



Our cover stories portray the amazing degree of collaboration between agencies which makes much mission success possible.

Ralph D. Winter



Dear Reader,

In our last issue (on the "Uncertain Future of Missions") I wrote about my recent return visit to Guatemala, where my growing family and I worked between 1956 and 1966. I wrote of how Christian families have been shattered by the massive, forced migration of fathers and older brothers seeking work.

I ended the article with the following question:

So what is the future of the Mam Indians? How can the existence of a strong church tradition contribute to that future? Is that now (or should that have been) a concern of the mission agencies?

In this issue our cover stories portray the astounding growth and success of mission efforts all over the world, and in particular the amazing degree of collaboration between agencies which makes much of that success possible. No one has made a greater contribution in this area than Phill Butler. See his story of the background. Get his marvelous and unparalleled new book on the ins-and-outs of forming field partnerships. (See pages 12-16 and 29.)

Note his reference to the Global Network of Mission Structures (GNMS), which is the first organization on a world level designed to track the peoples of the world wherever they may migrate.

However, without in any way detracting from that and other stories in this issue, I would like to move further in the attempt to answer my own question about how all this meets the ground. Last time I referred to the "success story"

of mission work in Guatemala. Only a few small countries of the world have a higher percentage of Evangelicals (40%). Yet hundreds of thousands of Evangelical families are trapped in extremely desperate (and getting more desperate) living conditions.

In this country our thousands of gang members are mainly kids with absent or non-functioning fathers. Instead of our laws merely forcing fathers to treat their wives right, fathers ought to be forced to treat their kids right. Instead of going after the fathers, we lock the kids up and put them under severe "injunctions" which hamper their attempts to get a job. Meanwhile, our welfare system creates more absent fathers by paying mothers more if their husbands have left the home.

In many mountain towns in Guatemala desperation forces over half the fathers and older brothers to pay huge sums to get smuggled into the USA. In some towns 80% of the people left behind are women and children. Ninety percent of available funds are "remisas" of money from family members illegally living in the U.S.

This situation is already shattering families. Worse still, we know what happens when communities of "Native Americans" live on a dole from a distance. Human beings are degraded if they cannot fulfill themselves through productive work in which they can take pride. Drugs, gangs, and violence are the result.

The historical record of this country shows that subsistence farming gave way to small farms, which then gave way to big farms, and then to colossal farming enterprises. In the USA whole families

could move to cities (without illegally passing through tunnels or barbed-wire fences to get there). To some extent, rural people have already moved to the city in Guatemala; the most modern city (the capital) is now awash with unemployed rural people.

I thought long and hard about this situation over 40 years ago, when it was not as bad as it is now. In the intervening time a host of different enterprises – unilateral governmental, United Nations, non-governmental, religious agencies, and others – have done their level best to figure out how to be helpful to people who are poor.

But consider seriously the sub-title of a new book, *The White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good*, by William Easterly. Two reasons "the West's efforts" have mainly failed is that people who are poor don't just lack money, and that no plan will work without a few truly honest people. As mentioned, putting people on the dole is degrading and doesn't get at the whole answer. They lack medicines, schools, job opportunities. They lose the potential of many of their most helpful citizens by the "brain drain." Further, without the mission movement to produce honest people, little will truly succeed.

The work they used to do is now suddenly taken away from them by some more efficient process a thousand miles away. Consider, for example, the lantern makers of Cairo, who used to work months in advance to pile up stock for the moment in the Islamic year when carrying around lanterns was the thing

to do. Today those millions of lanterns are made in China and are shipped to Egypt at less cost.

The thousands of Egyptians left without work are not less willing or less able to work. They simply cannot compete with Chinese efficiency. They have been made poor through no fault of their own but because of sweeping improvements

The Global Network of Mission Structures (GNMS) is the first organization on a world level designed to track the peoples of the world wherever they may migrate.



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This issue of *Mission Frontiers* reveals more solid achievement and more partnership efficiency than ever. But do we also need to more fully understand our mission?

in global communication and manufacturing. Neither is such poverty due to people in China trying to harm them. The Chinese workers are simply trying to make things the world will buy so they can buy what is made in other parts of the world.

In past centuries land has allowed most families of the world to be self-sufficient. But arable land has not increased with population. World population has increased *more than tenfold* since 1600. Low-cost high yields are now derived employing farm machinery worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. Even if land had increased tenfold along with population, those who work the land by hand cannot compete with modern methods.

It is not as though there is not enough food to feed the world; rather, people who lack food are not yet linked pro-

ductively into a larger economy. More than money, poor people need to be geared securely and productively into the international economy, which more and more is the only one that counts. That substantial reality offers more security and involvement of their talent than any other. Can missions help them?

If you were offered a job with Wal-Mart or with a six-by-eight cookie stand next door, which would you take? Even if a family gets a "micro-credit" loan to establish a cookie stand, the security is relatively small and likely to be temporary. That's not the way cookies are made any more! The Girl Scouts, who sell more than two billion cookies a year in the USA, don't get them from one-family factories.

Another 50 Subway sandwich stores are being opened in North Ireland. It is quite possible that those getting a job

with Subway (which has more stores worldwide than McDonalds) will be more secure than if they were to sign on with a family sandwich shop.

But even if work opportunities exist, people can't work at all if they are constantly prey to epidemic diseases. Who will seek to eradicate malaria and dengue fever? Some are – such as Bill and Melinda Gates. Evangelicals have shown they can organize against abortion. Should we do the same to extend work opportunities and fight eradicable diseases? Is our God's reputation at stake over the day-by-day conditions of His new millions of followers who are now poorer than ever?

This issue of *Mission Frontiers* reveals more solid achievement and more partnership efficiency than ever. But, do we also need to more fully understand our mission? ☉

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Ethnê '06 Accelerates, Coordinates Efforts Toward

“Least-Reached Peoples”

Justin Long

Here's a quick test:

How many Christians does it take to send one missionary? It depends: the United States, sends one missionary per 2,000 Christians. Mongolia, sends one missionary for every **220** believers!

What country has over 5,200 missionaries serving in 56 countries, is planning to bring the Gospel through many countries “back to Jerusalem,” and wants to invite the world to join them and China in hosting a tea party in Israel in 2020? The answer: Nigeria!

Finally, what region of the world went from 1,635 cross-cultural workers in 1987 to 8,000 today, working in more than 150 nations? Latin America!

These reports, and more, were heard by over 350 mission leaders from 50 countries and every continent, who gathered in Southeast Asia for four days in March at Ethnê '06. The purpose of this

global consultation: to celebrate progress, assess status, and accelerate efforts to reach the least-reached peoples (LRPs) of the world.

Over a third of the participants came

from Asia. Ten percent came from Africa. Due to the costs there were fewer from Latin America and the Middle East, but representatives from those regions' major networks were present. Another ten percent came from Europe, including many from Eastern Europe. Less than 25% were from North America, and of these, many have worked for years among unreached peoples.

The Focus: the “One-Fourth World”

Participants were delighted by wonderful reports from around the world – and also sobered by the realities related to the world's LRPs. Our world is enduring rapid cultural changes, numerous wars, millions who are hungry and hurting, and intensifying persecution in some areas.

Yet 100,000 new Christians are “born” in the world every day. 4,500 new congregations are established every week. The “center of Christian gravity” has shifted to the south (with two-thirds of all Christians) and the east (where 115 million believers live in East Asia). Many gospel movements have blossomed among peoples such as the Bhojpuri of India, the Masai of East Africa, and sub-groups of Han Chinese.

Missions is also changing. More missionaries are being sent from non-Western churches than from the West, and there are now over 4,000 Third World mission agencies. Most notably, exclusively “sending” and “receiving” nations no longer exist: virtually every country both sends and receives. Many non-Western agencies are allocating substantial workers to the unreached; COMIBAM, for example, has 14% of its workers focused on the unreached, and Singapore has an estimated 25%. Many new global and regional networks focus on the unreached.

