in England and America. The desirable aspects of the transplanted American experience for that reason could not take root in French soil. Even in America the Revolution was almost taken over by nonreligious multitudes.

For example, by 1800, the French revolutionary hysteria also ran powerfully in America. Not everyone released from British authority wanted to be under God's authority. At Yale, in 1800 the largest school of higher education in the USA, the godly president, Timothy Dwight (grandson of the influential Evangelical minister Jonathan Edwards) had to allow the handful of openly Christian students at Yale to pray right inside his office. That was the only place safe from the vast majority of hostile, anti-religious students. Some of those students were calling themselves by the names of leading French Revolutionaries—Danton, Robespierre, Marat, Hébert.

In 1806 the famous "Haystack" students at Williams College faced similar hostility being forced to pray outdoors because on campus they were totally outnumbered by anti-Christian, revolutionary-minded students. (Note: Not even wanting to come in out of the rain, they sat under the shelter of a haystack that looked like a huge mushroom after cows had eaten around it.)

We see further hostility when "Citizen Genet," an emissary of revolutionary France, landed in Charleston in 1793, and mobs of thousands favoring the French type of violent revolution, even the assassination of George Washington, gathered in ever larger numbers as Genet moved north toward the capitol. Even people on the Western frontier were carrying around miniature guillotines symbolizing what they thought ought to happen to George Washington. But that did not quite come to pass.

Meanwhile, in an England which was not so totally disrupted by the Revolutionary War as were the seceding colonies, the Evangelical Awakening continued to be a major force. The British evangelist George Whitefield had already contributed much to the extensive impact of the Great Awakening in America. Both he and John Wesley were even more prominent in the English Awakening. Wesley was a very determined little man and an impelling evangelist. He was an equally serious and unflinching social reformer, very clearly involved in Kingdom Mission as well as Church Mission.

His converts were prohibited from smuggling, even though that was a way of life for many who lived on the Cornwall peninsula (a long coastland attracting ships from France). But he insisted on *changing* instead of *breaking* the law. His reforms affected orphanages, mental institutions, mines, courts, and Parliament. On his deathbed he wrote William Wilberforce urging him to fight slavery. Wesley, Wilberforce and Carey had all been inspired by the Evangelical Awakening. A letter from Carey, after he was in India, urged a member of Parliament to join the Committee to Abolish Slavery. Furthermore, the specific example of William Carey's mission to India, and his published *Enquiry*, was much of the impulse behind hundreds of others who went to the field, including the five "Haystack" students of 1806. Before they left for the field they promoted the founding of the first foreign mission agency in the USA, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), in 1812.

Secondary Impacts

Relevant to the phenomenon of the *secondary impact* of missions is also the fact that the Evangelical Awakening spurred the Industrial Revolution. After years of Wesley's tireless travels, hundreds of English villages now had morally transformed people who could be trusted. So? So it was now possible for the mass production of, say, ax heads that could safely be sent to a distant village without the fear of not being paid back. England was becoming a single market. This allowed and fostered the Industrial Revolution. In the USA, a similar thing happened as the result of the Second Awakening, which elicited a listing of trustworthy people west across the Adirondacks. That project eventually became the credit rating and information corporation known as Dun and Bradstreet.

But, there was a downside. Sending mass-produced axes out to the villages of England—and other parallel things—put village workers out of work, in sort of a country-level “globalization.” Those unemployed workers then gravitated to London looking for jobs (as in most of the cities of the world today) and made London a hellhole of squalor and disease. By 1850, 20% of the working men in England were too malnourished to go to work! That was enough to trigger Friedrich Engels’ scholarly *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*, undergirding the eruption of Communism. He was the brilliant friend of Karl Marx. Our missionaries need to be prepared to deal with secondary effects.

Another example of unwelcome secondary impact would be my own work in Guatemala. Over the years it has been a smashing success as a *spiritual* mission. But globalization has destroyed the way of life and out of sheer desperation now more than half of all fathers are illegals in this country, tearing apart hundreds of families, leaving children to grow up into drugs and gangs. But, note, “Bible and bare hands” missionaries are not likely to anticipate, much less be able to deal with, such secondary effects.

Lest we think Carey invented Protestant missions, it should be noted that flickerings of mission interest had preceded his work, e.g., the Quakers in the 1600s and the Moravians in the early 1700s. But the combination of a flood of new mission agencies, along with significant opposition to the very idea of foreign missions, had not occurred earlier in the Protestant sphere. And notice the curious coincidence, that the Carey Era of Protestant missions emerged at the very moment the economic and cultural roots of the Catholic, Continental missions were being destroyed. Yet, by 1800 the Catholic orders had planted a substantial global base of faith. Would the Protestants ever catch up? Yes, if you wait 200 years.

Struggle, Opposition, Transformation

Thus, the First Era promoted the Protestant awakening to global missions. Vigorous arguments about its validity slowed it at every step, but it at least allowed the First, William-Carey, Era to struggle into existence. Nothing spectacular. The British Methodists after 1800 sent 35 missionaries to West Africa over a period of the next 35 years. Tropical diseases meant not a single one lived more than 24 months after arrival. Yet, there

were still new volunteers. No wonder they decided to ship their belongings to the field in caskets.

