

**URBANA PASTORS PROGRAM MESSAGE**

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**LEARNERS, PARTNERS, SERVANTS***The North American Church in Global Missions*

The question that we are asking over these four days has staggering implications – for global relationships, for Urbana and Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship (which we’ll address tomorrow), and for our churches. Where do we fit in God’s global plan? What are the future challenges of mobilizing the church in the West? What roles do we fulfill when we find the Great Commission being undertaken by a worldwide church?

This question of **THE ROLE OF THE WESTERN CHURCH** in world missions is, in my opinion, **the greatest ecclesiological and missiological issue** facing those of us who live in the West. And the issue increases in importance as the church grows increasingly non-white and non-western. “Where do we fit in the further advance of the Gospel?”

In a world divided, in Samuel Huntington's words, between the "West and the rest" (Huntington, p. 183), how can the Western church (and our accompanying mission agencies) best serve God's global purposes?

Addressing this issue is not new. I'd recommend to you these recent resources for further study:

- Jonathan Bonk, ed., Between Past and Future: Evangelical Mission Entering the Twenty-first Century (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2003).
- Samuel Escobar, The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone (Christian Doctrine in Global Perspective) (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003).
- Philip Jenkins, The Next Christendom: the Coming of Global Christianity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
- Lamin Sanneh, Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).
- Max Stackhouse, Tim Dearborn, and Scott Paeth, eds., The Local Church in a Global Era: Reflections for a New Century (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

Wrestling with the role of the Western church will challenge our commitment to servanthood: we may want the indigenous church to be self-governing, self-funded, self-propagating, and self-theologizing, but does that mean that we are

now left out? Are we in the West in danger of being marginalized by the initiative of the church in the Majority World? Will we become globally irrelevant? (Have we already become so?)

As we with our natural Western instincts towards initiative and optimism come to the Great Commission discussion table, what will we do if the indigenous leadership chooses another way? Are we ready to serve and let them lead? If we see our role changing from being leaders to being servants and partners, what will that mean for the way we choose our boards, recruit our missionaries, and plan national strategies?

And what's the best way to utilize our financial resources? Should we just start sending money to support indigenous workers? If we do that, will the Western church implicitly affirm an already pervasive materialism that believes that God wants our money more than he wants our lives? Will Western generosity continue when our support is for national leaders only and no longer for our own flesh and blood?

Being part of God's global mission means many changes ahead. True global partnership means being willing to redefine our roles. Boards will become more multi-cultural, international and non-western. Local leadership will set strategies, and Western missionaries will look for ways to serve those strategies. And financial management will mean balancing the desire for good stewardship

against our Western propensity towards paternalism and the non-western temptation towards dependency.

In this morning's message, I want to present you with the biggest challenges I believe we're facing in the North American church – both on the macro-level and on the micro (localized) level. Then I'll conclude with the suggestion that our effectiveness in the future directly depends on whether or not we will be committed to being learners, partners, and servants.

#### ***FOUR MACRO CHALLENGES:***

We operate in a fast-paced, constantly changing world, and like the Old Testament men of Isaachar, we must seek to “understand our times” so that we can direct the responses of the church of Jesus Christ (I Chronicles 12:32). In the words of John Stott, we need to exegete **both** the *world* and the *Word*.

For the sake of this morning's message, I've chosen three “mega” challenges that define the global context in which we serve.

***FIRST: Pluralism – changing the face of theology.*** For those of us old enough to remember, mission's conferences of the past were often defined by the singing of “*We've a Story to Tell To the Nations.*” In spite of the obvious tones of western imperialism in the song, it did reflect a core conviction that

Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life, and no one could find salvation without a personal response to his love.

The spirit of this age doesn't necessarily accept this belief. The impact of post-modern relativism puts us in front of people every Sunday who are asking, "Do we *really* have a story to tell to the nations?" In the classes I teach in Missions at Gordon College, a Christian liberal arts institution, more than a third of my students do not believe that people outside of Jesus Christ are truly lost (and these are the students taking "missions" classes!).