In spite of these advances, the unfinished task remains. Over 28% of the world has no access

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Ethnê '06 sought to celebrate progress, assess status, and accelerate efforts toward the least-reached peoples.

to the Gospel. Over 39% belong to an ethnic group without viable churches. There are over 4,000 “least-evangelized” ethnolinguistic groups and over 6,700 “unreached” peoples. Nearly two billion still need to hear the Good News for the first time.

The majority of Christians in the world are still not aware of the challenge of the unreached, and many that are aware feel little or no responsibility. Many church and mission leaders believe that missions to the unreached has been over-emphasized. Of the US\$15 billion given to missions, less than 2% is given for mission to the unreached, and less than 5% of the world’s missionaries are focused on the unreached.

Will we change? If current patterns continue, the unreached will still represent *one-fourth* of the world’s population in 2025. “Insanity,” wrote Albert Einstein, “is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.” Participants at Ethnê ’06 were challenged to ask not “What can we do?” but rather “What must be done?”

The Goal: Transformational Church Planting Movements

A strategic Ethnê ’06 focus was how truly “holistic gospel movements” (or church-planting movements using radical methodology) could be stimulated where churches, businesses, humanitarian and mission streams cooperate to develop holistic efforts that address spiritual, social, economic and cultural needs of each population segment. Least-reached groups do not have a viable church which can reach their own people. The goal is that each formerly unreached group will have a movement of consistently reproducing, indigenous churches that will take

the major responsibility for sharing the Gospel and discipling their own people group and *also* will begin reaching out to other groups in the world.

Once these least-reached peoples come to this point, God is obviously not finished with them. He wants to do much more both in the present and with future generations as the gospel is lived out in transforming ways for the glory of God.

The Distinctives of the Ethnê Initiative

The movement to reach the LRPs got a shot of energy from the late 1980s and 1990s, when the AD2000 & Beyond Movement popularized the “10/40 Window” and launched huge initiatives – like “Praying through the Window” and research projects like Joshua Project. The AD2000 Movement also nurtured many national and regional mission networks focused on unreached people groups (UPGs).

At the Great Commission Roundtable in 2001 many UPG-focused leaders voiced their

concern that the phasing out of the AD2000 Movement would

lead to less emphasis and collaborative planning toward the unreached. The recommendation of the UPG working group at the Great Commission Roundtable was that UPG “global forums of relationship” should be continued. Singapore ’02 and then Ethnê ’06 were the direct results of that recommendation.

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Ethne: All Regions Listing

(from www.joshuaproject.net)

Region	Region Name	-----Countries-----		-----Peoples-by-Country-----			-----Population-----		
		Total	with Least-Reached	Total	Least-Reached	% Least-Reached	Total	In Least-Reached	% in Least-Reached
1	South Pacific	27	27	1,500	26	1.7 %	32,972,000	510,000	1.5 %
2	Southeast Asia	11	11	1,809	663	36.7 %	551,352,000	271,769,000	49.3 %
3	Northeast Asia	7	7	605	454	75.0 %	1,522,533,000	332,013,000	21.8 %
4	South Asia	7	7	3,217	2,898	90.1 %	1,288,182,000	1,109,032,000	86.1 %
5	Central Asia	11	11	1,023	849	83.0 %	397,366,000	385,495,000	97.0 %
6	Middle East and North Africa	19	19	591	366	61.9 %	278,847,000	183,092,000	65.7 %
7	East and South Africa	27	27	1,290	349	27.1 %	392,605,000	59,426,000	15.1 %
8	West and Central Africa	24	24	2,197	499	22.7 %	355,833,000	111,499,000	31.3 %
9	Eastern Europe and Eurasia	20	20	656	188	28.7 %	334,261,000	24,836,000	7.4 %
10	Western Europe	29	29	943	227	24.1 %	397,249,000	19,761,000	5.0 %
11	Central and South America	21	21	1,066	96	9.0 %	413,830,000	1,604,000	0.4 %
12	North America and Caribbean	30	30	984	82	8.3 %	475,755,000	5,619,000	1.2 %
Totals: 12 Regions		233		15,881	6,697	42.2 %	6,440,785,000	2,504,656,000	38.9 %



Out of Singapore '02 came three global "calls." The first was a call for secure communication. The second was a call for a global network of mission agencies focused on the unreached. (The Global Network of Mission Structures is the result.) The third was a reiterated call for ongoing gatherings. Ethnê '06 grew out of this call, after SEALINK (a network of ministries focused on the UPGs of Southeast Asia) volunteered to convene a global committee to foster a world-wide UPG network.

The Ethnê '06 consultation was a culmination of a careful process intent on building a strong, long-term foundation. Some (mainly from the West) urged the steering committee to set out specific goals and outcomes which would be presented for adoption by others in the Body of Christ. This urging was resisted because it was felt that such a course would be presumptuous and would prevent true collaborative planning.

Instead, the key initiatives offered (and described below) were developed by careful consensus by a large, multi-national grouping. No movement or initiative really gains ground if just "announced." True movements gain momentum only as all feel they are full participants in shaping and leading the effort. This "shared ownership" has been a key goal of Ethnê.

The greatest distinctive of Ethnê might be that for the first time, leaders from non-Western countries felt like they were a full part of global decisions (as stated at Ethnê '06 by leaders from Korea and Latin America). The ultimate achievement will hopefully be centered around the Ethnê Vision: "Peoples Joining Together to Glorify God among all peoples" where no region dominates mission efforts and all believers in all the world are mutually responsible to reach all peoples. Rather than one region having ultimate responsibility, this is to be shared by all regions.

Desired Strategic Outcomes

Ethnê '06 participants came together to accomplish three strategic outcomes.

First, we came to *celebrate Great Commission progress among the least-reached*. This goal was successfully achieved as we acknowledged and built on the strength of past initiatives in order to honor pioneers who have led the Body forward. We were also challenged by the many initiatives and strategies which continue to move forward in great ways.

Second, we sought to *assess current opportunities and resources*. We examined trends, shared ideas and resources, and built relationships and synergy by which this effort can move forward. Many tangible and intangible successes were experienced at the Consultation, and processes are being worked out for the future – Strategy

Ethne's prayer mobilization tools (in over 10 languages) include:

- an overview video of the Ethnê movement and Harvest-Linked Prayer Strategy initiative (HeLPS),
- a set of 12 five-minute testimony videos (one per region) of people formerly from LRPs now following Christ and reaching others. These videos, with accompanying bulletin inserts and prayer bookmarks, could be shown during the first Sunday service of the month to celebrate what God has already been doing in response to prayer and to accelerate prayers for the remaining LRPs of each region.
- *The Global Prayer Digest* (www.global-prayer-digest.com) will offer parallel issues (in several major languages) from June 2006

through May 2007 with daily prayer requests for the LRPs in each region. These prayer items will be linked to the people profiles and information database of Joshua Project (www.joshuaproject.net). A special set of youth and children's issues are planned as well, available by free download from the GPD site.

- Ethnê's website at www.ethne.net gives further detailed information about the initiative and each of the 12 regions. Many resources will be available directly from the website. For questions, to receive regular e-updates or to join the Harvest-Linked Prayer Initiative, e-mail prayer@ethne.net. 🌐

Groups which are already planning and leading, website connections, and more.

Finally, we gathered to *accelerate movements to Christ among every people*. The relationships built and the emerging action plans of the strategy groups look especially promising!

Four Strategy Groups

Ethnê '06 participants gathered in four strategy groups: Harvest-Linked Prayer Initiative, UPG Workers, Crisis Response Network, and Holistic Gospel Movements. Each developed action plans to be implemented over the next few years.

A regional, year-long prayer focus

The Harvest-Linked Prayer Strategy group carried forward a global initiative to launch a year-long prayer campaign linked with strategic field outreaches to the LRPs of the world. The vision of the Harvest-Linked Prayer Strategy is not to create something new, but rather to encourage existing networks, churches, organizations and individuals to coordinate prayer.