Early confusion about the leadership structure of missions—whether it should be the board at home or a field council—almost killed Carey’s work in India, and for five years threatened Hudson Taylor’s. In any case missionaries in this era mainly went to the coastlands. Inland territories, usually far more dangerous, were yet to be challenged. For many years opposition to all missions continued, not just from churchmen-theologians but from secular forces ranging from the East India Company, which rigidly excluded missionaries from its territories, to members of the British Parliament who were told that

The sending of missionaries into our Eastern possessions is the maddest, most extravagant, most costly, most indefensible project which has ever been suggested by a moonstruck fanatic. Such a scheme is pernicious, imprudent, useless, harmful, dangerous, profitless, fantastic. It strikes against all reason and sound policy. It brings the peace and safety of our possessions into peril. (Google “moonstruck fanatic”)

However, by 1813 Evangelicals in Parliament were able to force the East India Company to allow at least *English* missionaries into India.

Soon after 1800, two momentous events took place. As Americans had expected and dreaded ever since the close of the Revolutionary War, the British reappeared in force in 1812. Secondly, new and profound awakenings began to take place throughout the new Atlantic-bound republic. Also in 1812, as mentioned, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions was founded. Then, the British, partly due to their preoccupation with Napoleon at Waterloo, abruptly gave up their War of 1812 against the new American republic, signing the Treaty of Ghent in 1815. That astounding and unexpected event, plus the incredible Louisiana Purchase, threw open the whole North American continent for occupation (ignoring the rights of the Native Americans) and as a result, one of history’s greatest migrations fairly exploded into existence as Americans moved west in thousands of “Conestoga wagons” to start a new life. That massive development provided the kind of social upheaval that often supports religious awakenings and mission thinking.

Thus, the Second Great Awakening burgeoned into full force in the period between the end

of the War of 1812 (1815) and the beginning of the Civil War (1861). Between these two wars extensive religious awakenings, coupled with the general upheaval, *fostered the most extensive positive transformation any country has ever experienced in history*. At the same time, this transformation demonstrated the continuing force of the earlier Evangelical Awakening which had already highlighted a strong emphasis on both evangelism and social reform, Kingdom Mission at its best.

The resulting transformation of the young nation was so extensive we sometimes read back into the ethos of our earlier Founding Fathers the bold and creative Christian character of this later, much more Christian, period. Politicians, wealthy families, and commercial leaders created many reforming societies. Examples include the American Tract Society, the American Seamen's Friend Society and societies for the abolition of slavery. Alexis de Tocqueville back then, and secular historians to this day, have been so impressed by the creative social vigor in this period that many speak of an "Evangelical Empire" in that period. Charles Finney, an attorney turned revivalist, is the most prominent such symbol. But there were also thousands of others, including the pastor Sylvester Graham who went about preaching against the use of white flour in favor of God's whole-wheat flour resulting in Graham flour and Graham crackers. "Johnny Applesseed" blanketed whole states with his seeds. All this was an impressive and God-glorifying aspect of Kingdom Mission.

Creativity, Good and Not So Good

This awakening also involved religious creativity, both positive and negative, typical of the mission field today. William Miller led tens of thousands standing out on housetops to expect Christ's imminent return. Joseph Smith led tens of thousands to believe God was calling out "Latter-Day Saints." Mary Baker Patterson Glover Eddy invented Christian Science with her book *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. The Shakers built buildings with perfection and prohibited marriage. In the Oneida Community everyone married everyone. In a different category, Mary Ellen White almost single-handedly created the Seventh-Day Adventist tradition. Even the Presbyterians argued over denominational vs. interdenominational mission agencies and other things and split their entire

denomination in 1837 when 1210 ministers were able to vote 1200 others out.

Yes, we need soberly to expect this kind of diversity overseas when spiritual revival occurs. For example, thousands of diverse, African-led semi-Christian movements already exist (perhaps 70 million people in 20,000 movements?). In China, secondary effects resulting from the missionary-indoctrinated Hong Xiuquan (who eventually felt he was God's Other Son) included the Taiping movement (often called a *rebellion*). Hong produced a huge "God Worshippers" subset of the country, which opposed the supposed illegitimate authority of the Manchus—something like the American rebels in the American Revolution, or the Southern "Rebels" in the Civil War. While Hong's movement was highly spiritual, Bible-emphasizing and reforming, it was unbalanced, and was finally put down by the Manchus with the essential military aid of the British and French. *Perhaps 30 million died in the process!* Is this why the Chinese are still wary of the power of Christian movements?

Kingdom Mission?

As is readily noticeable, this period displayed in general a distinctly novel Christianity that emphasized getting people forgiven and to heaven, but in the meantime also getting them into physical health and social reform. Within the mainline church traditions much of the texture of those times has now been lost. Traditions having European roots continued to be flooded by European immigrants of the same traditions, who were puzzled and even repulsed by the novel new perspectives engendered by the pervasive Second Awakening. Alcohol, for example, by 1850 in America was almost everywhere considered a personal and social vice. By contrast, brewing whisky was a way of life to Presbyterians back in Scotland.

However, two movements unassaulted by masses of reluctant immigrants were minted in America, the Mormons and the Seventh-Day Adventists. They retain to this day many of the novel characteristics of the general Evangelical movement in this transformative period. Those characteristics include a strong concern for world mission as well as a religious, theological and missiological concern for diet and health, to the exclusion of tea, coffee, wine and liquor—attitudes that, hard to believe, were general

Evangelical traits at the time these two otherwise unrelated traditions split off from mainstream society. Today, in Mormon Utah, more pills (medical and nutritional) are produced in St. George than any other city of America. One company alone manufactures 350 million pills per month. Similarly millions today eat Kellogg's cold cereals and value vitamins, not realizing that Adventist thinkers developed both. Nothing today compares to the quality and number of Adventist hospitals around the world.

