

Where Missions Are Headed

By David Lundy

Change is not something to revel in—unless you have ADD and suffer from a short attention span! In fact, Scripture warns us about the danger of befriending those who say ‘if it ain’t broke, break it’ in recommending change for the sake of change: ‘Do not associate with those who are given to change.’ (Prov. 24:21, NASB. The NIV substitutes ‘rebellious’ for ‘given to change’.) Nevertheless, our world, and that of missions, is fraught with *change* as we enter the new millennium. Let me briefly suggest some trends we face in our company and to which we must respond in an appropriate way in the coming years.

- **Churches will bypass the middle-man to do missions themselves.**

Speaking personally, I do not see this as a negative trend, in balance. Yes, it means that such churches do not have the specialisation to prepare those they are sending for cross-cultural living; yes, they may indiscriminately overestimate the value of the short-term teams they send; and yes, they may ‘corrupt’ national believers by throwing money at them willy-nilly. However, I believe church-initiated mission is a paradigm shift to a more biblically healthy theology of mission whereby church is not the *sender* so much as the *sent*.¹ Some of the mega-churches that started this trend to do mission themselves are now coming into a saner position of learning to work with para-church organisations that may have the

expertise and experience that they do not. If mission agencies overcome their defensiveness about this trend and develop attitudes of servanthood to the new churches, I believe synergistic partnerships will emerge that will keep us from becoming steadily redundant. Therefore, look for new ways of recruiting and new configurations of collaborating in our company. We may see church to church-planting team networks developing in the years ahead with our traditional sending mechanisms needing to adjust.²

- **Transformational development will continue to gain momentum as an essential component to world evangelisation.**

Fewer evangelicals are insisting on the separation of *proclamation* from *demonstration* in evangelism. Generation X Christians will settle for nothing less than a commitment on the part of traditional agencies to express the love of Jesus in action, addressing the needs of the whole person. With heart conversion and church planting still seen as being the core of genuine *transformation*, early mistakes of the relief and development movement will be avoided in penetrating the final frontiers with the Gospel.

- **The church in the two-thirds world will increasingly call the shots in the international missionary movement.**

Now making up 80% of the world’s Christians, evangelicals (including

charismatics) from Asia, Latin America, Africa and Oceania are sending missionaries in equal numbers to the western world.³ What they have been more reluctant to do is take the leadership in global gatherings and international organisations. This may have a lot to do with their dependency on the West financially to a significant extent still ('he who has the gold rules' is an unfortunate mindset yet present where global partnerships function). However, notice the recent challenge of the British Anglican community by an African bishop and a Canadian diocese by a Chinese one, whose high view of Scripture and a more literal interpretation of it disallow homosexual practice in the Christian faith community. Voices like Philip Jenkins argue that the conservative church of the two-thirds world will usher in a global revolution of the church that will have the same impact as the posting of 95 theses on a door in Wittenberg in 1517.⁴ South Korea is currently the second-largest sending country in the world with respect to missionaries. Singapore sends the highest number of missionaries per Christian capita worldwide. What I predict will happen over the next decade is that what is emerging in Christendom at large will occur in the missionary community as well; the two-thirds world church and her missionary agencies will graciously force a retooling of western mission agencies.

- **Fluid, networking, collegial methods of leadership and ministry will characterise all growing, healthy**

mission agencies, replacing pyramidal, directive styles.

A function of globalisation and post-modern scepticism of authority structures and meta-narratives, servant leadership will nurture team ministry, plural leadership and rapid responses to escalating crises. Fluidity bred by the Internet will facilitate networking to aid reaping, like an email contact nurtured initially in Frankfurt, now being followed up on the ground in Fez.