The group will mobilize the global Body of Christ to adapt LRP prayer emphases to match a common calendar. Hopefully, each region will launch outreaches during their specific month of prayer and for the two months immediately following. This initiative will begin just after the Global Day of Prayer (June 4, 2006) with an emphasis on the LRPs of the South Pacific, moving east to west through other regions until finishing in May 2007 with an emphasis on the LRPs of North America and the Caribbean.

Prayer resources for each of 12 regions will include videos, bulletin inserts, bookmarks and more. Currently resources are available in 10 languages, with more translations planned.

Worker Mobilization

Major changes in a post-9/11 world raises major issues related to how to equip, nurture and send workers. The LRP Workers Strategy Group decided to establish four web-based forums for continuing discussion on the multi-dimensional issues pertaining to worker effectiveness. This will hopefully lead to new initiatives among agencies and networks to pursue relevant, contextual projects regionally and globally.

Coordinated Disaster Response

This group agreed that Jesus taught (Mt. 24) that disaster and crisis requires our presence in

the middle of relief and recovery as a part of divine strategy in finishing the task of taking the Gospel to the whole world. At Ethnê '06 a strategy group from many nations met to reflect on these issues, and a global Crisis Response Network has begun to form. Participants are assessing readiness among our collective contacts and gathering resources to better respond to needs when crises occur. The network will seek to deliberately partner with local believers so they may be empowered for long-term witness.

Holistic Gospel Movements

The Holistic Gospel Movement Strategy group will share information, models, events, and initiatives. They are developing secure forums for communication. They will conduct joint research projects: documenting movements, needs, and possibilities. They will hold think-tank meetings. Finally, they will work on training resources including manuals, radio programs, workshops, and a coaching network.

A Facilitation Team is moving projects forward while looking ahead to the next Ethnê forum.

Youth

An Ethnê Youth network has developed to facilitate cross-regional youth initiatives focused on LRPs. This network will organize joint outreach, develop cross-cultural mentoring relationships, encourage strategic prayer, promote LRP-focused youth gatherings, connect with student mission movements, share fund-raising strategies, mobilize local church and agency involvement, and compile and distribute youth-related LRP resources through youth-responsive media.

Beyond Ethnê '06

Now that Ethnê '06 is over, a transitional Facilitation Team is moving ongoing projects forward while looking ahead to the next Ethnê forum. Discussions are continuing with COMIBAM (the Ibero-American mission network) about the possibility of their taking a key leadership and hosting role in the network and possible gathering in 2009.

More details on Ethnê, and for connecting to regional networks, can be found at www.ethne.net. A more detailed report may be found in the April issue of *Momentum*, downloadable from www.momentum-mag.org. 



A Survey of Kingdom Collaboration

Profiles in Partnership

Phill Butler

What's the Challenge?

It's said that all cultures have both idealized and realized values. These values represent the way things *ought to be* and the *way they really are*. The distance between what we dream about, hope for, and expect – and the way things *really are* can create tension, disappointment, sometimes disillusionment, and, occasionally rebellion.

Near the top of the list of Christian idealized values is the vision Jesus gives His followers in John 17:21-23 – “That they may all be one as you and I are one, so that the world may know that you have sent me....” Psalm 133 suggests that God's power and refreshment are found as His people live and work in unity.

Historical Context and Previous Models

Field missionaries are as aware as those at home of the distance between the idealized values of the John 17:21 principle and the realized, day-to-day world. However, over the decades a number of ingredients in the field have opened hearts and minds there to

cooperation as an alternative to Western paradigms of individualism. These ingredients have included distance from home constituencies (read: difficulty for sponsors to look over your shoulder); an awareness of limited resources in the face of overwhelming

The shift of power — from the center to the edges — has emerged as a powerful trend.

need; a sense of a lack of effectiveness, if not failure; intense isolation; and often an acute awareness of Satanic opposition.

Following the second World War projects like ACROSS in the Southern Sudan, HEED Bangladesh, the IAM (International Assistance Mission) in Afghanistan, and the UMN (United Mission to Nepal) broke new ground, showing that God's

people could work together – often with significant, sometimes remarkable outcomes.

In the resource countries, entities such as the IFMA (Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association), the EFMA (Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies) in the U.S., the Evangelical Missionary Alliance in the U.K., and the India Missions Association have demonstrated that sending agencies can find real value in shared information, best practices, and encouragement by linking together while retaining their individual identities. (The India Missions Association is now the world's largest association of mission agencies, with over 200 Indian mission agencies as members.)

From its roots in a 1966 Billy Graham Congress in Berlin and the historic 1974 meeting in Lausanne, Switzerland, the Lausanne Movement linked individuals rather than organizations. Its power was the core call of evangelism expressed in a twin commitment to holism (the Lausanne Covenant) and the awareness of unreached peoples (Ralph Winter's singular contribution to the 1974 Lausanne Congress). The Lausanne Movement provided a safe haven for many individuals who shared these commitments but found little, if any, resonance in their own denominational or organizational structures. What was emerging as a powerful trend – the shift of power from the center to the edges – was being realized in the world community committed to mission and evangelism.

The 1970s also witnessed the birth of Intercristo, a missions cooperative linking individuals with listings of field opportunities. Despite early criticism for its pioneering use of computers, Intercristo went on to link thousands of Christian agencies listing their personnel needs with tens of thousands of individuals receiving personalized reports of opportunities calling for their specific skills, experience, and interests. Intercristo continues today and has been widely copied by other initiatives.

Phill Butler directs visionSynergy, an initiative that develops international networks for strategic ministry.

The Seminal Year of 1986

In June 1986, 14 individuals representing eight ministries met in the Maestranza Hotel in Malaga, Spain to consider one question: “If we want to see real breakthroughs for Christ among the 60 million Muslims in Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, is there *anything* that we could do better *together* than if we continue to work separately?” At the end of nearly four days these leaders had identified nearly 20 things vital to church-planting efforts that *could only be done together*. Yet, like most others, this group had never taken one initiative together. So what should be the priority? After more rounds of prayer and consensus-building, they decided to focus on one key action point. In praise of what God had done in their midst, the group spontaneously broke into song!

By 2002 the number of language groups in which similar partnerships had developed grew to over 90, stretching from West Africa to Northeast, South, and Southeast Asia. Some of the smaller partnerships included 10-15 ministries, while larger ones frequently had 25 or more.

From Micro To Macro — The Field Partnership Model Gains Momentum

As the number of language-specific or people group-specific partnerships grew, annual consultations sprang up in various regions to link leaders of the partnerships in these regions. As the next level of collaboration, these regional consultations not only provided opportunity for people *from within* the region to meet and focus on specific people groups, they also were a natural forum for those *from outside* the region who had interests *inside* the region. This dual opportunity helped local churches, specialized and technical ministries, prayer groups, and many others to connect face-to-face with those working at the field level.

Over the years more than a dozen of these annual consultations emerged, from French-speaking West Africa across to Southeast Asia. Most are still active today.

Why Effective?

Reviewing this history of frontier missions cooperation, several qualities suggest why the movement grew and has shown durability.

- Work together always started at the field level, among those dealing with day-to-day realities. Often the home offices only learned about the partnerships after collaboration was well underway. Home offices are usually too far from day-to-day field realities, too close to their funding constituencies, and too accustomed to

focusing on structures before addressing vision and priority outcomes.

- Partnerships and the subsequent regional consultations were based on an “open architecture” model. *Any* individual or agency clearly committed to taking Christ to the specific people group was welcome. While the partnerships developed their own criteria for involvement, leadership roles, etc., they clearly have been *inclusive* rather than *exclusive*.
- The partnerships have always been driven by a big vision – usually to see a nationally-led church-planting movement in the unreached people group. However, participants understood you must start with limited, achievable, high-value objectives. Results and progress are needed early in the process, building hope, providing encouragement, and confirming that the effort to work together is worthwhile.
- Participation has always been international. Increasingly, since the mid-1980s these partnerships and regional consultations have reflected the growing commitment of the global church to frontier missions. If you were to attend any of these partnership-related meetings today, you would likely find Americans in the minority. The global church is more fully engaged every day. What extraordinary good news!