Missions and "manifest destiny," as in earlier global European expansion, were closely tied together. Reminiscent of the Crusades, many Americans understood the Kingdom of God to include a spiritual and military manifest destiny to seize Texas and California from Mexico, and a little later to exclude the British from the Northwest by suddenly pushing the Canadian-American border out to the Pacific. Not stopping there, they seized the mission-transformed Sandwich Islands (now Hawaii), Western Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico and the Philippines. Missions and manifest destiny, as in earlier global European expansion, were closely tied together. In the case of the Philippines it became ours (only after an incredible blood bath, mainly unreported) because President McKinley had knelt in prayer seeking God's will for the "benighted" Filipinos just then struggling out from under Mexican control. Meanwhile, California enacted a statute guaranteeing a sizeable bounty for anyone bringing in the ears or the scalp of an Indian. This appalling law was on the books for 50 years, from 1852 to 1902. (Does that sound like East Africa Christian Hutus in 1994 chopping up hundreds of thousands of Tutsis?). It was, in any case, a shocking contrast to the patient, if somewhat ineffective, decades of work by Franciscans among the Native Americans in California. These American "crusades" were, like the classical Crusades, uneasy mixtures of high-minded religion, low-born politics, and military violence.

The immense religious optimism and expansive visions of the 1815-1860 period were not entirely extinguished by the Civil War, even though that war was one of history's most tragic and destructive. (There were forty times as many deaths in the suppression of the Taiping movement in China, which ended at about the same time.) Like the Revolutionary War, the Civil War was created and supported to some great extent

by the depth of sincerity of revival-energized people on both sides. Had General Lee not sensed Lincoln's lavish generosity behind Grant's offers at the Appomattox truce he would not have urged the other Southern generals to give up the fight, and guerrilla warfare would have dragged on for years. Curiously, some scholars see a significant achievement of the war in the fact that before the war both the Northern and Southern states were by no means unified much less brilliantly conscious of being part of a nation state. But, the war unified the Northern states and, separately, unified the Southern states as never before, and the truce at Appomattox then "created" a single country where in many ways none had viably existed before.

More for our concern here, the war killed off so many men, from teens on up, that women were both allowed and even forced to take over the running of farms, banks and businesses and even to found their own colleges. Most of today's elite women's colleges, Bryn Mawr, Wellesley, Vassar, Radcliffe, Smith, Mt. Holyoke, Barnard, even Mills college in California, were either founded or transformed into colleges by women in the absence of men just after the Civil War, *and for the exclusive purpose of training women as foreign missionaries.* (Note that in the days prior to Hudson Taylor's "lay" mission it was often assumed that you had to be a college graduate to be a missionary—thus favoring wealthier families.) The first all-women mission board, the Women's Union Missionary Society, run by women and sending only women, was founded just before the Civil War but flourished after the war. In the next 30 years women founded 40 boards of missions to support financially and/or to work alongside existing men-and-women denominational boards. By 1900 they had formed 180,000 congregation-based "Women's Missionary Societies" and had indirectly created the highly mission-minded Young Peoples Society of Christian Endeavor (CE) which to this day is not only the largest global Christian youth movement, but without it the much lauded Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, born in 1886, would have never gotten off the ground. By 1906 CE had 67,000 societies around the world and four million members. These movements, note, were still holistic and transformational, involving a Kingdom Mission clearly supported by Church Mission.

THE SECOND ERA: 1865–1980

Inland Territories, Loss of Kingdom Mission

As we approach the end of the 1800s, several things cry out for attention.

Gradual Reduction of Kingdom Mission

Did the high-flown optimism of the earlier revival period continue despite the horrifying setback of the Civil War and the massive immigration which tripled the U. S. population between 1850 and 1900 (and proved hard for the revival movement to digest)? Yes, in a moderated form among the wealthy few who were college educated. And there were wealthy Evangelicals. The “Gay Nineties” (1890-1899) were an incredible waste of money as families, some of them Evangelical, competed in throwing enormously expensive parties.

College students, as late as 1900, were only two percent of the population. But, the continuing, society-changing force of the earlier Evangelicalism was still expressed, for example, in that 1896 hymn, “America the Beautiful” which looked forward to a changed world in which “alabaster cities gleam undimmed by human tears.” Furthermore, the Student Volunteer Movement (a college-level, generally wealthy movement of influential families) represented a carryover of this social optimism. Today, huge prestigious universities are to be found all over Asia, and in every province of China, created by the lingering force of the earlier age. Schools and universities, opposed by Carey’s supporters (and some of his modern interpreters), were a considerable force in opening minds to the larger world of nature and nature’s God. The Bible classes and chapels of 240 Christian schools in India are one of the major explanations for the existence of millions of believers who are still culturally Hindu.

What ever happened to this First Era “civilizing”? How did a song arise so different as “This world is not my home, I’m just-a-passin’ through”?

