

A free, monthly online publication that provides you with evangelism and missions news and information.

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## PUBLISHER'S MEMO

### [Church Leaders in the Global South Speak on Mission and Evangelism](#)

By Doug Birdsall

**Today we are unable to look at our world without seeing the tremendous and growing contributions of the Global South.** Geopolitics, economics, finance, education, sports, fashion—not a day goes by without touches and influences from the Majority World. We are truly living in a global age.

This is especially true in the Church. For some time now, we have heard and felt the increasing influence of the Global South. Not only has it been well documented from Western scholars such as Andrew Walls, Philip Jenkins, Dana Robert, and Todd Johnson, but from Global South scholars, such as Samuel Escobar, Wonsuk Ma, and U. Obed, themselves.

No longer are the voices of the Global South in the periphery. They are the very center of the world in which we live today. We must integrate and incorporate the voices, thoughts, and ways of the Global South. Moreover, we must not only encourage these voices, we must listen as well.

This past February the Lausanne Theology Working Group met in Chiang Mai, Thailand, to discuss key issues facing world evangelization. Thirty-five participants from over twenty countries from every continent of the world came together to concertedly listen to the voices of the Global South and North and give integrated voice to the whole Church with the whole gospel to the whole world. This theological consultation is part of a series in preparation for the [Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization](#) to be held in Cape Town, South Africa, in 2010.

In Lausanne World Pulse, we regularly have voices from the Global South; however, in this particular issue we wanted to focus our readers' attention on **Global South church leaders and missions and world evangelization.** From Asia we hear from Wonsuk Ma on the huge influence of the Pentecostal Church worldwide. From Africa U. Obed speaks to the topic of discipleship and evangelism. Samuel Escobar describes developments of theology of evangelism in the Global South and Valdir Steuernagel discusses lessons on discipleship and evangelism.

I hope these articles provide you with much food for thought, discussion, and understanding. I have been privileged to hear in person from leaders like these around the world over the past two years. They have challenged and sharpened how I see and understand the whole Church, the whole gospel, and the whole world. I commend these voices to you and pray the Lord will use them to both challenge and sharpen your own view.

**Doug Birdsall** is executive chair of the [Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization](#). He served as president of [Asian Access](#) from 1991 to 2007 and continues to serve on their board of directors. Birdsall is a graduate of Wheaton College, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and Harvard University. He is co-publisher of Lausanne World Pulse.

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## NEWS BRIEFS

### **AROUND THE WORLD: Over Four Million Bibles and NTs Handed Out**

**Bible League** workers handed out more than four million Bibles and New Testaments in 2007 to millions of people worldwide. Additionally, more than three million Bible studies were completed and more than 539,000 individuals became part of a church. (**Bible League**)

### **AROUND THE WORLD: Millions Discover God Speaks Their Language**

People from twenty different minority language groups received God's Word in their heart language in 2007 as a result of a long-standing partnership between **Bible League** and **Wycliffe Bible Translators**. These newly-translated scriptures were placed in the hands of specific people groups throughout Ghana, Kenya, Mexico, Papua New Guinea, Peru, and the Philippines—people who never before had the written Word of God in their language. (**Bible League**)

### **AROUND THE WORLD: TWR Surpasses 225 Languages-and-Dialects Mark**

Listeners in West Africa are the beneficiaries of expanded ministry experienced by international Christian broadcasting network **Trans World Radio** (TWR). Recent broadcast supplements to the airwaves include Baatonum, Ditammari, and Lukpa—all languages spoken in Benin, West Africa; and Ifè, a language of Togo. With these and other new additions, TWR now proclaims God's Word globally in more than 225 languages and dialects. Programs are broadcast from more than two thousand outlets, including fourteen international transmitting sites, as well as local AM, shortwave, long wave, FM, direct-to-listener satellite broadcasts, cable audio systems, and the Internet. (**Trans World Radio**)

### **CHINA: Mass Sentencing of Chinese House Church Leaders**

Twenty-one prominent Christian leaders have been sentenced to re-education through labor in what **China Aid Association** describes as the largest mass sentencing of house church leaders in China in twenty-five years. The Linyi City Re-education through Labour Commission in Shandong Province sentenced seventeen male and four female church leaders to re-education through labor for fifteen months to three years. The twenty-one were detained during a mass arrest of 270 Christian leaders on 7 December 2007 in Hedeng District, Linyi City, as they gathered for leadership training. The others detained with them were fined and released in the intervening period. The leaders were accused of holding an "illegal religious gathering" and labeled as members of an "evil cult," a term which Chinese authorities arbitrarily apply to unregistered religious groups. (**Christian Solidarity Worldwide**)

### **HONG KONG: Beijing Needs to Turn What It Says about Religious Freedom into Reality**

The government in Beijing needs to turn what it says about religious freedom into reality, says Chinese pastor, the Rev. Bob Fu, founder of the Texas-based **China Aid Association**. Fu, once a member of an underground house church in China, was at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. (USA) in early February, where he was presented with the 2007 John Leland Religious Liberty Award of the Southern Baptist Convention. He now lives in Texas (USA), where the Baptist church has a strong following. Despite living in exile from his home country, Fu sees a great future for Christianity in China. (**Ecumenical News International**)

### **MALAYSIA: English-language Bibles Seized**

The seizure by Malaysian customs officials of thirty-two English-language Bibles from a Christian woman who was bringing them into the country for a study group has prompted an outcry from Christians in the Muslim-majority country. "The Council of Churches is flabbergasted that such acts are happening in our country with such frequency and impunity," said the Rev. Hermen Shastri, general secretary of the Council of Churches of Malaysia. "We want to state categorically that the Bible is Holy Scripture for Christians," he added. "No authority on earth should deny Christians the right to possess, read, and travel with their Bibles." (**Ecumenical News International**)

### **NIGERIA: Bible Reading Marathon Draws Record Numbers**

The most recent Bible Reading Marathon in Nigeria drew nearly 730 participants, up from 152 in 2006. Sponsored by the Bible Society of Nigeria, the event, which offers anyone the opportunity to read the Bible aloud in any language, took place in six different churches and Christian centers in Lagos. The readings were primarily given in English, Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, French, and Egun. The readings were organized in such a way that they began with the Gospel of Matthew. ([Bible Society of Nigeria](#))

### **SRI LANKA: More Christians Facing Violence**

Christians in Sri Lanka have seen a dramatic increase in violence within the last month, according to reports from the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL). On 3 March the Zion Mount Prayer House in Mulaitivu District was set on fire. The previous day, ten Bible school students in Lunuwila, Putlam District, were attacked by masked men on motorbikes. On the same day a mob of two hundred people surrounded a local pastor's home in Udugama, Galle District, and told him to leave the village or face death. ([Christian Solidarity Worldwide](#))

### **UNITED KINGDOM: General Director of the Evangelical Alliance UK Leaving Post**

One of the UK's most senior Christian leaders, the Rev. Joel Edwards, will be leaving his post as general director of the [Evangelical Alliance UK](#) after more than a decade of service. Edwards completed two five-year terms as general director for the Alliance last year, but wanted to stay on until he had finished work on a new vision for evangelicalism, outlined in his new book *An Agenda for Change*. As the Alliance's first black general director, Edwards progressed and deepened the diversity of the Alliance while bringing credibility and attention to evangelicals in the ecumenical and secular spheres. He will continue on as chair for [Micah Challenge International](#) and as a commissioner for the Equality and Human Rights Commission. ([Evangelical Alliance UK](#))

### **URUGUAY: One Percent of Nation Accepts Christ at Outreach**

Over one percent of the population of Uruguay made a commitment to Christ through *Mi Esperanza-Uruguay*, a nationwide outreach sponsored by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. The event, held in September 2007, was the largest evangelistic event in the history of the country and included 1,413 participating churches. By the time the *Mi Esperanza* office closed 30 November 2007, 33,261 commitments to Christ had been recorded. ([Billy Graham Evangelistic Association](#))

### **ZIMBABWE: Pastors Key to Churches Being "AIDS Competent"**

If African churches are to be "AIDS competent," their pastors must be trained to equip members with "sharp minds, keen ears, warm hearts, quick feet, and loud voices," says Ezra Chitando, a Zimbabwean historian and theologian. Chitando has authored two new books on African churches and the pandemic. Such theological training of pastors is the essential first step, Chitando said, to overcoming "ambulance theology," which he described as "always arriving after the accident has already taken place." ([Ecumenical News International](#))

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## **THEMED ARTICLES: Church Leaders from the Global South Speak on Mission and Evangelism**

### **[A Theology of Evangelism in the Global South](#)**

By Samuel Escobar

The [Lausanne](#) movement that started after the 1974 International Congress on World Evangelization (Lausanne I) had a significant impact on the practice of mission around the world. One could trace back a great number of evangelistic and missionary efforts that have flourished in the past thirty-five years to the inspiration of [Lausanne 1974](#). However, the genius of the Lausanne movement was to promote mission activity and also theological reflection on that activity in light of God's word. Liberated by its missionary thrust from the bonds of sterile fundamentalism, evangelicalism was again able to rediscover the holistic dimensions of Christian mission clearly presented in the Bible.

The Lausanne movement has restated theological convictions characteristic of evangelicalism; however, it has also deepened evangelicals' understanding by responding to contemporary questions. This is evident, for instance, in the selection of documents edited by John Stott under the title *Making Christ Known*,<sup>1</sup> which offers an account of the years between 1974 and 1989. The nine lengthy documents that start with the **Lausanne Covenant** are a good record of the points of agreement of missionaries, evangelists, and theologians about burning issues related to evangelism.

Almost all of these documents strike a balance between the theological foundations and the pragmatic consequences. The lists of participants in this reflection include evangelicals from every region of the world. Thirty years later, the massive three-volume work *A New Vision, A New Heart, A Renewed Call*<sup>2</sup> gives an idea of this process of practice and reflection that is currently going on around the world. It is a series of Lausanne Occasional Papers produced during the 2004 Forum for World Evangelization that took place in Pattaya, Thailand 29 September 2004 to 5 October 2004. There are currently sixty-one papers which record the global process of missiological reflection that is carried on by new generations of practitioners and theologians.<sup>3</sup>

By the time the Lausanne Congress took place in 1974, a process of developing a theology of evangelism had already started in the global South. After the Second World War, to the Protestant missionary work of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (which had always had an evangelical ethos) was added the evangelical missionary activism of the post-war period especially from North America.

The fruit of those labours was the development of vibrant evangelical churches in the global South that had a great evangelistic dynamism. By the 1960s, a new generation of evangelical leaders in Africa, Asia, and Latin America started the quest for a theology of evangelism that would match their activism but also respond to the tremendous social tensions of that decade.

The 1966 Berlin World Congress on Evangelism that preceded Lausanne I became a catalyst for this ferment because it was followed up by a series of regional congresses on evangelism in which a questioning of the received Western evangelical theology took place.<sup>4</sup> The urgency of communicating the gospel in a context of poverty, revolution, strife, oppression, and violence required a fresh understanding of the gospel and new models of missionary action.

Because of this preceding process, Lausanne was not the missiological and theological monologue of European or North American evangelicals, but became a brotherly global dialogue of a community that had grown beyond expectations, a dialogue in search for ways of obedience to the missionary imperatives of Jesus.

### **Evangelism in Jesus' Way**

As a Latin American, I consider John Stott's series of four Bible studies about the Great Commission in Berlin 1966 a milestone. In his study of the Gospel of John, Stott argued that in this version of the Great Commission we not only have the imperative "I send you" but also the model of action "as my Father sent me." In response to the social dilemmas of the 1960s in Latin America, we had developed an understanding of evangelism that was built over a Christological structure that shaped both message and method.

René Padilla developed it, and I also used it in my presentation about the social responsibility of the Church in the 1969 Latin American Congress at Bogotá.<sup>5</sup> Since then, as good evangelicals, we have kept a central focus of our reflection on Jesus Christ; however, in the global South we have tried to deepen our understanding of this basic Christology. There are recent expressions of this approach from Asia in Ajith Fernando's study "Jesus: The Message and Model of Mission,"<sup>6</sup> and from Africa in Tokumbo Adeyemo's "Profiling a Globalized and Evangelical Missiology."<sup>7</sup>

Padilla offers a fresh restatement of his position in a paper on the theological basis for holistic mission.<sup>8</sup> Elsewhere, I offer an account of the development of this Christological search in Latin America.<sup>9</sup>

As we consider the missionary pattern modeled by Jesus, and the meaning of his death and resurrection, we face the uniqueness of his person and work. We must acknowledge that it is a scandalous truth, a puzzling reality. It

was surprising for his own contemporaries, as we see in the Gospel stories, and it continues to be a challenge to human logic in these times of religious pluralism.

One of the most forceful expressions of this Christological conviction that I know of is the chapter entitled “The Scandal of Jesus” in the book *The Recovery of Mission* by Sri Lankan theologian Vinoth Ramachandra. Ramachandra reminds us of Jesus’ claims to enjoy a unique filial relationship with God, to be a unique fulfillment of the Jewish scripture, and to be in a different category from other human beings.