More Power To The Edges

A natural by-product of all these developments was the rise of the AD2000 and Beyond Movement in the early 1990s. With a focus on common vision and practical outcomes rather than organizational structure, AD2000 personified the heightened profile of missions cooperation.

Not surprisingly, the AD2000 Movement was always rooted more deeply in the non-Western church than the Western. The North American and European church and missions communities were slower to sense the shifting of the “center of gravity” of the global missions movement. Non-Westerners, on the other hand, welcomed the vision, access to participation, and voice they were given in the AD2000 Movement.

Functional Collaboration Becomes a Significant Factor

The structural trends of collaboration today continue to follow the patterns developed in the 1980s and 1990s. Cooperative efforts have naturally coalesced around major criteria: linguistic (specific language groups), geographic (countries or regions), and functional (specialized issues that



cut across linguistic and geographical boundaries).

The language-specific partnerships have been just that – partnerships, or diverse groups focused on a common issue. But the regional consultations have looked more like networks – diverse groups sharing resources/information in order to do their own work more effectively. (See sidebar, “Do We Have to Choose?”)

Significantly adding to the mix of cooperative efforts have been the networks around specialized roles. AERDO connects the Christian relief and development agencies. The World By Radio links broadcasters. COSIM brings together ministries committed to support of national leaders in developing nations. The Refugee Highway helps coordinate the efforts of field and resource country personnel working with refugees and migrants. The Forum of Bible Agencies helps translators, publishers, and distribution personnel share information and coordinate efforts. The International Orality Network brings people together who are committed to the 2.5 billion oral communicators

in the world. It's estimated that there are some 25-30 of these regional or international functional networks.

New Strategic Networks In The Field

As the global church has increasingly taken ownership of the Great Commission, simultaneously the partnership/network movement has gained traction around the world.

COMIBAM has become the rallying point for the Ibero-American world of missions. The network encourages and links missionary training, mobilization, national missionary initiatives, resource development, and partnership training in the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking worlds. COMIBAM expects over 2,000 to attend their November congress in Granada, Spain!

MANI (Movement for African National Initiatives) has emerged in Africa as the galvanizing network for unreached peoples, national evangelism and transformation, and prayer networks. At their continental consultation in Nairobi in February, approximately 500 leaders from 50 African countries gathered to assess the state of evangelization

Do We Have to Choose – Network or Partnership?

*An excerpt from Phill Butler's new book, **Well Connected: Releasing Power, Restoring Hope Through Kingdom Partnerships**.*

Early in the book we defined the difference between networks and partnerships. Let's briefly revisit that definition:

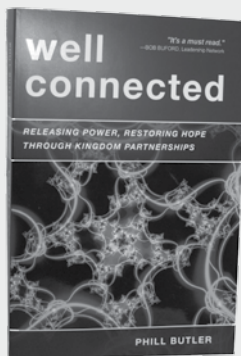
Network: Any group of individuals or organizations, sharing a common interest, who regularly communicate with each other to enhance their individual purposes.

Partnership: Any group of individuals or organizations, sharing a common interest, who regularly communicate, plan, and work together to achieve a common vision beyond the capacity of any one of the individual partners.

Notice that networks share information and possibly resources so that the individuals and/or ministries can do their work more effectively. On the other hand, partnerships bring people together around a common project or specific vision and, pooling their efforts and resources, they do something they could not do individually.

So, when addressing issues either in a complex setting like a city or over vast distances as in an interna-

tional network, it is more realistic and sustainable to first identify common concerns and resources. Then develop a network to share those resources, empowering participating individuals or ministries to greater effectiveness in their *own spheres of influence*.



We have also noted that frequently networks are incubators for partnerships. A smaller group of ministries that are part of the network develops an initiative that focuses on specific issues. Many times the network becomes a “mother ship” that fosters two levels of sharing and encouragement: (1) At the macro level, the network links people from diverse circumstances or across large geographical areas around specific but very large topics, such as cities, refugees, sports, or Bible publishing and distribution. (2) At the project level, the network encourages working partnerships composed of its participants to deal with very specific issues. These two elements of collaboration are highly complementary and should never be confused or seen as competitive. 🌐

*To order copies of **Well Connected** and other resources on partnership, see pages 28-29.*

in Africa. Sixteen work-groups addressed topics such as women's issues, Islam, oral communication of the Gospel, media ministry, and mobilizing, sending, and caring for African missionaries.

Other regional networks focused on the unreached include SEALINK in Southeast Asia and AWE-MA in the Middle East.

On a global scale, in March of this year Ethnè '06 brought together 350 leaders (from about 50 countries) focused on unreached peoples. (See story on pages 8-11.) The majority of the participants in these working meetings were non-Westerners, echoing the experience of the AD2000 & Beyond Movement. Hosted this year by SEALINK and the Southeast Asian community, future meetings will be coordinated and hosted by other regions of the world.

Blurring Of The Lines: "Field" And "Resource" Countries.

Increasingly non-Western countries are setting ambitious goals for their contribution to the unfinished task. Korea is now second in number of missionaries sent. The Nigerian Evangelical Missions Association, with over 100 indigenous mission agencies, has set a goal of 50,000 Nigerian missionaries focused on unreached peoples by 2025. The Philippine Missions Association has set goals for 5,000+ new missionaries in the next ten years. Christian populations from Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq already have many lay missionaries in every country of the Arabian Peninsula. Latin American churches and mission agencies have sent hundreds of missionaries, particularly to the Muslim world.

These non-Western missionaries now heavily populate virtually every frontier mission partnership and network in the world.

2005 saw the dream of many key leaders come true with the inaugural meeting in Amsterdam of the Global Network of Mission Structures (GNMS). Thirty-one leaders from 13 countries met to examine how a network of mission agencies/structures might more fully empower frontier ministry. An executive board was formed; incorporation has been completed; a working office in Malaysia was designated; and a web site established.

And, all throughout recent history, the World Evangelical Alliance's Missions Commission has played an active role in linking the growing diversity of the global Church and its commitment to frontier missions.

New Networks In The Resource Countries

In the West, a growing trend has been for local churches to connect around their common interests in language groups or countries. In North America alone, over 70 networks of churches are now focused on specific people groups or countries.

Other networks address similar but larger, more complex challenges. For example, China Challenge and Impact Indonesia provide annual working meetings for a wide range of individuals and agencies committed to unreached people in those regions.

These resource networks provide the best of all worlds. People from resource countries can connect with each other – and, on the field, with those cooperating there. Field personnel can not only link through their field partnerships, but they have networks in the resource countries with whom they can communicate.

Where Are The Resources/Who Has The Information?

A resource web site for the global frontier partnership/network movement, *www.powerofconnecting.net*, provides access information for many of the networks and other groups mentioned in this article. The site also has a deep reservoir of other materials (most downloadable) such as articles, case histories, principles, a complete bibliography, plus collaboration stories from around the world.

Two organizations are committed full-time to helping God's people work together to reach the unreached. Former Interdev field personnel now make up Interdev Partnership Associates and provide partnership/networking resources at *www.interdev.org*. visionSynergy focuses on partnership educational and resource materials plus helping coach strategic networks focused on unreached peoples (*www.visionsynergy.net*).

Working with several other unreached people organizations, visionSynergy is



currently compiling a comprehensive list of geographical and functional frontier mission networks. This “connectivity” project should be accessible by late April or early May. Around the world the number of men and women specifically committed to Kingdom partnership and network development is estimated at well over 2,000.

What Of The Future?

- Next-generation frontier mission networks and partnerships must acknowledge the realities of the global workforce for world evangelization and be intentional about providing a “level playing field” to connect Western and non-Western players.
- Faced with global migration on an unprecedented scale and the nature of the global Church’s involvement, networks must find ways to link those *around the world* committed to specific people groups. For instance, more Mongolians live outside the country than inside. Thousands of Mongolian students are in universities worldwide – with a particular concentration in central/eastern Europe and Russia. While both resource and in-country networks exist – no network ties together *everyone* committed to Mongolians *wherever they may be*. A similar challenge exists for virtually every other major unreached people group.
- The global Church’s relief and development agencies need a truly functional network that facilitates comprehensive coordination in times of national or international disaster. Events of the last two decades demonstrate the potential such coordination could have in increasing effectiveness and credibility for the Gospel by being in place *before* disaster strikes.