The Emergence of Church-Mission-Only

Well, more and more, due to the influence of the waves of immigration already mentioned, the Darwinian disturbance, and then destructive “higher criticism” of the Bible coming in from Germany (which carried the universities and the mainline seminaries), Evangelical leaders no longer ran the country. Nevertheless, there were the enormous counterbalancing gains in

evangelism among the working class through the efforts of D. L. Moody. The latter now became the determinative force of the Christian movement in America, tipping the Gospel in favor of the simpler, less optimistic, religion of the masses. Repeated events suggested for many that belief in the imminence of the Second Coming of Christ outmoded all efforts to remake this world.

Meanwhile, in 1865, J. Hudson Taylor, heard God’s call to found a mission to go to the *interior* of China. In the context of English social structure, what was regarded as his “lower-class” mission pushed inland, and so did those many other agencies that followed in its tracks, such as the Sudan Interior Mission, the African Inland Mission, the Heart of Africa Mission, and the Regions Beyond Missionary Union, etc. For many years these all constituted one of the two poles of the Second Era’s polarization.

Incidentally, all these agencies followed Taylor’s “Faith Principle,” each individual missionary family waiting on God to provide, not on a salary from their mission board. These agencies came to be called “the faith missions,” even though they were more significantly characterized by their endeavor to go to the inland frontiers.

Unlike Carey, Taylor’s emphasis was not on *whether* to go or not, but *where* to go. More specifically, Taylor’s task was the Pioneer and Paternal stages of *early, new* mission work, in contrast to the *later* Partnership and Participation stages of missiological perspective of those working in *advanced* fields. Taylor’s concern, in further contrast, was that missionaries to China ought *only* to evangelize as they went deliberately beyond the coastlands. The Sandwich Islands (Hawaii), for example, unlike China’s interior, was an *advanced* field and, as such, the missionaries after many decades of successful work decided it was time to *go home*—at about the time Taylor’s mission was *going out!*

This was in a way a polarization. One pole was the civilizing *and* evangelizing perspective of the leaders of the First Era—of William Carey plus the many who had read and yielded to his immensely influential little book *An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*. The other pole was those like Taylor who felt the call to start from scratch beyond the coastlands—with working-class missionaries, *emphasizing only evangelism*.

Interestingly, it may have been one result of Taylor's deep faith and fervent prayers that after twenty years God sent the sparsely educated D.L. Moody to win seven aristocrats in England, mainly from the Cambridge student body, revered athletes including C. T. Studd, the English Michael Jordan of cricketers, to join Taylor and eventually lift his struggling mission into upper-class ranks, well-deserved fame and a larger-than-pure-proclamation approach.

Note that the so-called "Negro Spirituals," being the work of disempowered people, talk of heaven rather than social action. Something similar was true for the missions of working-class people. College in 1900, remember, was for the wealthy two percent. Typical of the missions representing non-college people was, understandably, an absence of any great reflection on the overhaul of society—as with the themes of the "Negro Spirituals." Taylor is known for his at-least-logical idea that if a thousand missionaries would evangelize 50 Chinese per day for a thousand days, all of China would be evangelized. [This was based on the assumption that there were 50 million people in China which may have been true as late as 1500 AD. But in Taylor's day, even after the incredible devastation of the Taiping war, there were probably more like 400 million. But the sweeping idea is clear.]

The point is that other missionaries in China, like the theological college graduate, Timothy Richard, a British Baptist missionary, were trying to produce an entirely new educational system on the national level. And of course, Taylor's own mission would soon be taken over by college people with eventually a broader vision and greater social influence. Yet, both missionaries had an incredible impact on the history of China.

Yes, Taylor's people, who in the early period were advised not to linger long enough to plant churches, finally slowed down long enough to do so. But they still did not think a lot about reforming society. At the very time that Taylor was greatly expanding his superb mission in China on the sole basis of evangelism, other missionaries were working to establish universities and to affect the educational system. This they finally did with enduring success. This polarization would characterize much of the next (20th) century.

Class Divergence Sets In

A carryover of the 19th century, college-type "civilizing" mission strategy is seen substantially in the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions (SVM), which continued into the early 20th century. The word *student* in the title of the SVM meant *college* student, not *Bible Institute* student, even though 157 Bible Institutes would produce many missionaries and become colleges by the end of the 20th century. Yet, as late as 1925, 75% of American missionaries were sent out by the mainline churches, and were virtually all college people.

At the same time, something like class divergence was going on as the bulk of Evangelicals swelled to constitute millions of non-college, working-class masses which championed Moody more than Wilberforce or even Wesley. The latter's social reform activities were remembered only vaguely, if at all.

In this polarization, one pole was represented by the college-level Student Volunteers, who still thought in terms of establishing universities on the field and glorifying God by tackling the broader issues of the Kingdom of God—*Kingdom Mission*. The other pole thought in terms of glorifying God by establishing Bible schools and extending personal salvation—*Church Mission*. This was the polarization of the Second Era. There was not yet an absence of evangelism at either pole.

The one group would organize the Ecumenical Missionary Conference of 1900 in New York's Carnegie Hall, with President McKinley giving the opening address. This group would support the great Edinburgh 1910 conference, the later International Missionary Council and eventually the World Council of Churches.

Living in the overlap of the Second and Third Eras, two of the college type Student Volunteers were William Cameron Townsend, who made tribal challenges famous in the founding of Wycliffe Bible Translators, and Donald Anderson McGavran, who made everyone aware of the challenge of socially distinct (caste) groups through the Fuller School of World Mission, which he founded. Both men, though college people, appealed successfully to the mass of generally non-college Evangelicals, but especially to those toward the end of the 20th century who were increasingly college graduates.

