

A NEW DIRECTION IN MISSIONS...

Partnership With National Leaders

Jesus said:
*“All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Me.
Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...”*
(Matthew 28:18-19)

The

Modern Missionary Movement

When the modern missionary movement began in the 18th and 19th centuries, the primary way to evangelize foreign lands was to send European or American missionaries. This followed the Biblical pattern of the Church at Antioch that sent out Paul and Barnabas as missionaries to unreached Gentiles (Acts 13:1-4). Like their Biblical forerunners, these early pioneer missionaries carried the Gospel to much of the known world, often at great personal cost and family sacrifice. Many buried their wives and children in remote lands as a result of the dangers, diseases and disasters they faced. Untold numbers of others died as martyrs for their faith in hostile lands. But their vision, faith and sacrifice resulted in the salvation of millions. Their faithfulness to the Great Commission in their day resulted in the establishment of the Church of Jesus Christ in thousands of town and villages around the world. Many of those churches and ministries still exist today and are going on “...from strength to strength in the Lord” (Ps. 84:7).

What about today?

It is estimated today by missiologists that approximately *87% of all unreached people in the world live in countries that are basically closed to traditional foreign missionaries from the West.*¹ Religious or political barriers have effectively “closed and locked the doors” in these countries to missionaries from America and Europe. No visas are granted to any Westerner who is believed to be a Christian missionary – overtly or covertly. Every form of open evangelism or Gospel witness is strictly forbidden by any and all foreign visitors. All of this means that the vast majority of the yet unreached peoples of the world cannot be reached by the traditional method of “sending and supporting the foreign missionary.”

**“87% of all unreached people
cannot be reached by traditional foreign missionaries.”**

In the last few decades our world has experienced unprecedented political and ideological changes that have redefined the political landscape of our world. The “iron curtain” has fallen that used to separate the world into East and West. In addition, the “bamboo curtain” has split, opening up great economic interchange between China and Western countries. As a result, the

¹ 60% of unreached people groups live in countries closed to missionaries from North America.

Chinese dragon is aggressively on the move and China is highly motivated to dominate the world politically and economically. Marxism and Communism have now basically imploded and self-destructed. The remnants of Maoism are also tottering on a shifting political and ideological foundation that will soon cause it to crash and crumble on the ash heap of history.

In the demise of these older monolithic political systems, there has been a rebirth and revival of *religious fundamentalism*. Radicalism within the older world religions has produced the phenomena of *Hindu Fundamentalism, Buddhist Fundamentalism, Islamic Fundamentalism* and *Jewish Fundamentalism*. Radical Islam is now seeking to dominate the world religiously and culturally through jihad and Islamic Shari'a Law. This is creating an inevitable and growing "conflict of religions" and "clash of cultures" between Christianity and Islam throughout the world (*).

In the aftermath of these earth-shaking political changes that have fragmented the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China, *there is a revival of ethnicity, tribalism, political fanaticism and totalitarianism*. All of these upheavals have effectively "slammed the door" in the faces of vocational foreign missionaries in many parts of our world where hundreds of millions of unreached people are still living in spiritual darkness.

These closed doors to a Christian witness and influence from the West have not surprised our Sovereign Lord. The Bible clearly teaches that God governs and controls all of the political rulers of this world. He puts kings on their thrones – and takes them off again according to His sovereign plan (Ps. 75:6; Dan. 2:21; Rom. 13:1). We know that His throne is established in the highest heavens, and He rules over all of the political events of history (Ps. 47:8; Heb. 1:8).

Therefore, as Western missionaries have been expelled from some countries and refused entry into others, God has raised up tens of thousands of *National Missionaries* to lead His Church and expand His kingdom in those places. Many of these nationals are the spiritual children and grandchildren of early pioneer missionaries. And they are just as spiritual, dedicated, qualified, and sacrificing as their missionary forefathers and forerunners.

10 REASONS

The following *10 Reasons* for partnership with national pastors, evangelists, missionaries and church planters are to encourage and challenge the thinking, praying, giving and going of people in American churches. Some of the reasons will be amplified more than others for obvious reasons. But each one makes an important point that needs to be prayerfully pondered by Western Christians. After reading and reflecting on them, I believe that you will agree that *partnership with key national leaders represents one of the most spiritually strategic and sound financial mission investments you can make*.

However, while this is a clarion call for the Western Church to partner more fully with national missionaries, *it is in no way a depreciation or disparagement of the role of traditional foreign missionaries*. Thousands of them are still needed in many parts of the world. I personally come from an extended family with a number of career missionaries who have greatly impacted areas of the world for Christ – as well as my own life and calling. I personally continue to minister apostolically as a cross-cultural missionary. My wife and I have personally supported expatriate missionaries all of our lives. So while I make many very strong points in this book for the support of national pastors and leaders, *I am not in any way suggesting that we stop sending and supporting missionaries from the West*. I am only saying that we should broaden and widen our missionary enterprise to the degree that it fully embraces our national partners as vital members of the mission team. I believe that the Bible clearly teaches this model as the norm.

And the political, religious, cultural and economic realities of the world we are living in demand it as never before.

(*) For a more thorough study of this subject, see my book: *A Christian Perspective of Islam* that can be ordered from NDI.

THE ROLE OF THE FOREIGN MISSIONARY

Therefore, the new geo-political realities of our post-colonial world require a new breed of cross-cultural missionaries who will go out with the purpose of raising-up and empowering the national missionary – rather than entrenching themselves in foreign missionary posts for life. That's because the authentic role of missionaries has always been to *evangelize, edify, encourage, equip* and *empower* the national – and to do so as quickly as possible.

Every

“The role of the expatriate missionary is to *evangelize, edify, encourage, equip* and *empower* nationals – and to do so as quickly as possible.”

missionary candidate has been taught that the major paradigm of Christian missions has always been the same as Christian parenting: “*Work yourself out of a job.*” And both *physical parents* and *spiritual parents* do that the same way – through *mentoring*. That's another word for *discipleship*, which is nothing more or less than *spiritual parenting*. That's why *discipleship* – rather than just *conversion*, is the very heart of the Great Commission. In His last command and commission to the church, Christ exhorted us to “...go and make *disciples* of all nations...” Since the word *disciple* primarily means a “learner,” we are to systematically *teach* our physical children and spiritual children to the degree that they naturally and healthily make the transition from *infancy* to *adulthood*...from *immaturity* to *maturity*...from *dependence* to *interdependence*. Or as Paul said, that they would “...become *mature*, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). That spells success in life – as a parent or a missionary!

“*Spiritual* parents like *physical* parents are to work yourself out of a job, and to do so as quickly as possible.”

So this booklet is a fresh call to the Western Church and world of missions to refocus and reprioritize around the goal of *equipping, encouraging* and *empowering* the national leader to the degree that they are *Spirit-filled, secure* and *successful* for the Kingdom of God in their sphere of influence. It is only when the nationals have full *ownership* and *leadership* of the local churches that the mission enterprise can be called a success.

COLLAGE OF PICTURES OF KEY NATIONAL PARTNERS

I believe that spiritual and financial partnership with national missionaries makes great sense because of the reasons I will share in the following chapters. I hope you will read them prayerfully and with an open mind. And as you do so, I think you will come to the obvious conclusions that *partnership with strategic national leaders is both the Biblical norm for missions and one of the greatest needs in the local and global church today.*

CULTURALLY SENSITIVE

Perhaps the single greatest human barrier to evangelism is *culture*. There is nothing more diverse than human cultures across the world. It is the focus of a special group of social scientists known as *Cultural Anthropologists*. They spend their lives trying to understand the complex multi-levels of various cultures around the world – past and present.

Every group of people on earth then, has some kind of culture that they live by – even those in the West who consider themselves *counter-culture*. No one can ever fully separate themselves from his or her culture – any more than they can separate themselves from their sexuality. Culture is a “fact of life” – for life! Consciously or unconsciously, a person’s culture scripts their *thinking* and *behavior* all of their lives to one degree or another. So it is impossible for a person to ever gain a *supra-cultural* perspective to the degree that they are totally “above culture” in their thinking and behaving.

Even though we all live by some culture, few of us ever stop to analyze exactly what it is. Since we have all grown up in some kind of “cultural context,” it is second nature to us. That’s because these cultural values are both *caught* and *taught* as we grow up immersed in them. We become “enculturated” by them without ever being aware of the process. They become the tinted glasses through which we see our own life – as well as the lives of others. This is known as our *worldview* – or the way we “look at life.” Our culture gives us the *insight* that largely determines our *sight*. As a result of our worldview, we live by certain cultural values and mores consciously as well as subconsciously. We generally only become aware of our own culture when we step out of it into someone else’s culture.

DEFINING CULTURE

Since our own culture is almost unconscious to us, it might be helpful to pause and define just what *culture* is. Webster defines culture this way: “*The concepts, habits, skills, arts, instruments, institutions, etc., of a given people in a given period.*” Simply put, our particular culture defines “our *civilization*.” Usually our country, class, culture and civilization are all intertwined. As a result, we all have some “cultural context” in which we live out our lives, whether or not we are consciously aware of it. Our culture then, gives us a certain set of *assumptions* and *values* that script our thinking and living.

Studies show that most of us human beings are very *parochial* – rather than global, in our worldview and life-style. The word *parochial* means: “Restricted to a small area or scope; narrow; limited, provincial.” As a result of this narrow and limited life-style, most people live and die within a rather narrow geographical area. Their world is not much bigger than their “own back yard.” They live *isolated* and *insolated* lives from others who are different from them. And until the modern age of television and internet, most people had little awareness of the “big world” that was outside of what they knew and experienced in their little valley or on their side of the mountain.

Today more and more millions of previously parochial people are aware of other countries and cultures through TV, movies, internet and cell phones. But when it comes to *personal experience*, the vast majority still live and die within the narrow confines of their own little culture. They either never have the desire or opportunity of stepping outside their own culture into another one that is radically different from theirs. So they live and die within the comfort and security of their own “cultural cocoon.” They seldom – if ever, venture outside the security of their familiar surroundings. They spend all of their time immersed in the relationships with their own “kith and kin.”

“Most people live and die within the comfort and security of their own ‘cultural cocoon.’”

But today unprecedented numbers of people are becoming mobile and transient. They are moving from one country and culture to another one. Sometimes that is by choice. Oftentimes it is a result of political upheaval, racial or tribal tensions, climatic conditions or economic necessity. People are “on the move” as never before in human history. And the single greatest demographic shift is from the rural areas to the cities. As a result, *urbanization* is the single greatest challenge to class and culture. In the burgeoning metropolitan cities of the world, there is no predominant culture. There is a “cultural melt-down” in the cities of the world to the degree that no one culture dominates. All over the sprawling metro-plexes of the world are “cultural pockets” and “racial ghettos” where people of common race and culture tend to live together. This racial and cultural attraction and adhesion demonstrates the sociological maxim: “*Birds of a feather flock together!*” In those little cultural conclaves, people try to maintain and sustain their identity through a continuation of language, dress, food, religion and tradition.

So all human beings have a natural inclination to stay within their own *culture confines* where they feel comfortable, safe and secure. And they naturally pass that cultural along to their children and grand children.

CULTURE SHOCK

However, when we suddenly step outside our own culture into another one – we experience some degree of “cultural shock.” The differences that we suddenly face may be one of race, language, religion, dress, climate, food or lifestyle. We quickly sense that we are “outsiders.” We get an uneasy feeling that we are in “alien territory.” We experience personal anxiety – and are “out of our comfort zone” simply because we are “out of our cultural zone.” To some degree, this is what every *cross-cultural missionary* experiences – and spends their whole career adjusting to.

“As human beings, we are out of our ‘comfort zone’
when we are out of our ‘cultural zone.’”

Nationals on the other hand, do not experience this. By virtue of birth and upbringing, they are *culturally conditioned* and *socially sensitive* to reaching their own people in a way an outsider never can be. Unlike the foreign missionary, nationals were born and raised in the country and culture of the people they seek to reach with the Gospel. Therefore, they suffer no “cultural shock” in ministry. Nor do they need any special *cross-cultural training* and preparation before beginning their ministry among their own people. By contrast, it usually takes foreign missionaries years – often a lifetime, to begin to understand a foreign culture...feel comfortable living in it...and begin to effectively relate to its people.

Nationals are obviously more knowledgeable of their people’s history, religion, social and political structure than any outsider could ever be. As a result, they are less likely to unknowingly offend or “turn off” people through cultural ignorance or relational insensitivity. They understand the subtle nuances of their own culture that a foreigner might never become aware of. These “shared cultural values” often make it significantly easier for relationships to develop and for the Gospel to be more effectively shared.

Through conversion and the discernment of the Holy Spirit, nationals also better understand the “cultural blind spots” and “cultural weaknesses” of their own people. That’s because they were once bound by those same fears, superstitions and traditions. It is obvious that every culture has its own set of strengths and weaknesses. However, in a fallen and sinful world, there are

no perfect pristine societies – although Cultural Anthropologists continue to eagerly look for them! Darkness and sin abound in every culture in history – which is also certainly true for the rapidly degenerating American culture! While our Western world has been greatly impacted and influenced by the Judeo-Christian faith – ours is not by any means a “Christian Culture.”

BIBLICAL CULTURE

It is important then to realize that there was only one true “Biblical Culture.” That was the one that God revealed to the Jews in the Old Testament. Tragically their history shows that they constantly disobeyed God’s Covenant and Commandments by conforming to the religions and cultures of the people living around them. Because of sin and disobedience, they quickly fell from *purity* to *paganism* when it came to God’s *revealed culture* – or “Kingdom Culture.” They grew tired of being uniquely “God’s treasured possession” (Ex. 19:5). Rather than being sanctified, separated and holy, they wanted to be just like the people in the pagan nations they were living among. They further disobeyed God by intermarrying with the people and worshiping their pagan gods and goddesses. As they did, they always lost their distinctiveness as “God’s chosen people” (Deut. 7:1-11).

When the Jews did not conform to the pagan cultures surrounding them, their religion often made the shift from *truth* to *tradition*. It hardened into *legalism* with all of its *rules, rituals* and *regulations*. As a result, their spirituality shifted from *relationship* to *religion*...from *fellowship* to *formality*...from *internal obedience* to *external observance*. And in the process, they lost their distinctiveness and uniqueness as God’s people. Since that time, God’s new “Kingdom Culture” is supposed to be revealed in the “New Israel” – the Church. But as both history and contemporary experience clearly reveal, the church also struggles with the issue of “cultural conformity” to the world around her.

So everywhere the Gospel goes, it has to be lived out in some kind of *cultural context*. And it always struggles between *conforming* and *transforming* that culture!

History, then, has never revealed any pristine culture that is perfect spiritually and socially. While there is truth and beauty in every culture, there are always areas of ignorance, inequity and injustice. So the issue of *cultural sensitivity* is one of the greatest for foreign travelers and expatriate missionaries. Learning not to make “cultural faux fauxs” is a perennial major concern. And the annals of mission history are filled with tragic stories of how cultural ignorance or social insensitivity closed doors to the Gospel in one people group after another.

CULTURAL WARS

Today, there are many “cultural wars” raging around the world. This is especially true because of the growing revival of fundamentalism in the Islamic, Hindu and Buddhist spheres of influence. And both history and contemporary events show that each of these major world religions has a strongly engrained *social culture* to go along with their spiritual dogma. This is also true in much of the Western world that has created a culture based on post-modernism, materialism, scientism, relativism, hedonism and secularism – replete with its own cultural trappings.

So regardless of the country where the Gospel has been taken, *there is always a conflict between Christ and Culture for dominance and lordship*. Tragically, Christ is often forced to compromise with culture – rather than culture bowing to His Lordship! When that happens, a “culturally conformed Christ” is no longer a threat to the mores and life-styles of the people. But neither is He any longer the Lord of the Bible. He is a “compromised Christ” who is more culturally acceptable. He is “another Jesus” inspired by a “different spirit” proclaimed in a “different gospel,” which Paul so severely warned about (II Cor. 11:4-5; Gal. 1:6).

“In a fallen, sinful and rebellious world,
there is a constant conflict between Christ and culture.”

CULTURAL PRIDE

It is also an obvious historic fact that every people group – whether ancient or contemporary – consciously or unconsciously, live with some sense of “cultural pride.” For ancient Greece it was *intellectual pride* in the wisdom of their philosophy (I Cor. 1:22). For the Jews it was their *spiritual pride* in their religious traditions (Matt. 15:3). For Corinth it was *social pride* over their hedonism and sexual freedom of expression (I Cor. 5:10). For modern American it is *material pride* as a result of our scientific and technological advances that have caused us to be the world’s only remaining “super-power” monetarily and militarily.

As a result of our world influence in the United States, the so-called *globalization of the world* is in reality the *Americanization of the world*. That’s because ours is the *dominant culture* that is being most exported through the media to the rest of the world. The younger generation in country after country ape and imitate American music, dress, ethos and morals. This causes the ever-changing “American Culture” to simultaneously be both loved and hated...imitated and rejected...sought after and shunned. It is the perceived moral decadence of our American culture – as portrayed by Hollywood and the media, that has cause the radicals in the Islamic world to call us the “Great Satan” that must be destroyed. So as a result of our dominant influence, ever American who travels internationally carries a lot of excess “cultural baggage” with him – consciously or unconsciously.

THIRD CULTURE KIDS

Ever since there have been expatriate missionaries who go to some foreign land to live and minister, there has been the accompanying challenge of *raising children cross-culturally*. These MKs, or “missionary kids,” grow up in two worlds simultaneously. As a result they are often referred to as “TCKs” – or “Third Culture Kids.” Since much has been written about this in mission journals and missionary prayer letters, I will not expound on it in detail in this chapter and book. I will just briefly describe the phenomena so you can better understand this very real dynamic of missionary life. I also hope it will help enlighten your prayers for your missionary friends so that you can be more informed about one of the biggest struggles they face.

The children of missionaries are called “TCKs” because they are really living in a “third culture.” And this is true for all cross-culture missionary children – whether they are expatriates or nationals. The same cultural phenomena inevitably takes place when you live in two worlds at the same time. These MKs grow up with a foot in two cultures – while never fully experiencing either. One foot sits lightly in their “home culture” in America or Europe. But they only know that culture superficially from periodic trips back home. Also from magazines, movies and the internet.

Their other foot sits equally lightly in the “foreign culture” that they are living in. They become “cultural hybrids” who are not truly indigenous to either place. They are not fully “here” or “there.” They are not fully immersed in either culture. The color of their skin and language identifies them with their home culture. Their daily experience identifies them with the culture around them. Their experience of both cultures tends to be surface and superficial to the degree that they never feel fully “at home” either place. They grow up in an experiential no-man’s-land of a nebulous “third culture” that is neither one nor the other – but a strange admixture of both.

I have personally known and counseled many MKs who were damaged emotionally and relationally by this experience of growing up as a TCK. It indelibly marked them to the degree that they struggled all of their adult lives to find a place where they felt they really “belonged.” And marriage to a non-TCK added a lot of extra unexplainable baggage to the relationship. The non-TCK spouse could never fully relate to the experiences of this cultural hybrid they were married to! One was *mono-culture* and the other was *multi-culture*.

I can personally relate to this to some degree since I grew up as a “PK” – or “preacher’s kid.” That meant that we had to move from church to church every few years. As a result, we grew up “making friends” and “leaving friends.” For several years we lived in one town where we went to one school. Then we were transferred to another “church mission field” where we had to start all over again. It was always traumatic – especially when you hit your adolescent and teenage years when peer friendship is so crucial and defining!

So all of us as PKs and MKs carry some scares from “growing up” where we were always “giving up.” We never really had a place we could permanently call “home.” We were always living in a parsonage or manse belonging to the church. The house was never really “ours” – but “theirs.” We could never really “put down roots” because we were always being “up-rooted” as we moved from place to place. We always had to mentally and emotionally “keep our bags packed.” So we made friendships guardedly and held on to them lightly. We knew they could not last for life because “moving day” was coming!

However, this is not just a phenomena for PKs and MKs. Children whose parents are in the military or foreign diplomatic service grow up the same way. And in our highly mobile society and world, this phenomena of not having your “own culture” is increasingly the norm for millions of children.

So this TCK is not a totally unique phenomena. For many MKs, this is a very enriching experience that gives them a worldview far broader, richer and more diverse than their contemporaries have in either culture. It becomes the defining experience of their lives that prepares and equips them for great service internationally for their country and for the Kingdom of God. Scores of TCKs are in high places of influence in America and around the world today because of their unique up-bringing in two cultures simultaneously. Speaking two or more languages or dialects also opens many doors for ministry and business to TCKs that are not open to others who are more mono-cultural and mono-lingual. So in our world of *multi-culturalism*, many MKs have a leg-up on their peers when it comes to cross-cultural savvy.

This phenomena then, of “TCK” will never go away as long as there are cross-cultural missionaries. It is an inevitable and unavoidable part of the missionary call – whether you are an expatriate or national. Some see it as “sacrifice” while others see it as “sanctifying.” And as always, a lot has to do with the *attitude* of the missionary parents that they reflect to their children.

CULTURAL STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Every culture, then, is unique. None is exactly like another. And we all grow up in some cultural environment. Also, each culture has its own set of strengths and weaknesses – just like the people who compose it. And while each of us tends to be aware of our “cultural strengths,” we tend to be equally unaware of our “cultural weaknesses.” Effective cross-cultural missionaries must increasingly be sensitive to both. They must realize that they will always be observing another culture from the “outside” rather than from the “inside.” Therefore, their perspective of the people they are seeking to minister to will always be somewhat skewed, truncated, partial, incomplete, biased and naive. And at the same time they must be careful not to wrap Jesus

Christ in our Western culture to the degree that He becomes alien and offensive to the people and culture they are trying to reach.

A sad example of this kind of cultural projection are the many artistic paintings of Jesus that have gone around the world. Most of them portray Him as a fair skinned, Caucasian-looking person with brown hair and blue eyes – who looks like He just had His hair styled and blow-dried! In reality, nothing could be further from the truth of a dark-skinned, rugged man from the Middle East who grew up doing hard manual labor in a carpenter’s shop! He was a man’s man in every sense of the word with broad shoulders, muscular arms and calloused hands. When properly portrayed, Jesus is the kind of Man that any man in any culture can relate to.

It is often this kind of unconscious “cultural insensitivity” by foreign missionaries that keep them from being really effective in other countries on a long-term basis. And it is this subtle sense of “cultural pride” that many of them carry unconsciously into other countries that causes them to often postpone the full nationalizing of their work. The feeling that often strongly comes through to the nationals is this: “Our culture is superior to your culture.” As a result, full salvation and sanctification of the national leader is often seen by the missionary as a shift from “his culture” to “our culture.” Theirs is seen as “pagan and perverted” while theirs is seen as “educated and enlightened” – which obviously means that our culture is better!

It is this sense of “cultural superiority” that often causes the expatriate missionary to indefinitely postpone the full shift of leadership authority from himself to the national. In the process, the message that comes across loud and clear to the national is: “We are not ready to be fully in charge of our own churches. We are not yet mature enough spiritually to have full authority.”

So this not-so-subtle-attitude of spiritual pride and prejudice is quickly perceived, keenly felt – and deeply resented – by the nationals. It often comes across to them this way: “We are still immature...babies...inferior...incompetent...untrustworthy – while the missionary is spiritually mature and superior.”

As a result of this attitude of superiority-inferiority, there is often little authentic spiritual fellowship between the missionary and national. While they may have “functional friendships” whereby they work together to accomplish worthy “Gospel goals” – usually set by the missionary more than the national, they do not have “covenant relationships” between spiritual equals where true heart-to-heart fellowship flourishes.

COLONIALISM VERSUS NATIONALISM

It was ultimately this attitude of spiritual, cultural and political superiority that fueled and fostered the mentality of *imperialism*, *colonialism* and *paternalism* – which ultimately fueled a reactionary sense of *nationalism*. And it was this growing sense of nationalism and cultural pride that led to the many “wars of liberation” across continent after continent. Sadly, the attitude of spiritual and cultural superiority still lingers today on many mission compounds around the world.

Perhaps the greatest missionary of all time was the Apostle Paul. As a cross-cultural missionary and church-planter, Paul had to constantly face this universal issue as he ministered to Jews, Greeks, Gentiles and Romans. No doubt this took some real spiritual maturing on his part since he was raised in Jewish fundamentalism and legalism. As a Pharisee of the strictest order, he was totally indoctrinated in the most conservative form of Jewish religious and cultural life – which he took great pride in and gloried in as a Jew (Phil. 3:2-11). It was what defined him as a

person. But all of his religious and cultural pride was sanctified and sensitized when he was saved and sanctified!

Therefore, for “Saul the Fundamentalist” to become “Paul, the fool for Christ” – was a radical transformation and shift – almost beyond comprehension and explanation! In fact, it can only be explained and understood in terms of the “new birth” that brought about a totally new way of looking at life and relating to people through the Person of Christ (II Cor. 4:10)! For him to become the great “missionary to the Gentiles” was a real spiritual and cultural stretch from everything he had previously known, stood for, fought for – and killed for! But considering the number of cross-cultural converts he won to Christ and Gentile churches he planted all over the known world of his day – he was obviously able to make this radical cultural adjustments for the sake of the Gospel. (*)

In writing to one of the young missionaries he was mentoring named Titus, Paul acknowledged the “cultural weakness” of the Cretans. And he pointed this out by quoting from their own pagan poets and philosophers. But in spite of these obvious cultural weaknesses, Paul still left young Titus behind to “...set in order what was unfinished” and “appoint elders in every town as I directed you” (Titus 1:5, 12). So in spite of the cultural sins and weaknesses of the Cretans, Paul still instructed Titus to put them in charge of the leadership of the young church there. He didn’t say: “These Cretans are too immature and carnal to lead their own churches because of the darkness in their culture, so we need to send in some missionaries from Jerusalem or Antioch to lead them for a few years!” No, he still put the local “sons of the soil” in charge of the young churches he had planted. Dare we do any less today in our cross-cultural mission endeavors?!