I believe that **PLURALISM** is the ***greatest theological challenge*** facing the church. Tim Dearborn, writing in "Christ, the Church, and Other Religions" states it this way: "Every local church – whether in Kansas City or Kinshasa, in Toledo or Tokyo, in London or in Latvia – will serve in a religiously pluralistic environment" (Stackhouse, p. 139). Pluralism is not a philosophy reserved for the classrooms of Ivy League Universities; it's the worldview of the common person.

The idea that Jesus Christ and Christian faith is unique – a basic motivation for global missions – is far from acceptable in a world that responds "all of the above" to questions of truth. The spirit of the age militates against the proclamation that there is no other name by which we can be saved.

In the worldviews and religions of the East, truth gets absorbed into the pot where all “truths” melt into the composite whole. I once interacted with a lady in Delhi, India who was registering us for a conference being hosted by her school. Her desk was covered with various pictures of Jesus. I asked, “Are you a follower of Jesus?” Oh yes, she said: he is *one of my favorites*.” “One of my favorites” fits well in the world of Hindu’s 300 millions gods, but it is antithetical to the Gospel. It forces the question – are the people in our pews truly convinced of the uniqueness of Christ, or is he simply “their favorite”?

In the West, pluralism resists any concept of absolute truth. The challenge of pluralism includes people like Paul Knitter (No Other Name?) who sees every world religion as having saving grace in itself. Others like Karl Rahner identify those outside of Christian faith as “anonymous Christians,” saved by Jesus’ death and atonement whether they acknowledge him or not.

But most are not as theologically sophisticated as these. Most – even many of the laity sitting in our churches week by week – simply absorb a more passive form of pluralism. While they would never say that Jesus is just “one way to God amongst many,” their lack of concern for missions and evangelism reflects a theology that Robertson McQuilkin’s calls the “wider hope” theory – believing that people who have never heard of Jesus will be saved somehow – without our involvement as evangelists or missionaries.

The pluralistic spirit of the age challenges the very *raison d'être* of missions. If Jesus is not the only way, why bother going to the hardship places or the dangerous places or the difficult places? In the face of global pluralism, the church must proclaim Jesus Christ with theological integrity, critical contextualization, and counter-cultural preaching.

The challenge of pluralism forces us to evaluate our training: do the missionaries we send out (not to mention the leaders of our churches who are most likely confronting other world religions on a daily basis) really understand the beliefs and worldviews of other religions? Are they clear on the differences in what we believe so that they can engage others in dialogue? [As a side note here, I'm amazed at the number of churches who, though shocked by the horrors of September 11<sup>th</sup> and now the war in Iraq, have yet to offer any in-depth courses on Islam. If the daily news is not a wake-up call to understand the world's fastest growing religion, what will stir us?]

Tim Dearborn, again writing in "Christ, the Church, and Other Religions" observes that "Without a basic comprehension of other's beliefs, our encounters will be characterized by prejudice, paternalism, and pride" (p. 139).

Pluralism challenges our skills at ecumenical or inter-religious interaction: are we ready to engage people from other faiths like Paul did on Mars Hill? Can we – like Paul – quote from their texts, allude to their philosophies, and present Jesus

as the answer they are looking for? Here I recommend to you Timothy Tennent's book, Christianity at the Religious Roundtable; in it he presents an excellent example of interacting with other faiths as "engaged exclusivist" – believing in the uniqueness of Christ, but willing to listen, to learn, and to dialogue.

***SECOND: Globalization – changing the face of the world and of***

***Christianity.*** What does Christianity look like in a world deeply affected by multi-national companies and Golden Arches? And in the world of cross-cultural missions, what does it mean to be part of the world's largest non-white, non-Western religion? I consider our involvement in the global community our greatest ***sociological challenge.***

In The Next Christendom, Philip Jenkins points out that, "Over the past century...the center of gravity in the Christian world has shifted inexorably southward, to Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Already today, the largest Christian communities on the planet are to be found in Africa and Latin America. If we want to visualize a 'typical' contemporary Christian, we should think of a woman living in a village in Nigeria or in a Brazilian *favela*" (Jenkins, p. 2).