This uniqueness is part and parcel of the gospel we proclaim, and as Ramachandra very ably demonstrates in his book, it is truth that is consistent with the logic of the gospel story. It is this uniqueness that makes Jesus Lord of all and the Lord of mission. As an evangelist in Asia, Ramachandra knows that in the pluralistic religious world in which he proclaims the gospel, this uniqueness of Jesus brings controversy:

It is this traditional claim—that in the human person of Jesus, God himself has come amongst us in a decisive and unrepeatable way—that constitutes an offence to a pluralist society. It is this that invites the scorn of the secular humanist, the puzzlement of the Hindu, and the indignant hostility of the Muslim. The same range of response was encountered in the Greco-Roman world that the earliest followers of Jesus inhabited.<sup>10</sup>

### **Mission in Bold Humility**

Similar to other theologians in the global South, Ramachandra points out the humility and the spirit of service of Jesus Christ as well as his orientation toward “the others,” breaking up all kinds of exclusions, both social and religious. He goes on to state:

But it is here that Jesus stands as unique. One can search all the religious traditions—indeed all the great literature—of humankind and you will not come across one like Jesus, who makes seemingly the most arrogant claims concerning himself yet lives in the most humble and selfless manner conceivable, Jesus of Nazareth simply confounds our imagination.<sup>11</sup>

Elaborating on this point, Ramachandra warns us about our way of evangelizing which should be free from any kind of triumphalism and attitudes of superiority that marked traditional missionary methods or apologetics:

Since the gospel announces the sheer grace of God towards unworthy sinners, it can be commended to others only in a spirit of *humility*. Why I should have been chosen to bear witness to this gospel which has nothing to do with my personal qualities, let alone merit? It is all of grace.<sup>12</sup>

To describe this attitude South African missiologist David Bosch used the expression “bold humility.” This bold humility is the only way ahead for world evangelism. Writing about India and China today, Ramachandra reminds us that in these places, “for the first time in her history, the Church can no longer be identified with the power blocs of West and East.”<sup>13</sup>

And this is a blessing because it takes us back to the point where evangelism is to be carried on in the days of the Acts of the Apostles, with no other strength than the truth of the gospel, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the qualities of the lives of the evangelists as disciples of Jesus.

Theology also has a critical and corrective function. The reference to humility, servanthood, suffering, meekness, and deprivation in the evangelistic style of Jesus must confront the warfare style that is involved in the idea of “crusades.” Fernando calls our attention to the fact that “with the breakdown of a rationalist stranglehold of modernism in the West, there is now a greater openness to the supernatural among Christians too.”<sup>14</sup> Reminding us of the so-called “spiritual warfare,” Fernando refers to the rugged individualists that pioneered mission in the past and their contemporary successors. He adds these comments:

Sometimes it is not easy for these rugged pioneers, now influenced by this fresh emphasis on victory over opposing forces, to harmonize their battle emphasis with the emphasis on the meekness and gentleness of Christ

and servanthood. There is a sense that they must win, in a worldly way, every battle they encounter with forces (human and supernatural) that oppose their work.<sup>15</sup>

Some of us in the global South feel uncomfortable when the language and attitude of strategists of evangelism reflect more the style of such rugged pioneers than the style of Jesus.

### **Mission in Context**

The contributions from the global South in the Lausanne movement have also emphasized the need to take seriously the context of mission and evangelism. Issues such as culture, education of leaders, spiritual conflict, and persecution were addressed in paragraphs ten to thirteen of the Lausanne Covenant with due regard to context. The need was recognized for an evaluation of the social, ideological, and spiritual struggles that surround and condition the missionary enterprise in order to design a relevant type of discipleship for our own times.

There are no standard formulas that may be used anywhere for a valid communication of the gospel. The truth of Jesus Christ has to be expressed in response to the situation of the evangelist. Joseph D'Souza, a mission leader from India, writes,

It is quite obvious that Indian missions will have to chart their own course and come out of the shadow of imported ideas and ways of working. We need to stay true to the foundational gospel principles of regeneration, reconciliation, and redemption. Our own Christian communities need transformation first. We must not be pressurized by the "hurry up" mentality of our own day and go in for short-term results, statistics, and decisions of which we have had many millions.<sup>16</sup>

This is also forcefully stated by Kwame Bediako, an African theologian from Ghana who offers us an analysis of the sacralization of power that takes place in African societies and the need to affirm the Lordship of Christ in a meaningful way within that context. He concludes,

All Christian churches in Africa exist in contexts of religious pluralism and, in such contexts, they will have to learn to continue to worship God and his Christ, witness to the gospel, learn to survive in joy, and strive for peace and justice and democratic freedom for all.<sup>17</sup>

### **Endnotes**

1. Stott, John, ed. 1996. *Making Christ Known*. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Eerdmans.
2. Claydon, David, ed. 2005. *A New Vision, A New Heart, A Renewed Call*. Pasadena, California, USA: William Carey Library. Three volumes.
3. All Lausanne Occasional Papers are available at: [www.lausanne.org](http://www.lausanne.org).
4. For a brief summary, see my 2000 article "Evangelical Missiology: Peering into the Future at the Turn of the Century." In *Global Missiology for the 21st Century: The Iguassu Dialogue*. ed. William D. Taylor. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker-WEF, 101-120.
5. My paper was published by *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* and later became a chapter in the 1972 book *Is Revolution Change?* ed. Brian Griffiths. London: InterVarsity Press.
6. Fernando, Ajith. 2000. "Jesus: The Message and Model for our Mission." In *Global Missiology for the 21st Century*. Ed. William D. Taylor. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker, 207-222.
7. Ibid, 261-263.
8. Padilla in Claydon, 2005. Vol I, 216-231.

9. Escobar, Samuel. 1994. "The Search for a Missiological Christology in Latin America," In *Emerging Voices in Global Christian Theology*. Ed. William A. Dyrness. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Zondervan, 199-227.

10. Ramachandra, Vinoth. 1996. *The Recovery of Mission*. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Eerdmans, 181. The section from which I quote is actually the concluding section of the book. The first part is a masterful study of some contemporary Asian theologians from an evangelical perspective.

11. Ibid, 203.

12. Ibid, 273.

13. Ibid, 278.

14. Fernando, 2000, 214.

15. Ibid.

16. D'Souza, Joseph. "The Indian Church and Missions Face the Saffronization Challenge." In Taylor, op.cit., 400.

17. Bediako, Kwame. 1995. *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press—Orbis.

**Samuel Escobar** was born in Peru and ministered in Latin America under the International **Fellowship of Evangelical Students**. He was chair of missiology at Palmer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania, USA. He spoke at Lausanne 1974 and was a member of the committee that drafted the Lausanne Covenant. Presently he lives and teaches in Spain.

## **Imperative of Transformational Discipleship in the Global Church Pursuit of the Great Commission**

**By U. Obed**

**In *Operation World: 21st Century Edition* (2001), Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk reported that the twentieth century global Church was very successful in her pursuit of evangelizing the world.** In that period of time, Christianity was judged to have been the fastest growing religion. This was occasioned by the spirited efforts of such bodies as the **Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization** (LCWE), the **Billy Graham Evangelistic Association** (BGEA), the **AD2000 Movement**, and others. These all produced a combined thrust which drove evangelism beyond its traditional limits.

### **The Great Commission as Missions**

A rallying feature of most of the Christian bodies mentioned above is their commitment to the Great Commission. In the last four or five decades particularly, this has brought a powerful renewal of focus and emphasis on evangelism, especially reaching the unreached people groups.

I recall, for example, that at the 1997 Global Consultation on World Evangelization (GCOWE) in Pretoria, South Africa, a heavenly fire ignited in the hearts of many church leaders. There were new commitments to winning the lost. Follow-up consultations and strategizing in different nations helped to realize the massive turning of people to the Church. The GCOWE made two impressions on me.

*1. My local church should do more in reaching the unreached people groups in my country.* After returning home, I consulted with my church leaders. We immediately adopted three unreached people groups. Our local church involvement in mission was also revised positively. We worked out how to involve every church member in mission support.

To be contextually realistic, we adopted a sponsorship approach different from any Western style. Through our Partial Missionary Sponsorship Program (PMSP), our church developed an increasing sponsorship capacity, and we are now supporting more missionaries. In 2007, we spent about \$6.2 million NGN (\$58,000USD) on 240 missionaries across our nation.

2. *The global Church's interpretation of the Great Commission was stuck.* About ten years after GCOWE '97, Christian leaders have not realized the mistake of regarding mission as almost the absolute interpretation of the Great Commission.

It has been 216 years since William Carey presented his mission burden to his church board and invariably to the world. The passion of Christian leaders to reach the unreached people groups has not waned. In fact, new challenges keep emerging as mission proponents are diversifying the definition of “unreached people groups.”

As the pastor of a local congregation, I strongly believe that mission is the responsibility of the Church. Any church leader who has no vision for mission has no legitimate right to continue in that office. But are we right if we regard mission as the overriding interpretation of the Great Commission?

### **Re-visiting the Great Commission**

People hold different views of what constitutes the Great Commission. A church in my city is named “Great Commission Ministry,” and has Matthew 28:19 as its motto. Many people refer to only this verse when speaking of the Great Commission. But other people, including myself, think the Great Commission needs to be spoken in terms of the whole of Matthew 28:18-20. If we include these verses, we have the promise of God’s power (v. 18) and presence (v. 20). In between these promises is the very divine intention of the Great Commission (v. 19-20). In it, the Lord has commanded three specific action steps: go, baptize, and teach. These combined will result in making disciples of all nations.

When we consider global Church emphases, it is obvious we have been faithful to go and baptize—as indicated by our pursuit of mission, evangelism, church growth, and church planting. In every mission conference I have attended, these have been the focus.

But the fact remains that making converts among the unreached people groups and planting churches in every hamlet on this globe cannot necessarily equate to making disciples of all nations.

### **The Challenge of Declining Spirituality**

The research of Johnstone and Mandryk not only indicated that the twentieth century Church prospered greatly. It also identified nine needs emanating from such a rapid expansion of Christianity. The authors suggested that these needs should be regarded as important prayer points. But upon a closer consideration, each is undeniably symptomatic of spiritual decline. They are the strongest research evidence that the Church is experiencing a problem of spiritual decline.

We know that people are being won to the Church. Figures of the rate of conversion in countries around the world are often quoted. Pioneer and saturation church planting are going on. But what is the spiritual health of the Church? And, why is it taking Christian leaders so much time to appreciate and acknowledge that there is an increasing gulf between the growth of the Church in number and spread, and her spiritual growth?

Two possible answers would be that:

1. *Most leaders of the bodies which drive the pursuit of the Great Commission are not pastors by calling.* Consequently, they tend to be more program-oriented, and less mindful of believers’ spirituality. Their understanding and presentation of the Great Commission constrain everyone else to missiological concepts and theology.
2. *Pastors’ emphases in the last few decades have shifted from concern for believers’ spiritual growth to more humanistic issues.*

Africa's incommensurate growth of spirituality has been described as "one mile wide and one inch deep."

In June 2006, I shared at the World Evangelical Alliance Mission Commission that church leaders, particularly mission proponents, should not shy away from the critical challenge which observations like the "one mile wide and one inch deep" phenomenon poses for the global Church.

For example, the said phenomenon identifies Africa's crucial spiritual challenge for this moment. However, it may point to a possible global problem yet unacknowledged by many Western Christian leaders. I argued in June 2006 that the "one mile wide and one inch deep" phenomenon was a direct outcome of Africa's faithful and committed response to what popular Christian initiatives like the LCWE, AD2000 Movement, and others emphasized and encouraged us and the rest of the world to pursue.

Therefore, we should be asking questions such as,

- Has there been some deficit in the global Church interpretation, emphases, and pursuit of the Great Commission, such that growth in number and spread resulted, while growth in spiritual depth was suppressed?
- Why and how did the growth of Christianity in Africa come to be one mile wide and one inch deep?
- What was responsible for the general decline in biblical spirituality in the twentieth century Church, as identified by Johnstone and Mandryk?

### **Discipleship as the Missing Link**

It is time church leaders realize the third action step is the spiritual-depth imbuing component of the Great Commission. Because the command to "teach" is yet to be interpreted and pursued with any sense of urgency, spiritual decline has set in. There are several reasons teaching has not been a major focus in our Great Commission efforts:

*1. An assumption that teaching is a common church activity which most church leaders can do.* However, much of the teaching in churches may well be "preaching." Also, not all teaching can lead to positive change in believers' lives.

*2. An assumption that the initiative to interpret "teaching them to observe all things" is exclusively the responsibility of theologians and Bible scholars.* But then, has their attention ever been drawn to this as it affects a holistic implementation of the Great Commission? Whenever church and denominational leaders participate in mission conferences, their agenda is usually narrowed down to the improvement of local church participation in the missions drive, and never on establishing and growing the converts.

The time has come when leaders of churches and mission initiatives should appreciate that the three necessary action steps in the Great Commission are critically related. As we obey the command "go" by engaging in mission and evangelism, souls are won. As these converts are baptized and brought into believers' fellowship, the Church grows and spreads. As the Church teaches the converts to observe or abide in all the commandments of Christ, disciples are raised. In this context, teaching should be regarded as "the systematic training of believers in the accurate words of God and teachings of Christ, in order to facilitate their spiritual growth toward becoming his genuine disciples as their lives conform increasingly to his lifestyle." I refer to this as **transformational discipleship**.

Christian leaders should not just be satisfied with converts. We should not only be counting how many churches we have planted and in how many places. We must turn the converts into genuine disciples of Christ. Genuine disciples constitute the most reliable spiritual force and resource for the Church both now and in the future.

### **The Bold Step of MANI**

The Movement for African National Initiatives (MANI) took steps in Nairobi in February 2006 toward

ameliorating this spiritual depth deficit in Africa. It recognized the indispensability of transformational discipleship, and sought to integrate it into a holistic pursuit of the Great Commission.

Global Christian leaders should emulate MANI's bold step. Transformational discipleship should rightly be perceived as the key to the future of qualitative and sustainable Christianity. It should be given priority in any further emphases and implementation of the Great Commission if we are to maintain the drive for mission and church planting beyond this generation. To overlook this obvious challenge is to sustain the increasing decline in biblical spirituality, which most probably will continue to impact negatively even our most sincere efforts to fulfill the Great Commission.