I believe if we do the right kind of discipleship, spiritual parenting and mentoring, the *nationalizing of the local church* can take place far more quickly and smoothly – Pauline style. Then we will truly be planting *indigenous churches* rather than “cross-cultural transplants” that require a continuous infusion of foreign missionaries and foreign money to sustain them.

(*) For a further study of the conversion of Paul, see my book: *The Transformation of a Terrorist*.

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LINGUISTICALLY SUPERIOR

One of the uniquenesses of the God of the Bible over all of the pagan gods is that He is the true and living *God who communicates*. Throughout history, He has spoken to man in many ways (Gen. 1:1; Jn. 1:1). And the zenith of His communication to mankind is the “Word,” Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1-2). Most importantly, this Word was not only *spoken*, He was *incarnated* in human flesh. As such, Jesus Christ is God’s *full and final word of salvation* to a lost and dying world (Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12; I Tim. 2:5). God has nothing further to say to mankind apart from the Person of Jesus Christ. He is God’s *last Word* to mankind when it comes to salvation.

But since God created man and woman in His image and likeness (Gen. 1:26-27), that means that we too have the ability to verbally communicate. This is one of the greatest things that separate man from the other members of the animal kingdom. None of them have the ability to intelligently communicate like man does. Animals certainly can make noises. They can bark, moo, growl, roar, crow, hiss, whistle, chirp, etc. But they do not have the ability of intelligible

speech like we human have. While it is observable and obvious that animals can “communicate” at the most basic level – they cannot talk and articulate moral, theological, philosophical and abstract ideas and concept. They have no ability to “reason” and make future projections on the basis of past experience. “Animal instinct” strictly determines their behavior. Nor can they translate “thought” into written language. These are mental and verbal abilities that God gave only to man. And He did so in order for man to be able to have personal and intimate communication and conversation with Him. Without this ability on man’s part, he could never understand the salvation message of the Bible.

GOSPEL COMMUNICATION

It is understandable then, that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is something that has to be communicated through *speaking*. While we are also called to live out the principles of the Gospel through love, deeds of compassion and good works – *evangelism requires communication*. It must be *articulated*. The Gospel message must be communicated with *words* – and very *precise words* at that. Therefore, *it is absolutely impossible to clearly explain the plan of salvation without speaking*. The communication of the Gospel requires very specific *words* with equally specific *definitions*. Therefore, the story of salvation that is revealed in the Bible requires clear *verbal communication* and *mental comprehension*. Otherwise, authentic transformational salvation cannot take place.

Contrary to what many Christians want to believe, a clear presentation of the Gospel cannot be “lived out” and “acted out” to the degree that it can lead someone to clear spiritual understanding and salvation. *It must be articulated*. None of our Christian lives are so selfless, pious and perfect that it can clearly communicate Christ to others to the degree that they will be converted just by “watching us.” Quite the opposite is often the case! As non Christians closely watch our lives, they are often very disappointed and disillusioned by our sins, foibles, inconsistencies and hypocrisies! Sadly, they are often completely “turned off” to Christ by the carnal and immature behavior of many Christians they see! That’s why one of the most common criticisms of the Body of Christ is this: *“The church is full of hypocrites!”* And while that is usually a smokescreen covering up deeper motives, it still points out the obvious about the inconsistency of many of our lives as Christians. Our lives alone are not selfless enough...loving enough...forgiving enough...grace-filled enough – to lead others to Christ just by watching us. Therefore, *the witness of our lives alone is never adequate to bring other people to salvation*. So we must *tell them* the Good News about Christ!

Whereas the *witness of our lives* is an essential part of our Gospel presentation to anyone, the *witness of our lips* is absolutely essential to bring them to personal faith in Christ. That’s because the Gospel message is encapsulated in very specific words about the *life, teachings, crucifixion, burial, resurrection, ascension* and *Second Coming* of Jesus Christ. And those *saving words* must be clearly communicated in the language of the hearer if *conviction* and *conversion* are to take place. That’s why the Apostle Paul

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underscored the primacy of preaching and teaching the Gospel when he wrote: “Faith

comes from *hearing the message*, and the message is heard through the *word of Christ*" (Rom. 10:17; Gal. 3:2-5).

"Evangelism requires communication.
It is impossible to communicate the Gospel without speaking.
The Gospel message must be *communicated* and *articulated*
through the witness of our lives and the witness of our lips."

So the primary role of every missionary is to go and clearly communicate the "word of Christ" through both *word* and *deed*. Both forms of communication are absolutely essential. It is the *visual communication* of the Gospel through the compassionate lifestyle and good works of the missionary that often opens people's *heart* to the Gospel. But in finality, it is the clear *verbal communication* of the message of Christ that the Holy Spirit uses to open people's *mind* to the Gospel. And until both the *heart* and *mind* have been touched by the Spirit of God, spiritual transformation will not take place (Rom. 10:9-10).

When the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Day of Pentecost, every one heard the message preached by the Disciples "...in their own language" (Acts 2:6). So one of the purposes of God sending His Holy Spirit was so that people could hear the Gospel message in their own "mother tongue" or "heart language."

While God "confused languages" at the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11), He transcended language barriers at Pentecost. God performed this unique miracle of speaking and hearing through His Holy Spirit to speed the communication of the Gospel of His Son to as many people as possible – as quickly as possible. And on this unique historic occasion, God did not speak to man in "heavenly language" – but in the "earthly languages" of all of the people present. This clear linguistic presentation about the Person and Work of Jesus Christ has been the goal of Gospel communication ever since the birth of the Church.

Later when the resurrected and ascended Lord Jesus accosted Saul on the Damascus Road, He spoke to him in Aramaic, his "native language." As a very privileged Jew, Paul had both a Roman Citizenship and a Greek Education. As a result, he would have been fluent in Hebrew, Latin and Greek. And yet Aramaic was his "heart language" from childhood since that was the primary vernacular spoken by the Jews of his day. It was his *lingua franca*, or street language. So in speaking to Saul, Jesus by-passed Hebrew, Latin and Greek – and spoke to him in his "heart language." And it resulted in his radical conversion from "Saul the Antagonist" to "Paul the Apostle." That's the role and goal of the communication of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

THE LANGUAGE BARRIER

Usually the single greatest barrier to effective cross-cultural ministry is *language*. Unless you can speak another person's language, it is impossible to have full and effective communication with them – especially on a deep spiritual and emotional level. That's why cross-cultural missionaries and international business people spend years learning a "foreign language." It is absolutely essential for their effectiveness – whether in ministry, business, politics, the military or international relationships. Learning to "speak each other's language" is the very first step in communication that will lead to understanding. Without that skill, misunderstanding is inevitable and unavoidable.

But with national missionaries, there is no need to spend years of study in language school in order to communicate effectively. By contrast, it often takes a foreign missionary his first full 4-year term in their country of assignment just to begin to learn the basics of a foreign language –

much less all of the more subtle nuances, colloquialisms, figures of speech and literary genres of that language or dialect. These deeper understandings of another language take years to just begin to understand unless one is especially gifted linguistically. To become fluent in a foreign language takes a lifetime of being totally immersed in that linguistic sub-culture. This reality is why most expatriate missionaries have to constantly depend upon a good national “translator” or “interpreter” in all of his most important communication to make sure he or she is understood. Without that translator, they would constantly be misunderstood.

For the national then, the language they minister in is usually their own “mother tongue.” It has been their “heart language” from birth. In addition, many also speak several other native languages or tribal dialects. Therefore, all of the subtleties, nuances, colloquialisms and idioms of their language are already second nature to them. And with God’s calling and anointing, this linguistic familiarity can greatly speed the communication of the Gospel through their witnessing, preaching and teaching.

As a result of this linguistic familiarity, the national can usually more easily translate the Words of the living God into the living language of his own people. He or she can minister in the “heart language” of their people in a way a foreigner usually never could. Through his preaching and teaching, God can clearly “speak their language.” That is why His plan is to one day have around His throne people from “...every tribe and *language* and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9; 7:9; 14:6).

ORAL LEARNERS

Before leaving this crucial subject of language, I want to share some thoughts about one of the newest and biggest areas of emphasis in global missions. It is the issue of *Orality* (*). This word reminds us that a vast majority of the unreached peoples of the world are “oral learners.” That means that *they do not learn by reading books or literature*. Consider this helpful definition and description from the *Perspectives* book on world missions:

“Oral cultures tend to be face-to-face, highly relational societies. Oral cultures transmit their beliefs, heritage, values and other important information by means of stories, proverbs, poetry, chants, music, dances, ceremony and rites of passage” (p. 437).

Therefore, because these people groups are “highly relational societies,” the traditional less relational approach of education and academics that most missions is largely based upon is ineffective. As the *Perspectives* book goes on to say:

“Those who have grown up in highly literate societies tend to think of literacy as the norm and oral communication as a deviation. That is not so. All societies, including those having a highly literate segment, have oral communication at their core. Oral communication is the basic function on which writing and literacy is based...There are millions of people who choose to learn and communicate by oral methods instead of literate ones in spite of their literacy. Those people are known as secondary oral learners. Secondary oral learners are people who have become literate because of their job or schooling, but prefer to be entertained, learn and communicate by oral means” (Ibid. p. 439; emphasis mine).

So the issue of orality is not just a reality of the non-literate world. It is also increasingly a phenomena of the Developed World where the majority of communication is “paperless.” More and more of the communication of the most Developed Countries is through non-printed means. In this technological and electronic age the internet increasingly rules and reigns as the primary means of communication. So more and more highly literate people are increasingly visual and

oral learners rather than readers. Consider this quote about what is being called “secondary orality.”

“Secondary orality is a significant influence in cultures with a strong tradition of literacy. Millions of people may be able to read well, but they get most of their important information (including beliefs and values) through stories and music coming through radio, television, film, internet and other electronic means” (Ibid, p. 439).

What does all of this mean for missions? Simply this. Much of what has been the normal evangelistic and discipleship approach in missions is virtually useless when it comes to reaching non-literate societies. That means methods as basic as *translating the Bible and distributing Christian tracts and literature is absolutely worthless when it comes to evangelism among oral learners* – whether they are primary or secondary oral learners. They either *cannot* or *will not* read the Christian literature you might put in their hands. So to give these billions of people a Bible or other Christian books and literature is virtually a total waste of time, energy and money.

Let me share another crucial quote about this challenge from the International Orality Network:

“From the time of the Gutenberg Bible, Christianity ‘has walked on literate feet’ and has directly or indirectly required literacy of others. However, *two-thirds of all people in the world are oral communicators* – those who can’t, don’t or won’t learn through literate means. Ironically, *an estimated 90% of the world’s Christian workers presenting the gospel use highly literate communication styles*.

Making disciples of oral learners requires communication forms that are familiar within the culture: stories, proverbs, drama, songs, chants and poetry. Literate approaches rely on lists, outlines, word studies, printed pages and analytical expositions of God’s Word. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, for oral learners to hear and understand the message and communicate it to others.” (*Perspectives, “Making Disciples of Oral Learners,”* p. 437; emphasis mine).

Therefore, since it is now estimated that *60% of the world can’t, won’t or don’t learn through literate methods*, that means that there are some *4 billion oral learners* in the world today. And as we have seen above, it is a big surprise to realize that millions of them are in America, Europe and the Developed Countries. These multitudes are generally referred to as *illiterate people*. Either they have never been taught how to read – or they have not been taught the importance of reading.

<p>The vast majority of unreached people are <i>oral learners</i>. They cannot be reached by our traditional missionary methods of evangelism.</p>
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However, a person’s inability to read does not necessarily mean that they are dumb, ignorant or uneducated. They may be *illiterate* but they are far from *ignorant*. Many of them are very intelligent, industrious, successful and influential. They are among the top leaders in their country and culture. It just means that they do not learn by our Western model of reading, studying or sitting in classrooms listening to lectures.

By contrast to our educational model, they learn through what they *hear* and *see*. They are *visual* and *verbal learners*. As we have already seen, they learn through non-literary means like stories, dramas and music. And they especially learn through *watching* and *doing*. They do not learn *polemically* but *practically*. They are “hands-on learners” rather than “theoretical learners.” They learn by *imitation* and by *doing*.

This reminds us of the important principle of learning that says: “*Telling is not teaching and listening is not learning.*” That means that we really only “learn by doing.” It is important to remember that Jesus not only *taught* His disciples orally – He then “sent them out” to apply what they had learned (Lk. 9:1-6; 10:1-20). In other words, He made sure they were really *learning* what He was teaching them by forcing them to move from *information* to *application*...from *hearing* to *doing*...from *watching* to *participation*...from *following* to *leading*. This is often the most neglected ingredient in the church worldwide – whether it is composed of literate or illiterate people! And we just cannot disciple people to be true followers of Jesus Christ without this level of personal involvement.

Principle:
“Telling is not *teaching* and listening is not *learning*.
We ultimately only *learn by doing* rather than by just hearing or watching.”

For millions of other people, it is not a matter that they *can't read*. They have gone to school and learned their ABCs. They know how to put together letters and words into sentences. They know how to read a book, street sign or a billboard. They are *literate people*. Many even have a number of academic degrees after their names. But they just *don't read* or *won't read*. For most of these people, it is not a matter of *can't* – but *won't*. It is not an issue of *ability* or *aptitude*. It is a matter of *appetite*. They just do not have a desire to sit and read. It is not a characteristic of their temperament. Reading and studying is just not a part of their intellectual DNA. And men in most culture are usually the worse offenders in this area! That's why it is estimated that in America 85% of all Christian books that are bought and read are by women – not by men!

Therefore, the vast majority of unreached peoples of the world today *cannot* – or *do not*, read or write. As a result, they *cannot* be reached by many of our traditional missionary methods. These people remain *oral learners* throughout their lives. And most Westerners who come from our traditional educational system that is based upon reading, studying, classroom instruction, listening to lectures, reciting what has been learned or writing it down on tests or exam papers – are totally unprepared for effective ministry to oral learners. It is a totally foreign concept to them. So there is the double challenge of not only learning a foreign language, but also the additional barrier of *non-literate learning*.

How then are we going to reach these billions of oral learners? Are we going to continue too? Or will we make a radical paradigm shift to oral learning? The spiritual fate of billions of illiterate peoples hang in the balance! Certainly God wants us to reach them with the Gospel message. They are not outside the scope and responsibility of the Great Commission. We are just going to have to re-tool our missionary machinery and take a “new direction” in evangelism! Whatever we might want to teach these oral learners, we will have to do so through telling stories, drama, songs and personal mentoring. The classroom approach is out and face-to-face “relational mentoring” is the missionary mandate of the day!

THE ACADEMIC APPROACH TO TRAINING

The same thing goes for training and equipping thousands of national evangelists, church planters and pastors. Our academic model focused in a Bible School or Seminary classroom is often not dynamic and flexible enough. It is too slow and cumbersome to train and send out the hundreds of thousands of national evangelists and missionaries that are needed to keep up with the move of the Holy Spirit in the world today.

According to missiologists, some *3,500 new churches are birthed every week in the world* – mostly in the Developing Countries. Our traditional academic models just cannot keep up with what God is doing around the world! And as one writer summarized: “Evangelicalism has used its educational system primarily to staff its own needs and to talk to itself” (The Coming Evangelical Collapse, Michael Spencer, March 10, 2009). That’s not a very encouraging summary – but I believe it is very true.

So we will always be in a “leadership deficit” when we are dependent upon this institutional model as our primary means of educating and empowering church leaders – especially in the Developing Countries. There must be a faster way to train, equip and send out Christian leaders. And there is. It is the one modeled for us by Christ. He mentored and taught His disciples in the “laboratory of life” – primarily through practical hands-on training. We will look at this more in a later chapter. At this point I only want to emphasize this new mission paradigm shift from *academic learning* to *oral learning*.

Certainly this oral learning phenomenon did not catch God off guard – even though it had not come up on most mission radar screens until just recently. The Good News of the Bible is certainly easily adaptable to this visual and verbal method of learning. Obviously many people in Biblical days were also oral learners. That’s why so much of the Bible is story-telling, parables, drama, pictorial poetry and song. And the Hebrew language is especially effective in this because it is a very “earthly language” that is primarily based on word-pictures. Greek on the other hand is more abstract, philosophical and cerebral.

OLD TESTAMENT LEARNING

When Moses wanted to make sure the Children of Israel did not forget the history of their Exodus from Egypt and forty years of wandering in the wilderness – he made provision for both the literate and illiterate learners. The Bible records that “Moses *wrote down* the law and gave it to the priests” so that they could “...read this law before them in their *hearing*...so they can *listen* and *learn* to fear the Lord” (Deut. 31:9-12). So while some like the priest could read, most were oral learners who “learned by listening” and “remembered by reciting.”

But to insure the trustworthy transfer of this vital spiritual and historical knowledge, Moses also composed a song. The priest who were literate were to write it down and then teach it to the people by music. They “sang their history” to the people until all of the children of Israel also learned it – and then could teach it to their children through singing. And this song did not just have two or three verses. It was so long that it summarized their entire spiritual history (Deut. 32:1-47)! It is interesting and instructive that Orthodox Jews continue to sing this song to this very day. So the musical transmission of their religion across the centuries has been very successful. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why the Jewish people have been able to sustain their spiritual and racial identity through persecution, captivity and dispersion to the very ends of the earth.

In addition, every aspect of the Tabernacle, Priestly Garments and sacrifices were very vivid “visual aids” to portray and act out the great salvation drama that God was teaching His people. That’s why everything taking place on the human stage had to be exact in every detail so it would not misrepresent God’s heavenly drama (Ex. 25:40; 28:31-43; Heb. 8:1-5; 9:24).

JEWISH EDUCATION

In like manner, the *7 Feasts of Judaism* summarized the Jewish faith and pointed clearly to Christ as the Messiah. These were all annual agricultural festivals that had to be “acted out” in some way by the parents, priests and people. The Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Pentecost, Trumpets, Atonement and Tabernacles – all had very visual and verbal

elements to their worship and celebration (Lev. 23:1-44). These cyclical celebrations were designed by God so that the parents and priests could more easily instruct and dramatize their spiritual history to their children and grandchildren (Exodus 12:25-28) [*].

A study of the major and minor prophets also show that God often called these men to *act out* in dramatic ways His messages to the Israelites. And these more dramatic dramas were usually about impending judgment because of the disobedience of God's people (Jer. 13:1ff; 18:1-19; 24:1ff, etc). He even asked the prophet Isaiah to go around basically naked for 3 years to dramatize the pending judgment upon Egypt and Cush – whom the Israelites were wrongly looking to for deliverance rather than to God (Isa. 20:1-6). That is certainly dramatic and protracted teaching methodology that most of us would be very uncomfortable with today! But it got across the “naked truth” of the message to God's people! It was a dramatic and visual message they could not ignore!

Added to these examples of Orality and visual learners are the many “Psalms of David.” Many of them are nothing more nor less than songs that this shepherd king composed as a boy while watching his father's sheep. They musically express the full range of worship, praise and human emotions. As a result, he became the great Psalmist of Israel who inspired other song-writers like Asaph (I Chron. 16:7). He also made sure there were entire groups of musicians and singers set aside for Temple worship who would lead and instruct the Children of Israel through songs – just as Moses and the Sons of Korah had done (I Chron. 15:17-22; 25:1-8).

JESUS' METHOD OF TEACHING

And Jesus was the Master story teller of all time! That's why the New Testament says that “... the common people *heard Him gladly*” (Mark 12:37; KJV); or “...the great crowds *enjoyed listening to Him*” (NASV). That's a lesson that most theologians, preachers, teachers and missionaries need to re-learn! After their “much learning” many of them are so dry, dull and boring that they have the gift of “putting people to sleep” when they speak! But not Jesus. His story telling and parables caused the masses to throng to Him and listen to His preaching and teaching with rapt attention.

Once again we see the potential ministry edge that national Christians can often have over their expatriate counterpart. Since many national leaders come from these kinds of cultures that are primarily based on “oral tradition,” they are often better suited to adapting the Gospel to this oral context. Much of what they learned growing up about the “tradition of the elders” of their culture, tribe or group, was learned around the camp fire listening to stories, songs and skits from their parents, grandparents and tribal elders. They were not taught these traditions by being put in a classroom and lectured to. They learned them through *close personal relationships*. They were instructed from their earliest childhood by seeing, hearing, watching, singing, imitating and doing.

By contrast, most of us from the West did most of our “learning” in classrooms from pre-school kindergarten to college and graduate school. And while we have certainly benefited from this educational model in many ways, it has not equipped us very well to go cross-cultural and minister to oral cultures.

This difference between educational approaches also explains why some of the greatest and most effective front-line evangelists and church-planters have never “been to school.” They have never received any “formal training” in Bible Schools and Seminaries. And yet, because they are good preachers and teachers through story-telling – coupled with their personal understanding of the nature and needs of their audience, they are very effective evangelists and

church planters. As a result, these “untrained and un-lettered” national Christians often win far more people to Christ annually than their foreign missionary counterpart.

EDUCATION ABROAD

At this point well-intentioned foreigners often make a tragic mistake. They think it will be a great blessing and benefit for these effective national leaders to send them to America or Europe for a more “formal education.” So they get them a scholarship and the funding to travel abroad for 4 to 6 years of studies. In the process of this separation and isolation, they lose touch with their wives, children, families and local people. And in their attempt to help them by “sending them to Bible School” abroad – they often diminish or destroy their effectiveness as indigenous national leaders.

When these transported nationals do come back home to their own people after several years of formal academic and theological training abroad, they have usually been so brain-washed by the Western model of education that they have lost much of their ability to effectively communicate with their own people. To become fruitful in ministry again, many of them have to go through the long and humbling process of “un-learning” much of what they were taught in Bible School and Seminary! Again, we will look at this issue of education more in our next chapter.

And what is true spiritually in the Two-Thirds World is also true in the First World. Church growth studies across the years in America have consistently demonstrated that some of the most effective evangelists, church-planters and pastors are not formally trained. They have not been to Bible School, Seminary or Graduate School. Many are bi-vocational or second career pastors who entered the ministry later in life after another vocation. But they have a keen sense of God’s calling upon their lives. They have a passion for Christ and a burden for the lost. They have an unshakable belief in the authority of the Bible. And they have an anointing by the Holy Spirit that empowers them for ministry. As a result, God mightily uses them to build His Church and extend His Kingdom.

So in very recent years, this orality issue and Western model of education and training has come home loud and clear to missiologists. As painful as it has been, many have realized that the majority of their traditional methods of mission and evangelism – especially to the unreached, have been largely unsuccessful because they were based upon an out-dated Western model of education and learning that is not really trans-cultural. The assumption was that “formal education” Western-style would solve all of the problems in both the church and society. But they just did not factor in the issue of illiteracy and oral learning as opposed to academic learning based upon literacy. Most of all, far too many missionaries never learned the importance of *relationships*.

This issue of orality and relational learning will continue to be one of the biggest paradigm changes in mission methodology for the immediate decades ahead. The literate people of the world have largely been reached by the Gospel in one way or the other. Few of them can every plead total ignorance about the Gospel Story. That’s because Bibles, Christian literature, tracts, Christian movies and TV are readily available to them. And in most of the cities of the world, good churches abound – whether or not they ever “darken the doors of a church.” They still do have the availability and accessibility to the Gospel if they “have ears to hear” (Matt. 7:24-27; 11:15; 13:13, etc).

Now it is the billions of illiterate people who are oral learners that must be reached – which includes much of the animist, Hindu, Buddhist and Moslem worlds. But they will only be

reached as we *preach less and tell more stories...as we teach less and sing more songs...as we sit less in classrooms and act out the Gospel more in skits and drama.*

Therefore, to effectively reach the billions of unreached who are oral learners, we must get out of the Church Buildings, Sunday School Classes, Auditoriums, Conference Halls, Crusade Arenas and Lecture Rooms – and boldly invade the streets, villages, market places, transportation centers and shopping areas where the people congregate. We must reduce the Gospel to drama, story-telling, songs, skits, games, parables, pictures and movies. Only then will we have a better chance to reach the oral learners with our visual and verbal “word pictures” of the Gospel story. And most of us will need the national Christian at our side to help us with this verbal and visual storing of the Bible!

(*) See: *International Orality Network* (ION).

[*] For a further study of this, see my book entitled *Understanding Your Hebrew Roots*

EDUCATIONALLY SUITED

As we saw in the last chapter, most national Christian leaders never have had the opportunity of receiving the level of formal ministerial training that we take for granted in the West. The vast majority have never been to college or university – much less to Bible School, Seminary or Graduate School. Nor have most of them been formally “ordained” (More about this later). From our Western perspective, these perceived deficiencies would disqualify them for Christian ministry. Yet all over the world these “untrained nationals” are still aggressively engaged in evangelism and church-planting in their countries and cultures – especially on the “cutting edge” of where God’s Spirit is being poured out.

BAREFOOTED EVANGELISTS

These dedicated national leaders are what Dr. Billy Graham has called the “barefooted evangelists.” That means with little or no training or resources, they are the primary foot-soldiers and front-line-storm-troopers for the Kingdom of God. They are the “first responders” to the Gospel in their countries and cultures who then go out and become the “first evangelist” to their own people at the grass-roots level – most of the time with little or no formal preparation or support for their ministry.