Both men personally believed decidedly in Kingdom Mission. Townsend, for example, won

over the President of Mexico by assisting a village of Indians to grow vegetables. His willingness to cooperate with Catholics took Wycliffe Bible Translators out of the Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association.

The more “conservative” Church Mission group included large minorities of Evangelicals within the mainline denominations, plus an increasing number of small, distinctly Evangelical denominations and many independent congregations, as well as the growing number of Pentecostal groups. This sphere was either oblivious to, or definitely opposed to, the level of social concern of the older denominations. Meanwhile, the limited influence of Evangelicals in the professions, universities and civil governments in the United States tended to prevent these Evangelicals from spawning expansive ideas about changing this world.

Alternatively, they developed detailed concepts of Biblical prophecy, the “end times,” the return of Christ, and the Millennium, and tended to de-emphasize, almost to the point of total exclusion, ideas of social reform. Among them even the word *Kingdom* was for years suspect as evidence of “liberal” thinking.

Yet, they were conscientiously active in what was within their power to do: inner-city missions, for example. Their missionaries on the field did a huge amount of what they could, without expansive plans, to relieve suffering and sickness, but held as highest priority the founding of Bible institutes and personal, not so much social, salvation.

Even the “mainline” sphere became deeply influenced by the Evangelicals within their membership, due in part to Evangelical donor perspectives. They were pressured essentially, like political candidates today, to speak the Evangelical language. Simultaneously, another reason for the growing influence of non-college Evangelicals was because more and more of the children of these Evangelicals were going to universities and the 157 Bible Institutes were themselves morphing into Bible Colleges, into standard liberal arts colleges and into universities.

Secular Events Confirm Pessimism

But note, the first half of the 20th century confronted both groups with massive setbacks. Tragic events tended to justify the concentration on heaven, and encouraged a widespread

replacement of optimism about this world with deep pessimism and rapture thinking.

The 20th century began with the deadly Boxer Rebellion in China in 1900, which gruesomely murdered scores of missionaries and many other foreigners. Ironically, the triumphalistic Ecumenical Missionary Conference in New York was held a month earlier. Neither that huge conference nor the Welsh Revival of 1910 nor the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference of 1910 could entirely offset the implications of the setback in China.

There was also the sinking of the Titanic in 1912, which symbolized the sinking of confidence in human engineering achievements. Then the 1st World War struck and the often forgotten global flu pandemic killed more than fifty million people (2.5 to 5 percent of global population). The insane “Roaring Twenties” collapsed in the panic of 1929, ushering in the years of deep and painful global financial depression. Struggling out of that then took the whole world into the jaws of the 2nd World War—which did one good thing, by treating over ten million American soldiers to a world tour and as a result generated 150 new mission agencies in the first five years after the war’s end.

By this time the theology of both poles had been affected. All these tragedies seemed to confirm the Bible Institute people’s pessimism about any kind of earthly Kingdom of God. But even mainline theologians in the tradition of the Student Volunteer Movement developed theologies explaining and expecting failure in mission. John R. Mott’s final statement at the World Missionary Conference of 1910 had been “now begins the conquest,” but this was soon considered an embarrassingly imperialistic form of “triumphalism.” While in 1925, as mentioned, the missionaries who were being sent out by the mainline denominations still constituted 75% of the total from America, by 1975 they were less than 5% of the total. The concept of Kingdom Mission was dead or dying.

However, it must be said that the drop-off in missionary sending in the mainline denominations was not merely the child of theological pessimism or liberalism. It also resulted from the fact that the goal of mission for them had gradually become redefined as merely Church Mission, church planting. The (mainly Evangelical) missionaries within the older denominations had by

this time accordingly developed movements with field memberships running into the hundreds of thousands. Under the circumstances, sending more missionaries to those fields virtually implied (and would still imply) the rewording of the Great Commission into “Go ye into all the world and meddle in the national churches.”

THE THIRD ERA: 1935 TO PRESENT

*Unreached Peoples,
Recovery of Kingdom Mission*

Meanwhile those two young men of the college-level Student Volunteer Movement, Cameron Townsend and Donald McGavran, began to be noticed. Townsend was in so much of a hurry to get to the mission field that he didn't bother to finish college. Although he helped initiate the Third Era, he went to Guatemala as a Second Era missionary, building on work which had been done in the past. In Guatemala, as in all other mission fields, there was plenty to do for missionaries working with established national churches.

Townsend

But Townsend was alert enough to notice (and it was pointed out by more-experienced missionaries already working in the Indian languages) that the majority of Guatemala's population did not speak Spanish. As he moved from village to village, trying to distribute scriptures written in the Spanish language, he finally yielded to the fact that Spanish evangelism could never reach most of Guatemala's predominantly indigenous citizens. He was further convinced of this when, legend has it, an Indian leader asked him, “If your God is so smart, why can't He speak our language?” He was befriended by a group of older missionaries who had already concluded that the indigenous populations needed to be reached in their own languages. He was just 23 when he began to move on the basis of this new perspective. No one could have predicted the spectacular results.