David Barrett states that as of 2000, only 39% of the world's one and a half billion Christians live in the industrialized West. Barrett further predicts that by 2025, fully 70% of Christians will live in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Oceania.



(Cited by Ian Douglas, "Globalization and the Local Church", in Stackhouse, p. 203).

The global church takes place, however, in an increasingly globalized world.

"The sociologist George Ritzer has described this homogenization process and loss of local cultural expressions as 'the McDonaldization of society.'"

(Stackhouse, p. 203.) Tim Dearborn writes, "The world has been turned into a global shopping mall, with the 7 M's (Michael Jordan, Michael Jackson, Madonna, Microsoft, McDonalds, m & m's, and Mickey Mouse – and I'd add MTV) reigning as global culture symbols." (Stackhouse, p. 211.)

"Roland Robertson describes globalization as the 'compression of the world.'

This may lead to greater cohesiveness and integration. More likely it will lead to greater fragmentation." (Quoted in Stackhouse, p. 211.) In the post Cold War world, the rest of the world – though affected by Coca-Cola, the Western media, and cell phones from Finland – is not becoming a unified whole. Samuel Huntington points to almost a dozen "clashing civilizations," but he predicts that three will predominate:

"The dangerous clashes of the future are likely to arise from the interaction of Western arrogance, Islamic intolerance, and Sinic [Chinese] assertiveness." (Huntington, p. 183)

We serve a global church with a global commission in a globalized world. What will it mean? Will our North American citizenships hurt us or help us? A brother in Zimbabwe reminded me, “What you in the West call ‘globalization’ we call ‘Americanization.’” Can we use the advances of global technology without getting sucked into the exportation of Western materialism? How can we in the Western church serve effectively in a world exploited by our own greed? How can we present the Gospel without taking stronger stands against sweatshops, fighting child labor, and defending the defenseless?

***THIRD: Territorialism – changing the face of the challenge.*** Clashing civilizations and the resistance to Westernization has fueled a renewed nationalism. And this nationalism is often attached to religion – whether we’re referring to nationalistic Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Sharia Islam in northern Nigeria, nationalistic Orthodoxy in the former Communist Block countries or Bibles wrapped in the flag in the USA. Territorialism provides us with a challenge with how people will relate to the “other,” and as such, it presents us with the ***greatest anthropological challenge.***

Global peace and local war led the editors of Atlantic Monthly to title a lead article, “Jihad [religious, often ethnically defined war] versus ‘McWorld’ [globalization].” In just the last decade, we’ve witnessed what happens when ethnic specific religion declines into little more than tribalism and racism –

whether we're referring to death of hundreds of thousands in Rwanda and Burundi or the Serbian Orthodox-Croatian Catholic-Bosnian Moslem massacres.

Tim Dearborn writes, "The lines of conflict are no longer as clear and simplistic as they were during the Cold War. *Battle lines are now drawn between balkanized neighborhoods.*" (Stackhouse, p. 212, emphasis mine)

Peter Kuzmic, who has witnessed the atrocities of territorialism first hand, concluded a course on clashing civilizations this way: he said,

- "Religion is back
- And it's back in big and destructive ways
- And the United States is increasingly out of touch."

These realities force us to deal with long term historical territorial hatreds that never appear in our cross-cultural training manuals. If Rwanda/Burundi teaches us anything, it reminds us that we need to make disciples, not just converts, and that these disciples must grow deep in understanding Jesus' mandate to love and forgive our enemies. The disciple in a territorialized world must not only be taught to look upward to Jesus but also outward to the "other" who Jesus loves.

In this regard, we in the West will need to enter first as learners, not as teachers.

On a recent trip to Bosnia, our host explained that the Serbian aggression in 1989 towards the Muslims was related to an event in 1389. The 600th

anniversary of the defeat of the Serbs by Muslims in Kosovo now stirred Serbian nationalism.