A few of these spiritual soldiers and national pastors may eventually receive some “basic training” in a local Bible School – if there is one available. Obviously in newly reached countries or regions, such schools do not exist. The same is true for “closed countries” where any and every form of Christian training is illegal. And where a fledgling Bible school does exist, it is usually under-staffed, under-funded and under-equipped by our standards – so usually not academically accredited. At best then, they are only able to give certificates rather than degreed diplomas that are accredited.

Some of these national pastors may get their basic Bible knowledge through correspondence courses or “distant learning” – known as TEE, or “Theological Education by Extension.” The vast majority however, get any training they may receive through short Pastor’s Conferences or seminars – which have always been one of the top priorities of NDI. For most however, their education for ministry has come from the mentoring and encouragement from the missionary who first brought them the Gospel. Or it may have taken place as some other national pastor or leader disciplined them who had been in the Lord longer than they have. But since most were immersed in ministry almost from the point of their conversion onward, their preparation for ministry has come from “on the job training” that has taken place “in the heat of battle.”

Most national leaders then have been trained by the Holy Spirit in the context of ministry. And most remain bi-vocational, supporting themselves in ministry through some form of secular work – just like the Apostle Paul did through tent-making (Acts 18:1-4; 20:34).

MENTORING FOR MINISTRY

When you study the New Testament, you see that this is the same *mentoring method* used by both Jesus and the Apostle Paul to train their disciples for ministry. They did not send these young believers off to study with the various “denominations” within Judaism – like those conducted by the Pharisees or Sadducees. There they would have been circumcised by the “theological distinctives” of those groups – who had already divided Judaism into “conservative” and “liberal.” Nor did they send them to study with the Herodian Party of Judaism which would have taught them to “politicize” their message so they would be PC – or “politically correct” – in their thinking, preaching and voting! And neither Jesus or Paul sent their disciples out into the desert to study in the commune of the Essenes where they would have been turned into monks

and Christian mystics. Nor did they put them under the theological mentoring of the Jewish Scribes, religious lawyers or Levites in the Temple who would have turned them into religious ritualists, legalists and fundamentalists. Instead, they used the *rabbinical* method of personal mentoring. Jesus told them: “Follow Me and *I will make you* fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19).

PARENTING AND PASTORING

This rabbinical and relational form of education had its roots in Jewish *parenting*. It is clear from the Bible that *God established the home as the first locus of spiritual training* (Deut. 6:1-9; 32:46-47; Prov. 3:1-3) – not the Tabernacle or Temple. These later religious institutions were where the Jews went from time to time for sacrifice and worship on special days – especially the 3 Pilgrim Festivals (Ex. 23:14-17). But the real day-in-and-day-out spiritual education was to take place in the home around the table – which was the “family altar.” And this spiritual education was to take place first under the leadership of the father and mother as the priest and priestess of the home – not under the formal tutelage of the Priests and Levites in the Temple (Ex. 12:14-28). The role of the religious leaders was secondary and supplementary to the primary spiritual role of the parents.

It is also instructive to note that the Jewish rabbinical method was an educational approach based on dialogue...debate...questioning-and-answering...and practical application in the “laboratory of life.” It was not primarily *lecture-oriented* – but rather *life-oriented*. There were no academic Eiffel Towers where they were assigned heavy theological tomes to read and regurgitate to professors. There was primarily but one text book – and that was the Torah. It was to be taught, explained, memorized and meditated upon (Deut. 6:6; 11:18; 30:14; Ps. 1:2; 119:1; Isa. 51:7; Jer. 31:33, etc). As rabbis themselves, both Jesus and Paul used this method of *personally mentored people into ministry* by practically impressing the truths of God’s Word upon their hearts and

“Both Jesus and Paul *mentored* people into ministry.”

minds.

In similar manner, the education most nationals receive has been given by the Holy Spirit in the context of actual hands-on ministry. Often their training has come through the school of trials, tribulation, persecution and privation – what we sometimes call the “School of Hard Knocks!” And there are tens of thousands of these seasoned soldiers in ministry and missions today, most especially in areas that are unreached and hostile to the Gospel.

EDUCATIONAL SEPARATION

This grass-roots approach to training also means that the nationals have not lost contact with their people and culture while going away to college or Bible School in a distant city. Nor have they become detached by studying abroad, or by being away for years in some foreign seminary to pursue advanced degrees. As a result, they are not intellectually “above” or “out of touch” with their own people. Thankfully, they have not become so “theological,” “theoretical” and “academic” that they are no longer practical – like many Western pastors and theologians!

Further, nationals who are trained on the field have not become so enamored and enculturated by a foreign lifestyle and standard of living that they are seen as “foreign” or “Americanized” by their own people when they return home. And saddest of all is this fact: *Studies show that the vast majority of nationals who go to the West for study never return!* They are therefore lost for missions to their own people *forever*.

THE JESUS BIBLE SCHOOL

For over a century, we have become so enamored by our Western institutional models of theological education that we forget that there are other viable options available. In the face of this strong institutional and academic bias for theological training, we must freshly remember that both Jesus and the Apostle Paul trained Christian leaders in the “seminary of life” – as I have already emphasized. And they did so in a relative short period of time. Note carefully these words concerning how Jesus called and trained His disciples:

“Jesus went up on a mountainside and called *to Him* those He wanted, and they came to Him. He appointed them, that they might be *with Him* and that He might send them out to preach,” (Mark 3:13-15).

Jesus then, trained His disciples in the context of *interpersonal relationships*. When you ponder this passage, you see three crucial prepositional phrases that summarize Christ’s approach to mentoring disciples into ministry. They were called *to Him*...to be *with Him*...and then they were sent out *by Him*. He trained them for ministry by *personally mentoring them* through the dynamic of His constant personal relationship with them under every possible situation.

Then, after three years of an intense and intimate relationship with Christ, they were prepared for any and every ministry situation imaginable! They had been personally *trained by the Master!* They had earned their “Master’s Degree” at the feet of the Lord Jesus! Through three years of intimate friendship and partnership with the Lord Jesus, they had been called, anointed and equipped through the impartation of His power and authority (Lk. 9:1; Matt. 28:18). And as a result, they shook their world for Christ!

PAUL’S SEMINARY

The Apostle Paul used the same personal approach to training disciples and Christian leaders. Almost everywhere he traveled, he had people with him (Acts 20:34; Rom. 16:1-16). Paul conducted a “mobile Bible School” as he traveled and ministered! Listen to his instruction to his young ministerial understudy, Timothy:

“And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these *entrust to faithful men*, who will be able to teach others also” (II Tim. 2:2).

Christ taught Paul...Paul taught Timothy...Timothy taught other faithful men – who would then teach others...who would teach others...who would teach others, etc. Each one *reproduced reproducers!* And you and I have the Gospel today because that *missionary mentoring method* worked!

DIPLOMAS OR DISCIPLES?

The emphasis, then, for both Christ and Paul, was more on the spiritual life and lifestyle of the leader, rather than on his theological training or academic credentials. They were focused on *spiritual character* rather than on *academic certificates*. They wanted to give the world *disciples* – rather than give the disciples *diplomas*. As a result, they looked primarily for men and women who had *teachable spirits* more than those who already felt they “knew everything.” They sought out people who had a *spiritual appetite* rather than those with *intellectual aptitude*. Their concern was *purity* and *power of spirit* rather than human pedigrees or graduate degrees! And as a result of that approach, they “turned their world upside down” for the Gospel (Acts 17:6)!

GOD’S HUMOR

God has such an incredible sense of humor in using people like you and me to accomplish His foreordained purposes in the world! We are like the donkey that had the privilege of transporting Jesus into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday. All of the praise and fanfare was for Jesus – not for the donkey! Jesus was the center of attention – not the lowly donkey carrying Him. That’s why I often describe myself as nothing more than a “donkey for Jesus.” It is my privilege to transport Him and His resources wherever He wants to go in the world. And ministry is always *about Him* and not *about us!*

I am personally often encouraged by Paul’s words to the Christians in Corinth about how God so often uses the lowly “little people” of the world to accomplish His purposes – people just us!

“Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were *wise* by human standards; not many were *influential*; not many were of *noble birth*. But God chose the *foolish things* of the world to shame the wise; God chose the *weak things* of the world to shame the strong. He chose the *lowly things* of the world and the *despised things* – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him” (I Cor. 1:26-29).

That says it all, doesn’t it?! Those verses show how God “reverses the price tags” that we put on people. He bypasses the “high and mighty” and chooses the “lowly and meek.” He gives revelation and understanding to “little children” rather than to the “wise and learned.” He looks for a *humble heart* more than a *haughty head*. For His disciples, Jesus looks for those with a *teachable spirit* like that of a little child.

Both the Bible and Christian history demonstrate over and over again that God uses *availability* more than *ability*. The “Lord of heaven and earth” highly values and uses those whom the world overlooks and deems as insignificant. The *nobodies* and *anybodies* that He makes into *some bodies* for His Kingdom and glory!

Now please don’t misunderstand what I am saying here! I am not against social standing or formal academic training for national pastors and leaders. I have had the opportunity to go to college and seminary where I have earned graduate and post-graduate degrees. This kind of theological training can be very helpful, and the degrees can often open many doors for the Gospel. Also, our NDI ministry has helped fund the building and equipping of basic Bible Schools in some countries or regions where none previously existed.

However, as I stated in the last chapter, *studies across the years in many countries have proven that formal academic training does not necessarily guarantee effectiveness in ministry*. Nor does a lack of theological training disqualify someone from fruitfulness in ministry. At the end of the day, it all depends upon God’s call and anointing on the individual – and their obedience to His Spirit and His Word.

THE INTOXICATION OF EDUCATION

The danger of formal education is that “knowledge puffs up,” as Paul warned us (I Cor. 8:1). I saw this tendency in my own life and fellow students when I was in seminary and graduate school. Day after day as we learned more “theological knowledge” in the classroom, our heads got bigger and bigger – while our hearts tended to get smaller and smaller! We were often guilty of “stuffing our heads” with knowledge while “starving our hearts” of love!

Sadly, higher education often tends to produce a desire for more and more degrees or what I call the “intoxication of education.” We want more and more knowledge – and the pedigrees that go along with it. We keep repeating the same mistake Adam and Eve made in the Garden

of Eden by choosing the “Tree of knowledge” over the “Tree of Life.” In fact, we mistake one tree for the other. We think that *knowledge is life*. So in our pursuit of knowledge, we develop an insatiable appetite for more and more knowledge resulting in more and more degrees. We think that all of this knowledge will result in the “abundant life” – which only Jesus can give us if we have a humble heart and teachable spirit.

So even though our knowledge and education did not solve the mysteries of life and bring us happiness, we still transport it abroad as though it is the answer to every problem there. But unless we take Jesus as the “key of knowledge” – we are only transporting and teaching an academic illusion – just like Jesus said the religious leaders of His day were guilty of (Lk. 11:52).

When we expatriate ministers and missionaries glory in our education and flaunt our degrees and titles, we entice the national toward academia as the key to success in ministry. Soon they too begin to believe that formal academic training will give them an elevated status in ministry – just like the missionary. So off to school they go – leaving their people and ministries behind.

After several years of formal education, only a precious few ever return home – as we have already seen. And the ones that do return home have usually lost touch with their roots. As they climbed the academic ladder, they became more and more aloof. As their titles changed – their attitudes changed. They are no longer “brother” – but rather “reverend” or “doctor.” Their dress changes from the simple attire worn by their people – to suits, shirts and ties, robes and vestments. Because of their “higher education” they now require and expect a “higher standard of living.” They become less and less accessible to their people. And while they glory in their degrees, few of their own people are impressed by their diplomas and titles.

One of the characteristics of Christ’s ministry bears repeating again: “The *common people* heard Him gladly” (Mk. 12:37; KJV). Unfortunately after many Christian leaders have graduated from Bible School and Seminary that is no longer the case. They can no longer effectively communicate with the common people they came from. Their preaching and teaching is so filled with heady philosophical concepts and technical theological terms that only the few highly *educated* people can hear them gladly! The rest of the masses are left scratching their heads in confusion at the conclusions of the sermon! It might have sounded impressive – but most did not understand what he was talking about.

Because of this danger of “intellectual speaking,” I often remind young ministers that the role of effective preaching and teaching is to get the spiritual food down on the level where the sheep can feed on it. God’s people are not giraffes with long necks that thrust their heads into the clouds where only the intellectually elite can feed! No! Jesus called His followers *sheep*. So it is the role of the effective shepherd to put the food down on the sheep’s level and “feed them” (Jn. 21:15-17).

WORLDLY WISDOM VERSUS SPIRITUAL WISDOM

Jesus also warned about the dangers of this kind of intellectual pride that caused the educated to reject His message, while those with simple faith received it gladly. In the hearing of His disciples Jesus praised God that His teaching was received by the common people: “You have hidden these things from the *wise and learned*,” Jesus said – and “revealed them to little children” (Matt. 11:26). He still does the same thing today.

Likewise Paul pointed out that it was not “worldly wisdom” but rather “spiritual wisdom” that brings people to salvation. It was the *message of the cross* rather than the preaching of theology and philosophy that God uses to bring people to salvation (I Cor. 1:18-25; 2:14-16).

Theological education and enlightenment have often lost sight of the power of the Gospel when proclaimed with simplicity and clarity.

Unfortunately, many of those who are degreed and lettered by higher theological studies often end up encumbering the Gospel message with intellectualism, rationalism and heady reasoning that requires a similar level of education in order to understand them. But Jesus spoke in the language of the common people. He purposefully illustrated and amplified His message with parables and familiar examples from everyday life that would go straight to the heart. So with powerful simplicity, Jesus “spoke the people’s language.” And we must always strive to do the same, whether we are a minister in America...a missionary on the foreign field...or a national pastor in the African bush!

LOVE VERSES LEARNING

So while “knowledge puffs up,” only “love builds up.” That’s why it has often been rightly pointed out that it is *love* far more than *learning* that impacts people. It is *ministry with the heart* more than *ministry with the head* that changes lives. That’s because the majority of humanity has a far greater *existential hurt* in their hearts than *intellectual questions* in their heads. And while the Gospel message addresses both the head and the heart – it is the heart that must be won first.

“People are always impacted by *love* more than by *learning*.”

The wise man of Proverbs rightly noted that the heart was the “wellspring of life” (Prov. 4:23). That’s why Jesus said the “heart of the problem is always the heart of man.” It is “out of the heart” that all of the problems of humanity flow (Matt. 15:19). And since the heart of every man is “incurably sick” (Jer. 17:9), only Christ can give a person a “new heart” (Ezek. 18:31). So the battle is always for the heart first – then the head. And that’s an existential issue that many theologians have forgotten in their preoccupation with the mind through academic education.

Therefore, *it is not until love is felt that the message is heard*. In my own teaching to young pastors, I often share this principle of ministry: “*People don’t care how much you know – they only know how much you care!*” So people may be temporarily impressed by a pastor’s degrees, but they will be eternally transformed by his love! *Love is what ministry is all about*. Only the Holy Spirit can give this to any Christian leader – whether they are a missionary or national...whether they are living in the First World or the Third World...whether they are ministering in the First Century or the Twenty-First Century (Rom. 5:5)!

“It is not until love is felt that the message is heard.
Therefore, people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”

PHYSICALLY SIMILAR

In this section I will be dealing with the issue of *race* rather strongly. I hope you will not be offended! But since it continues to be one of the top challenges facing the Body of Christ worldwide, it cannot be ignored or lightly glossed over. And because this issue has such a direct impact upon domestic ministry and global missions, it must be examined in the light of God's Word.

Dr. Billy Graham was asked in a TV interview with British commentator, David Frost, about what he saw as the number one problem facing the church in the Twenty-First Century. Without hesitation Dr. Graham said this: "*Racial and ethnic hostility is the foremost social problem facing our world today.*" I totally agree.

"Racial and ethnic hostility is the foremost social problem facing our world today."
(Dr. Billy Graham)

RELIGION AND RACISM

Whether it is segregation, apartheid, tribalism or caste distinction, *racism continues to be one of the greatest challenges facing the advance of the church of Jesus Christ locally and globally.* Since the beginning of my public ministry I have preached this simple principle: *Racism is not a skin problem – it is a sin problem.*" Racism and prejudice does not tell us anything about the *color of a person's skin*, it tells us something about the *content of a person's heart*. It is not an issue of *color* but rather of *character*.

"Racism is not a *skin problem* but rather a *sin problem*.
Prejudice is not a matter of *color* but of *character*."

A NEW DIRECTION IN MINISTRY

That is why New Directions International has been proactively involved in racial reconciliation for all of the four decades of our existence. We were born as a ministry in the midst of the tumultuous Civil Rights Era in America. As an interdenominational and interracial musical ministry, we tried to be a positive incarnation and demonstration of racial reconciliation everywhere we went. And this interracial dynamic became our practical "learning laboratory" for the later *cross-cultural* mission work the Lord led us into in other countries.

We knew that we could not be an authentic voice of racial reconciliation in America unless we first demonstrated it in both our *fellowship* and *leadership*. Unless there was a growing authentic *internal* agape relationship among us, there would be no *external* witness of racial reconciliation. Without that level of consistent interracial involvement, our ministry would never have integrity or sustainability in the area of race relationships. Anything less than that would only be perceived as *tokenism* rather than *transformation* by both blacks and whites.

We also learned that racial reconciliation does not take place *accidentally* – but *intentionally*. Churches and ministries do not *drift into reconciliation* – because by nature we *drift into separation and segregation*. We only become involved in reconciliation by being *driven* into it through the love of God and the unction of the Holy Spirit! So because we were convinced from Scriptures that blacks and whites were fully equal and "one in Christ," we *intentionally* set out to demonstrate that at every level of our ministry. We specifically set out to be *proactive* rather than *reactive* in the area of racial reconciliation. And musical evangelism became the tool God gave us to lovingly incarnate and practically demonstrate our oneness in Christ.

It is an understatement to say that this was a *radical ministry paradigm* in the tumultuous days of the mid 1960s! It was not always easy or painless. In our youthful idealism and naïveté, we oftentimes put ourselves in dangerous situations where people did not want to *hear* or *see* our message of racial reconciliation. Many of our black and white members alike suffered ridicule and rejection from family, friends and foes. We all painfully learned that it is never easy to be a “*bridge over troubled waters,*” as we often sang. We found out that when you seek to be an authentic bridge over the hostile divide that separates and segregates races – *you get walked on from both sides!* And none of us as human beings like to be *walked on!* But that’s just the nature of a bridge. It is a structure that spans a gap or chasm of separation so that people can get from one side to the other – by being walked on! That’s what bridges are built for. Reconcilers do the same thing.

However, in the midst of our struggles in reconciliation, we also realized that Jesus faced the same rejection as He stood in the chasm between men and God and between each other. And yet He persisted to “love His enemies” in spite of their misunderstanding and rejection of Him. We sought to do the same thing. We did not always do it right – but we were trying to make a positive and reconciling difference in our racially segregated world. So we too lovingly persisted in this “ministry of reconciliation” that God called us to (II Cor. 5:19). And over the years, God abundantly blessed in ways we could never have imagined! We saw Him graciously use our ministry to erode the foundations of racism and undermine the walls of prejudice in the hearts of people everywhere we traveled and ministered.

Note: Add Pictures here of early ND’s with blacks and whites...

In the late 1960’s and early 70’s, we were really sailing in uncharted and tumultuous waters in this ministry of racial reconciliation. This was especially true since we were based in the south – which was considered to be the bastion of racial prejudice and segregation. So as the Founder and CEO of NDI, I had to first do a thorough study of what the Bible said about this subject to get my own spiritual perspective right. Like most Christian leaders at the time, this whole subject of race and ethnicity was never significantly addressed in my studies in College, Seminary or Graduate School. When it was addressed, it was from a very biased perspective that had major “blind spots” in it.

As an evangelical Christian, I am sorry to say that those from a more liberal theological perspective tended to be the most vocal and proactive in the Civil Rights Era than did the more conservative Christians. And sadly, this “liberal-conservative-theological-divide” on the race issue still lingers to this day in many parts of the American church. The more liberal wing of the church still emphasizes “social action” while the more conservative ones continue to major on “spiritual activity.” In reality, they are two sides of the same Biblical coin. You cannot separate one from the other and be a Biblically balanced Christian with both spiritual integrity and social relevance.

But in my own personal desire to be a more authentic servant-leader and agent of reconciliation, I had to reach out to people who could mentor me in this area. I had to spend time with people who were further down this road of reconciliation than I was. So first I had to begin to read everything I could get my hands on about this subject. Finally, in desperation to have more personal mentoring, I contacted some of the early evangelical pioneers who were speaking and living prophetically in this area of racial reconciliation.

During this time of personal growth, God was very gracious to give me favor with people like E.V. Hill, John Perkins, Tom Skinner, Clarence Hilliard and Bill Pennell – to mention a few of the

men who greatly impacted my life and ministry. In addition to reading their books, I traveled to conferences to hear them speak and be s-t-r-e-t-c-h-e-d by their prophetic and provocative preaching and teaching. Then I sought them out personally so that I could spend more individual time “picking their brains” as to how to be more positively and proactively involved in the ministry of racial reconciliation. These men greatly impacted my thinking, living and ministering – especially John Perkins who has been one of God’s great “Prophet of Reconciliation” to the American church.

Note: Add picture here of me and John Perkins (either from our banquet or from Jim Seymour in Raleigh; Also Tom Skinner from the ‘Soul Liberation Festival.’ And add EV Hill from Amsterdam

Interracial and multiethnic relationships are built *intentionally*, not *accidentally*.
And it must be demonstrated and incarnated in our *fellowship* and *leadership*.

'83)

So it was only after we had seriously begun to redemptively deal with the racial fears, insecurities and prejudices in our own lives, that we were able to demonstrate that reconciliation in America. And what we learned through years of racial reconciliation in America prepared us for the later cross-cultural ministry God called us to in other countries. Therefore, because of our pioneer interracial reconciliation work in America, we were much more proactive and comfortable in building authentic partnerships with nationals in other countries where God led us.

(Add pictures of Dr.Claude Noel at Lumnaire Banquet and early ND trips to Haiti)

So from our very first overseas outreach as an interracial musical ministry team in 1968, we were convinced of the absolute necessity and centrality of *autonomous national leadership* in the church. We have been a consistent advocate of that position through all of the years of our existence as a ministry – although it has always been a radically different paradigm from the norm in most global missions. Unfortunately, what seems so obvious and Biblical is in reality so seldom practiced with any degree of intentionality and consistency by most mission agencies and individual missionaries.

STANDING OUT OR BLENDING IN

When it comes to racial distinctions, nationals obviously have a more similar physical appearance to their own people than a foreign missionary does. They have the same physical characteristics, facial features, skin color, hair texture, etc. This obviously makes it easier for them to blend in with their own people. Therefore, they do not starkly stand out like a “foreigner” or “outsider” in their country and culture. By contrast, we Americans and Westerners from an Anglo-Saxon background tend to “stick out like a sore thumb” in most foreign countries! It is just impossible for us to hide or blend-in with our light-skinned ethnicity in a sea of humanity dominated by people of color! Our national partners have no such problem.

In addition to this racial similarity, our national brethren also have another advantage over us foreigners. Since they were born and raised in their own countries, they have usually developed immunities to many diseases that often immobilize a foreign missionary through sickness. In addition, the local climate poses little or no problem to them either. And the foods which so often are strange and unpalatable to an outsider are delicious to the national! It’s “home cook’in!”

From a physical perspective then, the national is totally “at home” in his own native land. Things that are often physically awkward and stressful to the foreigner are perfectly natural and

comfortable to the national missionary. It's the only environment they have ever known and one that they have naturally adjusted to from the time of their birth. It is their "natural habitat."

UNIVERSAL RACISM

However, while there are basic racial and physical similarities between the national and their own people, there are still tragic divisions along ethnic, tribal and caste lines. These racial and ethnic tensions exist to some degree in every country and culture. And they often erupt into open hostilities that result in horrific tribal fighting and genocide! It is estimated that since 1945 alone, there have been some *15 million people killed worldwide as a direct result of ethnic violence!* (*)

Among black Africans, there are literally thousands of different tribes – each with its own historical and cultural uniqueness. And there has been tragic tribal warfare between many of these groups that long predated the Colonial Period and arrival of the white man. Tragically, these tribal tensions and hostilities have continued to erupt into open hostilities in this current era of nationalism around the world.

"Since 1945, *15 million people* have been killed as a direct result of racial and ethnic violence!"

Just like the African continent struggles with the demon of tribalism, many Asian countries have long histories of caste division that go back centuries – also predating the arrival of the white man from the West. These thousands of castes and sub-castes keep hundreds of millions of people hopelessly imprisoned socially and economically in the lowly status of their birth. These entrenched systems of *institutionalized racism* forbid any upward mobility or cross-over from one group to another. The caste you were born into you will die in. And it is a person's karma that seals their racial and social fate for life. The only hope is that one's status may be improved in their next life through an endless cycle of reincarnations! Thus their Hindu religion reinforces their caste distinctions and divisions. It only further seals their racial and social fate – and offers only the hopelessness of endless cycles of births and rebirths.

GRACE AND RACE

Obviously the liberating love of the Gospel of Christ is the only answer to all of these ethnic discriminations, divisions and damnations. Only the transforming love of Jesus Christ can destroy the bastion of racism in the human heart. However, that will only begin to happen if a person proactively begins to apply God's love relationally and socially. As I stated earlier, racial reconciliation never happens accidentally or capriciously. It only takes place when we *intentionally* apply God's love and grace to that area of our spiritual lives and social relationships. And not to do that is to "...receive the grace of God in vain" by not becoming active agents of reconciliation (II Cor. 5:16-6:1). Sadly, most churches around the world have not proactively applied God's saving and sanctifying grace to the issues of racism, tribalism and caste-ism!