Surely Cameron Townsend is comparable to William Carey and Hudson Taylor. Like them, Townsend saw that there were still unreached frontiers, and for almost a half century he waved the flag for the by-passed and overlooked tribal peoples of the world. He started out hoping to encourage older boards to reach out to tribal peoples. Like Carey and Taylor, he ended up (in 1934) starting his own mission agency, later

called Wycliffe Bible Translators, which was dedicated to teaching linguistics as a prime tool for reaching these new frontiers. At first he thought there must be about 500 unreached tribal groups in the world. (He was extrapolating from the large number of tribal languages in Mexico alone). Later, he revised his figure to 1,000, then 2,000, and now it is over 5,000. As his conception of the enormity of the task increased, the size of his organization increased, numbering over 6,000 adult workers by 2008.

McGavran

As Townsend was ruminating in Guatemala, Donald McGavran was beginning to yield to the seriousness, not of linguistic barriers, but of India's amazing social and cultural barriers. Townsend discerned and promoted the reality of linguistically diverse (and overlooked) tribes; McGavran highlighted and promoted the social and cultural diversity of a more nearly universal category he labeled “homogeneous units” which today are more often called “people groups.” Paul Hiebert, missionary anthropologist, employed the terminology of “horizontal segmentation” for the tribes, where each occupies its own turf, and “vertical segmentation” for groups distinguished not by geography but by rigid social or cultural differences. McGavran's terminology described both kinds even though he was mainly thinking about the more subtle vertical segmentation characteristic of India.

Once such a social group is penetrated by diligently taking advantage of a missiological breakthrough along social lines, McGavran's strategic concept, already mentioned, of a “Bridge of God” to that people group comes into the picture. The corollary of this truth is the fact that, *until* such a breakthrough is made, normal evangelism and church planting cannot begin.

McGavran did not found a new mission (Townsend did so, remember, only when existing missions did not adequately respond to the tribal challenge). But McGavran built the largest school of mission in the world and his active efforts and writings spawned both the Church Growth Movement and indirectly the Frontier Mission movement. The former is devoted to expanding within already penetrated groups. The latter (which he did not agree with until his last few years) is devoted to deliberately approaching the remaining totally unpenetrated groups.

Edinburgh 1980, Turning Point

As with Taylor before them, for twenty years Townsend and McGavran attracted little attention. But by the 1950s both had wide audiences. In 1980, 46 years after Townsend's 1934 organizational move, a 1910-like conference was held, consisting exclusively of mission leaders and focusing precisely on both kinds of forgotten groups which these two men had emphasized. The Edinburgh-1980 World Consultation on Frontier Missions was at that date the largest mission meeting in history, if measured by the number of mission agencies sending delegates. And, wonder of wonders, 57 Third World agencies, fully a third, sent delegates. (None were at the 1910 meeting.) This meeting, though not widely noticed, was crucial to the Third Era, planting Unreached Peoples vision throughout the world. It also included a concurrent youth meeting, the International Student Consultation on Frontier Missions, pointing up for all future mission meetings an "intergenerational" ideal—to include significant youth participation. The student group started in 1983 the *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* (all of its hundreds of keen articles are all available on the web, at www.ijfm.org).

As happened in the early stages of the first two eras, the Third Era has spawned a number of new mission agencies. Some, like the New Tribes Mission, carry in their names reference to this new emphasis. The names of others, such as Gospel Recordings and Mission Aviation Fellowship, refer to the new technologies necessary for the reaching of tribal and other isolated peoples of the world. Some Second Era agencies, like SIM International, have never ceased to stress frontiers and have merely increased their staff so they can penetrate further—to people groups previously overlooked.

More recently many have begun to realize that tribal peoples are not the only forgotten peoples. Many other groups, some even in the middle of partially Christianized areas, have been completely overlooked. These peoples, including overlooked tribals, have come to be called "Unreached Peoples" and are defined by ethnic or sociological traits. They are peoples so different from the cultural traditions of any existing congregation that specifically cross-cultural mission strategies (rather than ordinary *evangelistic* techniques) are necessary to achieve the

"missiological breakthrough" essential to planting truly indigenous beachheads of faith within their particular cultural traditions.

Polarization Growing and Decreasing

But the irony is that at a time when missions of the older denominations were in decline—considerably due to a longstanding aversion by the mass of Evangelicals to the "non-evangelistic" activities of those mainline missions—the "true" Evangelical missions that were taking their place were themselves becoming inhabited by university people gaining an equivalent increase of awareness of the larger dimensions of the Gospel—and "non evangelistic" activities.

A true recovery on the part of Evangelical missions from their earlier evangelistic narrowness is even more significantly portrayed, unexpectedly, by the giving patterns of donors and the interests of young people. In a recent five-year period in this century, U. S. church-planting missions grew 2.7% while Evangelical relief and development agencies grew 74.8%. Yet, this divergence between the two groups must be considered an unwelcome continuation of the Second Era polarization.

Thus the Third Era has seen the adoption of a new and more precise definition of the *ethne*, the *nations* of the Bible, and effectively defined those peoples that are still unengaged by missionary outreach as of highest priority. It also displayed a steady, if very gradual, recovery from a rich but narrow emphasis on heaven that had replaced the 19th century merger of heaven and earth in mission purpose. In neither case—Unreached Peoples or Kingdom Mission—is the Third Era finished. Arguments and confusion still exist over the present significance of remaining small peoples, as well as over the full meaning of "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

This latter, "kingdom" confusion is more complex than the Unreached Peoples challenge. The lingering terror and fear that arise in some circles when there is any talk of seeking to extend the Kingdom of God in this world is in good part the result of the bitter, lengthy "Fundamentalist/Modernist" controversies which dominated much of the first half of the 20th century. Are we going to fall into that again?