The global missions community is radically more connected than it was 50 years ago. Sociological trends, globalization, the rapidly growing global Church, prayer, and the sovereign work of the Lord of the Harvest have all played a part. No matter what your role in the frontier mission movement, these remarkable trends can only be good news. 🌐



September 11–15, 2006

How to Develop Mission and Church Archives. Ms. Martha Lund Smalley, Yale Divinity School research services librarian, helps missionaries and church leaders identify, organize, and preserve essential records. Eight sessions. \$145

September 18–22

The Internet and Mission: Getting Started. In a hands-on workshop, Mr. Wilson Thomas, Wilson Thomas Systems, Bedford, N.H., and Dr. Dwight Baker, OMSC associate director, show how to get the most out of the World Wide Web for mission research. Eight sessions. \$145

September 25–29

Doing Oral History: Helping Christians Tell Their Own Story. Dr. Jean-Paul Wiest, director of the Jesuit Beijing Center, shares skills and techniques for documenting church and mission history. Cosponsored by the Episcopal Church/Archives. Eight sessions. \$145

October 16–20

Contextualizing Theology for Mission in Asia. Dr. Enoch Wan, senior mission scholar in residence and chair of the Division of Intercultural Studies at Western Seminary, Portland, Oregon, unfolds a Sino-Asian approach to theologizing that is strategically relevant for mission to Asians. Cosponsored by Areopagos and Maryknoll Mission Institute. Eight sessions. \$145

October 23–27

Nurturing and Educating Transcultural Kids. Ms. Janet Blomberg and Ms. Elizabeth Stephens of Interaction International help you help your children meet the challenges they face as third-culture persons. Cosponsored by SIM USA and St. John’s Episcopal Church, New Haven. Eight sessions. \$145

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November 6–10

Understanding the Western Missionary Movement II: The Middle Years of Western Missions. Dr. Andrew F. Walls, honorary professor, University of Edinburgh, and former director of the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World, will present OMSC’s second **Distinguished Mission Lectureship** series—five lectures with discussions. Consultation with participants on topics of interest. Cosponsored by American Baptist International Ministries, the Episcopal Church/Mission Personnel, the Evangelical Covenant Church World Mission, and World Vision International. \$115

November 13–17

Digital Video and Global Christianity. Dr. James M. Ault, James Ault Productions, in a practical workshop, covers how to use digital video to portray the life of faith in community. Eight sessions. \$145

November 27–December 1

Gospel Witness Among Muslims. Dr. Phil Parshall, for twenty years director of SIM’s Asian Research Center, Manila, Philippines, will lead this seminar. From a lifetime of mission innovation, he will look at pressing issues in outreach to Muslims. Cosponsored by Black Rock Congregational Church (Fairfield, Connecticut), Christar, Christian Reformed World Missions, and Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod World Mission. Eight sessions. \$145

December 4–8

Jerusalem, the Palestinian Conflict, and Christian Mission. Mr. Colin Chapman, senior mission scholar in residence, lecturer in Islamic studies at the Near Eastern School of Theology, Beirut, Lebanon (1999–2003), and author of *Whose Holy City? Jerusalem and the Future of Peace in the Middle East* (2005), focuses on Jerusalem in the Bible and in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, bringing Scripture and theology together with history and politics. Cosponsored by the Episcopal Church/Anglican and Global Relations, Mennonite Central Committee, St. Paul’s Episcopal Church (Riverside, Connecticut), and United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries. Eight sessions. \$145

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Since 1985 **Mission Vision Network** has been producing public service announcements for Christian radio listeners, spreading mission vision to encourage prayer and passion for the Great Commission. This network can now be heard on hundreds of Christian radio outlets, XM-170, and the Internet. Visit www.missionvisionnetwork.org to discover free resources and motivational information about unreached peoples. The Website also explains how to receive free audio "Global Minutes" through daily e-mail.

The **Rethinking Forum** convenes its fourth annual North American conference in Atlanta June 16-18. Scholars and practitioners of contextual ministry to Hindus are invited for presentations and interaction and to enjoy the contextual *bhajan* music of Aradhna. For further details, contact Rethinking Forum, PO Box 41121, Pasadena, CA 91114, or e-mail info@rethinkingforum.com.

Springing from the desire to catalyze Church Planting Movements (CPMs) throughout the world, *CPM Journal* focuses on the various facets of starting CPMs and provides a forum for church planters of differing levels of experience to submit new ideas to a larger community and invite feedback. To learn more and to order copies of this new journal, see www.freshwinddistributing.com.

Another new tool comes from the International Student Leaders Coalition for Frontier Missions (ISLCFM), which had its origin in the 1980 Edinburgh Consultation on Frontier Missions. *The International Journal of Frontier Missions* has been one forum through which the ISLCFM has sought to nurture intergenerational dialogue, but now the ISLCFM also offers a Web-based forum, www.TheTurningTide.net.

Friends of the USCWM have given us a variety of fascinating **cultural artifacts** for mission research, education, and mobilization. Many of these artifacts grace buildings on our campus. We now need volunteer help in preparing descriptions of each artifact on display. If you'd like to help, e-mail Jodie.Van.Loon@uscwm.org or phone (626) 398-2412.

The USCWM is one of more than 800 North American ministries who have received valuable help from the **Mobile Missionary Assistance Program (MMAP)** since MMAP was founded in 1979. MMAP members are self-supported, retired, married couples who travel in their recreational vehicles and serve Christian organizations with repairs, construction services, and office projects. MMAPPers have invested thousands of hours in many key projects at the USCWM; in fact, I don't know what we'd do without them! To learn how you might join or benefit from MMAP, see www.MMAP.org, e-mail joinmmap@mmap.org, or call 1-866-745-3848.

From the founder of Dawn Ministries now comes a weekly column produced under the umbrella of OC International. **Jim Montgomery's "Great Commission Update"** can be found at www.GreatCommissionUpdate.org. Take a look at Jim's good insights.

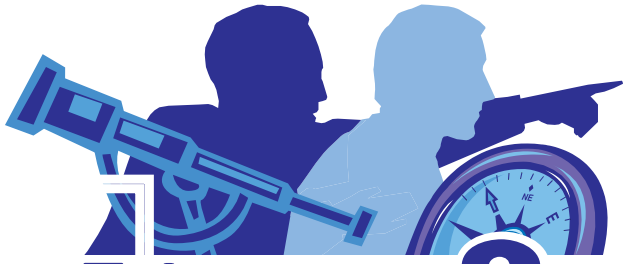
Elsewhere in this issue of *MF* (pages 8-11) you'll find a report on Ethnè '06 and its year-long initiative of prayer for a succession of world regions. Since the prayer initiative builds on the Global Day of Prayer (June 4), also note the *Ten-Day Prayer Guide for the Global Day of Prayer*, available from Waymakers (www.waymakers.org).

Darrell Dorr

Darrell Dorr is the Managing Editor of *Mission Frontiers*.



Following a brave struggle with cancer, our co-worker Corinne Armstrong went to be with the Lord February 26. For many years Corinne was a mainstay at William Carey International University, a sister organization to the USCWM. Her gifts in anthropological scholarship and academic administration were complemented by a wry sense of humor, a love for colleagues, and a commitment to unreached peoples. The USCWM and WCIU communities will miss her dearly.



Compass, Telescope & Tour Guide:

Lessons Learned in Student Mobilization

Claude Hickman

God has allowed us to have an enormous amount of contact with students over the past seven years. After 150,000 students and 1100 campus meetings I feel like we're finally learning some things about mobilization. Students are changing quickly and so are the influences on them, such as media, parents, peers, and music. Here are a few glimpses of what we've learned.