- **Soft apologetics and new styles of evangelism will emerge as a result of the clash of radicalised religious civilizations that are seeking to fill the vacuum created by the failure of postmodernism and secularism to capture the souls of a frightened and disillusioned world.**

Any form of fundamentalism will increasingly be suspect—Muslim, Hindu, or Christian—in a world riddled with terrorism.⁵ In this environment, whether in Birmingham or Beirut, a gentler form of apologetic that shows a respect for those following different world religions, while firmly presenting a less combative and more Christocentric defence for the uniqueness of Christ, will be the most influential. Again, blending 'good works' with friendship evangelism will be crucial to gaining a hearing.⁶

I do not have space to delineate other trends that I see on the horizon. Some are 'dreams' or 'hopes' and not 'educated guesses', so perhaps they do not belong here. In closing, let me, however, just mention them with-

out elaboration... and you be the judge.

- Harvesting in the Muslim world will occur in ways seen in the tribal and communist worlds of the previous two generations.
- The Chinese house-church movement will make a greater impact on the 10/40 Window, and in ways no other national church has been able to do.
- Many mission agencies will 'merge or perish' as the church in the West becomes obsessively preoccupied with reconverting its own post-Christian and religiously plural context and has less money to go around.
- The supplanting of incarnational long-term missionaries by short-termers will finally peak and there will be a renaissance of the 'career missionary', as Generation Y 'forsakes all', but this time they will be tent-makers and in sustainable development or micro-enterprise work.
- The 'glocal' church will view the mission field as 'here' and 'there' and will move on both fronts at once.
- Niche mission agencies will thrive as churches take on unreached people groups, and develop global missions in a local way, so that huge agencies with a global outreach will become an endangered species by distrustful postmodern evangelicals.⁷

I have gone out on a limb, so feel free to saw the branch off by contacting me at davidl@wornet.org. What a thrilling age to live in, as our Sovereign God takes pleasure in fashioning a people for himself.

Footnotes

- 1 I feel so strongly about this theology of church that I am currently under contract to write a book on *Rediscovering the Missional Church in a Postmodern and Religiously Plural World*, which will be published by Paternoster in 2005.
- 2 For further study on missional theology of the church and of this trend in missions, I recommend the following books or articles:
 Darrel Gruder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids, W. B. Eerdmans, 1996);
 Darrel Gruder (ed.), *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1998);
 Stan Guthrie, 'New Paradigms for Churches and Mission Agencies', *Mission Frontiers* (January-February 2002), 6-8;
 J.S. Hammett, 'How Church and Parachurch Interact: Arguments for a Servant-Partner Model', *Missiology: An International Review* (April 2000), 199-207;
 Ros Johnson, 'Cutting Out the Middleman: Mission and the Local Church in a Globalised Postmodern World', in Richard Tiplady (ed.), *One World or Many? The Impact of Globalisation on Mission* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2003), 239-250;
 George Miley, *Loving the Church, Blessing the Nations* (Waynesboro: Gabriel Resources, 2003);
 Paul Pierson, 'Local Churches in Mission: What's Behind the Impatience with Traditional Mission Agencies?' *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (October 1998), 146-150;
 Frank Severn, 'Mission Societies: Are They Biblical?' *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (July 2000), 320-326;
 Richard Tiplady (ed.), *PostMission* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002);

- Charles Van Engen, *God's Missionary People* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).
- 3 The term *Majority World* to refer to *Two-Thirds World* is increasingly used by missiologists to refer to the Christian presence there because it is more accurate statistically.
 - 4 Philip Jenkins, 'The Next Christianity', *The Atlantic Monthly* (October 2002), 53.
 - 5 Developing this thesis include Robert Spencer, *Islam Unveiled: Disturbing Questions About the World's Fastest-Growing Faith* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2002) and Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1997).
 - 6 Ajith Fernando, *The Christian's Attitude Toward World Religions* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1995) has an excellent chapter on the need for a less aggressive form of uncompromising witness.
 - 7 Todd Johnson, 'It Can Be Done': The Impact of Modernity and Postmodernity on the Global Mission Plans of Churches and Agencies', in Jonathan Bonk (ed.), *Between Past and Future: Evangelical Mission Entering the Twenty-first Century* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2003), 46.