That polarization is by no means dead, if only because, as fast as many Evangelicals gain

influence in society, upgrade their general education and missiology, and become able to entertain more expansive plans to promote the growth of the Church and the Kingdom of God, other thousands are just coming into faith and typically yearn for simple answers. This recalls the Jesus Movement of the early 1970s that swept many into an earnestly pursued but simplistic theology which, for example, acknowledged only one specific translation of the Bible (NASB) to be trustworthy. In fact, as late as 1973 about one twentieth of the congregations of the Presbyterians in the South withdrew to form a new denomination. This reflected the polarization we have been describing as well as the social levels of small, rural churches and city churches.

Is there really a massive transition that explains the polarization? George Marsden, an eminent historian of American Christianity, may have only partially overstated it when he said,

These American Christians underwent a remarkable transformation in their relationship to the culture. Respectable “evangelicals” in the 1870s, by the 1920s they had become a laughingstock, ideological strangers in their own land.

Now 100 years later, James Beverley, a professor at the Tyndale University in Toronto, Canada, states:

Are leaders in the Charismatic world going to curb the seeming obsession with angels, trips to heaven, gold dust, feathers from heaven, heavenly oil, heavenly gems, gold fillings and out-of-body travel? Lee Grady, editor of *Charisma* Magazine, has critiqued Bentley on these kinds of issues, especially for his incredible reports about angels and his wild stories about his regular trips to heaven. Sadly, Grady received a lot of condemnation from other leaders...

You can be sure that there are not a lot of well-to-do university graduates in Todd Bentley’s audience. In any case, missionaries need to expect things like this more often in the non-Western world than they occur here.

But to understand the durability of the social cleavage underlying the polarization being described, it is only necessary to realize that, over the decades, in meetings of the American Society of Missiology (ASM) and the Evangelical Missiological Society (EMS) there is never any reference to each other. Dr. George Peters of Dallas

Theological Seminary and myself from Fuller Theological Seminary headed up a side meeting at the huge IFMA/EFMA (see below) “Greenlake 1971” Conference on Church-Mission Relations, and recruited 65 to be founding members of the American Society of Missiology in 1972.

Thus the ASM has from the start been virtually dominated by “Evangelicals.” However, as intended, other people recruited other members from “mainline” spheres, both Catholic and Protestant, often from theological seminaries. That inclusivity of the ASM provided rationale for a separate society (EMS) made up of mainly professors of Bible Institutes/Colleges or schools that were once in that category. Yet many Evangelical professors are members of both the ASM and the EMS, while the two societies are durably separate.

Early in the 1900s Evangelicals founded Bible Institutes rather than colleges and seminaries. But one significant seminary was established, Dallas Theological Seminary. However, it waited sixty years before joining the Association of Theological Schools.

Similarly, the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), founded in 1945, was a counterpart to the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCCCCUSA), while the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association (EFMA affiliated with the NAE, and recently renamed The Mission Exchange) was a counterpart to the NCCCCUSA’s Division of Overseas Ministries (DOM). Mainline denominational mission agencies of the DOM don’t join the EFMA, nor do the denominational agencies of the EFMA join the DOM. Yet Evangelicals individuals in substantial numbers are to be found within both the DOM and the EFMA. Attitudes have changed faster than institutions.

But What is the Gospel of the Kingdom?

Curiously (and granted that very few people think this way today) neither of the two poles—neither the influential Student Volunteers nor the heaven-and-personal-salvation oriented Bible Institute people—have had a very well-defined concept of a Gospel of the Kingdom which would see the 40-hour week of lay people (beyond evangelism on the job) as a sacred calling. Could not lay people deliberately choose a different career based not on its salary level but on its strategic contribution to the will of God on earth? Many urgent problems and evils still cry out for solution, but are often totally outside of

the theological box of those who are content with Church Mission. Sadly, the goal of planting the Church in every people group, of merely extending Christianity, whether in the USA or around the world, is the most common understanding of the extent of God's purpose in our world. There is little room for a concept, apart from professional, church-related ministry, of a "full-time Christian."

But when every believer is expected to be consciously and deliberately "in mission," does that then mean nothing is mission? No, it just means that there are different types of mission. There will always be the fearsomely difficult cross-cultural pioneer mission. But those of us who have been championing that as the highest priority have no power to reserve the word *mission* for that urgent type of mission.

We now have a better understanding of the earlier, somewhat artificial, and damaging, polarization between Church Mission and Kingdom Mission. We don't need to be forever defeated by pendulum swings between the two poles. Today most of the sons and daughters of Moody's converts are now influential middle-class people such that college people are now no longer a tiny upper-class minority. Today, those tempted to glory in an artificially simple approach to the Bible and missions are mainly either a fundamentalist residue or a brand new hyper-charismatic fringe.

An optimistic case study in this Third Era would be to note the excellent headway being made by mission thinkers and agencies today in what is called "The Insider Approach" to Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists, with whom missions have made little progress in times past. Lately it is being realized that Paul's example (permitting Greeks to continue to be Greeks as they followed Christ) is parallel to allowing Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists to retain much of their language and culture as Christ's followers. That significant phenomenon is dealt with elsewhere in this course.