**Dr. U. Obed** is international coordinator of the [Apostolic Discipleship Movement](#) and the continental coordinator for the African Initiative on Transformational Discipleship. He was a senior lecturer in physics education and is currently the senior pastor of the Glory Tabernacle Ministry in Ibadan, Nigeria.

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## **The Spirit and Mission: Two Ripples of Pentecostal Mission**

**By Wonsuk Ma**

**In its short history (slightly more than one hundred years) Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity has not only grown, but has made a significant contribution to Christian mission.** At the time of the 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference, which presented a master roadmap to world evangelization “in our [their] generation,” the movement was only four years old (if we count from the 1906 Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles, California, USA).

It is not surprising that no mention was made in Edinburgh to this deeply controversial group. Nor is it surprising that there was no delegate at the conference to represent this new form of Christianity. A century later, Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity claims about half a billion adherents worldwide. And it does not show any signs of slowing. The movement is here to stay—or more accurately, “to travel”—for quite some time.

Our task in this study is to highlight the two spheres and stages of Pentecostal mission development. As each is related to others, an analogy of two ripples, or two concentric circles, is used. In my [companion article](#) we will explore a third area on deeper and wider mission engagement.

Here, “Pentecostal” (or “Pentecostalism”) is used in a generic way to encompass the growing branch of modern Christianity that stresses the work of the Holy Spirit in their belief and experience. Such conviction includes supernatural manifestations, such as healings and miracles, of God's presence and power. Pentecostals are often identified by their dynamic and participatory worship and mission commitment. This form of Christianity is often subdivided into three groups:

- Classical (often denominational) Pentecostals,
- Charismatics or Neo-Pentecostals (often found in established churches or independent congregations), and
- Neo-Charismatics, which include many forms of indigenous churches, post-denominational churches, and many other expressions of Charismatic Christianity.

Pentecostal mission has demonstrated its genius in two specific areas of mission engagement and they roughly correspond with the development of the Pentecostal movement itself.

### **The First Ripple: The Other Side of Heaven**

The first stage of the Pentecostal movement is found in its global expansion, especially in the first half of the twentieth century. Armed with and compelled by eschatological urgency and a Spirit-filled sense of missionary calling, the expansion of Pentecostal Christianity through missionary activities is unprecedented.

Several Pentecostal mission scholars have provided useful characterizations of their mission force. Allan Anderson,<sup>1</sup> for example, lists six characteristics:

- pneumatocentric mission, highlighting the role of the Holy Spirit in mission,
- dynamic mission praxis with zeal and commitment,
- evangelism as the central mission thrust,
- contextualization of leadership or development of local leadership as early as possible,
- mobilization in mission where everyone is called and empowered for witness, and
- contextual missiology with creativity in packaging the gospel to be relevant to the local cultural and social setting.

In a 2007 article,<sup>2</sup> I portrayed the Pentecostal mission forces as “the poor now fired up.” Their marginality in various settings has made them fittingly “poor” in every sense. They are even marginalized by other churches. They are characterized by:

- their deep zeal and commitment (exemplified by “one-way ticket missionaries” of the early days of the movement),
- everyone’s involvement in mission by its democratized theology of mission and ministry (or their belief in the “prophethood of all believers”),
- mission with healing and miracles,
- a priority of inner change and evangelism with other ministries such as “care,” ultimately contributing to evangelism,
- empowerment missiology with implication not only to the church, missionaries, and the new recipient lands, and
- their unique ecumenical potential as demonstrated in the Azusa Street Mission with its ecumenical and interracial congregation and leadership.

Pentecostals have been more practitioners than reflectors; thus, there is far more “fruit” of their mission engagement than literature about their history. Many reports have acclaimed the exponential growth of this movement. Equally impressive is the movement’s unusual ability to engage with the context (social and cultural) to create forms of Christianity that are dynamic and engaging. This sheer size and dynamism has turned its churches, particularly those in the global South, into a powerful mission force “from South to South” as well as “reversed mission to the West.”

Theologically, classical Pentecostals provided leadership and a theological basis for this mission thrust. Highly motivated by the unique empowerment theology for witness—and further fueled by eschatological urgency of the return of the Lord—evangelism was the most logical consequence. The continuing mission energy and commitment in spite of the unfulfilled eschatological “prophecies” proves that the main motivation for Pentecostal mission lies in its unique pneumatological missiology rather than the eschatological drive.

### **The Second Ripple: This Side of the Heaven**

From the 1960s, the movement expanded its influence and experienced a significant transformation in its mission engagement. The rise of the Charismatic or Neo-Pentecostal movement brought Pentecostalism to the Christianity mainstream as the spiritual dynamic spread through the established denominations, including the

Roman Catholic Church. It also spread among the social mainstream as the middle class embraced the “religion of the poor.”

This period also witnessed the quick disappearance of eschatological expectations among Pentecostal minds and pulpits. At the same time, Pentecostalism began to grow into significance in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. The spread of the controversial “prosperity gospel” also contributed to the development of the “southern” Pentecostal spread. That is when some social scientists began to notice Pentecostal’s unique contribution to the social and economic upward mobility of its members. This interest has been increasing and the recent publication of Donald Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori’s four-year research project<sup>3</sup> is a good example of this.

In mission settings, care for those in need is a strong part of Pentecostal mission practice. Specific approaches include orphanages, feeding programs, vocational schools, medical clinics, and educational programs. Even social contexts hostile toward open evangelism have led Pentecostals in some countries to develop drug rehabilitation centres, children’s homes, and elderly homes.

Recently, a new breed of Pentecostal churches, particularly in the global South, has taken social service as seriously; Miller and Yamamori call them “progressive Pentecostals.” It is worth noting that such churches are increasing in the southern continents as their social contexts demand churches to provide a more proactive response to social issues. The uniqueness of the “progressive Pentecostals” is characterized by a down-to-top and “one-person-at-a-time” approach.

This second stage of Pentecostal mission has resulted in social and economic upward mobility. Many studies have focused on the correlation between one’s spiritual experience and behavior change, which inevitably creates a ripple effect from personal life to family and community life. Although there is a risk of privatization of religious experience and a self-centred or material-centred “prosperity gospel,” studies have proven the critical role of an inner or spiritual change to one’s social life and economic activities.

Pentecostals, including “progressives,” are expected to continue to push their mission envelope to include social issues of the life “this side of the heaven,” or “life before death.” Pentecostal scholars have a daunting task to provide a solid theology that is distinctly Pentecostal in various social contexts around the world.

## Endnotes

1. Anderson, Allan. 2005. “Towards a Pentecostal Missiology for the Majority World,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 8:1, 28-47.

2. Ma, Wonsuk. 2007. “When the Poor Are Fired Up: The Role of Pneumatology in Pentecostal-Charismatic Mission,” *Transformation* 24:1, 28-34.

3. Miller, Donald E. and Tetsunao Yamamori. 2007. *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement*. Berkeley, California, USA: University of California Press.

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## **The Third Ripple: Deeper and Wider Mission Engagement**

**By Wonsuk Ma**

**This article will deal with a third area of Pentecostal mission, a deeper and more strategic level of social engagement and beyond (click [here](#) for the first two ripples).** This level of mission engagement often aims at “justice” in social, economic, political, racial, and environmental areas. “Reconciliation” is another term used for this sphere of mission engagement, which includes ecumenism, peace initiatives, and environmental

stewardship. Although the third level takes place on the same social level as the “care” and “service” of the second level, this will require a quantum leap in Pentecostal mission thinking and practice.

This section presents both a concrete setting as a launch point and challenging questions for Pentecostal mission engagement. This issue deserves deep reflection by insiders (Pentecostals) and outsiders (friends of Pentecostals).

## **Two Kenyan Stories**

My first visit to Nairobi exposed me to three types of Pentecostal congregations.

**The first congregation** was on the outskirts of Nairobi. It was full of urban poor and rural immigrants. Its construction-in-progress sanctuary seemed to suggest its growth, spontaneity, and creative responses to emerging circumstances, as seen in creative, impromptu moves of their dynamic worship. The primary interest of the worshippers seemed to be focused on daily survival and God’s enablement to live today and tomorrow. My admonition in mission did not excite them very much.

**The second congregation** was at the heart of the city. It was full of youth and young adults who appeared to be mostly professionals. This energetic congregation was in stark contrast with the first one I ministered to just an hour earlier. Undoubtedly middle-class, the worship was presented professionally (evidently coming from the first-class musicians, singers, and dancers and the first-class audio and lighting facilities). My unplanned message was on the Azusa Street story and its missionary call. The pastor’s humble request for me to pray his church would obey the great missionary calling in turn humbled me.

My friends and I apologetically excused ourselves as a samba dance presentation brought the whole congregation into another height of excitement in worship.

**The third congregation** was a more “settled” Pentecostal church in an exclusive, middle-class, residential area known for its active mission engagements, including gospel outreach and social service. I did not participate in their worship, as by the time we passed by the area, people began to jam the parking lot and nearby streets.

A casual look at its demography contrasted with the highly-charged youth congregation on the other side of the city. The presence of many children suggested a wider age distribution. Also, the presence of vehicles in the overflowing parking lot and the nearby streets, and the way people dressed, strongly revealed a better social and economic level of the congregation. This church also had the best building among the three.

Although the churches may be different, and the people may worship in different ways, there is no question Kenya has experienced a surge of Charismatic Christianity, both in urban and rural communities. This is not limited to Pentecostal denominations, African initiated churches, and independent Charismatic groups. New expressions of spirituality and worship (which some argue to be rooted in African religiosity) are increasingly found in the historic churches as well. Pentecostal Christianity has been shifting African religious demography. I returned home genuinely impressed.

An entirely different scene was presented less than a month later in the aftermath of the December 2007 Kenyan general election. I do not need to go into the painful details of political, social, and now racial, conflict. The situation can be analyzed in many ways, but it also poses some challenging questions to Christians.

*First, how could this robust economy and peaceful society be shattered overnight by a political tilt? If the majority of Kenyans are Christians—and a good number of them evangelical and Spirit-filled—one cannot deny that church-goers must have participated in the destruction of their neighbours’ lives, including fellow Christians. Second, if this is the case, then how do one’s social values quickly override his or her spiritual commitment? My own focus has been on how the growing “spiritual capital” of the country has played so little a role in the face of this social unrest. I am not trying to suggest that growing Christianity was expected to prevent such social conflict. Social dynamic is extremely complex. However, it is natural to expect that the growing spiritual “capital” should have promoted more kingdom signs in the society.*

## **Encouraging Pentecostals Toward Engagement with Social Issues**

What are some guiding thoughts to encourage already “progressive” Pentecostals to engage deeper and broader with social issues and beyond? Three points:

1. *The success and sustenance of much of the micro-mission engagement (or the second ripple) depends on the stability of the macro-level structure, although the spiritual dimension (evangelized souls) may continue to remain unchanged.* For example, many cases of social and economic upward mobility are extremely vulnerable to social stability. Here lies the essential nature of this level of mission engagement, and Pentecostals have to move beyond the first two levels of mission activities.
2. *The unique “Pentecostal” approach to this mission engagement begins with the assessment of Pentecostal mission resources.* Several studies, as briefly mentioned above, inform us of Pentecostalism’s unique resources. However, two stand out: (a) the dynamism coming from the unique Pentecostal spirituality and experience with the “divine” and (2) its sheer number of adherents, which can easily turn into a political resource. The empowerment missiology of Pentecostalism also has extraordinary potential to mobilize massive numbers of front-mission practitioners among its laity.
3. *The importance of the “down to up” or “from individual to community” movement.* This “people’s movement” comes with strong motivation and relevance; it includes a real-life setting in their mission engagement. Equally noted is the “from inside out” movement: the inner or spiritual change becomes the fundamental basis of changes in physical, behavioral, family, and community.

In fact, the Pentecostal approach toward deeper mission engagement should employ these unique Pentecostal mission resources. This will make its mission contribution distinctly Pentecostal.

## **Moving Toward a Deeper Level of Mission this Side of Heaven**

So how can Pentecostals continue to strengthen the dynamic growth in church, mission, and influence, while renewing this powerful movement with the more intentional goal of mission? How can the powerful mission force, which has prepared people for heaven so well, be made equally powerful in the deeper level of mission? Or to put the question differently, why are the Pentecostals so miserably ill-prepared for life this side of heaven, especially in the face of macro-scale challenges (be it social unrest, ethnic conflicts, corruption, oppressive political system, economic injustice, church divisions, or environmental degradation)?

Why is the characteristic dynamism of Pentecostals confined or trapped in the spiritual sphere? Three points:

1. *Pentecostals, like their evangelical cousins, need to seriously revisit their understanding of mission.* Pentecostals never lack in missionary activities. In fact, they are “sold out to mission” as the exponential growth attests. Since this is true, the disconnection may be blamed on the kind of theological orientation of mission that prevails among believers as well as leadership. A narrowly-defined concept of mission is now hurting the overgrown Church. The “rescue souls” mode is not going to serve the highly complex life of today. Mission engagement now stretches from soul-saving to earth-saving for the next generation.
2. *Pentecostal missiology is characterized by its emphasis on “power” or “empowerment.”* There have been two issues related to power. The first is the early Pentecostals’ narrow understanding of power. Based on Acts 1:8, the “power” was generally understood as a spiritual one (i.e., power to overcome evil, heal, or prophecy). This narrow view has been gradually corrected and expanded, not through an intentional theological revision, but more intuitively and circumstantially, to include non-spiritual components such as economic advancement. Another example is found where some Pentecostals begin to turn the swelling size of their Pentecostal constituencies into political capital. Some leaders now run for public office. If a sound theological guidance is not provided, this will follow the path of the prosperity gospel. The second issue is the weakest part of “power”—corruptibility. As the old saying goes, “Power tends to corrupt.” Unfortunately, Pentecostals do not lack examples to prove this, as we have seen enough charismatic “stars” fall. Thus, every power requires serious regulation and guidance.