Over-choice

"Over-choice" is a term that Alvin Toffler coined and that Paul Borthwick has applied to this generation of students. I couldn't agree more. Some students won't ever find their way to the right path God has for them, not because of disinterest or disobedience, but because of debilitation – the paralysis caused by too many options.

Many students enter an Urbana missions convention with 800 agencies all promising them the biggest and best opportunities, all doing meaningful work, all with a great brochure and a free Frisbee. They leave with a plastic bag-of-options feeling kind of paralyzed. I assume many dump the whole bag in the trash at O'Hare Airport on their way home because they feel too overwhelmed to make a decision.

With the whole world before you and a passion to reach it, where do you dive in? The problem is not the number of agencies or opportunities – it's really in this generation's theology of God's will and sovereignty. Many have an understanding of God's will to be this magical *one* path: if you miss it, there's no second chance and you are forever doomed to regret missing the destiny you were meant to have. Choosing one path seems like leaving behind several other great options. That is why keeping your options open is such a high priority and why fitting yourself somewhere into God's global plans seems like an overwhelming task.

We must help students in several ways:

1. When it comes to short-term opportunities, agencies, churches, and student ministries can assist students by offering clearer descriptions and fewer options.
2. We can explain that with the help of the Bible, prayer and godly counsel they can make decisions confidently and without fear that they're going to thwart God's will for their life.
3. We can give students principles – a compass instead of a map. Urbana can give them the maps, but mobilizers need to give them the compass. I think the biblical theology of God's purpose for the nations and every believer's responsibility to live a strategic "world-Christian" lifestyle can be the "magnetic north" that this generation needs. Mobilization should include less of our "favorite mission-trip" stories and more of God's One Story. (For example, take a look at materials on www.thetravelingteam.org or at Jeff Lewis' Bible study, *God's Heart for the Nations*.) A map will only take you places other people have already explored and marked out. A compass will lead you to your destination, but you may have to pioneer the path yourself. That is the kind of Pauline vision (Rom 15:20) required for this generation to finish the evangelization of the world.

Authenticity

This generation can smell advertisements, hype or agendas quickly. They are not impressed by

*Claude Hickman is the author of **Live Life on Purpose** and director of The Traveling Team, a missions mobilization movement of students in the United States. To learn more, go to www.thetravelingteam.org.*

the best marketing or gimmicks. Mobilization must move away from the feeling of “selling” and more toward an attitude of “inviting.” We must be authentic and invite others to the life we’re currently living.

Students might idolize the worship bands and speakers that bounce across the country in tour buses and airplanes, staying just long enough to brush a few hands on their way to their next gig – but students would trade all the superstars for a father, a transparent, loving person whose life they can watch, enter into, and learn from. They desire people close enough to rebuke them for error and to hold them accountable to their convictions.

Real is cool. You don’t need to get square-toed shoes and a Von Dutch hat. If you haven’t noticed, the “reality television” show is crushing everything else because students are sick of “actors.” This generation wants spiritual mentors who give them the freedom to be “in process.” Since we’re *all* “in process,” sharing our struggles in the World Christian journey is the greatest way to win attention and respect from students. They recognize the courage it takes to be vulnerable, and they will run to those types of leaders.

In mission mobilization we must become tour

guides instead of travel agents trying to sell students a ticket to a place that we’ve never been. If you no longer struggle with praying for the world daily, then at least talk about a time in your life when you did. Authentic mobilization involves less of the “you go” and more of the “come with me” in our communication and interaction with students. Watch Dorothy in the *“Wizard of Oz”*: she’s magnetic, not because she is the strongest and bravest, but because she’s taking the journey herself, come what may.

Making Long-Term Commitments “Incrementally”

In the past, missions commitments were for a lifetime: “Who will come forward and commit their life to missions?” Today young people are making smaller, incremental commitments back-to-back, sometimes leading to 10, 30, or 40 years of service. If we look broadly and add up the smaller segments of commitment, we see that this generation is capable of being committed to a *vision* for a lifetime – but maybe not to a *venue*.

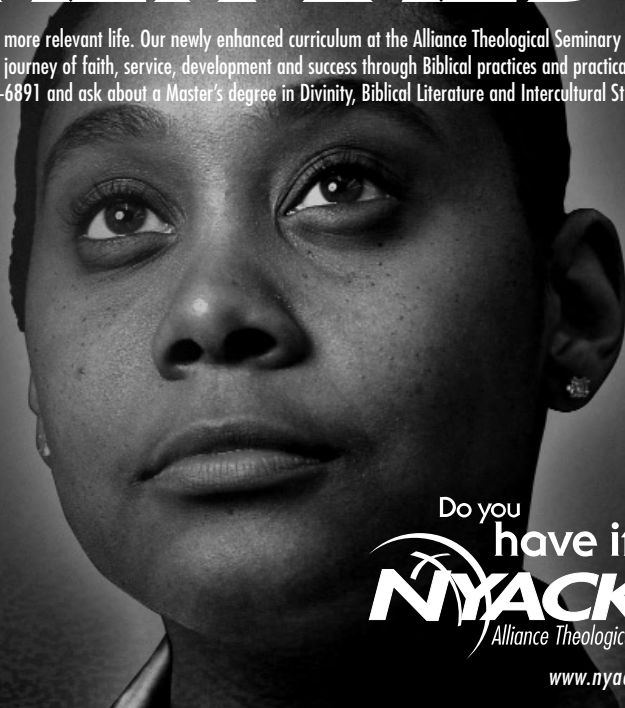
We can glean at least two important lessons from these observations. First, we must allow students to be “in process,” and we must offer various points of entry as well as progressive steps. Some

students go overseas for a summer or a year and check off overseas service from their to-do lists for a lifetime, assuming they’ve done their duty – especially when their sending agency or ministry offers no next steps for them to take. This is why our goal in The Traveling Team has always been a holistic one – to raise up World-Christians who are praying, giving, going, welcoming internationals and mobilizing others. If students only see missions as going, they will not see the strategic lifestyle choices that can keep them involved during seasons they are not overseas.

Second, thorough *follow-up* is essential to mobilization. The Traveling Team places a high value on follow-up in all that we do. After we speak

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to a group we will re-visit the campus the next day to meet one-to-one with students. Each student that we meet with individually gets several follow-up e-mails from us personally, a follow-up e-mail from our office once a month, an e-mail from agencies that we partner with, and guidance through the “12 lessons” on our website as continued development. In one month that student may get 11 “touches” from us, 11 reminders to keep moving in the process. It’s like physics – it takes the greatest amount of energy to get an object moving from zero to one, but once it’s rolling, momentum takes over. The job of mobilization is usually taking people, especially students, from zero to one. Students can go from zero to one, but it requires consistently-applied energy and follow-up to keep them moving. If it takes 3-5 years from initial exposure to a “missions decision,” then where are the people coaching these potential world-Christians along the way? A few people must say, “I’m going to invest my life in mentoring a few faithful men or women into a world-Christian vision.”

I’ll Go Anywhere As Long As You Go With Me

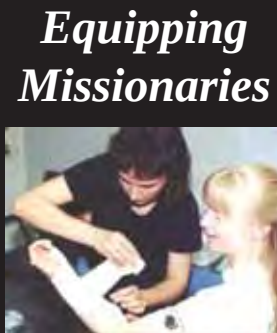
The importance of community among students is something that is radically changing the dynamics of short- and long-term work in missions today. Television gives us a great insight into the shared values of a generation. Shows like *90210*, *Friends* and *Seinfeld* in the last decade demonstrated that young adults can go through anything in life as long as there is a small community of relationships to provide social strength.

I think that this generation is asking the question “*Who* is going?” long before they ask “*Where* are we going?” I’m not talking about peer-pressure but a deeper need for a team or community.

For example, mission agencies that offer team approaches and clear descriptions for summer trips are seeing an increase in student participation. Though this may take more effort for agencies, the payoff can be great. We recently saw



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an agency put together a one-year team to India as prelude to what they hope will be long-term work there; the team came together quickly, and two married couples from the team have committed to lead that work long-term.