As I heard this story, I thought to myself, "How can someone like me from the USA – whose entire national history is about 1/3 as long as this – teach a Serb to follow Jesus and love those he's been historically indoctrinated to hate? How does Christian discipleship help people deal with – in Donald Schriver's words – "the leftover debris of their national pasts"? In the context of Bosnia, this "debris" included the destruction of 40 Orthodox Churches, 300 Roman Catholic Churches, and over 1000 Muslim Mosques.

Many of us come from a cultural context where we think little about the past: witness how seldom we who are white in the USA want to deal with the lingering issues of slavery or racism or the "ethnic cleansing" of the First Nations Peoples centuries ago. Most of us are naïve optimists – like Rodney King who wondered, "Why can't we all just get along?" Until we start wrestling with our respective and our collective histories, we won't really know how to address the historical hostilities we find elsewhere.

History as well can urge us to preach reconciliation with greater resolve. In light of the fantastic progress of Pentecostalism in the world, I've often reminded Pentecostal leaders of their own "roots" concerning the signs of the Holy Spirit. William Seymour, key figure in the Azusa Street revivals that birthed the modern

Pentecostal movement, "came to believe that the truest sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit was not speaking in tongues but the demise of racial barriers between Christians" (Cox, p. 63).

Tribalism challenges us to build disciples who know how to break down the barriers, the "dividing walls of hostility" through Christ and thus create the "one new person" community of Ephesians 2.

### **MICRO CHALLENGES:**

In the context of these global challenges, what are the localized, specific issues that we face in the churches where we serve? I've identified eight for your consideration.

**#1. Ecclesiology:** what is the role of the local church in the sending process?

In my exposure to the church in North America, I observe an "all or nothing" phenomena in response to global missions. Some churches, overwhelmed and "globophobic," choose to do little or nothing (Stackhouse, p. 207). Small budgets, survival mentalities, and local challenges predominate and as a result, they do nothing beyond their immediate sphere of influence.

At the other extreme are those who increase their involvement in missions, implying or directly stating that they want to return to the Antioch model *where*

*they do it all*. They want to take back [i.e., from agencies or denominations] the local church's priority position in the Great Commission.

Ian Douglas observes that this increased involvement and ownership has been made possible by globalization:

“We must recognize that the local churches' ability to connect with other Christian communities around the world is, in and of itself, a manifestation of the realities of global communication and transportation.” (Stackhouse, pp. 203-204.)

Rick Warren, one of America's best-known pastors, reflects the “*do it all*” second trend in a generic October (2003) email announcing the Saddleback “P-E-A-C-E plan” (planting churches, equipping leaders, assisting the poor, caring for the sick, and educating the next generation). Rick writes:

“In the first century, mission strategy was always congregationally based... Local churches accepted the responsibility for Jesus' Great Commission and his Great Commandment.”

Today, Warren writes, he sees that most local churches have become “sidelined and uninvolved” because the agencies are saying, “pray, pay and get out of the way.” Rick challenges the reader:

“I believe the proper role for all the great parachurch and relief organizations is to serve local churches in a supportive way, offering their

expertise and knowledge, but allowing local churches around the world to be central focus and the distribution centers.”

While I zealously endorse a central role of the local church in God’s mission in the world – what one British pastor calls “The Antioch Factor,” – I wonder what the world will look like when rather than 10 or 20 or 30 agencies sometimes working in competition to evangelize a country or a city, we have hundreds of Western sending churches all creating their own strategies for one locale?

In this regard, Todd Johnson observes, “perhaps the most significant development is the rise of specifically nonglobal plans. Without centralized planning, agencies and churches are focusing more on specific peoples, countries, and regions. Except for the largest agencies [and churches], most work in thirty or fewer countries. As churches begin to work directly on the field, their emphasis is not global but local. The advantage of this type of strategy is the availability of far more resources for reaching unreached peoples. The disadvantage, which has already been observed in places like the former Soviet Union, is massive duplication of resources. What happens when thousands of individuals, churches, and agencies all have their eye on the same new opportunity?” (Bonk, p. 46.)