This is why the Pentecostal theological task is more pressing than other less-powerful groups. The seduction of power is so great that Pentecostals must develop an equally rigorous theology of power, so that power will be wielded for God's mission, not for a person's wishes.

3. *A change in outlook concerning leadership is needed.* The height of wonderful charismatic leadership also comes with a long shadow. Often, organizational power is in the hand of the leader of a congregation. Therefore, leadership plays a decisive role not only in causing good growth and mission expansion, but also in threatening its very existence, not to mention its mission. One large African indigenous church has been going through a leadership crisis, and its vibrant church life and mission has been critically affected by this. Leadership is a complex phenomenon and a good theological treaty will not be sufficient to resolve the issue. Culture, social dynamism, and changes in social life are to be studied carefully.

## **Conclusion**

This study has only touched the surface of many urgent and important issues. I invite Pentecostal mission thinkers and practitioners from every part of the world to join in this important discussion.

In speaking about the ripples, it is important to further explore that the ripple does not come from a one-time drop of a stone into a lake. Rather, the ripples are created by an underwater spring which constantly provides energy to create the ripples. This analogy teaches two important lessons:

*First, the unique Pentecostal spirituality is the springhead of the mission dynamism and ethos.* Pentecostals need to acquire an historical and ecumenical sense that its theological and spiritual tradition is a unique gift of God to the global Church and to the world.

*Second, Pentecostals should be careful not to "graduate" from its "primal" form of spirituality as they begin to attain social and ecclesial respectability.* We have some painful historical lessons of spiritual renewal movements which later turned into sophisticated ecclesial forms by acquiring all the academic and social amenities. They lost what once made them unique.

The ripple analogy further suggests the interrelatedness of the ripples. One ripple (e.g., the evangelism thrust with spiritual fervor) resources the next one (individual behaviors and values and family life), while the latter informs the former by providing resources for theological reflection and revision. With the rise of the southern Pentecostal communions, creativity of Pentecostal mission will expand while equally formidable challenges are discovered. After all, the journey of Pentecostal mission is not much different from what its evangelical cousins are struggling with in mission engagement. This makes mission a kingdom business.

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## **A Mission Voice from Latin America: Partnering for World Mission** **By Valdir Steuernagel**

**This is an historical time in the Evangelical Church in Latin America.** Never before have so many churches awakened to the universal nature of the missionary task, with such willingness to make their contribution.

Let us rejoice because of this new trend, but let us rejoice with caution. Never before have there been so many people willing to be sent out, so many missionary training schools available, and so many resources raised to sustain those sent. Still, we must proceed with caution and invest in a missions posture capable of balancing: quality, urgent sending with effective training; a sound financial base with the resources actually necessary; and a biblical and contextual understanding of the meaning of the task and of frontiers in mission.

Indeed, we have already learned from former and current missiological reflection that the concepts of *nearby* and *far away*, in biblical terms, are more of a salvation nature than of a geographic nature. In other words, the universality of the mission is verified in the keen perception of the need for saving our household and the next door neighbor, as well as those whose language and culture are radically different than our own. We must seek a balance between missionary action “there and here.”

Clearly, the missionary awakening of the Church in Latin America comes at a time of significant church growth. The church that grows is very often the same church that is awakening to its missionary responsibility and sending workers to the mission field. But they should never forget that their own families and children are also missionary fields. That is, the task of evangelism has to be faced anew by every generation. Indeed, we face the challenges of continuity and consistency in many of our churches.

So we ask our brothers and sisters who have preceded us in the missionary awakening to help us sort out this dimension of evangelism. From the vantage point of the Third World, we face with great dismay the process of secularization, and to a certain extent, the faith and church crises in countries that once experienced deep revivals and were actively engaged in cross-cultural missions. Is it possible to avert or diminish this kind of “historic determinism” that seems always to go from “hot” to “lukewarm” and/or “cold”?

Further, it is important to point out that reflection on frontiers has merited two distinct observations. One has to do with today’s concept of communication and distance. The world has become smaller and what is done and/or produced in one place can be transmitted or makes its way to other places. Opportunities for evangelism (and missionary responsibility!) are multiplied.

The other observation has to do with the fact that mission frontiers are not only geographical, but social and economic as well. The gospel we preach and the church we try to establish should change toward justice and toward a collective lifestyle which embraces human dignity and environmental stewardship.

### **Healthy Participation with Mutual Enrichment**

Today, as never before, we can put into practice the slogan that mission is a task *of* six continents *for* six continents. But this practice is not yet obvious. Our mission history in Latin America is one of dependence and we need to recognize that getting rid of such dependency might be easier than repeating the model.

Dependency does harm. To some, it gives a dangerous sense of control; however, to many more it generates a false sense of immobilizing invalidity. The challenge before us is to build a reciprocal partnership; this will be best seen when Latino missionaries work not only with Latino immigrants in Europe and North America, but with mainstream mission efforts and churches as well. The practice of partnership could help us to become a Church that will make a difference indeed.

### **Some Things Need to Be Learned**

The missionary movement that has emerged in Latin America calls for a growing humility that is willing to learn from history. Youthful euphoria will only hinder this learning process. Such an attitude will cause us to think that our fathers and mothers “missed the point”—that we know better and are eager to send, go, and do better.

Yesterday’s experiences must be studied more, and the learning of our predecessors must be assimilated by today’s generation. There is no need (and we cannot afford) to repeat the same errors in each generation. Of the many areas in which we have accumulated experience that can enrich and challenge today’s Latin American missionary practice, I point to just four.

*1. The cultural issue.* We cannot think that just because we belong to a kind of Third World culture, our identification with other cultures in the missionary field will be automatic. The Brazilian culture, for example, is just as imperialistic toward other cultures as the United States is toward the Brazilian culture. Moreover, culture is so much a part of the people that we automatically tend to consider other peoples’ cultures as distant. There

are many lessons learned and much accumulated reflection having to do with the relationship between gospel and culture which the young missionary movement of Latin America needs to review.

*2. Missionary training.* There is a latent risk of considering intense, longer training processes as the concern of mission theorists. After all, isn't it more important to roll up our sleeves and go to work? Maybe not. We are not advocating training programs that simply copy the respective models designed abroad. What we are advocating is that in order to participate in such a serious, intense, emotionally-involved missionary mandate, a formation process is fundamental. The price paid for haste is too high to justify running the risk of not designing and implementing adequate training programs.

*3. Perseverance on the field.* Perseverance and persistence cannot be learned in a day; however, they are indispensable in missionary work. There are strong traits in many of our cultures which point to a personal and collective behavior toward rapid response, emotionally-determined decisions and support, and easy promise of engagement. One of the key issues is how one can learn to function in and internalize other patterns, such as persistence and the ability to cope with solitude and failure. These have proven to be fundamental in medium and long-term missionary work.

*4. Faithfulness in support.* As mentioned above, in missionary terms, our history is one of dependence, and hence, reception. The fact that mission also implies giving is a concept which most of our churches are still learning. They must go through a complete learning process that will lead them to understand that missions is serious business, involving financial faithfulness to those we send out in Jesus' name. Learning to give in a systematic and disciplined manner over a long period of time is a challenge we cannot escape if we want to face up to God's missionary moment.

### **There Are Things We Must Overcome**

We come back to partnership, stressing that overcoming dependence does not naturally and clearly lead to mature autonomy. The phase subsequent to dependence often appears to be a copy of some other model. That is, the Latin American missionary experience tends to copy the emphases and models of the missionary enterprise they have seen and have been familiar with as recipients.

After all, it is precisely those experiences which have been successful that seem the best and most appropriate to emulate. Here, however, I would point out three areas where a copy should not be the approach.

*1. Seeking unity and overcoming division.* The Latin American experience with North American missions was sharply marked first by the conflict between fundamentalism and modernism, which characterized Christianity in the US during most of the twentieth century, and later by a Cold War mentality. The theological and ideological conflict of the North caused much unnecessary division in the South, since our churches have very little to do with the European and North American theological conflicts.

Further, exported to our southern hemisphere was an ecclesiastical practice largely determined by a free-market mentality—also a typical North American experience. The seed of this ecclesiastical practice fell on a soil which cultivates a culture that has deep marks of emotional, charismatic, and authoritarian flavor. Merging these two worlds produced an extremely lacerated ecclesiastical picture. The ethical and communal principle of partnership and of community was usually overrun, and the geography of church founding, in many instances, corresponded to the history of personality conflicts and the establishment of personal or family feuds duly placed under the guise of revelation.

This lacerated ecclesiastical experience in Latin America is usually exported as the most natural way to operate. Hence, we must move from divisionism to an ecclesiastical experience that will respect the church that is already in place, seek to work in concert, and sometimes become integrated, with a posture of submission, into works already underway. And we must not forget that, biblically speaking, the testimony constituted by unity is itself a positive factor of evangelism.

2. *The expensive missionary model of the North does not serve us*, and the philosophy of pragmatism has deep, worldly roots. The introduction of belief and practice of the free market in the ecclesiastical realm brought with it still another issue—the establishment of a strategy aimed at growth and success. This strategy was established on the basis of pragmatism: you choose an area and/or challenge, you establish a goal and an achievement timetable, and you seek to fulfill both.

The problem is that not only does our culture not operate that way, but this philosophy runs counter to the biblical pattern and mandate which says that the person is more important than the goal. In the biblical pattern strategy is constantly interrupted and held in check by the blind man who cries out alongside the road to Jericho. Moreover, these strategies, their design, implementation, follow-up, and evaluation are very costly. The North American missionary enterprise has become very expensive, and for the paradigms and possibilities of the Third World, impossible. Following this reasoning, if we simply copy the typical model of the missionary agency developed in the US, we will fall into a bottomless pit. This approach will not work since that model presupposes and requires heavy financial resources, both to be sent to the field and to pay for the administration of the missionary machinery.

Latin America must develop other models of missionary obedience that consistently reflect its reality of the poor and, hence, hopefully emulate the missionary model of the hiker from Galilee with the authority of a servant.

3. *Caution with respect to bureaucracy and sophistication.* We know from recent missions history that time after time the “mission” has been vested with the most advanced Western technology in the whole area, and often, in the whole country. This has caused problems concerning image and resources. Missions arising from the South do not have this technology and traditionally do not depend on it nearly as much. This fact can be of enormous help in many of the areas where the people and their respective communities live in extreme poverty. It could also help us to put into practice incarnation as one of the basic pillars of evangelical missions.

The Evangelical Church in Latin America, and the Third World in general, is experiencing a unique missionary awakening in Protestant history. The poor are engaged in missionary activity and are investing their potential, talents, and resources in fulfilling the universal missionary call of the Church.

With the growing involvement of Third World missionaries of different races and cultures, the geography and color of missions has been changing for quite some time. This trend causes us to rejoice. And yet together we must continue cautiously into the future as we explore the growing needs for effective training, sound financial support, and a biblical and contextual understanding of mission.

**Dr. Valdir Steuernagel** is international vice-president of Christian Commitments for **World Vision**. He is an internationally-recognized theologian and serves as a global minister-at-large and author. He is Brazilian.

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## PERSPECTIVES

**“The Paradigm Is Changing”: Bible Translation and the Church of the Southern Continents**  
By Kirk Franklin

### Wycliffe International Overview

Over the past thirty years **Wycliffe International** has encouraged and assisted with the development of more than twenty national organizations in Africa, Asia, the Pacific, and Central and South America. All of these organizations, as member organizations

**“God, by the Holy Ghost, is saying ‘the paradigm is changing.’ Africans must not just stay on the receiving end. They must give and go.”** Pastor Daniel Mbiwan of Cameroon represents the new face of the missional Church today. It’s a global, inclusive, dynamic Church of believers from around the world who are recognizing that God’s mission of reaching the whole world is a mission for the whole Church.

A part of that mission is making sure all people have access to scripture in a language that speaks to their hearts. Pastor Mbiwan shared,

"As a pastor, I've gone to different parishes in the country. I think one of the best moments before I preach is to stand up and greet the people in their language. They feel a bonding; they are open to what I have to say. If I could go to such a community and I could speak the language, it would be very impacting. I would counsel Bible students. They should know this is another strategy: The Lord wants to put scripture in the hearts of people—the language—the language from the heart. And it's vital that every Bible student, every Bible teacher, should realize God is putting at our disposal another instrument to reach out. Transformation will come through the gospel, and people must hear the gospel in the way that it will affect their culture and their thinking—and that is in the mother tongue."

Hearing words like these from friends around the world, **Wycliffe Bible Translators International** (WBTI) has a passion for seeing more of the Church in more of the world involved in Bible translation. WBTI’s immediate desire is to become a greater catalyst for Bible translation among the Church of the southern continents. We want to see movements within the Church taking ownership and involved in completing the urgent work of Bible translation in their nations.

Many people, if they know of **Wycliffe Bible Translators**, know the Wycliffe organization in their own country. Or, if they know something of Wycliffe’s founder, Cameron Townsend, and the early history of the organization, they may think of Wycliffe as an American-sending organization. But Wycliffe International is actually an association of forty-eight national organizations in Africa, Asia, the Pacific, the Americas, and Europe. Some of these Wycliffe organizations not only recruit and equip people for Bible translation work around the world, but also have Bible translation programs in their own countries. With more than 2,200 languages still without any scripture, the challenge is significant.