Conclusion: How Far Have We Come?

We need to recognize the impetus toward the recovery of full-blown Kingdom Mission in the writings of three men. Some people insist they were early prophets of a Fourth Era, for better or worse. Professor Carl F. H. Henry in 1947 came out with his historic *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. In 1957 Professor Timothy Smith produced his pivotal *Revivalism and*

Social Reform, unearthing the impact on society of the Second Awakening in the first half of the 19th Century. Finally, Professor David O. Moberg in 1967 gave us his book entitled *The Great Revival* (released later in various versions), which detailed the decline from what we call Kingdom Mission (going beyond personal transformation) to a focus on the personal within what here is called Church Mission.

For the average lay person, Church Mission, the mission to promote and extend the Church as an institution, is described as the "pray and give type of "after-hours" Christianity." Church Mission together with Kingdom Mission should be a 24/7 "full-time Christian" type of Christianity. What does "full-time Christian" mean? It means that the mission to promote the Kingdom, or Kingdom Mission, involves or should involve every move a lay person makes in his forty-hour week of work *in addition to what he may do for the church* "after hours" in Church Mission. Examples might be teaching first grade as a holy calling, working at any legitimate work as a holy calling but being alert to the opportunity to pursue a career to end global human slavery, or extreme poverty, etc. That is what would be a "Full-time Christian." It would include, of course, what we call full-time Christian service if that is the most strategic option available.

Many pastors call for people not only to believe, but to be willing to "serve Jesus Christ." However, they may mean teach Sunday School, help in the nursery, usher in church services, or support missionaries. Many pastors may even urge their people to go out in the world and do good, as individuals, but they may not be thinking of the need for church people to support and/or form serious, large agencies that are tackling the major evils, obscenities, and tragedies of this world. For them, to promote either the Kingdom of God or the Church is essentially the same thing. The Lord's Prayer then becomes too often "Our kingdom come" as the Church is concerned with the personal and spiritual fulfillment of its individual members, its building plans, etc., not the solution of problems beyond its boundaries.

How Far to Go?

One of the most difficult things for some people to understand is why it is impossible, not just unwise, to think of words and deeds as being separable. The Bible as God's Word would be

little more than dreamy philosophy if it did not refer almost constantly to the deeds of God, the deeds of key human followers, and the deeds of His Son. In the same way, our missionary outreach must be filled with meaningful deeds or our words run thin and we do not reveal the character of God. The World Evangelical Alliance speaks discerningly of:

Integral Mission or holistic transformation [as] the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social action are to be done alongside each other.

They are not two different things. Note that “holistic” here does not merely mean the whole man but the whole of society, the whole of this world.

Furthermore, Evangelicals today, now with far greater wealth and influence, need to realize that heightened privilege calls for expanded and more complex responsibility. The amount of money Bill and Melinda Gates are putting into the defeat of malaria is no more than peanuts compared to the funds Evangelicals annually fritter away on non-essentials. Yet no respectable, organized effort of Evangelicals now exists that is stepping up to bat to seek the eradication of diseases that afflict millions, including millions of Christians. Does the conventional message of churches today challenge followers of Christ to deliberately choose microbiology as well as “Christian ministry”? (Note that Kingdom Mission means more than “social action” if it is to eradicate disease germs. The Bible speaks of *restoration* not just *social* action.) Come on! Can’t we digest the fact that thousands and thousands of Christian families around the world are, right now, so poor and diseased that when they can’t feed their children they must sell them into forced labor for them to be able to eat? In Pakistan hundreds of thousands fall into this category. Half of such children die by age 12.

Doing lots of good things, or as someone has said, “Keepin’ busy for Jesus” individually may be a case of “good but not good enough.” Our Evangelical perspective has become so individualized that we may only think of individual good works. Doing good little things wherever convenient may sometimes be merely a way to justify and make credible in our own eyes our minimal personal salvation. Starting with our own talents and interests is common but is the way of the world—it is getting things backwards. Don’t be upset—this is going upstream—but how can one’s subjective personal interests accurately predict God’s priorities?

We must start with *His concerns*, whatever our gifts, wants, and abilities. How can the four-year college major we once chose without reflecting on God’s priorities be assumed to define the direction of the next 50 years? We must “give our utmost for His highest.” Our obedience is certainly flawed if focused only on what the world approves. *Our obligation is to seek the expansion of the knowledge of the glory of God and His Kingdom, and this would logically require us each to prayerfully seek God about doing the hardest thing we are able to do in the most crucial task we can find.* First John 3:8 says, “The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the Devil.” To follow Jesus is to go to war. This side of the Millennium that’s what the Christian life is. In a war *what needs to be done* comes first. And a true sense of accomplishment is not that you did what you wanted to do, or what you thought you were best at, but what you felt convinced was most crucial, most important. Doing good things is the biblical way to portray God’s character and glory only if we are willing to act without inserting personal conditions.

Thus, we see that the Third Mission Era, in so far as it recognizes both Unreached Peoples and a recovering Kingdom Mission, reveals significant demands, unfailing inspiration and incredible promise. 🌍

Study Questions

1. Explain Winter’s distinction between “church mission” and “kingdom mission?” How do they relate to each other?
2. Describe what characterized each of the three mission eras, according to Winter.
3. What were the “tragic events” that influenced 20th century mission theology?