What will the scenario of local church involvement in the future look like? Ian Douglas paints a picture that many of us have lived:

“A local congregation here in the United States makes a connection with Christians on the other side of the world through a variety of circumstances – a Tanzanian seminarian studying in the United States begins to worship in the parish, an elder traveling on business in Malaysia find his way into a church in Singapore one Sunday morning, or a high school student learns about an Evangelical crusade in Buenos Aires while she surfs the Web. Before you know it there are real and tangible links established between the local parish in the United States and a Christian community in Tanzania, Malaysia, or Argentina. Letters and e-mails are exchanged; building projects are begun with funding from the United States; short-term mission trips for American youth groups are undertaken; doctors, teachers, and technical workers from the United States offer themselves for extended missionary service; and, on occasion, the church leader from Tanzania, Malaysia, or Argentina will travel to the United States, often exchanging pulpits with American pastors. (Stackhouse, pp. 204-205.)

Patrick Johnstone, speaking to this subject at Operation Mobilization meetings in tribute to George Verwer, concludes:

“The major change in global missions is the removal of barriers of distance and communication between local churches and fields. This is increasing the direct sending of missionaries (with mixed results), increased



impatience with mission agencies and many more field visits by local church leadership.”

As a result, “*Mission agencies will have to adapt to the local church desire for hands-on involvement and a greater say in policy.*” (Greenlee, p. 189.)

**#2. *Disconnectedness with the poorer world.*** In a volume dedicated to understanding the role of the local church in a global world, World Vision leaders pointed out that, “While global wealth increased by 40 percent in the 1990’s, more than one billion people fell into even deeper poverty. In 1997, the combined income of the 447 wealthiest people in the world was greater than the combined income of 50 percent of the world’s population.” (Stackhouse, p. 212.)

The rich/poor gap presents us with many challenges. How can Western missionaries be prepared to go to places in the 10-40 Window, for example, when the lifestyle adjustment is so severe?

Can a generation raised on double-latte coffees costing \$3.00 per cup be effective in a world where the majority has no access to clean drinking water?

Can Westerners who routinely spend \$5 to \$9 to go see a movie live effectively alongside the 1 billion abjectly poor people living on less than \$1.00 per day? If the editors of World Christian Encyclopedia (2000 edition) are correct, 43% of the

word will never make a telephone call. Can a generation accustomed to personal cellular phones and dedicated Internet lines make the adjustment?

The rich/poor gap challenges our commitment to incarnational living. New candidates need to adapt simpler lifestyles – ***before they go***. We need to train our new missionaries to live with diminished material expectations in an effort to increase incarnational effectiveness. And the entire church, so accustomed to spending huge sums on their own comforts and conveniences, must be reawakened to increased generosity and sacrifice.

**#3. Lack of information:** in a discussion with a lay leader at our local church (a PhD by the way), I referred to a Palestinian Christian friend who serves as a CMA pastor in Old Jerusalem. The lay leader interrupted, “That’s impossible; all Palestinians are Muslims.” His message to me? I have my mind made up – don’t confuse me with the facts.

Don’t get me wrong. The information rich are adopting people groups, studying the “Isa Mosque” phenomena, or examining indigenous missions. But the vast majority it seems – the information poor – don’t know any of these things.

On a weekend last December, at a seminar at the Overseas Ministries Study Center, mission and church leaders dug deep into the nuances of Islam, the interpretations of the Koran, and the Muslim-Christian tensions in the world

today. But on Sunday at church, I met a lay leader who, in his own words, “could tell you the first thing about what a Moslem believes.”

Even sadder was the experience at a mission conference when the associate pastor prayed for the short-term mission team headed to Russia: “Lord guide them in their evangelistic efforts *in Romania*.” The mission team leader (an excited, information-rich supporter of the “Perspectives” class) lamented to me that the pastor did not know that Russia and Romania are different countries!