### **Pursuing Vision 2025 Together**

Each of these organizations, along with other partner organizations, has embraced Vision 2025: *“Together, in partnership, to see Bible translation in progress by the year 2025 in every language that still needs it.”* Jose de Dios, Wycliffe Americas area director, has said, “The greatest missiological emphasis is not on ‘by the year 2025,’ but on ‘together.’ God has charged the Church—local, denominational, and universal—with the responsibility to translate, teach, and reach all people with the Bible. The church that is envisioned will participate, no matter how small or poor. They will give sacrificially and out of generosity.”

within Wycliffe International, participate in setting the overall direction of the global operations. They are autonomous self-directing organizations that seek to lead Bible translation activities in their own nations as well as work with national churches in promoting and developing the Bible translation ministry. Each has taken on a local identity and assumes some degree of responsibility for sharing the vision for Bible translation within their borders. WBTI and its member organizations also work with a wide range of other like-minded partners.

### Wycliffe Organizations in the Southern Continents

- Burkina Faso—ANTBA
- Cameroon—CABTAL
- Central African Republic—ACATBA
- Chad—ATALTRAB
- Ghana—GILLBT
- Kenya—BTL
- Nigeria—NBTT
- Brazil—ALEM
- Papua New Guinea—BTA
- Indonesia—Kartidaya
- Philippines—TAP
- South Korea—GBT
- Wycliffe South Africa
- Wycliffe Caribbean
- Wycliffe Hong Kong
- Wycliffe Japan
- Wycliffe Malaysia
- Wycliffe Singapore
- Wycliffe Benin
- Wycliffe Togo
- Wycliffe Taiwan
- Wycliffe Thailand

Pastor Mbiwan has also noted that “God is not just looking for money. He is looking for human beings. When the person is there and can put at God’s disposal what he has learned, then God can bring about transformation.”

As Wycliffe International adapts to the current world and Church contexts and the challenges and opportunities they provide, we look for creative ways to encourage dialogue and address needs. Creating and participating in meetings of key leadership is one way we are connecting with people who in turn can work together on how to meet the Bible translation needs. In 2007 we participated in three consultations related to Bible translation movements. The first was in June, in Yaounde, Cameroon.

**1. Consultation #1: Gaining awareness of Bible translation in Africa.** At the consultation, Africans from within the Wycliffe family, along with several African pastors, met to discuss the needs on the African continent. While realizing that the expatriate workforce for Bible translation is decreasing in Africa, they also recognized the future workforce that could come from the student community in Africa. Increased communication and relationships with student ministries across the continent could help build student awareness of the opportunities for serving in Bible translation.

It was at these meetings that Pastor Mbiwan issued this challenge: “God has first caused us to understand his word. God has, second, caused us to be partakers of his mission. We enjoy the Bible today because people invested and gave their lives, money, and abilities for us. Where do I stand? Isaiah 6:8 says, ‘Whom shall I send?’ Let’s all respond, ‘Here am I, use me. Help me give the best I can, help me understand. Here I am, send me.’”

At the Yaounde consultation we realized that in the African context, as in many other parts of the world, the national churches are generally not aware of Bible translation and related activities. This is a key opportunity for engagement among African Wycliffe organizations and the local and national churches. Our desire is to see the Church in Africa include Bible translation as core to its ministry of evangelism, church planting, and discipleship and compassionate service.

But what would this holistic approach to mission look like if Bible translation was a fully integrated part of ministry? It could mean: a greater focus on prayer for Bible-less people groups within the region and for translation work; equipping and sending personnel for Bible translation; and committing financial resources. It would result in greater awareness and appreciation of the value of language and culture in African churches, with an increased focus on worship in the local language.

Mundara Muturi, director of Bible Translation and Literacy (BTL), the Kenyan Wycliffe organization, stated, “We need to live up to the important contribution that we are making in the Bible translation movement. All Wycliffe organizations ought to take up their rightful place in engaging with the Church in their respective countries and the Church worldwide. ‘Much is required to whom much is given, and much more is required from those to whom much more is given’” (Luke 12:48).

**2. Consultation #2: Stimulating the use of mother tongue scriptures.** The recognition of responsibility and privilege for participating in God's mission was also evident at a second consultation held in Abomey-Calavi, Benin, in August 2007. This consultation focused specifically on the Francophone countries of Africa. Francophone Africa is part of the second largest area of Bible translation need in the world. The theme of the consultation was “The Church and the Use of Local Languages.” Participants were leaders of Bible translation organisations, church leaders, and theology teachers from twelve countries (Benin, Gabon, Congo-Brazzaville, Central African Republic, Chad, Togo, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Mali, Cameroon, Rwanda, and Ivory Coast).

Dr. Michel Kenmogne, director of CABTAL, the Cameroonian Wycliffe organization, acknowledged both the great need and the great potential. “The Francophone Initiative is a strategy of WBTI Africa area to accomplish Vision 2025 by furthering the advent of a Bible translation movement in Francophone Africa.” Leaders at the consultation emphasized that Francophone African churches have had only a limited involvement in Bible translation as a part of the Great Commission.

An outcome of the consultation is that Wycliffe International is facilitating a standard curriculum on the role and importance of Bible translation in the life of the Church. This curriculum will be used in theological institutions and Bible schools. The goal is to stimulate a response and interaction with Francophone African theologians in view of these challenges. The hope is that churches will expand their thinking to put greater value on mother tongue scripture and scripture use.

Throughout history, Bible translation has enabled the Church to fulfill its mission of discipling Christians. The process of Bible translation brings the thought patterns of the local languages face-to-face with biblical truth. Thus, Bible translation opens the door for theological reflection which expresses pre-Christian and Christian religious experience in the thought patterns of minority languages. This allows people to understand biblical truth and to proclaim clearly the invitation to all people to make a choice concerning Jesus Christ. Participants at the Benin consultation agreed that the Francophone Church will not be able to accomplish its mission without taking on the responsibility of translating the message in the languages of its people.

**3. Consultation #3: Developing partnership for Bible translation in the Americas.** In November 2007 a third consultation was held in Panama City, Panama. Here the focus was on developing a partnership for Bible translation and use of the translated scriptures across Latin America. Nearly 130 people with an interest on the impact of scripture came from fifty-eight ministries and twenty countries across the Americas.

The purpose of the consultation was to build a regional partnership in the Americas for sustainable universal access to and utilization of scripture in this and every generation. There now exists a Latin American Alliance for Bible translation called A Toda Lengua under the umbrella of COMIBAM and in partnership with Wycliffe International. De Dios said that what impacted him most about the conference was that “partnerships are about relationships with a purpose. We don't just use people so we can meet our goals, but seek these relationships in order to enable each other to meet our common goals.”

Conference organizers hoped to see the meetings result in: (1) strong community and teamwork among leaders in the Americas; (2) shared understanding of the global and regional issues where partners work; (3) cooperative strategies for translation, revision, publication, and distribution that promote scripture impact, using various media in the Americas and around the world; (4) collaborative systems to envision, train, and mobilize workers from the Americas for the Worldwide Scripture Impact movement; and (5) cooperation among partners in providing prayer, personnel, and funding for the Scripture Impact movement.

I was encouraged to hear the participants' vision and reports of what they are doing to involve the Latin American Church in Bible ministry. I was impressed with what I heard is happening, particularly among the Indians of the Amazon and the Quechua in Peru—of Latin Americans, including indigenous peoples, ministering among their own people groups.

We see the growth of the Bible translation movement across Africa, the Americas, and in Asia. The consultations this past year are just a few examples of how God is at work. WBTI is privileged to be serving as part of the worldwide Church. De Dios' statement about Latin America could be spoken from any continent: “We (Wycliffe) are not the movement, we are not the bankers, nor are we the spokespeople for the Bible translation movement anymore. It is the Church awakening the Church. It is Latin (and African and Asian) owned. It belongs to the Lord.”

**Kirk Franklin** is executive director/CEO for [Wycliffe International](#). He grew up in the mountains of Papua New Guinea, the son of American Wycliffe linguist-Bible translators. He became involved with Wycliffe in 1980 and has served in media-communications and leadership roles in Papua New Guinea and Australia. Franklin is based in Melbourne, Australia.

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**The Challenge of Missions in the Twenty-first Century**  
**By Stephen M. Davis**

**How can we communicate the unchanging gospel of Jesus Christ in the midst of a changing world?** This is one of the great missiological questions of our day. Gone are the days when the isolated West sent missionaries to unknown lands and people. Apart from isolated ethnic peoples in yet unreached regions, the world has taken on more of a global character.

Contact between ethnic groups, whether resulting from immigration, warfare and displacement, or tourism, is unprecedented. Times have changed. We have more opportunities and more resources; we are the benefactors of more past experience and research than any previous generation. The changing face of world missions presents unique challenges. One of these is preparing missionaries for effective cross-cultural witness and church planting. There are a number of areas in which our thinking must change in order to meet the challenges inherent in cross-cultural ministry. We must move:

### **1. From Western Cultural Superiority to Biblical Cultural Relativism**

We are cultural beings. It is difficult and undesirable, if not impossible, to separate our form of Christianity from our culture. Yet Christianity is a universal religion not bound by one cultural expression of it. It is unavoidable that Western churches have a certain flavor that reflects elements of culture.

However, one should not expect that this flavor be reproduced in churches planted among other peoples. Their cultures, in need of transformation, are adequate, socio-cultural environments in which the gospel can take root. No cultural way of life or its Christian expression should be absolutized. It is in this sense that we might hold to cultural relativism, spoken of by Charles Kraft,<sup>1</sup> without agreeing with all of Kraft's applications. We recognize the baggage implied with such terminology due to the popular and non-technical usage of this concept which equates cultural relativism with ethical relativism. Yet we should be more concerned with the practical implications of the concept rather than the fear of misunderstanding.

On one hand, we must not impose our culture on those we seek to reach for Christ. This will result in disloyal cultural conversions that prevent the new church from taking root in its culture.

Allegiance to Christ should not necessarily entail disloyalty to all elements of cultural and religious structural form.<sup>2</sup> Obviously, those elements which are clearly contradictory to scripture must be abandoned. But a paternalistic church which refuses to allow for cultural variables may attract those who are disenchanted with their own culture and way of life and are ready to embrace Western Christianity in order to receive not only salvation but also the "cargo" of Christianity. Without cross-cultural training, missionaries may unconsciously confound their cultural expression of Christianity with biblical absolutes or supracultural truth.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, cultural relativism should not be confused with absolute relativism which postulates that no absolute standards exist outside of culture. Neither, as mentioned above, should it be confounded with ethical relativism that insists that practices which exist in other cultures be allowed in all cultures. "Biblical relativism is an obligatory feature of our incarnational religion, for without it we would either absolutize human institutions or relativize God."<sup>4</sup>

### **2. From Planting Institutions to Planting Indigenous, Contextualized Churches**

Institutions, due in part to their emphasis on meeting societal needs, often draw from those marginalized by society.

Short-term needs are met; however, dependency easily sets in. Nationals are then employed by outsiders with outside funds. This can lead to "rice Christians" (people who have formally become Christians out of the need for survival). Not only are the models for these institutions (schools, orphanages, clinics, camps, etc.) often inadequate for meeting long-term needs, but they also distract from the essential task of planting reproductive fellowships of believers (i.e., churches). History teaches us that Western institutions related to missionary endeavors have often disrupted the culture to the point where undesired and unforeseen consequences have resulted.

Those institutions which follow initial church planting activity may be termed “second wave” ministry. They are good works but not essential to the missionary task nor mandated by the Word of God. We would do well to reflect on principles proposed by John Nevius in *Planting and Developing of Missionary Churches*:

New converts should continue in their occupations and provide witness where they live. Church programs and methods should only be developed which could be supported financially by the nationals. Gifted nationals should be developed for evangelistic work. Nationals should provide for their own church buildings without being dependent on outside resources.<sup>5</sup>

This would not preclude strategic partnership or sharing abundant resources with those less well endowed. But these institutions should not simply be the vision of the missionary who proposes, funds, and controls these ministries. If these ministries are not part of the vision of national churches, and under the auspices of local churches, then they effectively become parachurch ministries. Although these ministries are good and helpful extensions of a church-planting ministry, they can easily become “the tail that wags the dog.” And if not part of the vision and supported by the resources of the national churches, they are likely destined for perpetual dependency.

The broadened concept of “mission” which seems prevalent in our day equates all that the Church does as mission.<sup>6</sup> We might ask ourselves if we have so diluted the term “missionary” that it has become a catch-all word with accrued baggage that allows for almost any kind of overseas work or anything vaguely connected with the gospel to be called “mission.”

As a result, we have career “missionaries” who bear little resemblance to the New Testament apostle or evangelist (perhaps the closest counterpart to the non-biblical term “missionary”). This is not to criticize the good work they have done, nor to impugn their motives; however, when “missionaries” are engaged in ministry that does not result in planting reproductive fellowships of saved, baptized disciples, then we do well to reevaluate our present situation. What does it say about our concept of mission when evangelicals are “disturbed by the continuing flood of church-planting teams into various people groups in the world”?<sup>7</sup> Should we not rather be disturbed if this were not done?

Those ministries which result from church planting should be executed without neglecting the cultural and economic realities of the new churches. Such extra-ecclesial ministries easily divert personnel and resources to doing “missionary” work that is neither fundamental nor vital to the missionary mandate given to the Church.

These good works should be developed under the auspices of local churches and not funded and directed by “missionaries.” Should we ordain men and commit our churches to support them as camp directors, school teachers and principals, college and seminary professors, medical personnel, or orphanage workers, and then call them missionaries because of geographical displacement? Perhaps there are no easy answers, but we would be unwise to not raise the question.