Also, it is only the unconditional forgiveness of Christ that can take away the hatred and bitterness from those who have experienced racial prejudice, discrimination and injustice. Without that spiritual forgiveness and emotional healing, racial resentment and ethnic bitterness will continue to be passed on from generation to generation. And this kind of love and forgiveness *only* begins to take place in the church when Christian pastors and leaders set out *intentionally* to be agents of racial reconciliation on the basis of the common *spiritual reconciliation* all Believers have in Christ Jesus (II Cor. 5:19-20; Eph. 2:11-22).

It is tragic however, that the church has so often been silent about these issues. Rather than *speaking prophetically* and *living proactively* in this area of racial discrimination and social injustice, *the church has often been the chaplain of the segregated status quo*. Because of the divisiveness and dangers of speaking out about racism, many pastors and Christian leaders have remained silent and inactive. They have turned a blind eye and deaf ear in the direction of those around them who were crying out for racial acceptance, social justice and economic opportunity.

THE SLAVE TRADE

As history has demonstrated, it has oftentimes been misguided religious leaders who have built up a false theology that perverted the Bible to justify slavery, segregation, apartheid and racial injustice. Distortions of Biblical passages like the “mark of Cain” being the darkness of his skin is a sad example. This perversion of the Genesis text was often used to justify the slave trade by the “Christian west” (Genesis 4:15). Also a wrong exegesis of Paul’s exhortation to slaves to be “...obedient to their masters” and content in their slavery, is another tragic example (Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22; I Cor. 7:20-21; I Tim. 6:1; Tit. 2:9). Sadly these “slave traders” and “slave owners” overlooked or ignored other crucial passages that decisively cut the social and economic nerves for the slave trade. Verses like...

- “Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him. Were you a *slave* when you were called. Don’t let it trouble you – *although if you can gain your freedom, do so*. For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the *Lord’s freedman*. Similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is *Christ’s slave*. You were bought with a price, *do not become slaves of men*. Brothers, each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation God called him to” (I Cor. 7:19-24).
- “For we were *all baptized by one Spirit* into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, *slaves or free* – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (I Cor. 12:13).
- “You are *all sons of God* through faith in Christ Jesus, for *all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ*. There is neither Jew nor Greek, *slaves nor free*, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26-28).
- “...you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, *slave or free*, but Christ is all, and is in all” (Col. 3:9-11).

Passages like these – when correctly interpreted contextually, clearly teach the spiritual and social equality of all people in Christ Jesus. The racial and social divisions accordingly to the *flesh* are done away with through the Spirit who has made us all “one in Christ Jesus.”

And these slave owners especially overlooked Paul’s strong little letter to his friend Philemon concerning his run-away, slave Onesimus. As you will recall, this rebellious slave had become Paul’s spiritual son while he himself was in prison. So Paul writes Philemon a cogent little epistle exhorting him to receive Onesimus back “...no longer as a *slave*, but better than a slave, as a *dear brother*.” Paul further reminds Philemon that Onesimus is “...very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a *man* and as a *brother* in the Lord” (Philm. 16).

And lest there be any confusion at all about God’s law concerning such matters, Paul wrote these words:

“We know that the law is made not for the righteous but for *lawbreakers* and *rebels*, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts, for *slave traders* and liars and perjurers – and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God...” (I Tim. 1:8-11).

So Paul lists “slave traders” as “lawbreakers and rebels” and lists them alongside other depraved and degenerate people who “...kill their fathers or mothers...murderers... adulterers... perverts...liars...perjurers.” Not a very spiritual or socially acceptable lot in God’s eyes!

So the periods in Christian history when these heretical racial theologies of segregation prevailed were some of the darkest days in the Kingdom of God! Whether it was the “Jew-Gentile” division of the First Century Church or the “Black-White” division of the Twentieth Century Church, those were the times when the church lost all racial credibility before the world. That’s because we were only a mirror of the racial divisions of the world rather than a reflection of the redeemed racial diversity of heaven from “...every *nation, tribe, people and language*” who have been made a “kingdom of priests to serve our God” and who will one day “reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:9-10; 7:9).

But historically and contemporarily, the Church of Jesus Christ has never stood taller than when she has stooped to the lowest level to identify with the plight of those who have been racially discriminated against, socially marginalized and economically disenfranchised! When the Church set the example of authentic integration and led the way in reconciliation, she maintained her spiritual dignity and integrity before God and the world.

“The church has never stood taller than when she has stooped to the lowest level to identify with the plight of those who have been racially discriminated against, socially marginalized and economically disenfranchised!”

So this vast worldwide rainbow of ethnic diversity persists in being one of the single greatest challenges to the Gospel and to the cause of missions locally and globally. This persistent racial prejudice is one of the most important reasons why the Gospel must be *racially sensitized* and *culturally contextualized* in every country and to every people group where it is taken. The Gospel can never take deep root in these diverse ethnic, tribal and caste groups unless it is adapted to the *cultural context* of the local people. But it must do so without compromising the essential truths of the faith that are always *trans-cultural*. Without that sensitive *contextualization*, the Christian Gospel will always be seen as an “outside religion.” It will be perceived as the “white man’s religion” which is alien to the local people and culture.

I believe then, that the native “sons of the soil” are often the best equipped to lead the way in this spiritual and cultural *contextualization* through the wisdom of God’s Word and the discernment of God’s Spirit.

The Gospel must be *racially sensitized* and *culturally contextualized* in each country by the national “*sons of the soil*.”

MONOCULTURAL MISSIONARIES

Tragically, many cross-cultural missionaries are ill-prepared to minister in a racial context different from their own. It is not that they are overtly racists or consciously prejudice. It is just that most have grown up in a largely *homogenous* back ground of racial and cultural isolation –

rather than in a *heterogeneous* one of ethnic diversity. As a result, they have spent most of their lives with people of their “own kind.”

In this largely segregated setting, most Western missionaries have generally been in the racial “majority” growing up while any other races present were clearly a distinct “minority.” Most have largely come from segregated communities...worshiped in predominantly segregated churches...gone to largely segregated Bible schools and seminaries. In their theological education, what few “people of color” they encountered were foreign students who were a tiny and non-threatening minority. And through it all, few of them ever built any significant or lasting interracial or cross-cultural friendships.

Then after having spent the majority of their lives up to that point in a largely mono-racial and cultural environment, they sense God’s call to the mission field. In obedience to that call they raised their support and headed off to some foreign field. But the moment they stepped off the plane, everything was reversed. They were now a member of an extreme racial minority for the first time in their lives. They were no longer a member of the majority race with all of the rights and privileges thereof. The political playing field was totally different from the one they grew up on. No longer do all of the doors and gates automatically open for them. In this new environment the laws no longer are biased in their favor. They are now the odd “person of color” – and that odd color is *white* rather than black or brown! It is now they who get the turned heads, the curious looks, the disdainful stares – and often times the racial slurs!

So when the Western missionary goes cross-cultural, it is often the first time in their lives they have experienced being in a tiny minority in a country. It is the first time they have experienced “reverse racism” in the local community...when they walk the streets of the city...when they go shopping in the market place...when they go out to eat in a local restaurant...when they overnight in some hotel...when they go to church...when they go to teach in a local school...or when they become a professor in a Bible college or seminary. This sense of spiritual, racial and social isolation is understandably a great mental and emotional adjustment for almost every foreign missionary.

So once the novelty and excitement of being in a new country and culture wears off, the reality of racial separation and social isolation really begins to set in. For many it becomes an adjustment they are not willing or able to make over the long haul. As a result, the racial issue becomes one of the biggest unacknowledged reasons for the high attrition rate among many cross-cultural missionaries. This problem of racial separation especially becomes acute in the area of their children’s education and socialization. And most expatriate missionaries are totally unprepared for their children to date or marry a national from another racial background.

THE LEGACY OF COLONIALISM

In the early days of missions, this segregation mentality resulted in the development of the “mission compound” where the foreign missionaries generally all lived together. After all, this was the norm for the pioneering colonialists who had gone all over the world “conquering the natives” and establishing their little “colonies” in behalf of the sovereign nations they represented. Those were the days of imperialism, political expansionism and exploitation by European countries like Great Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, Germany, Holland, etc. And everywhere these colonial masters conquered lands and people, they would set up their “compounds” – which were the little political and social “outposts” from where they ruled and reigned.

Thus the “colonial compounds” were born. They were often a necessity for the survival of these expatriates living there. It was a physical location where their presence and power could be

consolidated and concentrated – and usually on the choicest land and location available in that country! It was also obvious that these colonialists were not primarily establishing these “colonies” for the benefit of the natives. They were there to extend their own political power and to exploit as many of the natural resources as possible for the benefit of their nations back in Europe. But since most of these colonialist came from “Christian countries,” they also built their churches on or near their compounds – which the natives were generally not allowed to attend. Unfortunately, this forever identified the church with the colonial powers in many parts of the world. And this is a legacy that the church in those countries still seeks to free herself from to this very day.

As one of my national partners has rightly said: *“In an ideological fight, a stigma will always defeat a dogma.”* Sadly, then, the *stigma of racism* has often been more powerful than our *Christian dogma* before the watching world! We are continuing to see this principle verified in this day of religious fundamentalism. In many countries of the world, the moral and racial stigmas of Americanism are being used to defeat the dogmas of democracy over and over again!

In an ideological fight, a stigma can always defeat a dogma!”
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So one of the tragic lingering legacies of the Colonial period is the blatant racial discrimination and social segregation that was an essential part of it. That’s why there was one thing common to all colonial compounds – *walls*. They were stark physical reminders of this segregation and separation. Also, these walls were usually joined by strong gates and armed guards – which were built for the safety and separation from the “wild animals” and “hostile natives” on the outside. And inside the walls of their compound, the colonialists built a little “cultural island” that mirrored as much as possible their countries of origin. Here they continued to live on a micro level the lifestyle they had left back in their home countries. It was all supported by a small army of native “servants” who helped them maintain their “foreign way of life” – replete with tea and crumpets on the veranda each morning and afternoon if they were British!

It is little wonder then, that many of the “natives grew restless” and increasingly resented this foreign lifestyle among them – whether by colonialist or missionaries. And while there were certainly many blessings and benefits brought by these foreigners living among them, the majority of the locals only watched from a far – both fascinated by and resentful of their presence and foreign lifestyle.

Since expatriate missionaries followed in the steps of these political colonialists, many of them also imitated their lifestyle. As a result, the “mission compounds” became the norm for many Christian workers living abroad. Because of the obvious similarities between the lifestyle of the colonialists and that of the missionaries, many were seen by the natives as nothing more than “chaplains of colonialism.” Tragically, this colonialist stigma lingers to this day in many countries of the world. As I have already stated, it is one of the most tragic lingering legacies of early pioneer missions in many parts of the world.

MISSIONARY MATURITY AND MARTYRS

But I also want to quickly point out that there were *many* expatriate missionaries from this period who were anything but colonialist! People like William Cary, Adoniram Judson, Hudson Taylor, David Livingston – and scores of others, who pioneered great ministries to the natives. Because of their Christian love and compassion, they fought the slave trade, the caste system, child abuse, female infanticide and sati, or wife-burning at the death of her husband. And most

faced great discrimination, opposition and persecution as a result of their long battles against these social ills.

History also proves that many of these early missionaries were also the pioneers in the battle against ignorance, disease and poverty wherever they went. They established the first schools, hospitals, orphanages, widow's homes, printing presses, etc. They pioneered literacy and translated the first textbooks for education. They also translated and printed the first Bibles in the local languages and dialects. These hearty and sacrificial missionaries brought education and enlightenment to many of the darkest, most destitute and deserted corners of the world. And in the process of all of this, many gave their lives and the lives of their wives and children for the people and lands they sacrificially served in the Name of Christ! They are some of the ones recorded in heaven in the "Faith Hall of Fame" of whom the world is not worthy (Heb. 11:38). They are numbered among the greatest spiritual heroes of the faith!

So if you want to be inspired, challenged and stretched as a Christian, read the biographies and autobiographies of these great mission pioneers. When I read of the sacrifices of their lives, my own life and ministry seems so insignificant, safe and comfortable by comparison!

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

When we study the issue of race – whether historic or contemporary, there is a well known social maxim that we need to pause and consider: "*Birds of a feather flock together.*" That simply means that animals or people like to be with their "own kind." So as humans, we naturally congregate with others of the same or similar racial origin and socio-economic background as us. That's because every person tends to feel more physically comfortable and emotionally secure when surrounded by others who are "just like them." There is the sense that we are in our "natural habitat"...we are "at home"...we are living in our "comfort zone."

But while that social maxim of "birds of a feather flocking together" may be true in the realm of nature and race, it should not be the norm in the Kingdom of God! We Christians are to be demonstrating racial equality and reconciliation in our interpersonal relationships. In the church people should see that God has broken down the racial dividing wall of hostility. He has healed us of the internal barriers of fear and suspicion of other races and ethnic groups. Christians should demonstrate the reality that God is producing "one new man" in Christ Jesus out of the old separated and segregated halves. The Body of Christ should incarnate the reality that the racial, social and cultural distinctions and discriminations "in Adam" have been overcome "in Christ" (Gal. 3:26-29; Eph. 2:11-22).

HEAVENLY DIVERSITY

As we have already seen, the church needs to remember and reflect what the Apostle John saw in his vision of heaven. There he saw an *eternal diversity* around the throne of God – not a bland eternal uniformity of "vanilla saints!" What the Spirit showed him was multitudes from "... every tribe, language, people and nation" (Rev. 5:9; 7:9). Everyone was not just alike. The Kingdom of Heaven was anything but an eternal mono-culture. Heaven had not somehow racially homogenized and ethnically blended everyone into an eternal bland sameness. No! That would have been an eradication of the rainbow of racial and ethnic diversity that God created mankind to be!

<p>"In the Kingdom of God our racial and ethnic uniqueness is intensified because it is <i>saved</i> and <i>sanctified</i> – and in heaven will be eternally <i>glorified</i>."</p>

John's revelation shows us that in heaven everyone's racial and ethnic uniqueness will be *eternally intensified!* So in heaven our racial distinctive and ethnic uniqueness will not be

nullified. Quite the contrary. Our racial differences will be *intensified* because they will have been *saved* and *sanctified* – and then eternally *glorified!* That way every “tribe, language, people and nation” will be able to uniquely worship and praise Him for all eternity. That’s why heaven can never become dull or boring! There will be eternal diversity and everlasting variety among the citizens of heaven as the redeemed saints become a “kingdom of *priests* to *serve* our God” for all eternity in heaven and on earth (Rev. 5:10).

HELLISH UNITY

However, hell will be just the opposite. As C.S. Lewis suggested, in hell there will be *eternal sameness*. Everyone who ultimately ends up in hell will be all just alike. That’s because Satan as the arch thief of the universe will have robbed them of their uniqueness and individuality. Since God’s image will have been so utterly defaced and destroyed by sin and made eternally permanent through death – everyone in hell will experience the utter *isolation* of a soul turned inward and fixed on itself. There will be the everlasting loss of personal identity – which is what increasingly happens when a life is separated from God. And that eternal separation – or *hell*, is what the Bible calls the “second death” (Rev. 20:14).

Therefore, since God is about redeeming people from every “tribe, language, people and nation” who will eternally reflect His glory – we need to be far more diligent in demonstrating that reality here on earth. We shouldn’t postpone it until we get to heaven! Since God is about redeeming people from every tribe and ethnic group through the blood of Christ, that must be the highest goal and ultimate purpose of world missions. This will bring eternal glory to Him. And God’s glory among the nations is what missions is all about.

As Christians then, we need to get in step with God’s plan and priority of redeeming people from every race and ethnicity. For that to happen, we must *intentionally pursue racial reconciliation* as God’s people *now* – beginning with Christian leaders. And as a start, we should do everything in our power to reflect this “unity in diversity” in all of our missionary relationships, friendships and partnerships.

THE MOST SEGREGATED HOUR

It is tragic however, to stop and remember that 11:00 o’clock on Sunday morning continues to be the most segregated hour of the week in America! Studies have continued to show that 90% of American churches are 90% composed of people of the same race. (**). So it matters not whether it is a church that is white, black, Asian or Hispanic – most are strongly *homogenous* rather than *heterogeneous* in racial composition.

It is sad to see that *there has been a stronger and more successful multi-ethnic integration in the world than there has been in the church*. As a result, there is more interracial and multi-ethnic involvement in education, business, sports and entertainment – than in the Body of Christ. As a result, whatever interracial exposure and experience people get usually comes more from the secular world than from the church. This is indeed sad because only the church has the power to take people deeper than just a superficial reconciliation based upon politics, laws, economics and expediency. It is only *spiritual reconciliation* – rather than *political correctness* – that can bring transformational change of the heart that will lead to permanent social change of behavior.

Unfortunately, then, most Western missionaries have come from largely non-integrated church backgrounds that had little or no multi-ethnic leadership or membership. So cross-cultural mission work that totally immerses them into another racial majority where they are the extreme minority – is a great adjustment. It is only stating the obvious to say that the national does not face this racial distinction or social separation. And since the missionary is always the *guest* in

a foreign country while the national is the *host*, it is necessary that the missionary aggressively seeks to build deep friendships and authentic covenant relationships with some key nationals.

COVENANT RELATIONSHIPS

As I stated earlier in this study, these relationships must not be just “functional friendships” that are established around the accomplishment of certain “Gospel goals” – as worthy as that may be. While partnering together in the accomplishment of “good works” is commendable and helpful, demonstrating racial reconciliation and equality in partnership and leadership is even better. So as Christian leaders, we must strive to make those relationships and friendships grow into “covenant partnerships” that are an end in themselves – not just a means to an end of accomplishing some worthy Kingdom goal. That’s because *goals are temporal* – but *relationships are eternal*.

Missionaries and national must develop “covenant partnerships” rather than just “functional friendships.”

Therefore, through much concerted time and concentrated effort, interracial relationships must grow and mature to the degree that they are not just “head-to-head” – but also “heart-to-heart.” And as a vital part of that process of partnership nurture, the missionary and national leader must learn to fellowship together... worship together...sing together...pray together...dance together...weep together...eat together...sleep together...succeed together...fail together – and when necessary, die together!

THE MODEL MISSION CHURCH

At this point of racial and social diversity, I think the Church at Antioch is a wonderful Biblical model to study and follow. I often teach this principle: “*While the church was born spiritually in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, it matured racially and socially in Antioch.*” That’s because the first church in Jerusalem was predominantly Jewish. We are told that at Pentecost there were “God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5). So the vast majority of these thousands of people who had come to Jerusalem to worship were from the “Jewish Diaspora.” And since they were from so many diverse countries, they spoke different languages and dialects – although they were all Jews racially. So the miracle of “speaking in tongues” or “foreign languages,” took place so that everyone heard the disciples “...speaking in his own *language*” (Acts 2:6). The Church in Jerusalem, then, was largely Jewish by race and religion. For a time they were characterized by spiritual and social unity since we are told that “All the believers were *one* in heart and mind” (Acts 4:32).

However, that spiritual and social unity did not last long. Soon there was a controversy between the “Grecian Jews” and the “Hebraic Jews” over the daily distribution of the food to the widows. Even though they were all Jews racially, those from the Diaspora primarily spoke Greek rather than Hebrew. And in many ways they were more Greek in culture than they were Jewish. Understandably, then, there were soon tensions and divisions. The Jews who were from “out of town” felt the “home town boys” were discriminating against their widows in the daily feeding program. They felt that the local widows were getting preferential treatment. The Jerusalem widows were getting the best food while the widows from the Diaspora were getting the left-overs – if there were any! So they voiced their complaint in such strong terms that it apparently disrupted the unity and halted the growth of the early church. As a result, the early church faced its first potential “denominational split” – which was along racial and ethnic lines.

Whether this discrimination was real or imaginary, we do not know. Regardless, the Apostles took the complaints very seriously. They wisely saw the potential split that could occur because

of this perceived discrimination. They knew that the fellowship and unity of the Body was about to pull apart at the ethnic seams. As wise and proactive leaders, they did not ignore the problem, belittle it or take sides. They took it to the Lord who gave them clear guidance through the Holy Spirit. As a result, they “took charge” of the situation. Through a combination of spirituality and practicality, the Apostles were able to quickly heal that growing ethnic division by a Spirit-directed “division of labor.”

In consultation with the whole Body of Christ, they very wisely put the Grecian Jews in charge of the distribution of the food. We clearly know that from the fact that all 7 of the men who were empowered to take over this ministry to the widows – had Greek names. So the very group who felt discriminated against were put in charge! That magnanimous step of faith restored the spiritual and social unity in the Body of Christ to the degree that greater evangelism occurred in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-7).

So if there was division in the early Church in Jerusalem between Christians who were all Jews by race, we should not be surprised when there are racial and social tensions and divisions between more diverse racial and ethnic groups of Christians throughout the world. But just like the initiators of reconciliation were the Apostles, pastors and church leaders today must do the same thing and proactively take the lead in racial reconciliation.

“Christian leaders must be the *initiators* and *demonstrators* of racial reconciliation within the Body of Christ.”

By the time the church was birthed and planted in Antioch, there was a growing heterogeneous complexion and racial mix that the Church in Jerusalem did not have. Even though the “First Church of Jerusalem” was composed of both “Hebraic Jews” and “Grecian Jews” – they were still all Jews, as we have already seen. Not so in Antioch. That’s because when the Gospel began to be preached there – it jumped over the racial divide. As a result, one of the great mission paradigms of history took place. Rather than just going to preach to Jews living there, these evangelists “...began to speak to *Greeks* also” (Acts 11:20). The result was that the Church at Antioch became interracial and multiethnic from its very inception. It became largely a “Gentile Church” rather than a “Jewish Church.” And this racial and social diversity was reflected from “top down” through the leadership.

Take a few moments to consider the diversity in the eldership of the Church at Antioch:

- *Barnabas*, a Jew from the Diaspora in Cyprus
- *Simeon*, a Jew with the Latin nickname “Niger” – or “the Black.” He moved in high Roman circles
- *Lucius*, from Cyrene in North Africa
- *Manaen*, who was reared in the court of Herod
- *Saul*, a converted Rabbinical Jew trained as a Pharisee

You could not put together a leadership team that was more diverse racially and socially! This is why I often teach and preach that while the church was born *spiritually* in Jerusalem – it grew up and matured *racially* in Antioch! And it also became the first major missionary “sending church” in the First Century (Acts 13:2). While the Church in Jerusalem was also commissioned by Christ to take the Gospel message to “Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8) – they only reluctantly did so as a result of persecution (Acts 8:1-4).

By contrast, the saints at the Church in Antioch sent out Paul and Barnabas as missionaries in obedience to Christ’s command. There was no persecution involved – only *leadership sacrifice*

as they sent out their two founding pastors as missionaries. Talk about sacrificing for missions! And as a result, we Western Christians are believers in Christ today because of the missionary obedience of the Church at Antioch. That's because it was from there that the Gospel first went to Europe and ultimately in later centuries to America. It was Paul's obedience to the "Macedonian Vision" on his Second Missionary Journey that caused the Gospel to jump from Asia Minor to Europe. And from there it ultimately came to America centuries later. It is for that reason that I believe the Church at Antioch should be the model that we strive for in our world today – especially in cross-cultural missions.

OUR GREATEST MISSION MESSAGE

So "unity in diversity" must be reflected from "top down," not from "bottom up." It must spread from "pulpit to pew" rather than from "pew to pulpit." Anything less will always be seen as nothing more than tokenism. If we want to see significant racial and social diversity in the church, *it must start with the eldership and leadership*. It is only obvious that if racial unity cannot be worked out there, it will never take place in the wider fellowship of the church. Love and reconciliation must always flow from top down. To be authentic and lasting, it must grow and flow from parent to child...from pastor to people...from the teacher to the student...from the shepherd to the sheep.

Remember, it was Jesus who said that it was only this kind of *volitional, visible, verbal, vulnerable* and *vicarious love* that would authenticate us as His disciples (Jn. 13:34-35). That's why He fervently prayed in His High Priestly Prayer that this unity among His followers would become the greatest single step to world evangelization. He said our "unity in love" would ultimately be the single greatest missionary apologetic to a diverse, divided and dying world (Jn. 17:21)!

A segregated church has little to say to an integrated world.

In our post-Marxist and post-Maoist world, it is now a reality that the major divisions and divides that are separating and segregating humanity are more *racial walls* and *ethnic walls* – than *ideological walls*. Over and over again, history has painfully proven that the foundation for those racial walls is *religion*. The cement holding those racial and ethnic walls together are primarily *cultural*. So at the end of the day, racism in any form is a *spiritual warfare* rather than just a *social conflict*. And only the Gospel of Jesus Christ has the power to erode the false foundation that will result in the pulling down of those *spiritual walls* that will ultimately remove the *racial walls*. Jesus Christ alone is the divine-human foundation that a new humanity can be built upon (I Cor. 3:11; Eph. 3:19-22)!

So whenever missionaries and nationals *intentionally forge covenant partnership unto death*, they incarnate and demonstrate the racial reconciliation that only the Gospel can bring. And this is a love and unity the world is literally dying to see! Without this racial reconciliation, ethnic divisions will continue to plague the church and destroy our witness to the world. *A largely segregated church has little to say to a largely integrated world!* But when there is true racial reconciliation and social unity in the midst of diversity, then the church will enter her finest hour of witness to a watching world.

(*) Quoted from *AD 2025 Global Monitor*, Sept/Oct, 1998. p. 5

(**) *Divided By Faith*, by Michael Emerson & Christine Smith.