**#4. *Our propensity to oversimplify the world.*** We leaders often talk about Chinese and Muslims and Hindus and Latinos – or even “the West” – as if these words represent large homogenous units. With such an oversimplified view of cultures (and the multiple cultures within cultures), it’s no wonder that church leaders fall prey to global plans designed to “crack the code” of a culture and evangelize everyone at once through a campaign, a movie, or a technique.

I observed an illustration of such over-simplification in the Fall of 2001. After September 11, one USA mission agency sent out an “emergency” fund-raising solicitation. The organization’s president referred to their budgetary state-of-emergency – which he attributed to “the **collapse** of the US economy.” Did I miss something? I recall a downturn, but a collapse?

Oversimplification and overstatement can only lead to an overall loss of credibility for that agency and the mission movement at large.

**#5. Propensity to nationalize God.** Recent world events have exaggerated our propensity to blur the lines between nationalistic fervor and Christian faith. We in the USA talk about deaths-in-the-war as if only our guys count. We pray prayers identifying “us” versus “them” – with the obvious implication that God must be on our side. We pray as if God’s our national Santa Claus and we need only bring him our wish list.

Christians in the Muslim world warn us that the blurring of these Christian and nationalistic lines will confirm to Muslims the need for “holy war.” These Christians tell us that identifying our Christianity with American foreign policy will serve to intensify the commitments of Muslims to their faith. They urge us to remember that our first citizenship is in heaven!

Add to nationalism the relative geographic ignorance of people in the United States (I cannot speak for Canada), and you’ll understand the magnitude of the problem. In June 2000, National Geographic stated that their research indicated that one in seven adults in the United States could not find our country on a map of the world. Without September 11<sup>th</sup>, many would not know where Afghanistan is. Peter Kuzmic will tell you that most cannot identify the Baltic Republics from

the Balkans, and Zac Niringiye can testify of American pastors asking, “What is the capital of Africa?”

Peter Kuzmic reported that in the mid 1990’s – during the height of the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia – one-third of the United States Congress had never served in the military nor held a passport. Those elected to make decisions on national involvement in international issues had nothing but textbook knowledge of the world.

Combine national arrogance with global ignorance and you’ll understand why global Christian leaders shudder at the singing of “God Bless America.”

**#6. Failure to think critically.** I wonder if we in the church have lost our ability think critically. The church speaks as God’s prophetic voice, but have we become so “amused to death” (a-muse means “no thinking”) that we simply absorb the status quo?

Consider our ability to think critically about where we’ve been and learn from history. Present a pastor with the historical perspective of a Palestinian – who believes that land they occupied for over 1000 years was **stolen** from them – and you’ll be labeled an apostate.

Or how about our ability to think critically about what we're doing? I am devoted advocate of short-term missions, but is it possible that the idea needs some serious review? Many churches seem to believe that the global cause of Christ will automatically follow our increase in short-term missions. Doing more and involving more people takes the priority – without much evaluation of the local, financial, and global impact.

Patrick Johnstone, arguably one of the most knowledgeable people on earth concerning global Christianity, recently identified four priorities facing the Western church in the next forty years. Number three on his list:

*“The limitations and costs of short-term missions need to be watched, and all short-term programs evaluated for their value-added contribution to the overall goal of world evangelization (Johnstone, “The Next Forty Years for Christian Mission,” Greenlee, p. 189.)*

And is anyone thinking critically about where we're going? When churches hear the presentation of some mission agencies, they can get the impression that the replacement of retiring Western missionaries is the highest priority in world evangelization. Are we assuming that Western missionary influence needs to stay the same or increase? Other presentations seem to imply that indigenous leaders will do all that remains of the work of world evangelization. All we need to do is send our checks while we stay home and wax our cars.

We who lead the mission endeavor of local churches must be willing to blend our enthusiastic optimism with willingness to be more self-critical. We must devote ourselves to serious listening to our non-Western counterparts. Without critical thinking, we'll simply repeat the errors of the past or launch ourselves into global isolation.