### **3. From Conversion as Implying Cultural Discontinuity to Conversion as Involving Worldview**

Transformation Missionaries should have strong convictions. They will be confronted with undreamed-of challenges to their own worldview assumptions. But they must also learn to distinguish between convictions rooted in scripture and those culture-informed convictions that, while leading to legitimate implications in their socio-cultural context, should not be elevated to the level of scriptural truth. The failure to differentiate between these kinds of convictions will result in what some have called “weaker brother missionaries,” having strong convictions that they inflict on others without distinguishing transcendent ethical norms from convention and cultural conditioning.

There are shared areas of conscience between the messenger of the gospel and the recipients through which the Spirit of God can begin his work of conviction. The missionary risks emphasizing certain areas of conscience informed by cultural variables which find no resonance in the conscience of the receptor. This may lead to change which may only be superficial conformity and which leads to believers having compartmentalized lives.<sup>8</sup> On the surface, the forms are foreign (Christian), but at the deeper level converts continue to attach meanings

from their pre-Christian allegiances. The result can be called *Christopagan syncretism*.<sup>9</sup> Just as cultural Gentiles were not required to become cultural Jews (circumcision, etc.) in order to convert, we must not present conversion as a break from culture *per se*, but from those elements found in all cultures that are incompatible with kingdom living.

#### **4. From Inadequate Training Models to More Thorough Missiological Training**

The complexities of cross-cultural ministry demand not only a solid theological foundation and strong convictions, but also a relational and analytical competence by which one can enter a strange culture and develop an effective strategy for witness. The training of missionaries should provide tools for understanding the socio-cultural adequacy of the host culture and to see how God can work with its sub-ideals toward radical transformation at the worldview level. We are grateful for the training being provided by schools which God has raised up. However, it is rare that someone is ready for effective cross-cultural ministry after four years of post-high school education. Neither does seminary training necessarily equip one for non-Western ministry but provides additional time and study opportunities and an outlet for practical experience.

This does not deny that many people, who have had neither the opportunity nor the encouragement for adequate pre-field preparation, have had effective ministries. But the idea should be banished that only minimal training is required since one will be ministering in primitive societies or among technologically-undeveloped peoples.

You may think you know more than those to whom you minister, but you must know them, their history, their culture, their real and felt needs, their cognitive framework, their kinship relationships, their organizational principles, in short, their way of life, if you want to reach them.

There are no shortcuts to acquiring linguistic and cultural competence. We would do well to insist on raising the bar for missionary training. At the very least we should expect some exposure to the disciplines of a biblical theology of missions, history of missions, studies in world religions, and some exposure to cultural anthropology.

Few cultures accord to youth the prestige they receive in Western society. We need to recognize that youth is not necessarily an asset in ministry. Youth compounded with inexperience equals disaster. We should question the wisdom of sending freshly-minted graduates without intensive missiological studies to minister in a foreign context with the additional pressures of language acquisition, lifestyle adjustments, and child-rearing.

One might reasonably ask how old, how long, how much? There are no simple answers partly due to the differences in gifts, opportunities, and place of service. The point is that we should not be quick in sending missionaries who have not been adequately prepared, who have not developed relational and theological skills, and who have not demonstrated abilities and effectiveness in the area of their calling. Cross-cultural competency cannot be learned in a classroom. However, pre-field training can help prepare missionaries for the challenges of ministering in another culture and for the culture stress associated with the strangeness of one's new surroundings.

My experience and observations have led me to conclude, with David Hesselgrave, speaking about the matter of voluntarism, that "the result of our approach has been the sending of many relatively untrained missionaries to accomplish a task which is ill defined and in which they have not had much experience."<sup>10</sup> This observation can be applied more generally to pre-field equipping of missionary candidates. The solutions to these issues may not be easily forthcoming; however, it is time to raise the bar in order to meet the immense mission challenges of our day.

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## URBAN COMMUNITIES

### **The Echo of a Saint: Signs of Hope in a Slum Community**

**By Christopher L. Heuertz**

**We walked through an open-air market, down a side street in Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, West Africa.** The vibrant colors and smells of the fruit and vegetables filled our senses. The road was narrow yet full of life. We were surrounded by children laughing and playing all up and down the street. Nearly every vendor greeted us with warm and sincere hospitality.

Before we knew it, the market opened into what appeared to be a valley—more like a crater—on the edge of downtown. Slowly we walked down a long concrete staircase, into the worst slum I have ever seen in my life. Having traveled in nearly seventy countries throughout Asia, Africa, and South America, I was blown away by the density of poverty and texture of suffering that marked every detail of Kroo Bay.

Kroo Bay is the poorest slum community in the capital city of the world's poorest country. It's a former fishing village turned into an informal coastal slum with around six thousand residents—more than four thousand of them children.

Located below sea level, where two of Freetown's major rivers meet and drain into the Atlantic Ocean, it floods with sewage every time there is major rainfall in the city. This forces residents to spend countless days and nights fighting to save their homes bucket by bucket.

It's overcrowded, congested, and clogged with trash.

If it weren't for the laughter of the children and the smiles of the vendors, it would have seemed one of the most hopeless places in the world.

According to one recent [article](#), there is only one toilet in the entire community, forcing half of Kroo Bay's population to defecate in public. The article goes on to note that one-fourth of Kroo Bay's children will not live to see their fifth birthday and a tenth of the families in the community have lost a loved one to sickness or disease (typically cholera or malaria) in the past month. Given major technological advances in the twenty-first century, combined with the billions of dollars spent on aid to Africa, it's hard to believe there is really a place like this on earth.

My friends and I were visiting the [Word Made Flesh](#) community that works in Sierra Leone. We were all going to meet up at Noah's house.

[Noah Tullay](#) runs the Good News Club in Kroo Bay. The Good News Club is a weekly Bible study which includes joyful praise, dynamic Bible stories, heartfelt prayer, compassionate first aid, and nutritious food. Noah grew up in the Kroo Bay community with his father's two surviving wives. He never knew his own mother. When he was ten years old his dad died. Overcoming obstacles, Noah left Kroo Bay to complete his education. He then returned to the slum that was his childhood home.

His return is a sign of hope, an indictment against the plundered childhood of Kroo Bay's little boys and girls—reminding them to dream past the clutches of poverty on their own lives. His return stands as a prophetic statement against poverty's assault on the oppressed humanity of Kroo Bay—a deeply spiritual affirmation that every human being carries the image of God in his or her intrinsic beauty. His return is a tangible sign that the Kingdom of God has arrived in Kroo Bay—inviting us to follow him and our friends who are poor, because God is near.

That afternoon Noah invited us into his little home in the slum. He has taken in several children, at least one of the boys orphaned during Sierra Leone's brutal 10-year civil war. We sat in his front room as he offered us cold drinks.

Noah then took us to the bottom of Kroo Bay. The further down the hill we went, the poorer things seemed to get. We eventually arrived at an old, dilapidated church. With several broken windows and a tropical-weather-beaten exterior, I could hardly believe the building could be used.

### **More Than Good News: Affirming God's Goodness in a Bad World**

This church is where Noah conducts the Good News Club. Nearly three hundred children were quickly yet gently ushered into seven rows of old wooden pews. When the pews were filled, kids stood against the walls and in the aisles.

Church was happening in a way I had never seen before. The service opened up with a couple other friends, David and Joseph, leading the few hundred children in song and dance.

We were told that during the civil war, Joseph was conscripted by the rebels and forced to fight. As a child soldier, he was a victim himself. Radiant and beaming with joy, you would never have known that during the war, Joseph had committed unspeakable crimes and perpetrated horrific atrocities. He is one of Kroo Bay's many reminders of grace; his past is still being redeemed and his life is being restored.

Joseph's joy and enthusiasm were inspiring. The songs he sang were truly angelic. His praise to God was a prophetic utterance of hope realized.

Joseph, David, and Noah have been joined by a few others who have made substantial sacrifices to serve Christ among the poor. [Cami](#) left a strong community and a stable job in southern California (USA). [Faye](#) put a high-paced life of influence in Washington, D.C. (USA) behind her. [Stephanie](#) grieved the loss of proximity and the embrace of her loving family in a small Midwest American town. All three obediently and faithfully set out to discover Jesus amidst the suffering of Sierra Leone.

Once the singing concluded, Noah shared a Bible story, a simple reflection on the scriptures, and a challenge to find the goodness of God in a bad world.

After church, the Word Made Flesh staff joined David and Cami in setting up a makeshift first aid stand. I sat stunned as I watched child after child come forward to have their painful boils or open wounds washed and bandaged. The infections in most of the gaping cuts were gruesome. I was shocked to see how suffering was a commonality shared by every child in that church.

Rarely in my life have I ever been as inspired by a community as I was by those children who gathered to worship in Kroo Bay. Watching Noah lead that congregation of forgotten children in the shell of what was left of that church reminded me of my favorite saint, Francis of Assisi.

### **The Imagination of a Modern Saint: Suffering for the Sake of Restoration**

I also think about Noah, and sometimes refer to him as “St. Noah of Kroo Bay.” What is it about his life that is so inspiring? How is it that God is using Noah in such compelling ways?

Is it his prayerfulness? A hope against hope, a lament for equality and the affirmation of the dignity of his neighbors?

Is it his commitment to poverty? Noah doesn't have to live in Kroo Bay, but he does. In fact, he came back to Kroo Bay after escaping its devastating grasp on his life. Even more, Noah has entertained the opportunity to study finance in England, yet remains among his friends—the victims of poverty's relentless prison of oppression.

Is it his vision and vocation for restoration? Noah believes in the potential of God to change the lives of the children with whom he worships. That is real church. That little, broken-down, poor excuse of a church building at the bottom of the slum is the Church. That is where God is.

It is in the Good News Club in Kroo Bay where the open wounds of Christ's body still bleed today. It is the testimony of Noah's life that tends to these bleeding wounds, ministering to God where the heart of God breaks today.

Reflecting on the lives of Noah and Francis there are a number of marks that make for an effective commitment to establishing hope where there is suffering.

- **Building Community.** Given an exceptional calling, Francis and Noah threw themselves at the mercy of community. Journeying with a team is not only practically helpful, but theologically central to relevantly expressing the love and presence of Christ among the poor. I have watched Cami's life and ministry take shape through her service with Noah. It's also Cami's friendship to Noah that has kept him accountable, supported, and inspired by her own commitment to community.
- **Embracing Poverty.** Living a lifestyle that reflects respect for friends who are poor and those who suffer pressed Francis and Noah into an embrace of poverty and a celebration of simplicity. The invitation to experience community in Kroo Bay for Cami, Faye, Stephanie, and others is a hinge to the privileged and affluent lives of those of us who come from the West to the lives of those suffering in slums. Noah has created an open door for our community to take part in the life of Kroo Bay's community by gently challenging us to place ourselves on a process of mapping the incarnation with our own lives.
- **Rebuilding the Church.** Finding a spirituality that sustains is one thing, but thriving in the faith is a mark that is true of Francis and Noah, and the community that has given itself to the people of Kroo Bay. This spirituality roots itself in a contemplative posture before God, the formation of a serving community expressing itself through worship, a celebration of voluntary poverty as a means of creating freedoms for others, and a new way of being and doing church.

Of course, I don't want to exaggerate the saintliness of Noah, but I've yet to find a man like him anywhere.

Except in history.

And today, in Kroo Bay, history is being made through Noah—a man courageous enough to be the answer to the prayers of a community.

**Chris Heuertz** is the international executive director of [Word Made Flesh](#), and has served with the community for nearly fourteen years. He and his wife Phileena live in Omaha, Nebraska, USA. His book, [Simple Spirituality: Learning to See God in a Broken World](#) (InterVarsity Press), will be available summer 2008.

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## **Simple Spirituality: The Spirit of Francis: A Prophetic Sign of Hope in a Slum Community** **By Christopher L. Heuertz**

**Some may ask, what is a saint?** Sadly, most evangelicals and Protestants lack a perspective that would help locate themselves in the historical continuity of the Church. Our church history, if we start with the Protestant Reformation, starts somewhere in the early 1500s to the mid-1600s. Generally, as Protestant evangelicals, we do not have a good grasp of Christian history—one that is full of stories from real saints.

But in the [Word Made Flesh](#) (WMF) community, we have sort of adopted Saint Francis of Assisi, sometimes called the "Reluctant Saint." We pray the prayer ascribed to Francis at most of our public and community gatherings, we commission our full-time staff with the call of Francis, and we even give our commissioned staff the San Damiano cross as a symbol of shared vocation (in fact, many WMFers have the San Damiano tattooed somewhere on their bodies).

Luckily for Protestants, Francis predates the Reformation, so we can probably claim him as well.

### **Francis—The Early Years**

Francis was born and baptized Giovanni di Bernardone circa 1181 by his mother in Umbria, Italy. At that time (the Middle Ages), nearly one-third of the world's known population lived in extreme poverty.

Francis' father was one of the most successful and richest merchants in the community. He sold silks, textiles, and fine clothing. After a business trip to France, he promptly returned and renamed his son Francesco.

Francesco, or Francis as we know him today, had a privileged youth—although he lacked any substantial education. He was known to be a wild kid, full of life and creativity.

Around the turn of the century, a local feud erupted between Umbria and neighboring Perugia. A castle on the edge of Assisi was destroyed, starting what would become an all-out, small-scale war. Francis, hoping to prove his valor, enlisted in a band of knights who set out to defend the honor of their home. It was ugly. Perugia defeated the Umbrians, killing most of the small army and imprisoning the few captured survivors. Francis suddenly found himself a prisoner of war.