SOCIALLY SYMPATHETIC

It is understandable that national missionaries are more able to live on the same socio-economic level as the people to whom they minister. That's because they generally come from the same people group, tribal group or caste group that they are seeking to reach. And this is important when it comes to reaching the millions of marginalized and minimized people of the world. Few expatriate missionaries can "live on the same level" of such people groups who are existing subsistently in poverty and privation. Most all of us American missionaries have always lived "above the poverty line" – not below it.

Understandably then, it is often difficult or impossible for someone from the outside who has come from a much higher socio-economic group to minister effectively to those who are at the bottom of social order. A high caste can never identify with a low caste or outcaste. A person who has known nothing but the privileges and advantages of high social and economic status can never existentially understand the plight of a Dalit, or untouchable.

"It is difficult for a middle-class missionary to relate to those who have always been *mocked, marginalized, minimized, mistreated and misused* in life."

THE EXPERIENTIAL GAP

Social scientists have consistently proven that a person who has been born on the "right side of the tracks" will struggle with identifying with the realities of being born on the "wrong side of the tracks." The experiential gap is just too great. The people involved have grown up in two vastly different worlds under very different socio-economic realities. And there are few people who have known nothing but the comforts of a higher standard of living who can radically "lower their standard of living" long-term in order to live with people in those radically debased and deprived socio-economic conditions.

Life in the seething ghettos, sprawling townships, squalid slums, overcrowded inner cities and festering refugee camps of the world are just too difficult and dangerous for most outsiders to adjust to long term. The same is true for remote tribal living conditions in extremely arid or desert situations. While the expatriate missionary or foreign worker may have a love and compassion for these needy people, few foreigners are able to fully "move into" those surroundings and live there day in and day out for the rest of their lives. That is just a totally unrealistic expectation. At best they may visit there regularly and "go in and out" among them, but they cannot live long under those extreme conditions of deprivation. We Westerners are just too prosperous, privileged and pampered to *survive* – must less *thrive*, under those extreme living conditions long term!

Nationals, then, do not need to live apart from their own people on mission compounds, or in specially built homes with "all of the modern conveniences." As a result, they are not viewed by their countrymen as "outsiders" ... "rich foreigners" ... or members of the "elite society." For them, there is little or no change of living conditions at all in order to minister to their own people. After all, they are right "at home!" So they can be very sympathetic and empathetic with the social conditions of their own people.

Understandably, many Western missionaries spend significant amounts of time in visiting, serving, recreating and fellowshiping with other missionaries. This is not at all bad in and of itself. It is a very necessary aspect of the socialization of the missionary and his family. But much of that "time away" takes the missionary out of the context of ministry. For the national

however, his socializing and relaxation time is often some of his or her best time for informal evangelism and ministry.

Hospitality is almost a sacred duty in most non-Western cultures. Therefore, eating together, drinking tea, or sharing a cup of coffee affords great opportunity to be with the local people and share the Gospel. This informal “hospitality evangelism” often becomes one of the national missionary’s best opportunities to witness, sow seeds, answer questions, pray for healing and spontaneously respond to needs as they arise. In addition, many nationals who are tribal, pastoral and nomadic, spend large amounts of time walking from place to place...watching over the cattle in the fields...hanging around the watering hole...sitting around the camp fire. And all of this informal time becomes a great opportunity to share their faith in Christ.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN

In many countries and cultures, the women often become the “first responders” to the Gospel. In many ways they are at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder with little or no human rights. Since they are usually little more than chattel...beasts of burden...sex objects...servants...human property – they often quickly respond to the Gospel of God’s love and grace that makes no discrimination between “male and female” (Gal. 3:28). So once they receive Christ, they quickly begin to “gossip the Gospel” as they go about their daily duties!

Generally, the women spent a lot of time with the other mothers, widows and girls of the clan or tribe as they go to the woods to collect firewood...to the spring to fetch water...to the stream to wash clothes...to the fields to watch the cattle...or to the gardens to work. And as they do so, they often sing and talk about the Gospel message that has impacted them.

When the women, wives, mothers and older widows are back home cooking the food or sitting around the fires with the other women and children, they often talk about Jesus and repeat Bible stories they have been told. Because many of these lowly women are illiterate, their communication of the Gospel stories are primarily through oral transmission as well as through the songs they compose. This is another reason for creative involvement in the Orality Movement in missions as we saw in an earlier chapter.

“Around the world, women are often the *first responders* to the Gospel and the *first evangelists* for Christ as they “gossip the Gospel” everywhere they go..”

Because of the higher response level among women than men, one of the priorities of NDI through the years has been to sponsor grass-roots Women’s Conferences to encourage and equip these female evangelists and church planters. They are some of our most exciting Conferences we participate in each year in various countries.

Note: Put in a page of good pictures of Women’s Conferences, plus close-up of women studying the Word at Conferences from diverse contexts – Asian & African. Also picturing Patt, Hannah and Judy.

So the Western missionary and national missionary not only come from different cultures, they also usually come from very different socio-economic levels. Whereas the Western Church is largely middle class, middle-aged and “middle of the road” – most churches in the developing nations are predominantly poor, lower class, young and more spiritually dynamic. National missionaries from this background are therefore much more attuned to the injustice, oppression, hunger, and supernatural world than are their Western counterparts.

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC GAP

It is because of this different socio-economic background that much of the Church in the Two-Thirds World closely identifies with the Old Testament – while Western Christians are generally more focused on the New Testament. Most nationals understand and personally relate to the lifestyles of the pastoral patriarchs of old. This identification is often hard for the modern missionary who has usually grown up in an urban environment where they have never seen or ridden a camel or harnessed a donkey before they get to the foreign field! Most have also never milked a cow, goat or camel. Nor have most of them helped in the birthing of any cattle – a very basic fact of everyday life for pastoral people.

Also, because of their tribal backgrounds, many nationals easily identify with the rivalry and struggles of the “Twelve Tribes of Israel.” Third World Believers also especially feel close to the social struggles of slavery, servitude and injustice when they hear or read the Biblical accounts of the Children of Israel. But to most Americans, these are just “Bible Stories” we have never experienced personally.

So the National Church in many parts of the world has a theology that is strongly focused on the social and economic issues of the present – rather than a theology that is based upon a future hope in heaven. They have a “theology of hope” in the midst of their present misery and injustice that many Western Christians cannot existentially identify with.

THE ROLE OF THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHURCH

At this point it is important to share some further information about the history, spiritual potential and social relevance of the African-American Church in ministry and missions.

After the Civil War and their liberation from slavery, many former slaves played a crucial role in foreign missions in the late 1700s. This first thrust of the freed slaves into missions came soon after the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863. Black missiologist David Cornelius, wrote the following about the early global missionary activities of these freed slaves:

“Their involvement can be traced back to the 18th and 19th Centuries when African American missionaries went not only to Africa, but to the Caribbean Islands as well...As soon as African Americans began to shed the chains of slavery, they began to press their way to foreign lands with the Gospel” (*Perspectives, “African Americans in Missions,”* pp. 299-302).

Cornelius then shares some of the stories of these first African American missionaries to leave the shores of this young nation for foreign lands. Let me summarize a few of these black “heroes of faith”...

- *John Marrant* from New York City, preached cross-culturally to whites and natives in Newfoundland. By 1775 he began a domestic mission to American Indians and preached to the Cherokee, Creek, Housaw and Catawars.
- *George Liele*, a freed slave and preacher from South Carolina, sailed for Jamaica as a missionary in 1783. By 1791 he had planted a church of over 350 in Jamaica. He is sometimes portrayed as the very first cross-cultural missionary from American shores.
- *Prince Williams*, another freed slave, sailed in 1790 from St. Augustine, Florida, to be a missionary. He established a thriving church in Nassau, Bahamas, that birthed over 160 other Baptist churches. He preached from the age of 70 until his retirement at 104!

- *David George, Hector Peters and Sampson Calvert*, sailed from Nova Scotia and arrived in Sierra Leone on the West Coast of Africa as missionaries in 1790.
- *Daniel Coker* was the first African American Methodist missionary to serve in Africa, sailing for Sierra Leone, West Africa, in 1820. He was sent out by the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME).
- *William Sheppard*, a Presbyterian, went to the Congo in 1821. His ministry became so effective and influential that he became known as the “Black Livingstone.”
- *Rev. Lot Carey* and *Rev. Colin Teague* sailed for Liberia, West Africa, in January, 1821. Cary has probably become the most famous African American missionary because of his association with the Southern Baptist Church. He was born and raised in Richmond, Virginia, where he worked in the tobacco warehouses. Through his own savings and the help of sympathetic white people, he raised the money to purchase his own freedom from slavery and that of his family. Through the years, he became a powerful and well known preacher. He also founded the African Baptist Foreign Missionary Society, which was the first organization for world missions founded by African Americans in the United States.

But increasingly through the years, the “Negro Churches” understandably became largely inwardly-focused. Their church – usually in some secluded woods or on the “wrong side of the tracks,” became their spiritual, social and political haven on the way to heaven. For them, their church was not only their place of worship, it was also their school house, lodge hall, social center and place of political activism. The pastor was not just the spiritual leader, he was the shepherd...educator...marriage-counselor...arbitrator...doctor...banker...sociologist...and political strategist. In African chieftain tradition, the black pastor had great influence, authority and respect. And most of them then – as well as now, were bi-vocational.

For the Black Church, the greatest “Commission” increasingly was further liberation and full equality with white America. They could not forever live in an atmosphere of institutionalized racism, prejudice and forced segregation. Because of the “Jim Crow laws,” legally enforced segregation had become the norm in much of America. These unjust laws forced many of the blacks to live worse than they did during slavery. And in the process, these prejudiced laws tragically divided America into “whites” and “coloreds” – with the latter being legally segregated against politically, socially, educationally, economically and spiritually. As a result, most of these African Americans lived in “colored town” where they were segregated and marginalized. They were forced to live in substandard rural areas or in “shanty town” on the wrong side of the tracks. These were certainly some of the darkest days in American history for both blacks and whites!

THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Obviously this kind of prejudice and segregation could not last forever in a country that was founded on the principles of liberty, freedom and “justice for all.” So the fight for full integration began. Nothing less than full equality would be accepted. So in the 1950s the Civil Rights Movement began in earnest – generally designated as the years between 1955 – 1968. And because of the central role of the “colored church” in the life of these disenfranchised Americans, most all of the early Civil Rights leaders were also pastors. As a result, the black churches became the primary focus of political activism.

Today, names like Rev. Adam Clayton Powell, Rev. Martin Luther King, Rev. Ralph Abernathy, Rev. Joseph Lowery, Rev. Andrew Young, Rev. Jesse Jackson – are inseparable from the Civil

Rights Movement. Many were eloquent and fiery preachers with an apostolic and prophetic aura! The great liberation stories of the Bible – like Joseph being sold into slavery and the Exodus of the Children of Israel from Egyptian bondage, were the spiritual and political inspiration for their own liberation struggles. There was a co-mingling of the Biblical and political in their preaching and teaching.

BLACK MILITANTS

During this time, many blacks became proponents of “Liberation Theology” with its emphasis on overt political activism – a strange mixture of Marxist ideology and Christian theology. This period also saw the birth of the more radical liberation groups who increasingly espoused a separation mentality from the white man. The radical voices of young blacks like Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, Huey Newton, Bobby Seale and Eldridge Cleaver echoed through the black communities – and especially on the campuses of the “Negro Colleges” across America. M

During this tumultuous time, many young blacks became frustrated with the slowness of the legal system in coming to their aide. As a result, thousands became violent against the police and National Guard troops who were called in to “keep order.” Many of our inner cities became war zones as the rallying cry of “burn baby, burn!” echoed through the black ghettos. So while some followed Dr. Martin Luther King in his position of non-violence and peaceful demonstrations, others “took up arms” in their struggle against the government, FBI, police forces and National Guard. Groups like the Black Panthers and Black Muslims became powerful forces among many young blacks. And these radical black groups galvanized various “white supremacy groups” like the Klu Klux Klan, who became guilty of horrific crimes against blacks – all in the name of Christianity!

Some of the major events of the Civil Rights days took place in Greensboro and Raleigh, North Carolina – right where NDI was born. So we were often at the racial vortex of some of the most defining events of this tumultuous time. And as an interdenominational and interracial singing group, we were trying to give a positive demonstration of racial equality in Christ.

Unquestionably then, the Civil Rights Movement was one of the most defining times in American history. That movement defined the last half of the Twentieth Century more than any other single political event. It not only rewrote the “laws of the land” concerning segregation and integration, it opened the door to racial equality at every level of society. While the legal battle was won, there is still much progress to be made in the spiritual battle in the heart for many whites in America who still harbor prejudice. And the white church is still not as proactive in the area as she should be. White churches still tend to segregate the “spiritual” from the “social” and “political” spheres of life. As a result, many now – just like many in the days of segregation, are largely silent and non-active when it comes to the issues of racism and prejudice. It will always be a judgment of history that the majority of the white churches were on the wrong side of the Civil Rights Movement.

However, for the black church, there is no such separation between the spiritual, social and political spheres. That’s why most of the Civil Rights leaders were all pastors and preachers. And they too stood on the shoulders of the thinking and writing of men of faith like George Washington Carver, WEB DuBois, Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker, Rev. Vernon Johns, and Rev. Otis Moss, Jr.

During these defining years of racial struggle, the name of these former Africans went through a telling evolution from *slave*...to *negro*...to *colored*...to *black*...to *African-American*. But for many prejudiced whites, the preferred term of denegration was the “N word” – or *nigger*.

THE 'GREAT OMISSION' OF THE BLACK CHURCH

As a result of their years of slavery and racial segregation, integration and racial equality became the *cause celebre*, or primary calling and concern of the Black Church. It became the predominant *modus operandi* of most of the pastors and black leaders. Domestic racial equality and social justice became their Great Commissions – not foreign missions.

Even though the Black Church historically played a significant role in the early days of American missions (*), they largely lost that vision through the years of their struggle for Civil Rights. As we saw above, their message became largely politicized to the degree that racial and social issues dominated much of black preaching more than the spiritual issues of the sinfulness of man and the need for global evangelism. The more important issues for the Black Church were racial prejudice, social discrimination, legal injustice, educational inequality and economic disparity.

While much legal and social progress has been made in all of these areas of racial inequality, there is still much work to be done. And the Black Church needs to rediscover her role in the fulfillment of the “Great Commission” – which has largely become the “Great Omission” for most of them.

During the days of segregation in America, the Great Commission for the Black Church was the Civil Rights Movement.

THE BROWNING OF AMERICA

Tragically, there is a growing “separate but equal” mentality in America that is becoming the accepted norm that is creating a new kind of divide between blacks and whites. The fact that in 2003 Hispanics for the first time surpassed blacks as the largest minority group in America – only exacerbates this social tension. This explosive growth of legal and illegal Hispanic immigrants is being called the “browning of America.” As a result, there is now a three-way racial tension growing in America – which does not even include the burgeoning Asian population.

What is the role of the church in this growing social phenomena? Sadly, she is often passive and silent. Rather than being able to spiritually “blend” these three groups – beginning at the level of leadership, we are seeing the reality of the predominant “White Church”...“Black Church”...and “Hispanic Church” – as well as the “Asian church” in some parts of America. And each one tends to be rather inwardly focused with the greatest mission being the spiritual-political-socio-economic advancement of their own racial and ethnic group. This has especially been true for the majority of Black Churches for decades.

So to this very day, many American Black Churches have still not rediscovered the wider mandate of global missions. They have not regained their earlier missiological focus as a church. Studies show that *95% of African American Churches today are not proactive in the sending and supporting of foreign missionaries*. They also compose less than 1% of the total missionary force sent out by the American church. At this writing there are less than 300 known cross-cultural black missionaries out of a population of approximately 35 million African-Americans. In addition, the majority of black missionaries that are on the field are largely supported by predominantly White Churches and Christians.

Studies show that 95% of African-American Churches are not involved in sending and supporting foreign missionaries. Blacks compose less than 1% of the foreign mission force.

THE HEALTH AND WEALTH GOSPEL

in many of the larger mega-Black Churches today, there is a shift from a *Social Gospel* to an *Economic Gospel*. As a result, there is often an unbalanced emphasis in many of these churches on the “Prosperity Gospel” of health and wealth and “upward mobility.” Tragically, this unbalanced Biblical emphasis is little more than “baptized materialism!” It is just another form of *self-focus* that promotes the “Gospel of Greed” and personal advancement in anyone who embraces it – whether they are black, white, brown or yellow! (*)

But it also must be pointed out that this popular spiritual and economic focus on self is where many of the White Churches have been for decades. Many of them are engaged in what I call *ecclesiastical narcissism* – or the *worship of self under the guise of worshipping God*. The preoccupation of many of these churches has become spacious and lavish buildings that are equipped with the latest and best of everything. As I often point out: “*You can raise any amount of money in the American church – just as long as the man in the pew is the direct beneficiary of what he or she gives for!*” That’s narcissism with a spiritual veneer!

Also, studies consistently show that *all of this lavish and grandiose religiosity usually is funded at the expense of global missions*. While many churches have become “seeker sensitive” – they have ceased to be “sinner sensitive” and therefore “mission sensitive.” They have largely lost their sensitivity to the mandate of global missions. Their ecclesiastical narcissism has often dulled or deadened their compassion for the spiritual and social needy of the world!

Many white churches are involved in *ecclesiastical narcissism*,
or the *worship of self* under the guise of *worshipping God*.”

So during the Civil Rights Era, the African-American Church had an understandable emphasis on upward mobility racially, socially and politically. Now the emphasis tends to be upon *economic upward mobility*. As a result of this predominant inward focus, there are precious few African-American missionaries on the foreign field today, as I have already stated.

(*) For a further study on this subject, please see my book entitled *The Poverty of the Gospel of Wealth and the Sickness of the Gospel of Health*.

THE DEARTH OF BLACK LEADERSHIP

The same racial scarcity in foreign missions is also true for most para-church organizations in America – whether Campus Crusade, InterVarsity, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Youth With A Mission, Young Life, Youth For Christ, etc. They are overwhelmingly white in leadership, participation and financial support. As a result, the few African-American missionaries or para-church workers on the field today usually have a disproportionate amount of their financial support coming from white Christians and white churches – rather than from the black ones, as I have already pointed out.

Along this same line, many African-American pastors have to be bi-vocational because their congregations do not even fully support them financially. Thankfully this lack of financial support locally and globally is beginning to change. That’s why it is now time for the African-American

Church to rise to her full stature in Christ to the degree that she will cast a large global shadow in world missions!

MINISTRY TO THE MOTHERLAND

One of the initiatives I have personally been apart of to try and increase foreign mission involvement by the Black Church is an annual “Ministry to the Motherland” composed of influential African American pastors. This has been done in partnership with my long time friend and mission partner, Dr. Jim Seymour. These yearly ministry trips to Africa have been transformational in the thinking, preaching and global mission involvement for these pastors. Each has come back home and become more proactive locally and globally through their congregations. What they saw and experienced in Africa motivated them to become far more involved spiritually and financially in the needs of their African brethren. An exciting ministry and mission synergy and partnership has developed that is strengthening churches on both sides of the Atlantic.

Note: Make and insert here a full page collage of pictures from the MML trips.

THE MISSIOLOGICAL TIME FOR THE BLACK CHURCH

Now more than ever before, *the global church desperately needs the experience of the African-American Church!* Their history of slavery, discrimination, persecution and suffering has uniquely prepared them to play a *major role* in world missions. Unlike many of their white Christian brethren, they can identify with the racial and social struggles that is the norm for hundreds of million of the marginalized people of the world who have known nothing but racial discrimination, social disparity and economic destitution all of their lives. As a result, they have an *existential authority* in speaking about these issues that most of us white Christians do not have. While we can discuss these issues *theologically* and *theoretically*, our African-American brothers and sisters can discuss them *existentially*. They can preach and teach about these issues “from the gut” of their experience. It is their spiritual and social history also. That’s the incarnational difference! Their prophetic word about these issues have their flesh wrapped around it. So their preaching and teaching about these things have the “ring of truth” to it. Their own personal history in this area is self-authenticating.

When someone asked Nelson Mandela how he became President of South Africa, he said: “I suffered my way into leadership.” It was his years of imprisonment and suffering under the Apartheid regime that gave his life and leadership such integrity. Just like Paul could say that he bore in his body the marks of authentic apostleship because of his suffering for Christ (Gal. 6:17; Col. 1:24), Mandela could say the same thing about how suffering had exalted him to national and international leadership.

FROM THE INNER CITIES TO THE MEGA-CITIES OF THE WORLD

Also, since many of the Black Churches were birthed in the inner cities of America, they have an experience of *transformational engagement* in these contexts that most White Churches do not have. This is especially true for the ones that took the “safe white flight” from the inner city to the safer suburbs.

So many of these black pastors and leaders understand from their own years of struggle in the inner cities, slums and ghettos, the plight of people living in those conditions – whether they are in the First World or Two-Thirds World. Often times the majority of their members are unemployed or underemployed. Many in their congregations live in substandard “housing projects” situated in unsafe neighborhoods where crime and disease is rampant. Many of their church members are from single parent families living in over-crowded conditions where alcohol and drugs abound. And most of their people face the daily pressures of gang violence, police

corruption, slum lords, prostitutes, pimps and pushers. And their children that do go to school, attend ones that are usually poorly staffed, under-equipped and dilapidated.

As a result of these conditions, the African-American Church has tended to be more *holistic* in approach than their white counterpart. That's because if they are going to be relevant to their people, they have to be involved to some degree in all of these issues that their people struggle with on a daily basis. Their church context has forced them to be more entrepreneurial in their struggles with the issues of housing, jobs, education and community development.

While the White Church has been largely involved with the individual *spiritual development* of its members, the Black Church has had to be involved in total *community development* as well – and often with little resources to work with. This very fact can make missionaries sent out by the Black Churches more familiar with the struggles people are facing in the sprawling slums and townships in the Caribbean, Africa, Central and South America and Asia.

While the average white American Christian can speak to these racial and social issues *theologically* – our message will always largely be *theoretical*. Most of us have just not lived under those conditions of poverty and deprivation. But because of their *existential* struggles with these issues, African-American pastors and leaders can become one of God's major prophetic voices of reconciliation to a broken and divided world. They can bring to the mission partnership an inner-city-born-streetwise-entrepreneurial-spirit that can be very timely and relevant to the challenges of sister situations in the Two-Thirds World. All of their lives they have struggled with the issues of the *under-resourced communities* of the inner cities of America – while their white counterpart has struggled with the problems of ministry in the *over-resourced communities* of middle-class America!

Let me close this section of our study by a timely quote from black missiologists David Cornelius:

“Throughout much of their history, African Americans have achieved neither their full desire nor their full potential in the international mission arena...The African American church is a sleeping giant in the area of international missions: a giant that is being awakened by her Lord. Only God knows the extent to which His Kingdom will be strengthened as the full potential of this giant in international missions is realized!” (*Perspectives*, pp. 302-303).

I couldn't agree more! Therefore, I believe that this is the *kairos* moment – the “fullness of time,” for the African-American Church to become full proactive partners and leaders in the global cause of Christ as never before. Since some of the largest churches in America today are predominately African-American, it is their hour to step onto the stage of global missions and help bring closure to the Great Commission of the Lord Jesus!

(* List book by Center For World Missions on “Black Church in Missions.” Also please study the writings of COMINAD, or the “Cooperative Missions Network of the African Dispersion.”

POLITICALLY SECURE

Being a natural born citizen of their own country, nationals understandably have freedoms, rights and privileges that might not be extended to a foreigner. And this issue is increasingly significant in a time when we are experiencing a radicalizing of faith in most of the non-Christian religions of the world. As we have already seen, there is a great increase of *fundamentalism* in religions like Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism. This means that the political atmosphere in countries where these religions are dominant are super-charged with an anti-Western bias.

ANIT-AMERICANISM

Some countries of the world have a strong sense of nationalistic pride to the degree that they just want to keep all forms of American influence out. They maintain a posture of *political*

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protectionism from influences from the West in general and America in particular. But in other countries where extreme religious fundamentalism dominates, there is a posture of *political protagonism*. In these countries there is an open and overt anti-America sentiment.

“Religious fundamentalism, political instability, anti-Americanism is the new norm in much of the world today.”

The seething hatred in many Islamic countries where the Moslem radicals dominate are good examples of the overt hatred against Americans in general and Christians and Jews in particular. These countries are not just politically protective of their Islamic culture, they are on a jihad, or “holy war” to take it to the ends of the earth and impose it upon all people everywhere. And they see America as the “Great Satan,” or their only major political obstacle to the worldwide domination of Islam. They rightly understand that Judaism and Christianity are the only two inter-related faiths that are keeping them from conquering the world in the name of Allah. Their goal is nothing short of a worldwide Caliphate, or Islamic theocracy, where everyone must submit to Shari’a Law – or die. And this is mandated by their ultimate authority, the prophet Mohammed through the Koran. It is their “Islamic Great Commission” commanded by Allah!

It is obvious then, that there is a growing ultimate conflict between Christianity and Islam on a worldwide scale. It is unavoidable. This religious-cultural war is already raging on a number of fronts. And the horrific events of 9/11 when America was attacked by these Islamic radicals was but the latest salvos on our soil of this worldwide war of terrorism. The lines have been indelibly drawn in the sands of history and peaceful coexistence is impossible from the Islamic perspective. Properly understood, both religions are under the mandate of a “Great Commission” to take their faith to the whole world.

However, while we Christians believe we are commanded by Christ to *evangelize the world* through the love of Christ, we are not called to *Christianize the world* through the forceful imposition of “Judeo-Christian Law.” Our Great Commission is a *mandate of love*, not one of law. Our faith is a matter of free choice – not force.