**#7. "Option overload."** The intensification of programmatically driven church ministries inevitably shoves global issues into a category one pastor calls "sideshow missions." Other priorities drive the church, but missions and world concern get shoved into the periphery. Some devotees will faithfully carry the burden (and attend the midweek program), but most see missions as one option amongst many, and often the music ministry or men's ministry or 1000 other specialized ministries will keep people from involvement in the wider world.

With all due respect to the actual disorder, I sometimes wonder if we in the church don't have a case of global "Attention Deficit Disorder." We participate in missions with a remote control in our hands. Today the fund-raiser for the seminary in Brazil; tomorrow the short-term mission trip to Burkina Faso; the guest speaker represents indigenous missionaries from India; and the Sunday School adopted missionary translates the Bible in Southeast Asia. We move freely from project to project and place to place with little concern for long-term issues.

We often critique the church in other parts of the world as being a mile-wide and an inch deep. I wonder if our missions programs in the North American church don't have the same malady. If we do have a societal case of A.D.D., how will our hesitancy to make long-term commitments affect our effectiveness in reaching out to Muslims, Hindus, and others – who might require years of relationship and service before they consider Jesus?

Several years ago, I met with the recruiters of the Wycliffe Bible Translators to discuss the mobilization of new missionaries. They asked this basic question: do those coming out of the USA church have the capacity for the focus, commitment and sacrifice necessary to do the work of Bible translation? I wonder.

The writers of Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America call the church to see the church “not as the purpose or goal of the gospel, but rather as the instrument and witness” of the Mission of God (*missio dei*) in the world (Guder, p. 5). They write:

“In the ecclesiocentric approach of Christendom, mission became only one of the many programs of the church... it has taken us decades to realize that mission is not just a program. It defines the church as God's sent people. Either mission defines us, or we reduce the scope of the gospel and the mandate of the church. *Thus our challenge today is to move from church with mission to missional church*” (Guder, p. 6, emphasis mine).



**#8. Cross-less Christianity?** A south Asia leader wrote an essay several years ago critiquing the American church's excesses in supporting and sending short-term missionaries. He entitled the article, "Bring Back the Missionary Cross."

The theme carries into our lives. What will the missionary cross look like to new North American missionary candidates who bring their addiction to comfort to cross-cultural settings? Will those demanding evacuation policies and multiple containers full of "stuff" be able to be incarnational ministers of the Gospel in the midst of Majority World poverty?

A few years ago, after participating in a Missions Conference that included 1000 Nigerian pastors, I wrote in my report their sense of zeal, devotion, and reckless abandon to the call of Christ to go and make disciples. I commented on their Abrahamic willingness to go out, not knowing where they are going and on their Pauline "to live is Christ and to die is gain" attitude towards the hardships ahead.

A veteran leader of an agency working in the Muslim world read my report, and he reflected:

"The Nigerians remind me of how older generations went out. Today, I spend hours and hours on evacuation policies, hostage policies, and insurance policies. In the old days, we just went and died."

As I look over these 18,000+ enthusiastic young men and women, I wonder what taking up the cross daily will mean? Increased violence, clashing civilizations, and increased hostilities will mean intensified opposition to Christians. As Jesus reminds us in the Olivet discourse, the gospel of the Kingdom will be **preached to all nations**, and then the end will come – but we cannot forget that the context of that prediction says first that we will be **hated by all nations** (Matthew 24:9, 14).

As pastors and church leaders, we face a great challenge ahead in living and presenting the way of the Cross.

### ***LEARNERS, PARTNERS, SERVANTS: THE WAY FORWARD***

Surrounded by global and local challenges, what is the way forward as we seek to understand the roles, opportunities, and responsibilities for the church in West? I'd like to conclude with a three-fold challenge which will not define our programs, but which will put us in a **posture** that can help maximize our effective contribution.