The Telescope

Because of “overchoice,” I’ve begun to give students a principle-based approach to finding direction from God on their journeys. The process encourages decision-steps in an important order to ensure meaningful Great Commission decisions and to protect against selfish distortions. I call this approach *the telescope*.

In this telescope the first lens we look through is *leading*. (When I say *leading* I do not mean that some feel “called” to missions and others are not called. We missions mobilizers get on-edge when you start using this kind of language because we maintain that everyone is called to be on mission with God in reaching the nations. We are all commanded to *go* – leading just tells us where to *stop*.) Two main “leading” factors to start with are 1) a religion group or 2) an area of the world. Many times the decision-lens of leading must be discerned by experience, which is why every believer should determine to take at

least one meaningful short-term mission trip in his or her life. God clarifies in the midst of obedience, not beforehand.

We get clearer direction from the second lens of the telescope, namely, by asking what service is *strategic*? The strategic lens is what ensures that we are not “building on another man’s foundation” and that we are “finishing the race and completing the task” of reaching the unreached peoples of the world.

The strategic lens asks questions such as “Where in the area or religion group (first lens) is the most strategic place I can be used?” or “Where is the greatest need for the gospel or greatest opportunity for its spreading?” (You might feel the Lord “leading” you to Fiji – “Yep, I can see myself there.” But that might not be the most strategic in reaching the unreached. I may want to work among Muslims, but just because there are Muslims in

Kansas doesn’t mean that’s the most strategic place to reach them or that it will impact the unreached peoples of the Muslim world.) *Leading* is gained mainly by experience, and *strategic* may be gained by education.

The third lens I call “*gifting*.” This is the question “Can God use my talents, career, degree, or skills to serve in this strategic area where I feel Him leading me?” Right here is where most students err because they want to flip the tele-

Students may be tempted to look through the telescope backward.

scope – they want to look through the lenses backward. Steve Hawthorne once related to me a long conversation he had with a young lady seeking various ways she could use her Spanish-language skills among unreached peoples. After Steve had exhausted his knowledge of possible unreached people groups in South America, etc., he finally challenged her, “Why don’t you stop telling God what you want to do for Him – and begin by asking God what He wants you to do?” Students can’t look through the telescope backwards or they get a very narrow, limited view of how God may want to use them.

Finally we encourage students to look through the *agency* lens: what mission agency or sending entity can train and send me to this area, whether using my academic degree or not? Once again students may be tempted to look through the telescope backward if they know of only one agency (which many do). It’s good to prompt students to become familiar with several agencies so that direction is based on choice and not default. 🌐

To read a fuller version of this article, go to www.thetravelingteam.org/2000/articles/mobarticle.pdf

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- ▶ Does the New Testament teach that one church should pay for the ministries of another?
- ▶ Do the lessons from mission history support the agenda of the International Partnership Movement?
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- ▶ How can the church demonstrate interdependency without creating dependency in an age of globalization

For reflections on these issues, and more, get your copy of ***Mission in the Way of Paul: Biblical Mission for the Church in the Twenty-First Century*** by contacting Peter Lang Publishing at (800) 770-5264 or www.peterlangusa.com.

WHAT RESPECTED MISSIOLOGISTS ARE SAYING:

David J. Hesselgrave: “Books of the nature of *Mission in the Way of Paul* call for evaluation on at least four bases: the importance of the subject matter; the quality of the research; the logicity of the development; and the validity of the conclusions. Most books are worthy of commendation on one or another of these bases. But this one is unusual. It passes every test. . . . Any and all who really want to understand where missions are today and where we ought to be heading tomorrow should not only study these chapters carefully, they should ponder their challenges prayerfully.”

Samuel H. Moffett (from the foreword): “I knew I was going to like this book. It is more than a splendid comprehensive study of a whole century of analyses of St. Paul’s missionary methods. It adds something that may surprise a good many: a critical look at how the apostle’s methods compare with what has become the most popular recent model for global mission.”



The SHIFTING God(s) of Western Christianity

Jacob Loewen

*The following excerpts are taken from chapter 18 of *The Bible in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (William Carey Library, 2000). To obtain copies of this book and other thought-provoking resources, see www.MissionBooks.org*

Western Christians, especially missionaries from the West, have always declared that they worship and proclaim only one God, the God of the Bible, the God of the whole world. However, in spite of this theological ideal, in actuality Western Christians – including evangelical Christians – commonly indulge in spiritual promiscuity with gods other than the God of the universe. Much like ancient Israel in Canaan, we, too, radically diminish God's place in our worldview and in our lives, substituting various gods from our cultural environment.

Of course, the nearly universal modern awareness of the whole physical world, and even of outer space, has helped Western Christians shake much of the territorial linkage of God which we saw in many world religions and also in early Israel Western Christians do believe in a geographically universal God who should be made known to people everywhere. But that is not the whole story.

The Diminution of God

Western culture, with its emphases on science and technology, has for decades been in the process of eliminating God's involvement in ever larger areas of human concern like weather, agriculture, economic well-being, medicine, mental illness, and almost everything else Bonhoeffer spoke of the God of Western religion as a *Deus ex machina*, an artificial element introduced into human thinking to provide quick, superficial solutions. People use this God to provide the answers and explanations beyond the point at which their understanding fails. But such a God is constantly being pushed farther and farther back as our secular knowledge advances

A Specialized God of Religion

This diminished God of Western Christianity has become a specialized God, restricted largely to preparing people for the afterlife. This drift seriously troubles most informed third world Christians. In their religious backgrounds, God/gods dealt with all of life, but in the Christianity of the Western missionaries they have been taught to worship a God with a narrow specialization

A Tribal God

In some respects, we give our diminished God many of the characteristics which prophets of ancient Israel and New Testament writers sought for centuries to help the Israelites outgrow. Israel struggled to shake its understanding of Yahweh as a tribal God and to learn to see God as the God of all peoples.... And when Jesus read the Scripture in a Nazareth synagogue, people spoke well of him until he implied that the Messiah was for Gentiles as well as Jews. Then the same people were enraged (Lk 4:22-30).

That struggle to grow out of a tribal God continued in the early Christian church, and Paul's conviction about this matter was sounded with great clarity: "There is no difference

Western Christians commonly indulge in spiritual promiscuity with gods other than the God of the universe.

Jacob Loewen, Ph.D. in anthropology, served as a Mennonite Brethren missionary among Indians in South America for ten years and as a translation consultant with the United Bible Societies in South America and Africa for 20 years.

between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free men, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28 GNB). But although we proclaim that God is the God of all peoples worldwide, we shrink God down into our own parochial deity

The diminished God of modern Western Christianity leaves much room for other gods to take over.

Religiously, God is made in the image of our particular biblical interpretation. We see our own understanding of God as biblical, that of other Christians as not. We consider the reflection of God we see dimly in the

mirror to be the only true reflection. Those images which others see in the same glass are gods to be destroyed.

I have met Bible translators who considered themselves and their work so close to God and so sacred, that they hesitated to let me look at it, even though they wanted the Bible Society to publish it. In one case, I sat on the doorstep of a mission house for three mornings while the missionaries inside debated about whether I was Christian enough to look at their work. In another I was told outright that they could not put the fruit of their spiritual labors before an "unsanctified" outsider....

Rivals to the Universal God

... The diminished, specialized, tribal God of modern Western Christianity thus leaves a great deal of room in our lives for other gods to take over. Western Christians therefore happily worship gods which are rivals to the God of the universe. We are idolaters. Idolatry is the elevation of a preliminary concern to ultimacy. Something essentially conditioned is taken as unconditional, something essentially partial is boosted into universality, and something essentially finite is given infinite significance (Tillich 1953 1:16).