“While Christians are commissioned to *evangelize the world* through love,

we are not called to *Christianize the world* through force.”

Radical Islam on the other hand, is committed to the forceful imposition of Shari'a Law throughout the entire world. And the first fruits of this has already been seen in the countries they have taken control of in the last couple of decades (*).

It is obvious then, that in these radical Islamic countries, no American in general – or Christian in particular, has any political or religious freedom. No visa is ever granted to a known Christian missionary to even enter the country – much less evangelize.

So the very moment a foreign missionary steps onto the soil of a country with either a protectionist or protagonist political posture, they are in danger of arrest, kidnapping, beatings, assassination, or beheading! In such hostile countries, a known Christian is seen as a “political outsider” at best – or a “political enemy” at worst. Either way, he has little or no political or religious freedoms. Even their passive presence is viewed as a threat to the religious, political and cultural status quo. Therefore, they face suspicion and hostility from the moment they get off the plane!

THE POLITICAL GAP

It is also important to realize that the political philosophy in many of these countries is vastly different from what we know in the West in general and America in particular. Here we have erected a rather high wall of separation between religion and government. Every American has been born and raised under the almost sacred concept of “separation of church and state” – meaning that neither the Church nor State can forcefully legislate upon the other. This American concept has sometimes been summarized by the words “free State” and “free Church” – meaning that both have a guaranteed freedom from interference from the other. Each has its sovereign realm of authority. That means that the State has authority in the “secular realm” while the Church has authority in the “spiritual realm.” And Christians believe that God has sovereign authority over both.

However, in many countries of the world, this is a totally alien concept. Their government is usually an inseparable combination of religion and politics. Likewise, their culture is usually a combination of both. This is often a difficult mind-set for Americans to understand and relate to. We are accustomed to and committed to the concept of *democracy*, or “rule by the majority. We do not believe in or relate to an *oligarchy*, or “rule by the state.” Nor do we Americans believe in the “rule by an individual” or “rule by a radical minority” – whether it be a totalitarian tyrant, a military dictator, an African chieftain, a Hindu Brahman, a Buddhist monk, the Dali Lama, the Taliban or a Moslem Mullah. We believe in *democracy* – “rule by the majority,” through free and open elections. This sacred political and spiritual freedom is dictated and guaranteed through our Constitution.

But in many countries of the world, there is no “fire wall of protection” separating government from religion. Just the opposite is often true. There is a three-strand cord of religion, politics and culture that is tightly intertwined into one unbreakable societal unit. And it is that religious-political-cultural rope that binds those people together in a common society. To touch one is to touch all three. They are inseparable. That is why conversion to Christ is often so very difficult in these countries. Belief in Christ is not just “changing religions.” It is walking away from one's total society – family, tribe, caste, politics, culture, work – *everything!* As a result, conversion to Christianity is a *social death* that can often quickly lead to *physical death!* Therefore, conversion to another religion is not tolerated because it is seen as a total rejection and repudiation of the entire society – not just a change of faith. It is *total treason* of the highest order – deserving death!

(*) See author's study series on *Christianity & Islam*, on our NDI web site: www.biblicalprinciplesforliving.com.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In America we obviously do not face such immediate and stark social rejection or physical persecution if we change religions. That's because we are one of the few societies on earth that exalts *individualism* over *collectivism*. We revel in "freedom of expression" in every area of life. And this is especially true when it comes to "freedom of religion." Faith is portrayed as an "individual right." As such, *faith is seen as a private matter with little public consequence*. In America, a person's religion is a matter of their own free choice. It is respected and protected as a matter of one's own personal conscience – safe-guarded by the Constitution and Bill of Rights.

Spiritual freedom was the very essence of the pioneer spirit that brought many of the earliest pilgrims to our shores. They came with the desire to practice their faith – or even their lack of faith if they had none – in absolute freedom. And it would be the role of government to guarantee that total "freedom of religion" in so far as it did not harm others or infringe on their freedoms. So the political "arm of government" was not to overreach her bounds and interfere in religion. And the "arm of faith" was not to dictate to government. Religion was free to do everything in her spiritual power to influence government through preaching, teaching, writing and the *power of the ballot* – but not through the *power of the bullet*.

SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

In America then, the church, synagogue or temple were totally free to express themselves through the freedoms of speech, press and democratic process. While religion's role is one of being a prophetic voice to government, she cannot impose her theological or ideological beliefs upon the populace as a whole through politics. In America there would be no official "State Religion" that would have privilege or power. Unlike the Anglican Church in England, the Lutheran Church in Germany, the Catholic Church in Italy or Spain, Greek Orthodoxy in Greece, or the Russian Orthodox Church in the former Soviet Union – America would have no official "State Church" that would enjoy political power and privilege. Every religious faith would have equal freedom before God and man.

By contrast, many other countries of the world have their official "State Religion" – like Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Shintoism or Islam. And in those countries, the "official religion" casts a long shadow over the whole of life – including government.

Our kind of *religious liberty* is paramount to the American political process. We believe it is the very essence of the "American Spirit" of individualism that made us great and powerful as a nation. We are a people who pride ourselves in attributes like individual initiative, standing alone from the crowd, visionary risk-taking, pioneer entrepreneurialism, and a rugged self-sufficiency that "pulls yourself up by your own boot-straps!" As our national motto says, America is the "*Land of the free and the home of the brave*." We are a country of people who are politically and religiously free to bravely pursue our own individual dreams!

So life in America is clearly segmented between the "sacred" and the "secular." And because of this bifurcation between politics and religion, a person's personal faith has often been segmented and compartmentalized from the rest of his or her life. So what one chooses to do spiritually is seen as their own "private business."

<p>In America the rights of the individual are supreme. In most other countries the rights of the group is supreme.</p>

However, as we have already seen, no such separation exists in many other countries and cultures around the world. There is an inseparable union and solidarity between their religion and their politics. The two cannot be divided. Their religion dominates and dictates their politics – and their political system is set up to protect and perpetuate their religion. The political reality then in many countries is that they are far more of a *theocracy* than a *democracy*. Their god and their government are married – and the citizens are the religious and cultural children of that union. As a result, religious leaders are either the primary governing authorities in those countries – or they largely influence the political agenda.

“In many countries god and government are wed
and the citizens are the political and cultural children of that union.”

Therefore, in many countries and cultures of the world, mullahs, ayatollah, priests, monks, lamas, medicine men and witch doctors often dominate politics from local villages to the highest corridors of national power. This is a mindset that is very foreign to most Americans who have been raised on a concept of strict “separation of Church and State.”

In countries where a religious theocracy is the norm rather than a secular democracy,
expatriate missionaries are barred from entry at ever level of society.

So because of a missionary’s spiritual agenda, their presence is seen as an immediate threat to both the religion and politics of the country and culture they enter. However, this kind of political antagonism is not necessarily the same for the national leader. Within the context of their country and culture, they can usually be politically vocal and active in a way that the foreigner cannot – whether it is at the local tribal level or national level. They can vote if there are elections...sit in on tribal meetings...and voice opinions at the village counsel of elders if they are old enough.

In addition, nationals have little or no immigration problems and generally have no need of passports or visas for travel within their own country – and oftentimes to their neighboring countries. Within their own national borders, they usually are much freer to travel and minister at God’s leading than an outsider would be. Also, they are less likely to be accused of being a “foreign agent”...“America spy”...“CIA Agent”...“Zionist sympathizer”...“political trouble-maker” or “cultural outsider.” Nor will they be labeled as “colonialist” or “racist.” Neither will nationals be the likely target of robbery, bribery, terrorism, kidnapping or extortion – as foreigners often are.

PERSECUTION

However, national missionaries still may be persecuted, imprisoned or killed for their faith – as many of them constantly are all over the world. That’s why the Twentieth Century was the bloodiest century in human history! It is ironic that the century that experienced the greatest advances in education, science and technology – also saw the greatest advance in racial and religious persecution. It is estimated that more Christians died for their faith in the Twentieth Century than in the previous nineteen centuries combined! So much for the promised peace that was to be ushered in through enlightenment and education!

Thus far, the Twenty First Century does not promise to be any less bloody due to the increase and spread of religious fundamentalism. That is part of the reason why to this very hour, *an average of 500 Christians are martyred every day worldwide for their faith in Jesus Christ (**)*. But as history has always shown, *“The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”* That’s why the church has always grown and prospered more under poverty, privation and persecution than under peace and prosperity!

(**) For a further study of this contact *Voice of The Martyrs, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Open Doors, Release International, IDOP (International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church* (www.WorldEvangelical.org/idop).

So while national Christians are constantly persecuted and killed for their faith, they are generally never deported like foreigners during a time of war, revolution, or political upheaval. Nor are they evacuated to a safer country when things get tense and dangerous. As citizens of their country, they generally suffer alongside their fellow Christians – and continue to nurture the fledgling National Church during her times of distress. And when they are arrested and imprisoned, their cells usually become a place of ministry and evangelism – often to the very people who are guarding and persecuting them. The untold thousands of Christians who have been imprisoned in China are shining examples of this.

Concerning one of his own imprisonments, Paul was able to write:

“I want you to know brothers, that *what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel*. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that *I am in chains for Christ*. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly” (Phil. 1:12-14).

And as a result of this imprisonment and being chained to the royal guard, he was able to close his letter with an incredible statement: *“All the saints send you greeting, especially those who belong to Caesar’s household”* (Phil. 4:22). What an amazing statement! It verifies and demonstrates God’s sovereignty over all of the political events that His people find themselves in from time to time. Without being arrested as a Roman citizen, Paul could never have gained access to the “palace guard” – and through them to the very members of Caesar’s household!

The Apostle Paul’s life echoed the truth of what Joseph found out about political intrigue and injustice that seems to so often capriciously turn against God’s people. After years of seeming whimsical unfairness and injustice, Joseph ended up at the very right hand of power beside Pharaoh. As a result, he was ultimately able to say to his own brothers who sold him into slavery as a young lad: *“It was not you who sent me here, but God...you meant it for evil, but God intended it for good”* (Gen. 45:8; 50:20). And down through the centuries, Christian pastors and leaders who have been imprisoned and persecuted for their faith have been able to echo the same conviction.

In many countries then, nationals often have a freedom to preach and witness in ways foreigners cannot. Like Christians down through history, they may be vilified, abused, persecuted, beaten, arrested, put in jail, sent away to prison camps or gulags. But while they may be imprisoned and isolated – like the Apostle Paul often was, they become Christ’s *“ambassador in chains”* (Eph. 6:20). And just like Paul was able to use his Roman citizenship to

influence the top governmental leaders of his day (Acts 22:22-29; 26:32), national leaders are often able to do the very same thing.

In recent years, several of our NDI national partners have been exalted to such positions of political influence in their respective countries and have wisely used those opportunities to share Christ and advance His Kingdom. Others are doing the same at the grass-roots level through caste and tribal reconciliation. These men and women are *nationalists* in the best sense of the word. While they clearly recognize and acknowledge the spiritual, political, economic and cultural problems their nations have – they still love their countries and are seeking to be good citizens. As a result of this nationalistic spirit of pride, they work for the betterment of their countries spiritually, politically, socially and economically.

“A *nationalistic* national is one who loves his country of birth
and steadfastly works for her blessing, benefit and betterment.”

THE GREAT ESCAPE

All over the world there are millions of nationals who are seeking to escape the problems of their countries through immigration to Europe or America where there are “greener pastures” and greater opportunities. But the kinds of strategic national Christian leaders we are talking about here love their countries and feel an intense call to *stay for life where God has sovereignly placed them*. They have an intense passion to “bloom where they are planted” and continue to work for the betterment of their nations. And they seek to raise their children with this same positive nationalistic pride and be good citizens of their country. They do not “send them abroad” for education and for “a better life.”

These mature nationals feel just as proud of being a citizen of their country as we do in being Americans. And they are seeking to be faithful in their “dual citizenship” by being good citizens of the Kingdom of God as well as positive and proactive citizens of their own countries. These are the kinds of “nationalistic nationals” that NDI is proud to be in partnership with around the world!

Nationals, then, are more accepted by their people as “one of their own.” They do not have to face the novelty, curiosity, suspicion and fear that often surround a foreign missionary. As a result, they generally have a political freedom within their own country and culture that a foreign missionary does not have. And within that political context – however free or limited it may be, they can share the Gospel in a way an outsider generally cannot.

God indeed providentially rules and reigns over all of the governmental and political affairs of man. As history has shown over and over again, He sovereignly transposes and transforms politics to advance His Kingdom in country after country and in culture after culture. And national Christians are His primary “Ambassadors for Christ” in those ever-changing political situations.

7

ORGANIZATIONALLY SIMPLE

While we Westerners are largely an *industrialized* and *organizationally* based society, many other countries are more of an *informal* and *relationally* based society. We Americans are astute at designing and erecting complex organizational infrastructures with flow charts depicting our multi-level layers of leadership and management. We are masters at setting and achieving organizational and corporate goals. And the bottom line is this: our *goal* is *gold* – or *profit!* That's why it is often said: "*The business of America is business.*" We have become a consumer-oriented society. As a result, our consumer-economy is the driving force of much of our modern way of life.

RELATIONSHIPS OR RICHES?

In our drive for economic success, *we often sacrifice relationships for the achievement of goals.* That's one of the reasons why the world of business is filled with successful men and women

who achieved the goals of promotion, position, power and prosperity – while often losing their marriages and children in the process. In their frenetic 24/7 pursuit of the “brass ring” or “golden handshake,” many lost their health climbing the ladder of success to the top rung. They sacrificed relationships for riches. They valued the office over the home – the business over the family. They confused *success* with *significance*. In the process of gaining *economic success*, many lost *relational significance* with their families. And no amount of success outside the home could compensate for the loss of *significance inside their home*.

Without meaningful relationships, success proves to be a hollow, empty shell echoing the loneliness of our soul. CEO after CEO has learned this principle: *Success without significance gives no lasting satisfaction*. And the principle is true whether one is a Secular CEO or a Spiritual CEO. Since God has “...put eternity in our hearts” (Ecc. 3:11), there is no *permanent satisfaction* in any work that does not have an eternal dimension to it – starting with a *personal relationship* with God through Jesus Christ. We were created for an *eternal relationship* with Him and with others. So from God’s perspective, *relationships spell riches!* The goal is not *gold* – it’s *God*. His Kingdom and glory then become the source of our success, significance and satisfaction.

Therefore, no amount of wealth can compensate for a lack of “divine dimension” to our work. Without Him at the center, it’s all “fool’s gold!” It will never bring lasting satisfaction – what we often call “happiness.” That’s just the way God wired us. Let me state it again: *There is neither success, significance nor satisfaction outside of His will for our lives*. None. But corporate America keeps on trying to find it – offering one golden carrot after another to its executives! But they usually have to sacrifice personal relationships to “get to the top” – only to find that the promised success was an illusion. It is “lonely at the top” without God and without others!

“There is no true success, significance or satisfaction outside of God’s will for our lives.”

Tragically, this same kind of relational sacrifice oftentimes happens in ministry and missions as well as in secular organizations. It is sad to say that there are many pastors, missionaries and Christian leaders who have sacrificed their wives and children on the “altar of ministry.” Somewhere in the process of accomplishing worthy goals *for God*, their personal relationship *with God* suffered. And as it suffered, so did their relationship with their spouse and children.

Our Western world then, is notorious for achieving organizational and financial goals at the expense of broken relationships. While we achieve social prominence and financial success, we often do so at the expense of relational happiness and marital fulfillment.

A DIFFERENT PRIORITY

While we in the West often *achieve riches at the expense of relationships* and *accomplish goals without God*, people in the Two-Thirds World often do the opposite. They tend to *sacrifice goals for the sake of relationships*. This is especially true if these goals are perceived as the “goals of the white man” that have been brought in and imposed upon them – even with the best of spiritual intentions. In the earlier years of imperialism and colonialism, the “natives” were often coerced or forced to help in achieving these goals. However, in these days of nationalism they often refuse to do so.

It is generally true then, that in the Two-Thirds World, *relationships* are generally more important than *results*. And this emphasis on relationships over achieving goals is one of the reasons that

o f many these
“The Western World sacrifices *relationships* for *results*;
The Two-Thirds World sacrifice *results* for *relationships*.”

countries are in the “underdeveloped” category from the Western perspective.

As I have already pointed out, in America we exalt individualism as a laudable virtue. But in most other non-Western countries, that kind of “rugged individualism” and “freedom of expression” is anathema! It is just not permitted or tolerated. While we exalt the *rights of the individual*, they exalt the opinion and *rights of the group* – whether it is the family, clan or tribe. So “group consensus” is generally far more important than that of individual choice or freedom of expression. As a result, personal goals generally must always be subjugated and submitted to community goals. And the achievement of personal goals is generally only encouraged when they are seen as a benefit to the whole group, not just to the individual.

Likewise, the local people are often not very enthusiastic about helping the foreign missionary accomplish his goals – which soon becomes a growing tension in cross-cultural ministry. That’s because so often the nationals have not had significant input in the establishment of those goals right from the very beginning. And without that kind of *national ownership*, there will be little interest or involvement in achieving the goal. The local people may become involved for pay or for food – but they will not be involved from the heart. And without that level of local national involvement, there will be little – if any, continuity or sustainability of the organization or project.

It is because of the lack of this national partnership that the landscape of foreign mission fields is filled with “white elephants” that were largely erected by the white man. They are called “white elephants” because they were primarily built *by* the white man and *for* the white man. Although the project or program may have brought benefit and blessing to the natives, it often was more of a vision of the missionary than the local people. And sometimes, it was created more to validate the on-going presence of the missionary than to benefit the natives.

As a result of the lack of significant involvement by the local people, the perpetuation of the organization, program or project requires a continuous infusion of *foreign money* and *foreign missionaries* to keep it going. Without that on-going transfusion of money by the missionary, the project cannot be sustained. So when the missionary leaves, the project tends to implode and the organization begins to fall apart. What lingers on is the “white elephant,” or empty organizational shell of what was once built and sustained by the white man.

Unfortunately then, a great deal of the people and programs of most organizations exist to perpetuate itself. That’s an organizational reality. So many organizations, just like most political parties, exist to perpetuate themselves! Therefore, many foreign missionary organizational structures have over time become the obsolete “dinosaurs” that could not adapt to the changing political and social realities around them. As a result, many of them were seen as largely irrelevant and unnecessary from the national perspective. They view them as organizations that were primarily built to support and sustain the foreign missionary, not to enhance and advance the national leader or indigenous church.

ORGANISM VERSUS ORGANIZATION

Mission history has often demonstrated that many of our “foreign organizations” prove to be a poor, unbiblical, unattainable and unsustainable model for many national leaders and churches. It is not that they are incompetent or incapable of doing so. The reality is that they are just not interested in doing so because it was never “their baby” from the very beginning. So it becomes a neglected or abandoned “missiological orphan.” It is the age-old tension between *organization* and *organism*. Generally speaking, nationals tend to be more oriented toward *organism* while we Westerners are more oriented toward *organization*.

Experience shows that it is generally true that most nationals do not build the kinds of complex, multi-layered organizational structures that we Westerners do. Their organizational model is more authoritarian, top-down and stream-lined – rather than a broad-based horizontal one with multiple layers of committees. So their “organizational flow chart” would be far simpler and less complicated than most Western ones. Whether or not we like it or are comfortable with it, the local chief or elders have almost total authority. And in those contexts, the National Church often mirrors that model of authoritarian leadership and organizational structure.

The Black Church in America tends to operate in much the same way. The pastor is highly revered and given almost total authority. Like his counterparts in Africa, he is given a “chief status” among his people and his word is law. He is the real prime “mover and shaker” in the church. He plays the role of preacher, prophet, politician and parent. He casts a very long shadow over every aspect of church life. And he is an ex officio member of every committee in the church – if not the committee chair! While the White Church tends to be operated by committee, consensus and congregational rule, the Black Church is much more autocratic. Nothing happens without the pastor signing off on it.

This difference in polity and organization is another of the reasons why it is very difficult for Black Churches and White Churches to merge or work together in America. Their styles of leadership are just too different. We just “do church” differently! But this is also another reason for the relevance of the Black Church to many areas of global missions today.

Since the vast majority of foreign missionaries are white, they have obviously tended to transport a more organizational model for mission enterprises rather than a relational one. It is just what most whites are familiar with and more comfortable with. However, wherever there was a strong colonial presence that built this kind of more complex and bureaucratic infrastructure, the nationals tended to only further compound and complicate it when they took it over. That’s because they learned that jobs and salaries were created by the *bureaucracy of organizationalism*. Simply put: the larger and more complex the organization – the more jobs that are created and the more salaries that are paid! Since they do not have a personal inclination or cultural background for that kind of complex organization, they tend to make the one left behind by the colonialist or missionary even more bureaucratic, inept, inefficient – and often-times corrupt!

ALL IN THE FAMILY

In addition, non-western leaders also tend to be very *nepotistic*. That means that they tend to put family and tribal members in places of authority rather than the most qualified persons available. That’s why we often say in jest: “Nepotism is not bad as long as you keep it in the family!”

In most of the Two-Thirds World then, there is the mentality that *you can only trust family or blood relatives with position, power and possessions*. So because “blood is thicker than water,” organizational structure in the non-Western world is primarily marital, familial and tribal. It is based more on blood relationship than objective qualifications. This is a very hard adjustment in understanding for most Westerners.

Generally then, what organizations that do exist in the non-western world are more *relationally driven*. As a result, nationals are usually more able to live, minister and function on a far more basic relational level than their foreign counterpart who is more comfortable with an organizational model. Their social structures are more autocratic and top-down. They are less cumbersome to them than our bureaucratic structures. There are clear lines of authority without

multiple layers of organization. There are often little or no need for “committee meetings” before decisions can be made. The clearly understood social structure already dictates most of the decision making process.

MISSION APPLES AND ORANGES

This is not to say that the non-Western approach is always better. Far from it. It's comparing apples and oranges. They are both fruit – just different. And this kind of relational model is just the *reality* of the local landscape. It is how things work in many countries and cultures. But is still very *different* from what most Westerners and Americans are used to. And learning to operate within their societal structure and cultural context is often a long learning curve for outsiders. But for those who grew up within that system, they are often more able to “push the right relational buttons” and “pull the right levers of authority” to make things happen more quickly and smoothly than an outsider can – unless bribes are involved!

Nationals then, are generally not nearly as prone toward building large, expensive, cumbersome organizational structures as the foreign missionary. And where they do attempt this, it is because they are seeking to copy the organizational style they have observed or been taught by the missionary. Or, this has been the model that has been imposed on him in order to get foreign funding.

Also, most of the things that are an absolute necessity for our Western organizations are often not as important in other countries and cultures. Most nationals have never known the luxury of cars, airplanes, offices, secretaries, staff, telephones, typewriters, computers, e-mail, fax machines, public address systems, or video equipment. These are all wonderful tools, but the national is not nearly as dependent upon them for effective ministry as is the missionary often is. Conversely, for most national missionaries, something as basic as a bicycle is a great luxury! However, the new technological common denominator is cell phones!

Also, computers are increasingly becoming another necessary ministry and mission common denominator. They are transforming communications world wide and connecting the world as never before in history – with a speed and cost-efficiency never before dreamed of. And even when the national cannot afford a personal computer of his own, they increasingly have access to them at local Internet Cafes.

THE CITY VERSUS THE BUSH

It is also important to realize that so many of our Western “conveniences” that are often necessary to sustain Western missionaries in a foreign country – require enormous amounts of time in repair, maintenance and replacement. And it is also stating the obvious that the foreign missionary must have a sizeable and consistent supply of foreign financial support to keep them functioning on the field.

In addition, the presence of an expatriate missionary on the field requires some kind of accessibility to a “big city” where they can get the necessary supplies they need to stay functional. Thus, the missionary has to make monthly or quarterly forays to the city to get re-supplied for another time “on the field” or “in the bush.” Many expatriates end up staying in the larger cities because there are more “modern conveniences” there. As a result, there is more and more of a concentration of missionaries in large cities – and fewer and fewer in the remote villages. True “bush missionaries” are becoming rarer and rarer!

So it is understandable that most foreign missionaries must have access to a large city and a trustworthy banking system where they can receive a regular transfer of monthly support from banks in the West to banks in the country they are living and working in. So a certain level of

organizational infrastructure is necessary to sustain most foreign missionaries – like banks, roads, transportation, communication, internet, satellite phones, etc. These are obviously not as necessary for the national worker – most of whom grew up without ever using them or having access to these modern technological tools. They are “missionary luxuries” that most nationals will never have or need.

THE ISSUE OF AUTHORITY

Also, transplanted Western organizations and institutions are usually funded and controlled by Foreign Mission Boards. And sadly, from the perspective of the national leader, many of these are outdated and out-of-touch. Most of all, they are largely out-of-control of the national leadership. They are also often very expensive to build, sustain, and maintain.

In addition, a foreign-based mission organization is often insensitive to the perspective and priority of the national leaders who are seldom asked for serious input about any major policy decisions. These are generally all made by the Foreign Mission Board in consultation with the missionaries. And few people are motivated to fulfill decisions and achieve goals that they had little or no say in or agreement with – whether they are missionaries or nationals. That’s just human nature.

Another problem is the fact that many of these organizational structures built by expatriate missionaries tend to localize a ministry to the degree that much of the *mobility* and *flexibility* is lost. There is little room for spontaneity in ministry. Most organizational structures mitigate against that kind of “flow in the Spirit.” The organizational “flow chart” is more important! So once a lot of foreign funds have been raised for mission work and organizational structure in a certain location, it is hard to justify ever moving it or closing it down. This kind of organizational and infrastructural permanence can be especially problematic when working with nomadic peoples who are constantly on the move with their cattle or climate.