After a year of suffering in an underground dungeon, Francis was released, perhaps due to his tuberculosis. He returned to Assisi humiliated and defeated. It was upon his homecoming that he turned to prayer. Cultivating core contemplative practices and committing to a life of deep reflection, Francis started his journey toward Christ.

After recovering from sickness and incarceration, and again hoping to secure fame and honor, Francis set off to continue his valiant crusade. Dressed in the most expensive and elaborate suit of armor, he set off on what would be a meeting with Christ.

## **The Transformation**

The Franciscan stories tell of a meeting between Francis and a man with leprosy. Francis hated leprosy—the mere sight of the open wounds or the smell of decaying flesh was enough to turn his queasy stomach. But as Francis laid his eyes on this man, something inside him broke. Francis found himself compelled to get off the horse he was riding and approach the man. With tears streaming down his cheeks, Francis embraced him, kissing him on the cheek. Francis took off the expensive robe he was wearing and cloaked him. As he turned and rode away, he looked back and was surprised—the man had disappeared.

Francis considered that his encounter with the man had been a meeting with Christ—essentially his conversion to Jesus. That conversion led Francis to a vocation of prayer and utter dependence on God. He found an old, dilapidated church on the hillside of Assisi, where he would spend hours upon hours praying and pleading with God.

While deep in prayer, Francis gazed at the large San Damiano icon hanging in the front of the church. In a vision or in a miraculous and divine pronouncement, Christ on the icon spoke to Francis: “Rebuild my church which is in ruins.”

Immediately, Francis knew what needed to be done. He went from door to door in his small town, begging for money or supplies so that he could literally repair the broken-down structure of that hillside church building. Francis even went as far as plundering materials from his father’s shop to sell them as a means of raising money to buy supplies and building materials to fix up that little cathedral.

Francis’ father was furious and humiliated at the conversion and subsequent vocational trajectory at which his son had thrown himself. Unwilling to support his son and still angered at having his own shop ransacked, he took his son to the bishop in hopes that a priest would talk some sense into the idealism of Francis.

In what may be one of the most recounted stories of his life, Francis declared on the steps of the bishop’s residence that his sonship was not defined by a bloodline, but on a divine commitment to God. Francis then took off his clothing and threw it at the feet of his forsaken father. The bishop suddenly covered Francis’ nakedness with his priestly robe, echoing the hint of an ecclesial covering that would guide the submission known to be true of future Franciscans.

During the following years, Francis rebuilt many churches in the area, prayerfully serving the community as he served God. He also joyfully began his own romance with “Lady Poverty,” beginning his vocation of dependence. Francis was known to beg for his food and wine, often exchanging his fresh food with others whose begged food was staler or less appealing. Francis was even known to go naked after having given up his own clothing to cover the nakedness of another.

## **A Deeper Understanding of the Call**

One day, during worship, Francis received vocational clarity, finally realizing that it wasn’t the church building God had called him to rebuild. But in fact, it was the Body of Christ—the members of the worshipping community—that God was asking Francis to help restore.

He now knew that restoring the Church meant centering on those who were poor. It was an incarnational commitment to recovering the identity of Christ’s Church by bringing the vulnerable and the marginalized to the center. Committed to community, Francis identified companions. The early echoes of the order simmered in the hearts and minds of those who would eventually become the Franciscans. During the early days of the community’s formation, the brothers made three biblical commitments to poverty, generosity, and suffering.

Toward the end of his life, Francis went on retreat with some of the brothers. He was praying for a divine grace of identifying with the passion of Jesus when suddenly an angel appeared from the heavens. The angel burned into Francis’ body what are now known to be the stigmata of Christ. The physical wounds of Jesus were miraculously imprinted on the hands, side, and feet of Francis. These wounds caused Francis tremendous suffering and constantly needed to be bandaged as they bled until the end of his life.

I think about Francis often. What was it in the life and imagination of this simple man from Italy that has inspired the Church throughout history? His prayerfulness? His commitment to poverty? His vocation of restoration? History tells us that it is all three.

**Chris Heuertz** is the international executive director of **Word Made Flesh**, and has served with the community for nearly fourteen years. He and his wife Phileena live in Omaha, Nebraska, USA. His book, *Simple Spirituality: Learning to See God in a Broken World* (InterVarsity Press), will be available summer 2008.

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## RESEARCH

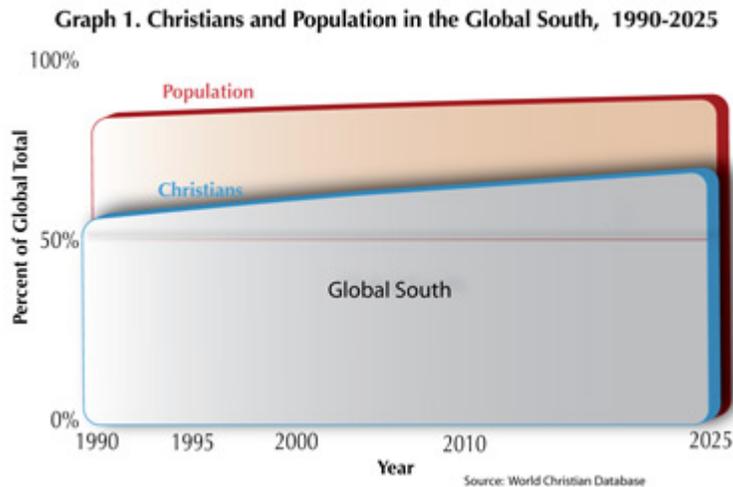
### The Past Five Years of Christian Growth Worldwide

By Bradley Coon

In the **April 2007 issue of Lausanne World Pulse**, I wrote an article entitled **“One Hundred Years of Christian Growth.”** The article used visual aids to compare the growth of Christianity both externally (with population growth) and internally (between various ecclesiastical blocs).

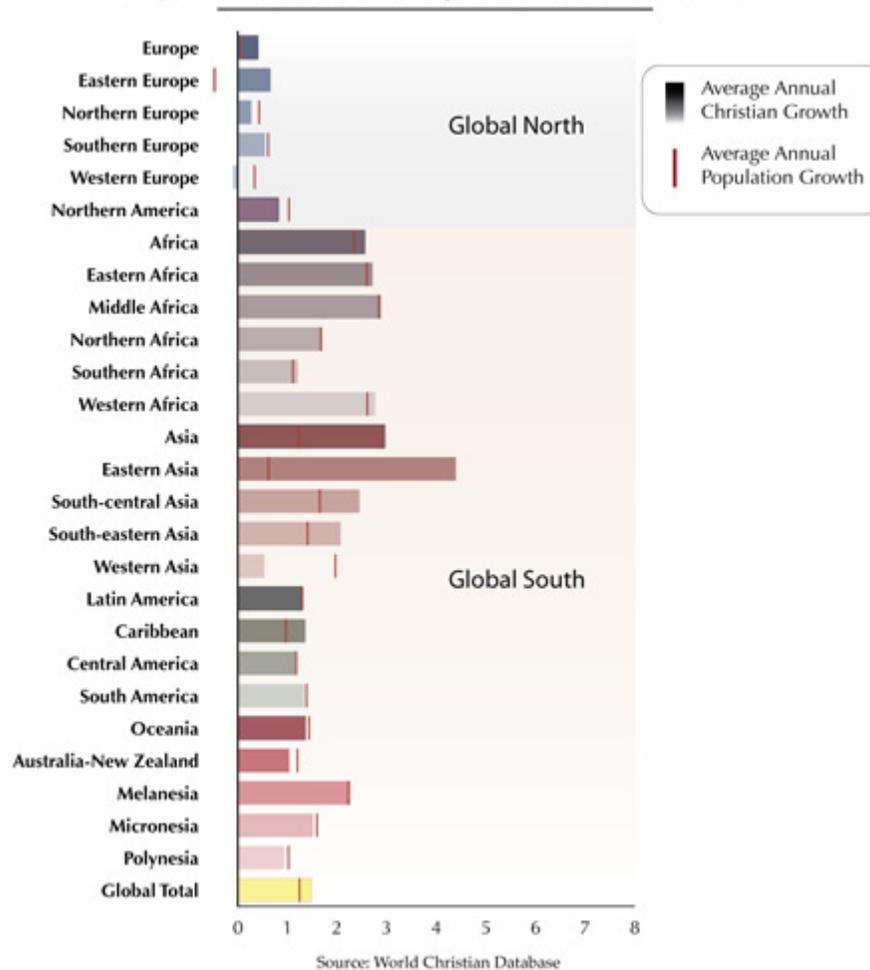
These figures captured the monumental changes to the Christian world between the years 1900 and 2000, including the shift of the Christian majority from the Global North to the Global South and the emergence of a vast number of churches that are independent of traditional branches of Christianity.

Although the reader response to this data was positive, many asked, “What does the growth of Christianity look like now?” This article seeks to answer that question by examining the growth of Christianity from 2000 to 2005 using the same visual formats as the April 2007 article. Definitions and an explanation of how to read the graphs may be found in the previous article located [here](#).



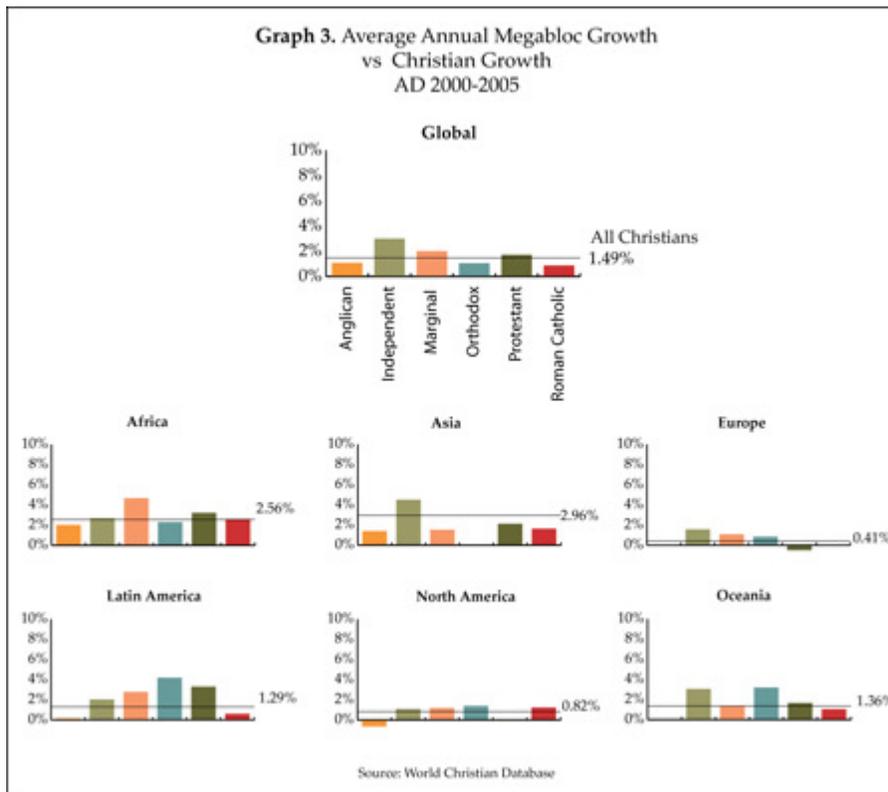
Graph 1 (above) highlights the same trend noted in the previous article, namely, that Christianity continues to move southward at a steady pace. However, although the gap is closing, the percentage of Christians living in the Global South (sixty-eight percent) is far below the percentage of the global population living in the South (eighty-four percent).

**Graph 2. Christian Growth vs. Population Growth, AD 2000-2005**



Graph 2 (above) compares the average annual growth rate of Christians with that of the population for each region of the world between the years of 2000 to 2005. Some interesting trends are noted here, and more can be found by comparing these growth rates to those taken over the past one hundred years.

Most notably, during the first five years of this century, Christianity as a whole grew faster than the global population. A quick glance at the continental growth rates shows that much of this growth came from Asia and Eastern Europe. Eastern Asia’s Christian growth rate was fueled by the continued growth of Christianity in China. Over thirty million new Christians emerged in China between 2000 and 2005, yielding an average annual growth rate of over five percent. Like Eastern Asia, South-Central Asia’s Christian growth as a whole was aided by the steady rise of Christianity in India’s large population (although Afghanistan and Nepal saw the greatest growth rates in that region). South-Eastern Asia, in comparison, drew its growth from many countries in the region. In Africa, meanwhile, the widespread adoption of Christianity in many countries during the twentieth century has led to lower growth rates today, as natural increase replaces the higher conversion rates of the previous century.



Graph 3 (above) gives a closer look at the growth of Christianity within each continent. Globally, each Christian megabloc maintained roughly the same average growth rate over the past five years that it held during the last century. Anglicans continue to grow in Africa and have risen slightly in Asia at a rate of 1.4% per year, from almost no growth over the past century. Europe’s Christian landscape is continuing to change with the present decline in Protestant adherents. Anglican and Roman Catholic congregations are at a near standstill and failing to keep up even with the low birthrates in most of Europe. Independent, Marginal, and Orthodox believers are all on the rise.

Christian growth can be approached from many different angles. The broad strokes painted in this article in graphs 2 and 3 will likely draw more questions than answers. As research draws us to both ask and answer questions about the state of global Christianity, let us remember that we see these figures with two prayers in mind: that Christ would reign as Lord and King in the lives of as many people as would bow to him, and that he would unify believers as they love one another in his name.

For a closer look at the numbers behind the graphs, visit: [www.worldchristiandatabase.org](http://www.worldchristiandatabase.org).