Wealth as God

The Western secular, materialistic and scientific worldview finds the God of the Bible to be largely irrelevant, most blatantly so in the area of economics. When we read the specifics of Old Testament economic law, such as giving back the land to its original owners every fiftieth year (Lev 25:10-13,25-28), charging no interest on money loaned (Lev 25:35-38; Deut 23:19-20; Neh 5:7-10),

giving whatever to whoever asks for it (Mt 5:42), and never asking back some item that has been borrowed (Lk 6:30-35), we get the uncomfortable feeling that the God of the Bible knows very little about a viable economic system

Third world Christians who have lived in America or who know missionaries well perceive that wealth rather than God is the organizing principle in secularized Western culture, including Western Christianity. The massive economic hole we sense in the universal God leaves a lot of room for an economic idol for wealth as God



Materialism as God

[Author John White notes,]

"My definition of Western materialism might appear to exclude Christians. No Christian would agree (that is, if the matter were put to him or

her as an abstract proposition) that matter is all that matters, for our very faith negates the assertion. Yet if our behavior (as distinct from our verbal profession) is examined, many of us who call ourselves Christians begin to look more like materialists. We talk of heaven, but we strive for things."

[White continues,] "Yet Christians are rarely happy as materialists. Heaven tugs at us too vigorously. We find ourselves apologizing for our new cars or our larger houses. This tug of war renders most Christians ill at ease and at times ineffective" (White 1979:38-39).



Technology as God

Technology, the art of tool-making, is one of the wonderful capacities with which God has endowed human creatures. However, both nations and people can grant technology a life of its own, set it on its own

course, and make it their God. People convince themselves that what technology can do, it must do, and do it for them.

The Church as God

For some people, some groups, some denominations, the specialized God of religion has begotten a son, a junior God, the church – my church, my denomination, my community of believers. When the church is God, the community of those who hold common beliefs and practices and who submit to a common rule becomes the ultimate object of

trust and loyalty. The church becomes the source of truth. What the church teaches is believed and is believed because it is what the church teaches. The church is trusted to be the judge of what is right and wrong and the guarantor of salvation.

When the church is God, to have faith in God is to have faith in the church. To turn to God is to be converted to the church because the two are identical. The way to God is through the church. The community that once pointed to the faithfulness of God now points to itself as the faithful representative of God. God and the church have become so identified that often the word "God" means the collective representation of the church. God is defined as the one in whom the church believes.

Church history is reinterpreted from the account of the mighty deeds of God in creation, judgment, and redemption, to the story of the church. Church history becomes holy history, an account of the deeds whereby the special community was formed and its rites established. Church rituals, instead of being the dramatic reenactments of what God has done, is doing, and will do for people, become celebrations of the deeds of the church or its functionaries.

The unity of the church, the holiness of the church, and the universality of the church are valued not so much because they reflect the unity, holiness, and universality of one God, but as ends to be sought for the sake of the church. They are virtues to be celebrated because in them the true church makes its appearance. The God to whom reference is made in every act of worship and in every proclamation of the church's message is still acknowledged, but is merged into the church as God (Niebuhr 1943:58-59; Niebuhr 1951:68).

Evangelical Protestants do not hesitate to point to the Roman Catholic church as being the God of Catholics. But especially in evangelical churches which began as small separate movements and continued to be ingrown because of their differences from the world around them, the church has likewise often become God. The small body of fellow believers bonds into a group which gets its life, its sustenance, its identity, from the church. Similarly, larger, more historical churches whose God has been diminished, seek to fill the gap by making the church into a God and thus fall into self-worship.

Mutual Reinforcement of the Gods

We have other gods as well, but those already mentioned illustrate the phenomenon of the shifting gods in the West. As the God of the universe, to whom we still give lip service, has been special-

ized to religion and particularized to a welter of conflicting interests of nation, denomination, and the individual, three other mutually reinforcing, powerful gods fill the gap left by this diminution.

The God of materialism supplies the motivation. Consumed with the worship of things, goods, belongings, we have turned to technology to provide them for us, and as technology has performed many miracles for us in this century, we worship it also as our God. The God of technology, in turn, rewards some of us with wealth, which makes us comfortable and gives us security, so we worship it, too. The God of wealth, in turn, feeds the God of materialism, making it possible for us to acquire the goods we crave (Goudzwaard 1984:13; Walsh and Middleton 1953:131-39).

So we have a trinity of mutual reinforcement among these three great gods of the gap, three great idols to which we have built our altars, and in whose slavery we live. And that trinity has been co-opted into the service both of our specialized God of religion and of our tribal God. The materialism-technology-wealth trinity of idols nourishes the God of religion and the tribal God, making them more powerful, and us more comfortable in them. The God of the church, spawned by the God of religion, is especially dependent on this trinity of idols and governed by it. And all look to the tribal God for security against other tribal gods and the people who worship them....

We see our idols more clearly when we examine ourselves in light of other cultures, including biblical cultures. They, too, have their idols, of course, but if we see only their idols and not our own, we do not see much of the truth. Peoples of other cultures sometimes need to see their idols through our eyes, and sometimes we need to see ours through theirs. 🌐

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When Our Message Falls Flat

Greg H. Parsons



We all like things a certain way – from how we like our eggs cooked, to serious things like how we communicate Jesus. Our backgrounds and experiences shape our preferences of church, emphases in our relationship with Jesus, and how we communicate our faith. While some of us like occasional variety in our egg orders, we certainly don't want to change "truth" at all.

But our understanding of truth is often clouded. Certainly our way of communicating truth must vary with the context. Neither Jesus nor Paul treated everyone the same, but they used different lessons, methods and illustrations.

Naturally, our views have also been profoundly impacted by where we live. When some from North America see challenges to their views and perspectives of Christianity, they lash out. Well-known Christian leaders have done this repeatedly in the last few years. Even if their words are sometimes mere "sound bites" taken out of context, what those outside the Church most clearly remember is that Christians are inclined to point out evil in *other* people, in *other* religions, and in *other* systems – but never about problems or evil within Christianity.

We can't see – or don't talk about – the log that is in our own eye related to the ways in which Satan has infiltrated the Church and our "Christian" systems in the West. In fact, if someone writes a book about problems in the Church, he or she is usually branded as attacking the Body of Christ or causing disunity.

Yet when we learn of the number of Christians in North America or around the globe, we have to ask: why aren't they making more of a difference? Either (1) we are hiding our light under a basket, (2) there isn't any light at all, or (3) our light is so weak as to not need a basket to hide it!

So, when well-known Christian leaders speak out about the evil in other religious systems, do we follow their lead because they seem more spiritual than we are? Or do we assume they must be right because they are so well-funded? Or are we really, secretly, hoping they're right because – like many Americans – we want to "get angry" and lash out, demanding our rights and freedoms (and donating to ministries which do that)?

Remember that the world is not so much listening to our ranting as watching our slip-ups. Are we communicating truth in ways that really impact and edify? Today's higher volume of public information on the Internet and other media (some of it true!) means that it's not only *not* helpful to spew out judgments, but that such statements also derail those seeking to effectively reach out to people categorically included in the public rants.

For example, the public pronouncements of one North American leader have prompted a nationalistic backlash in one Latin American country, forcing 150 missionary adults and their children to leave their homes and work in the remote tribal areas of that country. These missionaries are waiting in the cities of their adopted homeland, expecting to be forced to leave the country. They're now wondering how they will continue church-planting ministries and translation work.

If we know Jesus and are seeking to follow Him, we have the truth living in us. Yet none of us reflects that truth fully all of the time. Some of what each of us believes is right, some of it is wrong or misinformed, and some of it is neutral.

One example revolves around how we represent ourselves to Muslims or Hindus. If we call ourselves "Christians" before Muslims, many assume we are immoral. Why? Because America is a "Christian" country which churns out the immoral media programming beamed every day into their homes and sold in their video stores. Most Muslims have never met an American, much less a believing follower of Jesus, to provide a comparison or contrast to what they see in public media.

Have you tried to befriend a Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist near you? Learning how they think and how they perceive us is as important as knowing what to say. Listening and learning teach us how to verbalize truth in ways others can understand and receive. 🌐



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