THE PROBLEM OF ACCOUNTABILITY

There is another criticism that is often raised against national leaders that we need to openly and honestly consider here. It is the issue of *accountability*. Mission leaders often point out that *national leaders are not answerable to anyone*. They are not really under anyone’s authority.

While that is certainly true for some national leaders, the same criticism can be made of many missionaries. Generally speaking, most missionaries are a rather independent lot. It takes a rather independent, head-strong, highly motivated individual to “pull up stakes” and move to some foreign field. Without that “independent streak” they would not survive the challenges of living abroad. So in reality, they are often not accountable to anyone in any practical sense of the word. This is just one of the realities of being separated from their sending Mission Boards or supporting churches half a world away. And while they may be connected technologically through emails and phones, actual oversight is often slim-to-none. It is up to the missionary on the field to communicate with his Board and prayer support team about his work. And if honesty and transparency ruled and reigned here, many “missionary prayer letters” would reflect a far different reality than what is often reported!

So how can practical oversight and accountability take place from a distance of 5,000 or 10,000 miles away?! It is just not possible. And while there may be “field visits” from time to time by Mission Boards and Sending Agencies, any daily, weekly or monthly oversight and accountability is basically impossible. Hopefully the interview, application, screening process and missionary orientation help some in this area. But there are still many foreign missionaries who get to the field who should never have gone in the first place because of the relational

baggage they were carrying! I know because I have met and counseled with many all over the world.

Therefore, there are no perfect systems when it comes to sending and supporting missionaries – whether expatriate or nationals. That’s just the reality of human nature and the world we live in.

When it comes to sending out missionaries, it is obvious that there is an underlying *trust* factor here that is built up between the missionary and his or her sponsoring organization and supporting team. Trust is the “relational glue” that holds partnership together – whether in marriage or ministry. But often that same trust factor is not extended to the national leader – who is usually viewed as suspect from the very beginning. This is an attitude that cannot be hidden from the national leader – who deeply resent it! That distrust destroys authentic relationships and partnerships.

“Trust is the relational glue that holds partnerships together – whether in marriage or ministry. Without trust authentic relationships and partnerships cannot be built.”

FOREIGN OR INDIGENOUS?

Indigenous is the key word here. It simply means “native to the land.” Let me give an example. I live in North Carolina, which is not a tropical climate. I enjoy working with plants and have several palm trees and plants I have brought from tropical states and countries. However, I have to take them inside my home during the cold winter months. Palm trees are not indigenous to my state. By contrast, the oak trees in my yard are indigenous to North Carolina and do fine in our harsh winter weather. They do not require a greenhouse to survive our typical cold winters – often with snow, sleet, hail and strong winds.

What is true of trees is also true of Christian organizations and churches. An *indigenous church* is one that was *planted* by nationals, as opposed to being *transplanted* by foreign missionaries. As a result, it will *grow more naturally* in the indigenous spiritual soil of its own cultural climate.

By contrast, when we transplant Western forms of organization and styles of worship, they

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require continuous Western input to sustain themselves. However, in countries where the Gospel has not been taken, no such indigenous leaders or churches exist. They must be planted by someone “from the outside” – which is the primary role of cross-cultural missions. But that church plant should become indigenous as quickly as possible – rather than being a transplanted Western hybrid that will require constant foreign presence and money to sustain it. When that is the case, the church will have to one day go through the transitional trauma of contextualization from a more Western model of church to a more indigenous one.

“An indigenous church is one that has been *planted* by the national, as opposed to one that has been *transplanted* by the foreign missionary.”

LEADERSHIP TRANSITION

The Apostle Paul was apparently able to bring about this cross-cultural church planting rather quickly. As you carefully study the Book of Acts, along with his Pastoral Epistles and letters, you see that he was able to take young converts he had brought to Christ through the discipling and mentoring process rather quickly. And he did so without formal academic and theological

training. The New Testament record would seem to strongly indicate that in a matter of a few weeks or months in a given country or location, Paul seemed to be able to move people from conversion to Christ...to recruitment to ministry...to full leadership functionality rather quickly.

In addition, he often had to do this evangelism, mentoring and leadership development, under situations of hostility, stress, persecution and meager financial resources. But this practical “on the job training” – followed by quick contextualization, made it possible for the church to spread rapidly to the known world of his day.

Therefore, I think a fresh study of his approach of “mentoring into ministry” would be timely for many of us involved in cross-cultural evangelism and church-planting. Thankfully it is being successfully used in many areas of the world – especially in the more closed areas.

The national, then, can usually better develop more indigenous forms of ministry, worship, and organization than can the foreign missionary. He can better “contextualize,” “Africanize,” “Latinize,” or “Asianize” the Gospel to his own people to the degree that it will not seem “foreign.” As a result, the work can more quickly reach the “3 Self’s” of an authentic indigenous church: *self-governing, self-supporting, self-propagating*.

ORDINARY OR ORDAINED?

Before closing this chapter, we must look at the very controversial issue of *ordination*. Unfortunately, this concept has largely divided the organization of the Body of Christ into two groups – the *ordained* and the *unordained*...the *clergy* and the *laymen*...the *pastors* and the *people*. This unfortunate division in the Body of Christ largely goes back to the 1611 King James translation of Acts 14:23. There it speaks of Paul and Barnabas’ follow up ministry on their way back to Antioch. As they visited the young Christians and churches they had planted, we read in the Authorized Version:

“And when they had *ordained* them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.”

However, all other later translations render this as “...*appointed* elders in every church” (NASV, NIV, ESV, TEV). Even the New King James Translation has correctly changed it to “*appointed* elders.” The word in the Greek is *cheirotoneo*. It comes from two words: *cheir*, or hand; and *teino* or “to stretch out.” So it literally means to “stretch forth the hand.”

What Paul and Barnabas did here was just to “lay hands on” those whom they were “appointing as elders.” This was a very common Old Testament practice as well as New Testament one (Numbers 8:10; 27:18; Acts 9:17; 19:6; 28:8; I Timothy 4:14, etc). It indicated that these people were being publicly “set apart” for some area of *eldership* or *leadership* in the local church. Unfortunately, because of the KJV use of the word “ordained,” we have created two classes of leadership in the church which indicates that one is in a higher order and “more spiritual.”

So because of this translation, we have created an ecclesiastical hierarchy that has elevated those who have been “ordained” to a position of superiority over others who are “not ordained.” And usually one cannot be “ordained” until they meet certain *academic standards* – usually established by a Western educational model. As a result, only those who are duly “ordained” can perform the sacraments of the church: baptism, marriage and Communion. All of the rest are “lay leaders.” This means that they are only *laymen* and *laywomen* who are often seen as “second class leaders” in the Body of Christ who can only do the “non-spiritual ministry.” So

because they have not been to Bible School or Seminary and “ordained,” they are perceived as less spiritual and have less authority before God and man.

I believe that this is indeed an unfortunate and unbiblical division within the leadership of the Body of Christ. And it certainly runs contrary to the clear New Testament teaching of the “priesthood of all Believers” (I Peter 2:5; 9-10; Revelation 1:6; 5:10).

“The practice of *ordination* tends to create a leadership elite in the church that runs contrary to the Biblical teaching of the *priesthood* of all Believers.”

When

we teach and perpetuate a system of “ordination” that makes a select few individuals the “spiritually elite” within the Body of Christ, we greatly reduce the level of proactivity and activity in the Church. Once this theological perspective becomes the norm, only the few leaders who are properly “educated” and duly “ordained” are seen as “ministers.” Everyone else becomes “pew-sitting spectators.” Then only a tiny minority in the Body of Christ who have become “ordained ministers” are worthy of becoming “full time Christian workers.” The overwhelming majority of the church is reduced to being “full time spiritual *watchers*” rather than “full time Christian *workers*.”

Authors Christopher Crane and Mike Hamel underscore this hierarchical problem in the church this way:

“We’ve become so accustomed to the clergy-laity caste system that we forget it didn’t exist in the New Testament. It’s not that there are no clergy in the church; the reality is that there is no laity, as I Peter 2:4-9 makes clear: ‘As you come to Him, the living Stone – rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to Him – you also, like living stones are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ...But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.’” (*)

I couldn’t agree more! So I firmly believe that the New Testament clearly teaches that every Christian worth his salt and worthy of her light is a *minister* – and therefore a “full time Christian worker.” And this is a spiritual reality whether they are “ordained” or not!

THE ROLE AND GOAL OF MINISTRY

Therefore, according to the clear teaching of the New Testament, it is the duty of “Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers” to “equip the saints for the *work of ministry*” (Ephesians 4:12). If they are “doing their job” and “fulfilling their ministry” (II Timothy 4:5) within the Body of Christ, then those spiritual leaders are to help every Believer under their authority *discover, develop* and *deploy* their spiritual gifts for the glory of God. And this “priesthood of all Believers” is to first take place within the church for *edification*, and then outside the church for *evangelism*.

Therefore, *the clear role of the ministry is to equip others for ministry*. It is not to do all of the ministry yourself. As we have already seen in this study, the role of *parenting* and *pastoring* is the same: “To work yourself out of a job.” And we do this by bringing our *physical children* and *spiritual children* to maturity in Christ (Ephesians 4:13) so they can be fully *fragrant, functional* and *fruitful* as spiritual adults (II Corinthians 2:15; I Corinthians 12:7; John 15:8).

Vocational Christian workers then, are to “mentor people for ministry” – regardless of the profession God may call and equip them for. We are to *parent* and *pastor* them to the degree that they all become “full time Christian workers” for the Kingdom of God – whether they are doctors, lawyers, teachers, preachers, farmers, carpenters, masons, computer programmers or custodians! Since they will be a priest who will serve God for all eternity (Rev. 1:6; 5:10) – we Christian leaders are to be training and equipping them for that here on earth in and through the church!

“The role of *authentic* Biblical leadership is to equip every Believer for the work of ministry.”

(*) *Executive Influence: Impacting Your workplace for Christ*, by Christopher A. Crane and Mike Hamel, Navpress, 2003, p. 88.

Both church history and contemporary experience have proven again and again that some of the most dynamic, spirit-filled and effective Christian preachers, pastors, evangelists and missionaries – have never been “ordained” in the traditional ecclesiastical sense of the word. However, God’s anointing is clearly upon them and the fruitfulness of their lives prove it. As the Apostle Peter said, they may be like Jesus and be “rejected by men” but they are still “chosen by God and precious to Him” (1 Peter 2:4).

All over the world today where the church is exploding exponentially, most of the evangelists and pioneer church planters have never had formal training in Bible School or Seminary. Neither have most of them been “ordained.” But God has spiritually anointed them. His powerful right hand is mightily upon them to win the lost, cast out demons, heal the sick and plant churches! And most of this explosive Christian growth is taking place with little or no formal organizational structure as we know it in the West.

So while God is a God of *order* and *organization*, we must be careful about erecting overly complex church bureaucracies and ecclesiastical structures that stifle leadership development and spiritual multiplication. When this happens, the church becomes too cumbersome and slow to keep up with the “new thing” God is doing in the world!

Famous missionary, J. Hudson Taylor, summarized the missionary role this way: “*I look on foreign missionaries as the scaffolding round a rising building. The sooner it can be dispensed with the better. Or rather, the sooner it can be transferred to other places, to serve the same temporary purpose*” (*).

Unfortunately, however, many expatriate missionaries have built layer upon layer of “organizational scaffolding” to the degree that it has become more solid and secure than the fledgling National Church it is surrounding! This ultimately makes the nationalization of the church very difficult and painful. And oftentimes relationships between the missionary and national leaders are strained or broken.

THE DENOMINATIONAL DISTINCTIVE

Also, when the local church has been birthed by a foreign missionary, it usually has been established under their denominational name – along with their particular theological distinctives being preached and taught as the acceptable norm. Thus the work is clearly labeled as Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Reformed, Anglican, Pentecostal, Holiness, etc. And that work is usually also controlled by a constitution that was largely written by the Mission Agency. It also is operated by their rules of behavior – and usually with a prescribed “dress code” (suits and ties for pastors, dresses for women, no shorts, etc.).

So by precept and example the nationals are largely taught to imitate the foreign missionary in styles of worship, preaching, praying, music and acceptable dress – often replete with robes, vestments and clerical collars! Is it any wonder then why there is often much pain and confusion when the missionary leaves and the church nationalizes?! If the church would have been more indigenous and contextualized from the very beginning, this *transitional trauma* would not take place.

The relational dynamics in country after country have shown that true *interdependence* between the missionary and national are hard to bring about. This is especially the case for those missionaries who have always been “in charge” of the work ever since its inception. It is always very hard to “turn over a work” and truly “nationalize it” when the missionary has always been in the driver’s seat from day one. But when the national has had major ownership right from the very beginning, he is far more likely to continue the work – even through suffering, persecution and privation.

(*) *Mentoring For Mission*, Gunter Krallmann, p. 154

PASTORALLY STEADFAST

The periodic “coming and going” of the foreign missionary is often a frustration to them as well as to the people they are seeking to reach. First there is the trauma of “going” and adjusting to a completely new country. Then later there is the re-adjustment of “leaving” and going back home for a visit and deputation. And just about the time the missionary and his family really get adjusted and settled in one place – it’s time to pull up roots...pack their bags...say “good-by”... and return from whence they came. As frustrating as this itinerant life-style is, it is just a necessary fact of life and ministry for the vast majority of foreign missionaries.

Today, “short term” rather than “long term” mission life is increasingly the norm. The life-long career missionary is becoming rarer and rarer. The pioneer days of missions have long since passed where the missionary either “went to the field for life” – or staid on in the field for decades before returning home to Europe or America. In the early days, some even packed their belongings in coffins that they took along because they knew they would be on the field until they died. So their coffins became their suit cases for their “one way trip” to the mission field! But in this jet age, that is no longer the case. Most missionaries go to the field with a “return ticket” in hand. And many countries will not grant long-term visas. So they have to leave the country after a few months or couple of years before they can return again. Obviously this regular “coming and going” is costly emotionally, financially and relationally – on both the expatriate missionary family and national partners. But it is just one of the realities of missions.

Unlike foreign missionaries, national Christian leaders do not struggle with this constant “coming and going” dynamic. They are permanent citizens and residents of their own country. They were born there, live there and will die there. They aren’t going anywhere. They were there before the missionary arrived and they will be there after he leaves.

Also, national pastors and missionaries do not need to “go home on furlough” every few years for rest and deputation. What means of support they may get is locally based. Or they are bi-vocational and support themselves in ministry through their small farm, flock of goats or micro-enterprise of some kind. As a result, there is no periodic uprooting of their families as they go back and forth between home and their mission field. They are able to be more *pastorally steadfast* than a foreign missionary.

THE EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGE

Understandably, one of the biggest challenges for most missionary parents is the issue of education for their children. Whether you live in America or abroad, helping your children get the very best education possible is one of the greatest challenges for parents. The quality of education your children get will largely determine their future in many ways.

As every parent of young children knows, education in America today is in a time of great change – and generally not for the better. For several decades there has been a continuous eroding of the quality of education in most public schools. Many Christian parents see this as a direct result of the moral deterioration that inevitably set in after prayer and any form of Biblical instruction were banned from the classroom. As the Ten Commandments were legally barred from public display, every form of moral degradation set in. The result is that in many public schools today neither the class rooms, locker rooms or bath rooms are safe for teachers or students! Rebellion, drugs, sex, gangs, violence and general anarchy are increasingly the norm. Sadly, inner city schools are the worst of all. And while the public school system still has a lot of qualified and dedicated teachers, their hands have been increasingly tied by laws and liberal agendas that mitigate against morality and quality education.

As a result of this moral and educational deterioration in many public schools, more and more parents are turning to other options – like private Christian schools, boarding schools and home schooling. But when they move and live abroad, the educational options are generally not as plentiful. Usually, sending their children to public schools is not even an option because of the very sub-standard facilities, poorly trained teachers, lack of educational materials and safety – to say nothing of the language barrier. So missionary parents have the difficult choice of private schools – which are usually expensive. Or, boarding schools where they have to send their kids off for months at a time – often to another country or back in America or Europe. A final option is home schooling – which is exceedingly taxing to the parents, especially the missionary mother.

In many countries of the world, there is no such thing as Government sponsored schools. Unlike most missionary children, those of national Christian leaders do not have to be “sent abroad,” or go away to expensive boarding schools for their education. While they may desire that for their children, it is just not possible for most of them because of finances. Usually their only option is whatever local public school that might be available. Substandard or not, it is usually their only choice for their child’s education. But this does keep them involved on the same level of the people they are living among and ministering to.

However, the expatriate missionary usually has a few more options because they have more personal finances through foreign support. Few of them ever send their children to the public schools where the national children go. It is just too poor a quality of education to base your child’s future on. So off to Boarding School most of them go. And this separation trauma often takes its toll on emotions and relationships.

Often, it is this regular period of separation for schooling that becomes an agonizing emotional burden too heavy for the parents to bear – especially the mothers. For many missionaries, it is these prolonged periods of family separation that finally causes them to leave the field and return home to America. This especially has become the norm for many missionaries when it is time for their children to enter college.

VOCATIONS AND VACATIONS

Just like the “education separation,” there is also the dynamic of the “vacation separation.” Unlike their missionary counterpart, most national leaders do not take a month’s vacation away each year – even though they may need and deserve it. Vacations are generally a complete unknown concept to most national Christian leaders. And while many have now come to understand the concept by watching the missionary, most could never afford such a vacation or retreat with their family.

“Vacations, furloughs or sabbatical leaves are unknown concepts to most national leaders.”

MINISTRY TIME

Also, it is a well established fact of missions that few if any foreign missionaries spend 100% of their time in their areas of ministry assignment – especially if they are in remote locations like the “African bush.” As we pointed out in a previous chapter, most missionaries have to split their time between living and ministering on the field, and having “recovery time” in some larger city. Studies show that this usually works out to be about a 50-50 split of time. So the reality is that between furloughs every 3 to 4 years, recovery time in the city from living in the bush, and yearly vacations of a month or more, total on site ministry time for many foreign missionaries is

averages around 35%. And then much of that 35% is actually spent in *maintenance* more than in *ministry*.

Studies also show that it is rare when an average missionary puts in 20 hours a week in actual preaching, teaching, evangelizing, discipleship and relationship time with his host people. And these are the “ministry activities” that are the primary focus of most missionary prayer letters! While they may want to spend more actual time in direct ministry, the realities of missionary life usually does not make that possible. They are constantly drawn away from ministry to others because of the daily demands of “putting out fires” on the home front.

By contrast, the national missionary spends an average of 30-50 hours per week in actual ministry. And again, because the Western missionary is very dependent upon foreign modern conveniences, a disproportionate amount of their time on the field must be spent on keeping them up-and-running, as I have already pointed out.

FAMILY HEALTH AND SAFETY

It is only natural that missionary families with young children face an especially difficult time of adjusting to the foreign mission field. A missionary mother with babies or young children have all of the usual stresses and strains of motherhood – but they are often having to carry them out under much more difficult situations than they would have faced back in America. Often times the living standards and sanitation levels are significantly sub-standard. The water is generally not safe to drink, so must be boiled or filtered before use. Food preparation is much more difficult because there are usually no grocery stores or “fast food restaurants” nearby. So every meal takes twice as much time and effort to prepare because they have to “start from scratch” for every meal. And their children are constantly exposed to germs and diseases from national children they would not generally encounter at home.

The weather conditions are also often harsher and more extreme than what many missionaries are accustomed to. And most importantly, there are usually little or no medical resources immediately available to turn to in times of serious sickness. Often times the only medical clinic or small hospital may be hours – or even days away. This creates a level of unspoken anxiety for most missionary mothers all the time. There is the constant nagging thought: “What if my child gets seriously ill or has a bad accident? What will I do?!”

So while the missionary husband and father tends to become absorbed in his ministry and the accomplishment of his goals, the wife struggles with the “dailyness” of raising the children under very difficult circumstances. And if she is doing “home schooling,” then that is an additional challenge to her daily routine – giving her less time for local ministry. As a result, many missionary families have to leave the field because this adjustment is just too great for the missionary wife and mother to live under over the long haul.

Conversely, single missionary women have continued to be the vanguard of missions because they do not have this tension between husband, children and ministry. Some of these single missionary women are my heroes! I have run across them over and over again in some of the most difficult and dangerous places in the world. And I always ask myself: “Where are the single missionary men who should be here doing this?” These single missionary women who have been “married to missions” for life will be especially rewarded in heaven! Since they have sacrificially lived and ministered on the “front lines” of missions, I believe they will be on the “front seats” in the Kingdom of God! They will be among the ones whom Jesus referred to who are often considered the “least and last” here – but will be the “first and foremost” there!

CONTINUITY AND CONSISTENCY

So there is often more consistency of presence, pastoring and shepherding by the national missionary than the foreign missionary. As a result, there is generally less break in the continuity of ministry, witness and discipling every few years. Also, most nationals do not engage in solitary or isolationist relaxation like reading books, watching videos, computer hacking, jogging or playing tennis. While this kind of social withdrawal is often necessary for the mental sanity and emotional stability of the foreign missionary who has grown up with the luxury of privacy and “time off,” this is largely an unknown concept to most nationals.

“*Seclusion and privacy are largely an unknown concept to most nationals who have been born and reared in a one room hut or house.*”

Therefore, when a church or ministry is truly indigenous, there is a steadfastness of pastoring and longevity of ministry by the national missionary to his people. He has a stronger sense of identity, ownership, and commitment because he has birthed the work. The ministry is not an “assignment,” but rather a “calling.” It is his “spiritual baby” and not that of the missionary. He is not adopting and raising someone else’s spiritual child – but nurturing his own. The work has come into existence through his faith, vision and prayers – as well as through his own “blood, sweat and tears!” As a result, he is committed to his people and his ministry unto death. It matters not whether he has a salary, equipment, resources, or buildings – he will stay with his people and do his best to shepherd the flock that God has entrusted to him.

It is often said that “blood is thicker than water” – meaning that there is no loyalty greater than “blood loyalty” by virtue of birth. You will die for your “blood relatives” far more quickly than you will for someone who is outside your family or ethnic group. But while that social principle is certainly true, *the blood of Christ is even more binding!* Only the shed blood of Christ will cause anyone – whether national or foreign missionary, to utterly give themselves for others. It is nothing short of the “love of Christ” as expressed through the “blood of Christ” that has caused untold numbers of expatriate missionaries to lay down their lives in ministry to others around the world.

In his biography of famous missionary David Livingston, W.C. Blaikie, closed with these words of summary: “*It was the love of Christ that constrained him to live and die for Africa.*” Missionary Hudson Taylor echoed this same sacrificial motivation when he wrote: “*One thing and one only, will carry men through all, and make and keep them successful; the love of Christ constraining and sustaining is the only adequate power*” (*).

(*) *Mentoring For Mission*, Gunter Krallman, p. 106.

That’s why Jesus said: “No greater love is there than this, that a man *lay down His life for His friends*” (John 15:13) – which is exactly what He did for us. And then with these words of exhortation, He commissioned us to do the very same thing: “By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you *love one another*” (John 13:34).

National

“Whether missionary or national, it is only the agape love of Jesus that will empower you to be steadfast in ministry to the end.”
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missionaries can therefore be pastorally steadfast and consistently available to their people in a way the foreign missionary often cannot – regardless of how much they may want to. And it has nothing to do

with one being more spiritual or more committed than the other. Nor is it a matter of one being more loving and sacrificial than the other. It is not that the expatriate missionary would not like to be more totally available to the people they are serving on the field. It is just the realities of the facts of life that go along with moving to another different country and living cross-culturally. Everything just take much more time, energy and effort than it did back home.

Obviously, the reverse is just as true when foreign nationals move to America. It takes years for them to adjust to life here. It takes great effort and concentration for them to do the things that we do without even thinking about them. What we do in our everyday lives almost unconsciously, takes nationals months and years to master and become comfortable with – whether driving, shopping, cooking, washing clothes, learning how to use electrical appliances, going to the bathroom with a flush toilet, taking the children to school, making an appointment with the doctor, getting their car repaired, paying the bills – all of the every day things that we do easily because we grew up doing them.

So while I hope you will continue to fully support your expatriate missionary through your prayers and financial support, I also lovingly urge you to invest equally in the national missionary. They too are worthy of your love, trust, prayers and financial support.

SPIRITUALLY SENSITIVE

This point is obviously very closely connected to the previous one about pastoral steadfastness. National Christians have a natural zeal, passion and intensity for the salvation of their people that the foreigner often does not have.

The Apostle Paul had a personal passion for the salvation of his fellow Jews to the degree that he was willing to be *spiritually accursed* if that would somehow lead to their salvation (Rom. 9:3; 10:1). That's a level of love that few foreigners ever develop for people of another race or culture – especially if they are hostile to your presence! But nationals, just like the Apostle Paul, have a similar burning passion for the salvation of their own people. After all, it is their own family members, fellow tribesmen and caste group that they want to see liberated from Satan's bondage and saved from eternal hell!

<p>“Nationals have a passion for the salvation and sanctification of their own people that a foreigner never can have.”</p>

CULTURAL BRIDGES

Along with their passion for the salvation of their own people, nationals usually also know best how to present Christ and the Gospel to their fellow countrymen. They better understand the social structures, local religions, tribal traditions, ancestral superstitions and spiritual fears of the people among whom they were born and raised. As a result, they can often better perceive the “cultural bridges” that exist between their own people and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They know from personal experience the bondage of being a captive of the devil who had hopelessly imprisoned them in the kingdom of darkness prior to their conversion (Jn. 8:44; Acts 26:18; Col. 1:3; Heb. 2:14).