**Humility, not arrogance: my first challenge is that we would recommit ourselves to being global learners.** “Western arrogance” can nullify our

Christian effectiveness; therefore, we need to reaffirm our commitment to humility. We need to listen and learn:

- From Christians in Cuba or China who can teach us much about carrying the cross daily.
- From Christians in the poorer world about finding our identity in Christ, not things
- From Christians in the Middle East and North Africa, who know something about staying faithful under the pressure of dominating Islam.
- From Christians in the Philippines, India, Nigeria, Brazil, Korea, and more who are learning afresh the joy of sending out missionaries to places where Christ is not already named.
- And from people outside of our own ethnicity in our midst – so that they can teach us what it means to have the dividing walls broken down and become one new creation in Christ (Ephesians 2:14ff).

Tim Dearborn, formerly of World Vision and now at Seattle Pacific University, addressing *“The Local Church in a Global Era”* observes that learning intentional diversity is one of the greatest challenges facing the local congregation:

“The Spirit of God is stirring local congregations to embrace the diverse world that God has brought to it, demonstrating the quality of community for which all humankind hungers. ***In fact, the church will have global credibility only to the extent that it has local diversity.***” (Stackhouse, p. 213, emphasis mine).

**Followers with the family of God, not leaders of the world: my second challenge is that we would recommit ourselves to being global partners.**

Our challenge is more finding where God is working and joining him rather than leading the charge for completing the Great Commission. Philip Yancey observes:

“As I travel, I have observed a pattern, a strange historical pattern of God ‘moving’ geographically from the Middle East, to Europe to North America to the developing world. My theory is this: God goes where he’s wanted.”  
(Quoted in Jenkins, p. 15).

Combining this movement of God with the statistical predictions that “By 2050, only about one-fifth of the world’s 3 billion Christians will be non-Hispanic Whites” (Jenkins, 3), we need to accelerate our commitment to partnership simply so that we are not left out of the mainstream action of the Spirit of God.

Being partners with brothers and sisters will force us to focus first on relationships, not the creation of global strategies. We will need to hear the Majority World mission leaders critique of our obsession with “managerial missiology” and – again in the spirit of humility – build our efforts based on biblical concepts of community.

The globalization of missions will mean a deeper commitment than ever before to mission efforts that are multi-cultural in composition or in field partnering. This will

mean that, as Patrick Johnstone observes, “Much greater sensitivity to multiple missionary cultures as well as target cultures will be an essential component of training and orientation on the field (Greenlee, p. 189).

Partnering will present not only the challenge of multi-cultural relationships but also the challenge of joining together across a wide range of economic disparity.

Ian Douglas states the challenge well:

“Finally, in our discussion we need to consider the economic realities of globalization and the local church. Which local churches are more likely to participate in mission ventures around the world? Is it not true that larger, richer congregations generally have more disposable income to 'spend' beyond themselves than poorer, struggling churches? If this is so then will the new face of American congregational involvement in the global church be primarily that of white, affluent Christians in a large rich, suburban parish? Will mission be understood as the haves providing for the have-nots, economically speaking? What are the possibilities for mutuality and interdependence in such unequal relationships?” (Stackhouse, p. 207).

**Members of a global movement, not dictators of a global agenda: my final challenge is that we would recommit ourselves to being global servants.**

In his predictions about the future of Western missions, Bruce Camp highlights “the dramatic shift from the missionary being over the national church to serving under the national church” (Bonk, p. 242).

Traveling over the past twenty-five years to more than 100 countries, I have often asked local leaders, where does the church in West fit in global missions?

Responses have included:

- “You have the educational resources”
- “You are enthusiastic and optimistic”
- “We have the people, but you have the money”

I suppose I have heard dozens of responses, but I’ve never yet heard any leader say, “Well, you really set the pace in teaching us how to be servants.” We in North America know how to be in control, but do we know how to follow orders of those who will lead Christendom through this century? We often pray, “O Lord, use me,” but how do we respond when we feel used?

If Jesus came not to be served but to serve, will we be willing to follow his example?

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