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## LAUSANNE REPORTS

### [The European Church Today: Reflections on Her Context](#) By Gordon Showell-Rogers

#### Looking Back to Look Forward

Europe is hugely varied. Albania and Switzerland could almost be on different planets. However, the entire continent shares a common heritage, geographical space, and some elements of culture in a globalised world.

Europe today also shares some significant similarities with the world in which the early Christians lived. It is pluralistic, multicultural, hedonistic, and perhaps as open to new ideas as that century was.

Christians in first century “Europe” (today’s name for the western end of the Eurasian landmass) did not know what a difference they would make. They simply knew that Jesus had died for their sins and had risen from the dead. They understood that the cross and the resurrection had cosmic consequences. As a result, they went out and, by God’s grace, changed the world.

### **The Early Days of Christianity: Christ’s Arrival in Europe**

The Book of Acts records the growth of the early Church in “Europe.” But what was Christ’s impact on European *society*? Rodney Stark, professor of sociology and comparative religion at the University of Washington writes,

Pagan and Christian writers are unanimous not only that Christian Scripture stressed love and charity as the central duties of faith, but that these were sustained in everyday behaviour. I suggest reading the following passage from Matthew (25:35-40) as if for the very first time, in order to gain insight into the power of this new morality, when it was *new*, not centuries later in more cynical and worldly times....When the New Testament was *new*, these were the norms of the Christian communities.<sup>1</sup>

Keith Hopkins, professor of ancient history at King’s College in Cambridge, is not always sympathetic in the way he writes about Christians. Nonetheless, he writes, “For all its idiosyncratic excesses, Christianity also promoted an image of self-sacrificing piety, of virtue, generosity to the poor, and kindness to the sick.”<sup>2</sup> And again,

The visual world of Christianity was startlingly different, in image and meaning, from the classical world of paganism. But the greatest achievement of ancient Christianity in this period was, I think, its remoulding of social ethics, its purposeful construction of the virtuous believer.<sup>3</sup>

And that remoulding of social ethics by a minority—often a marginalised and even persecuted minority—shaped every area of life.

### **Twenty Centuries Later**

Dramatic changes have occurred across Europe (and the rest of the world) since that first century—from Constantine’s conversion and the growth of Constantinian Christendom, via the Enlightenment and the age of discovery to the present post-modern world. But one other influence must be mentioned in the European context: despite the great impact of the good news of Jesus and the resurrection, biblical faith is not the only root of European civilisation or of European culture (or European forms of Christianity). Because the other major root of “European civilisation” is Greco-Roman, European Christian thinking about life and church is shaped by both its Greco-Roman and Enlightenment contexts.

The gospel is **always** contextualised. Jesus was a first century Jewish Palestinian carpenter. The early Christians in Palestine were Jewish believers. They worked hard to contextualise a Hebrew message to a Gentile setting—and used Greek words and patterns of thought to do so. The early Church’s theologians worked out their theology in a Greek context.

Today’s European Christians are both their children and children of the Enlightenment (with its Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian roots). That needs to be borne in mind in any consideration of the “contemporary Church in Europe.”

### **Europe Today**

Today, Europe is complicated, but exciting. It is:

**1. Post-everything.** Rejecting authority, it is post-industrial, post-rational, post-Christian, post-communist, and post-modern. It sometimes seems to be post-hope and post-caring. At least this seems to be the case when it comes to elections. Very few people vote, perhaps largely because of cynicism about politicians.

A recent “YouGov” survey for the UK’s *Daily Telegraph* found that less than thirty percent of the people trust their local politician (percentages are lower for national politicians). These levels of trust are matched in recent Eurobarometer and Pew Foundation surveys (in the European Union and the USA, respectively).

A recent Prêt a Manger nutritional information booklet has this quotation from Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Sacks: “The idols of today are unmistakable—self-esteem without effort, fame without achievement, sex without consequences, wealth without responsibility, pleasure without struggle and experience without commitment.” This is a very helpful analysis; it is equally interesting that Prêt a Manger feels it is commercially positive to quote it! Europe is post-everything. And yet somehow we know there is something wrong, something missing.

**2. Highly secularised.** Struggles within the European Parliament, for example, are often between the secular (often militant, a form of secular fundamentalism) and people of faith (of varying flavours). Christians need to work hard to be taken seriously in the public square. Historically, evangelicals have sometimes retreated into private piety, suggesting that Christianity is about personal faith alone, and sometimes expecting special privileges.

Christianity is about personal faith; however, it is also about public justice and righteousness. It is about relationships between rich and poor. It is about ethics in business. It is about abortion and euthanasia. It is about medicine, education, and public policy. It is about making a difference in this life and the next. Christians have as much right as everybody else to have input into the debate about the future of our schools, hospitals and offices, cities, countries, continent, and world.

On the flip side, some Christians automatically assume they should have **more** rights than others to influence and shape our countries because they are Christian. The reality is that all of Europe is now very pluralistic, with highly secularised media and political systems. Christians do not have more rights than others—but neither should they have fewer.

However, Christians in Europe need to translate scriptural truth into language that can be understood in the secular context. In this way, all of society can hear the message and benefit from the wisdom of scripture.

**3. Globalised.** The multi-racial nature of Europe’s societies is one sign of globalisation, but the impact of globalisation goes way beyond this obvious area (i.e., global politics, organised violence, global trade and markets, global finance, global production networks, etc.).

**4. In search of identity.** The big questions on the political agenda are identity questions: Who are we? What do we want to become? What does it mean to be Spanish, Serbian, or British? What does it mean to be European? The European Union Constitutional Treaty debate revolved around these questions. The question of Turkey’s European Union membership revolves around identity issues. Ongoing tensions in the Balkans (particularly in parts of former Yugoslavia) have identity issues at their centre. Much of the debate at national elections revolves around these questions. The question of who we are and should become is central to human existence. And what is also certain is that, despite the rampant individualism of our age, people want to belong, to be identified as part of identifiable social networks.

**5. Very open to spiritual ideas.** Europeans have rejected Christendom. But there is, arguably, more openness to spiritual reality than there has been for a long time. See, for example,

- the fascination with the para-normal and the afterlife in films
- the seriousness of some of the lyrics in contemporary rock music

- the sociological analysis of people like Grace Davie or Philip Jenkins
- the growing interest in pre-Christian religions and paganism. Some believe this is a major trend (see Jeff Fountain’s 2005 book, *Living as People of Hope*). Certainly, there is a fascination with the occult and with esoteric questions (e.g., the popularity of the large esoteric fair in Basel every September)
- the belief that Islam will take over in Europe (In my view, the dominant “spirituality” will continue to be secular materialism.)
- that many creative types and younger people are aware that there is more to life than this<sup>4</sup>
- the 4 March 2007 Tearfund survey, which found an unexpected openness to invitations to attend church
- the fact that although evangelical church growth across Europe has not been dramatic (except in Ukraine and in ethnic minority churches), there are several indicators that show steady growth in evangelicalism in the last twenty years
- the fact that atheism is becoming more aggressive and seeking to proselytise (I suspect this is a sign of desperation, in the light of fresh openness to spiritual issues.)

To be continued...

### Endnotes

1. Stark, Rodney. 1996. *The Rise of Christianity*. Princeton, New Jersey, USA: Princeton University Press. 86-87.
2. Hopkins, Keith. 1999. *A World Full of Gods: Pagans, Jews and Christians in the Roman Empire*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson. 136.
3. Ibid. 136.
4. There are indications that this dissatisfaction could become a wider trend. Secular materialism has failed, by any measure. Surveys about happiness show that after a certain level of affluence, people are less happy, because the false appetite for more things (created by aggressive advertising) can never be fully satisfied. And there is a growing awareness of the huge damage that we are doing to the planet. This raises questions about the validity of secular materialism as a foundation for the future.

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## Where Is the Church in Europe Going?

By **Gordon Showell-Rogers**

Where is the Church in Europe going?

**In one sense, this is an impossible question to answer.** In the financial markets people make hundreds of millions of Euros by predicting the rise or fall of currencies—others lose hundreds of millions of Euros.

Fortunately, we know that all is not lost in the Church. In fact, the opposite is true.<sup>1</sup> So the question is not “Will the Church in Europe one day arrive?” but “In what condition will the Church in Europe arrive?” or “How will the Church in Europe arrive?” To find a possible answer, we need to think about both where we have come from and where we are.

For the sake of time and space, this article looks only at evangelicalism, instead of the wider question of all those who profess Christianity. In the English-speaking world there are several definitions of evangelicalism. Church historian Dr. David Bebbington refers to four “main characteristics of evangelicalism,” namely, *conversions, activism, biblicism, and crucicentrism*. Dr. John Stott also includes: *the Bible and the cross* and *evangelism and conversion*. Stott himself talks in terms of three evangelical “priorities”:

- The **revealing** initiative of God the Father
- The **redeeming** work of God the Son
- The **transforming** ministry of God the Holy Spirit

Evangelicals are Trinitarian Christians who are convinced that Jesus is the only Saviour and that the Bible is the ultimate authority. An experience of Christ associated with these convictions is the experience of evangelicalism.

Evangelicalism is often either misunderstood or misrepresented, and sometimes evangelicals’ own actions misrepresent the Christ we serve and the scriptures we seek to understand and follow. But this is evangelicalism at its core.

There are three possible futures for evangelicalism in Europe.

**1. It goes under.** Matthew 16:18 confirms this will not happen globally. Indeed, the signs of hope for the Church in Europe include the growing presence of many Christians from the Majority World (many of whom understand the missionary importance of their presence in Europe).

**2. It withdraws from society and lives in an increasingly irrelevant corner.** It has occasional excursions into the world to persuade a few others to come to the holy corner as well. If it does that, and uses a special language that is completely incomprehensible to most people, some will join it in the corner simply because a monastic existence has some attraction. In the meantime, society will slip away to hell.

**3. It withstands** various social pressures, enjoys increased influence in society, and sees many people finding Christ and growing in him. So what are some of those social pressures? Having talked in an earlier [article](#) about trends in society, we now return to two trends that have a direct impact on the Church.

- *Secularism.* Europe’s evangelicals gratefully acknowledge that secularism has brought some big benefits to evangelicals in countries like Spain, France, and Turkey.
- *Fundamentalist Secularism.* Today, however, there is a radical form of secularism on the march in Europe, which is fundamentalistic. It is aggressive and seeks to exclude all people of faith from public life. This is, of course, hopelessly inconsistent because it is itself a faith (in no god), so it really should exclude its own people from public life as well.

This pressure to exclude faith from life is by people desperate to restrict conversation about religion—all in the name of “respecting“ all beliefs. Personally, I have never had a problem talking with Muslim friends about spiritual issues. They have never objected to talking; in fact, many have tried to convert me! It is not a sign of respect to Christianity or Islam to restrict the freedom to share that faith enthusiastically. It is odd that tolerance therefore gets redefined to mean Christians and others of strong faith conviction can only be tolerated if they are willing to give up their convictions. In many parts of Europe today, absolute convictions will absolutely not be tolerated.

Christians are a soft target for two reasons. First, because Christianity has a longer history in Europe than Islam (the other missionary-minded religion), it has a longer history of bad things done in its name. Second, because Christians never react with violence.

The future may very well hold a reduced religious freedom, partly as a political reaction to the militant arms of Islam. Among other things, there are pressures on freedom of speech and on freedoms to evangelise (only secular fundamentalism or fundamentalist secularists can fully enjoy those freedoms). However, our biggest problems as Christians in Europe are internal:

- We expect far too little from the Lord.
- We have become far too comfortable.
- We are far too shallow in our understanding of scripture.
- We are far too indifferent to the needs of this needy world.
- We lack a vision for mission.
- We are not desperate for God.

Europe's biggest problem today is not society out there. It is us. And still I am encouraged by several signs of life in the Church. Here are a few:

- Although statistics from the Protestant State Church in Germany show overall shrinkage, a growing number of people are joining as well. It is likely that a good percentage of those joining are people of real faith conviction, while those leaving are mostly nominal.
- There are growing congregations in many countries, especially in ethnic minority churches (i.e., black majority churches in the UK, African churches in France, Turkish churches in Bulgaria, and Gypsy churches everywhere).
- Young believers have a growing interest in world mission, poverty, justice, and prayer.
- Evangelicals have a growing willingness to stand up publicly, with great love and grace.
- Evangelicals have a growing influence as salt and light in society.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Three concluding thoughts.

First, *ordinary people are shaping things more and more*. The blog culture shapes the content of the news as well as the way it is received and presented. *Time* magazine's "Person of the Year" in 2006 was "You." Increasingly, the news is being driven by amateurs empowered by the internet.

Second, *people do care about their futures*. Very few people turn out for elections; however, huge numbers discuss important topics in chat rooms. In fact, it is possible that the low turnout for elections is even because people care. Cynicism about politicians may be a sign of that.

Third, *people are as hungry as ever for relationships*. This is true even if these relationships are at a distance or over the internet. The Triune God has designed us all, in his image, for relationships. Isn't building relationships central to our understanding of life?

The early Christians were accused of "turning the world upside down." They knew that:

- Jesus had died for their sins.
- He had risen from the dead.

- The cross and the resurrection had cosmic consequences.

They were prepared to live, and, if necessary, to die, for him. Their environment, although very different in some ways from ours, was hardly welcoming and waiting for them to shape it. And yet they did!

Could the start of the twenty-first century be our opportunity, under God, to turn the European world upside down? Who knows what he might yet do in Europe today if we humbly offer ourselves to him and to our world.

#### **Endnote**

1. Although we also know that the Church in any particular place can be “lost” in future generations (i.e., the thriving churches of what is today Turkey or North Africa in the early Christian era).

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