When it comes to ministry, it is interesting how there is often a different response to the foreign missionary and national missionary. When they basically do the identical same things in ministry, the missionary tends to get far more attention than his national counterpart does. It matters not whether it is witnessing, preaching, teaching, praying or baptizing. This increased attention by the locals to the ministry activity of the missionary is not necessarily because the missionary is any more spiritual or qualified in what they are doing. It is just the *curiosity* that goes along with watching or listening to a foreigner! So this very fact often skews and clouds the real *heart response* of the local people.

POLITE PAGANS

Also, in many non-Western cultures a person is expected to give the response that he thinks the foreigner or guest is seeking. So they will often politely listen to the message...bow their heads in prayer at the appropriate time...raise their hands when asked to do so...and come forward at the “invitation to receive Christ.”

In addition, the “response” that the foreigner received may have also been influenced by some perceived financial benefit the national thinks he will receive by responding, participating or “becoming a Christian.” This is the phenomena known as “rice Christians” – or people who respond to the Gospel in order to get rice, food, medicine, money or jobs from the white man.

Then after the “ministry event” is over, the foreign evangelist goes home with glowing reports – along with pictures and videos – about how many ‘conversions’ he saw while he was “on the

mission field.” In reality, the true spiritual response may have been far different than what he saw on the field and reported back home. There may have been little change of heart or lifestyle by those who “came forward” at the invitation. The nationals were only being polite to the foreigner, as their culture has taught them to be. This tendency is of course not true in every country or culture – but it is in many. I have personally watched this many times in many countries. And I have listened to the glowing reports and seen the pictures, videos and TV programs extolling the “thousands of conversions” brought about by the foreign evangelist!

But because of my close national partnerships and years of involvement in many of those countries – I know that the real facts are often far different than those being reported back home in America. Many of my national brothers say to me with a bit of healthy spiritual skepticism: “Most of these people are the same ones who attend every crusade by a foreigner – and come forward at the invitation! They get ‘saved again’ at every crusade!”

Proper follow-through and follow-up is one of the single greatest challenges to every evangelistic event. How do you realistically do consistent follow-up with the people who have “come forward to receive Christ?”

- How do you make sure that they are being properly disciplined and mentored in their new faith?
- How do you make sure that they have gotten involved in a good local church where the Bible is consistently taught and practiced?
- How do you know if some local pastor is really shepherding and nurturing them toward maturity in Christ?

All of these are the real on-going follow-up concerns for any valid evangelistic effort – whether in America or on some foreign mission field. This is where the spiritual “rubber hits the road” in authentic evangelism and missions. Without this consistent follow-through and follow-up, the evil one will quickly come and “snatch away the Word” that was sown in the person’s heart before it has time to take root (Matt. 13:19).

So a foreign evangelist is often easily deceived by the delusion that they have had a far greater spiritual impact than they really have had. The national missionary is generally much more attuned to this reality and can better judge when his own people have really been transformed by the Holy Spirit, or whether they were just “being nice to the foreigners.” That’s because they live among the people in the same village or community and can see the lifestyle of the person who supposedly was “converted.” This kind of close-up observation is often not possible for the eyes of the foreign missionary who is always an outsider.

“Foreign Christian workers can easily misunderstand and misrepresent the spiritual impact of their ministry in a foreign country.”

SPIRITUAL EMPATHY

Understandably, a converted Hindu can often better reach other Hindus. He understands the system of idolatry and appeasement in the 350 million gods and goddesses of Hinduism. Likewise, a former Muslim can better relate Christ to someone still lost in Islam because he has believed and experienced what his national friend still embraces. A convert to Christ from Buddhism, spiritism or animism, can better compare the emptiness, futility and fear of his former religion to his new faith, freedom and security in Christ, than an outsider can. Whereas the Western missionary speaks from a theological perspective about these things, the national Christian speaks from personal experience.

In addition, the national Christian is not prone to wrap Christianity in a Western or American culture to the degree that it appears “foreign” or “alien.” They are not nearly as likely to be accused of preaching about a “foreign god” or the “white man’s religion.” In their hands, the Bible is “God’s Book” – not “the white man’s Bible.”

DENOMINATIONAL DIVISIONS

In many parts of the world today where the Church is first generational like we read about in the Book of Acts, there is a spiritual power, freshness and unity that is exciting! It has been my joy and privilege to minister and fellowship with some of them – which has been the greatest spiritual experiences of my life. As I often times say, in those places the Church has not existed long enough to be “bound by tradition” or “divided by theology!” Instead, there is a powerful spirit of unity and cooperation among the Believers. They are just the Body of Christ...the family of God...the local church.

Refreshingly, these new Christians usually do not use Western denominational names for their church fellowships. If they have a name for their local church, it is usually something from the New Testament. Or like the First Century Church, they call themselves by the name of their city or village (I will share more about this in the appendix at the end of this book under the topic: *Indigenous or Illegitimate?*).

Tragically though, many foreign missionaries and evangelists are going into those places primarily to spread their own theological distinctives. In doing this, they are like the Judaizers who followed the Apostle Paul with their “circumcision knives” to bring the Gentile converts into the Jewish fold. Their goal was not to nurture them in Christ – but to make “little Jews” out of them.

Sadly, that same *sectarian spirit* invades mission field after mission field. Like the Judaizers of old, they are out to make Baptist...Methodist...Presbyterians...Anglicans...Pentecostals...Mennonites...or Independents – out of the nationals. All over the world today there are many Western missionaries and Christian leaders who take their “theological branding irons” to the ends of the earth to bring people under their church banner. It would be far better for them to keep their dogma, denominationalism and divisions to themselves – and let Christ be Lord of His Church!

Along this line, we need to freshly heed one of the “seven woes” that Jesus pronounced against the religious leaders of His day who were guilty of the same sectarianism and proselytizing:

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! *You travel over land and sea to win a single convert*, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are” (Matt. 23:15).

Strong words indeed! And ones that need to be heeded by many American evangelists and foreign missionaries who are still traveling “...over land and sea to win a single convert” to their theological persuasion! As a result of their strong theological focus and bias, the first thing they want to know is whether a national Christian is Pentecostal...Baptist...Wesleyan... Calvinist... Reformed...Holiness...Charismatic...or Independent. And once they have identified where they are theologically, they begin the “spiritual circumcision ceremony!” They begin to “correct their theology” – or lack thereof. In the process, they soon have confused and “divided the sheep”

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“Most first generation Christians have a pristine love and unity that glorifies Christ. They have not existed long enough to be “divided by theology” or “bound by tradition.”

opposing camps of “us” and “them.” How sad indeed!

WHO HAS SPIRITUAL POWER?

When it comes to doctrine, it is an undeniable fact that *Pentecostalism is the fastest growing segment of Christianity worldwide*. While most white Christians tend to approach their faith *cerebrally*, most non-whites tend to do so *experientially*. We Westerners usually approach our faith “head first” while non-Westerners approach theirs “heart first.” Because of centuries of emphasis on education and rationalism, we Westerners are often especially concerned about “sound doctrine” and “systematic theology.”

However, while certainly not minimizing the importance of teaching “sound doctrine” (I Tim. 1:10; Titus 2:1), it is important to realize that the majority of the other Christians of the world are first and foremost interested in the “power of the Gospel.” They are not predominantly attracted to the Gospel for “head knowledge” – but for “heart experience.” Their motivation is not “does the Gospel make sense” – but rather “does the Gospel have power?” So the primary concern for most nationals are spiritual realities like deliverance from evil spirits...release from demonic bondage...freedom from fear of dead ancestors...forgiveness from sin...healing from sickness... victory over the devil.

Closely related to this issue of Pentecostalism is the matter of “power evangelism.” It is through these “power encounters” that the Gospel is most forcefully advancing worldwide. Because of the ever-present presence and power of the demonic realm, people are looking for deliverance more than they are theological understanding.

So in much of the church in the Two-Thirds World, there is a great emphasis on “healing, miracles, signs, wonders, exorcisms” – which most Western Christians have little or no background or experience in. However, they were one of the authenticating marks of Christ’s ministry (Heb. 2:4). These “signs and wonders” were also a part of the ministries of Peter, Paul and the other Apostles (Acts 2:43; 4:30; 5:8; 8:13; 9:40; 15:12; 19:11; 28:8-9, etc). But our religious experience in the West has often been a more intellectual and rational approach to faith.

In the Two-Thirds World people have grown up in a demonized world saturated with evil spirits, ancestral worship, witchcraft, black magic, voodoo, spells, charms, amulets, blood sacrifices, evil eye, curses and death! So again, the issue for most people in the Two-Thirds World in approaching any religion is not “does it make sense” – but “does it work?!” Does it have authority over the evil forces and demonic powers attacking me? If it does not have supernatural power over the kingdom of darkness – then they are not interested in it. Without the supernatural manifestations of “signs, miracles and wonders,” many natives will stay in the lesser powers of their traditional religions rather than come to Christ. As the old saying goes: “Better the devil you know than the God you don’t know!”

Therefore, we Western Christians need to remember the words of Paul about his own ministry under similar circumstances: “For you know brothers...that our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with *power, with the Holy Spirit* and with deep conviction” (I Thess. 1:5; Rom. 1:16; I Cor. 2:4).

“The major issue in the Two-Thirds World about religion is not ‘does it make sense’ – but ‘does it have power?’”

WORSHIP

A final word needs to be said here about the matter of praise, worship and celebration in the Two-Thirds World Churches. As already noted, because of our centuries of Western emphasis on education, enlightenment and the rational and intellectual side of our faith, we tend to face our church experience more *cerebrally* and *ceremonially*. Through the centuries, various denominations of the Western Church have built up strong layers of *tradition* – replete with prescribed liturgy, orders of worship, prayer books, recitation of creeds, priestly vestments, etc. They have what I call the “hails, bells and smells” of religion!

These various levels of religious *formalism* have become a fixed part of the church tradition in many of our more liturgical denominations in the West. Certainly there is nothing wrong with this more ordered and formal approach to faith. It is often the form of faith that many white people grew up in and are therefore more comfortable with. But one of the negative results of generations of *traditionalism* and *formalism* is the fact that often little or no spontaneous “freedom of expression” is allowed in church. The worshipers are expected to sit quietly and placidly in the pews – and only stand, sing, recite, sit, kneel or genuflect as they are instructed by the “Order of Worship” printed in the bulletin. Over time, the worshipers become preprogrammed to passively observe more than proactively participate. As a result, the *formalism of religion* stifles the *freedom of religion*. In the process *order* stifles *ardor*!

“The Western Church values *order* over *ardor*,
or the *formalism* of faith over the *freedom* of faith.”

B u t in most other non-Western Churches composed of “people of color,” there is much more freedom of expression and involvement in the entire worship experience. It is generally far more *praiseful*, *participatory* and *proactive*. This is especially true in the more Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. However, in many parts of the world, one is hard-pressed to distinguish between the freedom in worship of an Evangelical church or a Pentecostal church. That distinction is not nearly as pronounced in the Two-Thirds World Church as it is in the First World Church.

Also, this more lively, demonstrative and interactive form of worship is a hallmark of virtually all of the African-American and Hispanic Churches in the West. Their singing is often spontaneously accompanied by clapping, swaying, dancing, kneeling – and even prostrating oneself on the floor before the Lord.

Interpretive dance, drama and storytelling are also very important features of the non-Western Church tradition. And these expressions and forms of worship have proven to be very important means of advancing the Gospel in other countries and cultures that have a much stronger *oral tradition* rather than *written tradition*, as we saw in an earlier chapter.

Also, during the sermon there are a lot of verbal affirmations from the audience – rather than the passive silence that is the norm in most predominantly white churches. As the pastor preaches, the air is increasingly punctuated by “*amens*,” “*praise the Lord*,” “*preach it brother!*” and “*hallelujahs*” from the audience. They don’t just listen to the sermon – they literally help the preacher preach the sermon!

And since this type of participatory worship and celebration is not what most white missionaries have been raised in, they tend to perpetuate their more formal and sedate styles of worship on the national church. And rather than encourage the local people to write and sing their own worship music in their own style – accompanied by their own indigenous instruments, they often

just translate the “old hymns of the faith” and teach the local people to sing them. And whereas those old hymns and Gospel songs may have great meaning for the missionary, they often have little relevance for the national Christians. In addition, they often sound very strange and foreign to their ears.

It is also important that the traditional instruments of the local culture be “sanctified” and employed in the music and worship of national churches. Without that, the instruments and singing in worship will always seem like “foreign music.” It will not be the “music of the heart” of the local people. That’s why the whole subject of *ethno-musicology* is one of the important issues in missions today (*).

So for any people group, an essential part of their becoming a truly indigenous church is the freedom to develop their own ethnic forms of worship and celebration. And the strong emphasis on *spiritual celebration* in worship is one of the great gifts that the national church has to give to the Western church!

(*) See *Mission Frontiers* magazines for a fuller discussion on this important subject (May-August, 1996; March-April, 1997, etc., plus other books and resources produced by the U.S. Center for World Missions

ECONOMICALLY SOUND

Let me begin this final chapter by stating clearly that *it is impossible to separate money from missions*. Money is a very necessary part of the missionary enterprise. It is absolutely impossible to fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus Christ without financial resources – and lots of them! While the Gospel message is first and foremost spiritual by nature, it requires a monetary component to see it taken to the ends of the earth. Therefore, *we cannot separate Christ's mandate from our money*. Simply put, *money is the financial fuel for the Great Commission*.

“We cannot separate money from ministry and missions.
Money is the financial fuel for the Great Commission.”

FINANCING THE GREAT COMMISSION

It is important to remember that Jesus had people – especially women, who gave financially to support His ministry (Mk. 15:41; Lk. 8:1-3). Likewise, Paul had people who supported him financially – especially the saints at the Philippian Churches (Phil. 4:14-19; II Cor. 1:16; Rom. 15:23-24). And he clearly instructed the young churches to support itinerate evangelists and missionaries by “sending them on their way” with all they needed materially and financially (I Cor. 16:11; c.f. II Jn. 5-8). So while not every Christian is called to be a “goer,” every Christian is supposed to be a “sender” by providing the spiritual and financial fuel to propel both expatriate and national missionaries to the places God has called them.

“While not every Christian is to be a ‘goer,’
every Christian is to be a ‘sender’ and ‘supporter.’”

So from Paul’s day to this, there have been precious few cross-cultural missionaries on the field without some form of financial support from the wider Body of Christ. And many more would be on some foreign field today if they could only “raise their support.” So it is a lack of financial support that is keeping God’s army of missionaries from increasing exponentially! And He has entrusted the American and Western Church with the financial resources to equip that missionary army (*).

However, it is equally true that *in America it is the rampant materialism among Christians that is keeping hundreds of millions of dollars annually from being released for the support of missions locally and globally!* So while missions cannot be separated from money, *materialism among God’s people is the number one enemy to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ!* Simply put, our *greed* is the greatest enemy of their *need*.

“Materialism among God’s people in the West
is the single greatest enemy to the Great Commission.
Our *material greed* desensitizes us to their *spiritual need*.”

But when it comes to the financing of global missions, it is my strong contention that financially investing in national leaders is one of the wisest forms of mission stewardship. *Supporting national leaders is a monetary mission strategy whose time has come.* Perhaps more than ever before in Christian history, the Western Church must financially partner with the national church. As this spiritual and economic synergy takes place, I believe it will be a partnership that will rapidly increase the advance of the Gospel – especially among the unreached, under-reached and out-of-reach peoples of the world.

(*) For a further discussion of this, please see my book: *Will A Man Rob God?*

BANG FOR THE BUCK

Both historic and contemporary missions show that nationals can often reach these people groups at a fraction of the cost of expatriate missionaries. In many parts of the world, nationals can live on the equivalent of \$30, \$50 or \$100 a month – depending on their country, the local economy, the size of their family and personal circumstances. Nationals ministering in larger cities may need \$200 - \$500 a month as they live on the economic level of the local people. That is still a fraction of the cost of supporting and sustaining an expatriate missionary in the same situation – which generally ranges from \$2,000 - \$5,000 a month. So at this monthly support level, *almost any American Christian could fully support at least one full time national missionary in some part of the world!* But only if they get their hearts right and their priorities in order.

“Any American Christian can fully support one full time national missionary.”

Studies show that the average cost for sending and sustaining a foreign missionary family is \$35,000 - \$50,000 a year. For a single missionary, the average is \$25,000. Mission statistics further show that by the end of the first four-year overseas term, the average mission board has spent at least \$100,000 to send and sustain a single missionary couple on the foreign field.

By contrast, in many Third World countries you can support 20-50 national missionaries for the same cost of sending and sustaining one Western missionary family. In parts of Asia, you can often support up to 80 nationals for the same amount. That’s an incredible “bang for the mission buck!”

MISSIONARY ATTRITION

It is also important to pause and look at the problem of *missionary attrition*. Studies show that for one reason or another, *25-50% of foreign missionaries leave the field before their first term is over.* Of the ones who do stay for their entire first 3 or 4 year term, an average of 50% never return to the foreign mission field. So this foreign missionary attrition rate represents a huge investment of the resources of God’s people – often with little lasting fruit to show for it.

By contrast, estimates for national missionaries leaving their field of service is between 5% to 10%. So there is generally a much lower ministry attrition rate, primarily because the social and cultural adjustments are much less.

In addition, because of his lower standard of living, the national missionary is not as likely to be viewed as a source for money, loans, handouts, or jobs, like the foreign missionaries generally are. This is a tension that every expatriate missionary lives with almost daily because they are generally living in the midst of people with a much lower socio-economic standard of living than they have. Because the missionary generally lives in a big house with a lot of modern conveniences, drives a good automobile, wears nicer clothes, has plenty of food to eat – they

are seen by the native people as “very rich.” And indeed they are by comparison to their national neighbors. So they are often seen as a source for loans and handouts.

While most missionaries live on a rather moderate salary in comparison to their contemporaries back in America, their salary and standard of living is exceedingly high when compared to the local people – unless of course they have a ministry to the “up-and-outers” of that country.

THE COST OF MINISTRY

The national missionary can also generally carry out their ministry of evangelism much cheaper than the foreign missionary. Because they are used to “living on the local economy,” they usually can travel, minister, hold local revivals or conduct crusades at a fraction of what it costs for the Western missionaries and foreign evangelists. He can live on the level with the local people in a way that the expatriate generally cannot – or can for only a short period of time.

Also, all local prices immediately double, triple or quadruple the moment a foreign missionary steps on the scene! That’s because we have to pay what I call “*skin tax*” because we are white – and are therefore perceived as “*rich foreigners*” who have deep pockets and unlimited resources! A local national obviously does not have this same problem.

“*White people* in almost every foreign country have to pay an excessive “*skin tax*” for everything because they are seen as “*rich foreigners*” with unlimited resources.”

Therefore, when you tally the travel cost, lodging in a 4 or 5-star hotel, food cost in the best restaurants, stadium rentals, staff salaries, publicity, etc., for just one crusade or series of meetings by a “foreign evangelist” – it would support a national doing the same thing for years!

So it has been my experience that *supporting national missionaries is one of the best investments American Christians can make!* It represents one of the wisest stewardships of God’s money that I know of. However, money is not the driving issue here – it is relationships.

THE DEMON OF DEPENDENCY

But when it comes to the matter of supporting national missionaries, there is the oft-raised issue of *dependency*. There are those people who dogmatically say that neither missionaries nor foreigners should *ever* regularly support national workers because it will “make them dependent financially.” Other reasons and arguments like the following are often heard in missionary circles about financially supporting nationals:

- “*They need to learn to trust God for themselves...*”
- “*They need to learn to ‘live by faith’ like we do...*”
- “*Nationals need to learn to stand on their own two feet...*”
- “*They must support themselves and not look to others for help...*”
- “*National leaders must teach their own people to give...*”
- “*It’s time for the national church to support the national worker...*”

While I certainly acknowledge the very real potential danger of dependency, I also want to “flip the coin” and try and level the financial playing field on this issue. The honest question needs to be asked: “*How many expatriate missionaries live that way?*” Further, how many of them “live by faith” to the degree that they leave America or Europe and go to some “foreign field” without regular financial support? Are they not “financially dependent” upon their “ministry partners” back in the United States or Europe? Do they not postpone their departure for the mission field until a minimum of 75% to 95% of their monthly support has been raised and secured? (Most

mission boards will not permit their people to leave before that financial baseline is secured). And once they are on the field, do they continue to stay there when their monthly support has significantly dropped off for some reason? Certainly not! They almost immediately come back home to “raise support.”

But why do we call this “living by faith” when it is done by the foreign missionary – and then call it “being dependent” when it concerns the support of the national leader? I believe there is a serious flaw here in both our thinking and acting. It seems to me that this is an unfair double standard. And it would empty most mission fields of expatriates if suddenly they either needed to totally “live by faith” without any home support, or fully “support themselves” through some form of tent-making!

I definitely believe it is a valid “step of faith” to look to God for your financial support through the praying and giving of partners back home. It is equally an “act of faith” to go to the foreign mission field with the plans to fully support yourself through some form of “tent-making.” And this is just as true for the foreign missionary as for the national missionary. But it can also be argued that both are differing forms of *dependency*.

In the first situation, the missionary or national leader is dependent upon the “uncertain prayers” and “unsecured financial support” of their foreign partners. In the second situation, they are dependent upon the “works of their own hands” to provide their livelihood while on the mission field. But both are different forms of “living by faith.” You have no absolute guarantees either way. Economic changes back home or the devaluation of the US dollar can immediately cause a missionary’s monthly support to drop off to the degree that they have to pack up and leave the field.

Likewise, either changing economic conditions on the mission field or health problems can radically alter one’s ability to support themselves on the mission field through tent-making. So great faith is involved either way – whether you are being supported by the prayers and finances of others – or by the “sweat of your own brow” in tent-making missions.

TENT-MAKING MISSIONS

Let’s look a bit deeper then, at the very valid issue of *tent-making* by the national leader. It is definitely an important and timely paradigm in missions. As you probably know, the name comes from the fact that the Apostle Paul was a “tent-maker” who often supported himself in missions through this trade (Acts 18:1-4; 20:34). So the greatest missionary of all times was at times *bi-vocational* in his ministry to the unreached of his day.

It is often said: “Nationals should get some kind of tent-making job so they can support themselves while they are doing ministry. That way they would not be dependent upon the local missionary.”

While I am a strong and vocal advocate of this concept of tent-making ministry and mission (**), I want to again “flip the coin” and try and get a more level ministry playing field. Even though it is often suggested that the national should support himself financially through some form of tent-making, few if any expatriate missionaries support themselves that way. So it is one thing for missiologists or missionaries to preach and teach the paradigm of tent-making, but quite another for them to make their own tents – and then permanently move into them! Missionaries often do not “practice what they preach” in this area. So it is far easier to “talk it” than it is to “walk it” and “work it.”

So while this issue of tent-making ministry is the frequent fodder for a lot of missiological lectures and writing, the actual practice of it is hard to find on the foreign field. And even in the New Testament, it would appear that Paul's method of tent-making ministry was the exception rather than the norm for the other Apostles and cross-cultural Christian workers (1 Cor. 9:1-18).

Therefore, the issue of financially supporting national leaders is the ultimate "bottom line" of conflict in this whole discussion. At the end of the day, the greatest issue is almost always *financial* – although it is usually cloaked in other more "spiritual terms." The reality of foreign missions is what I often call the "Golden Rule." Simply put, partnership in missions usually is reduced to this reality: "*He who has the gold – rules!*" Since *money is power*, whoever controls

(**) See my book: *Breaking The Dependency Cycle; Moving from Dependency to Dignity in Christ*. Available from NDI or on line at www.biblicalprinciplesforliving.com;

the money usually also controls the power. So money is often used to manipulate the national leader to the degree that he will comply with the priorities, plans and programs of the missionary.

"Missions usually operates by the "*Golden Rule*" –
Meaning that those who have the *gold rule!*"

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Perhaps the single most difficult thing for physical parents or spiritual parents to do is to entrust your children with the "power of money." And unless your children have been clearly taught the Biblical principles of stewardship growing up, it is only to be expected that they will often wrongly use money and material things. None of my four children came into the world preprogrammed with a comprehensive understanding of "God's Principles of Finances!" No. They had to be systematically taught these Biblical principles over a long period of years. And during those learning years, they often made some poor choices in the expenditure of money! But that is part of the learning process.

Because all of us are born with a sinful and selfish nature, we are all vulnerable to an idolatrous "love of things." As a result of sin, we are born with an *ownership mentality* rather than a *stewardship mentality*. It is any wonder then, that both our physical children and spiritual children often make bad money decisions? So as Biblically oriented parents, we must disciple and mentor our children in the wise stewardship of money and material things. Those Biblical principles of finances must first of all be demonstrated in our own lives if our children are to learn them with integrity through precept and example.

"Because of original sin, we are all born with an
ownership mentality rather than a *stewardship mentality*."

If God's Word on this subject of finances and stewardship are not *taught* and *caught* in this area through the lives of the parents, the distorted values of culture will always dominate our use and abuse of money. And since many missionaries never really intend to turn this area over to the national leader, they never really mentor them in the area of money. As a result, the relationship between the national and missionary is generally doomed to frustration and failure in this area from the very beginning.

Sadly, all over the world today the stewardship of money and material resources is one of the BIGGEST sources of tension between the missionary and national. It has been the tool that the evil one has used to break many ministry and mission partnerships. That's because there is nothing that tests a friendship or partnership like money!

“The *stewardship* of money and material resources is generally the single *biggest* source of tension between *missionaries* and *nationals*!”

So it is my loving exhortation that there be more “equality” in this area of finances between the missionary and national leader, just as Paul exhorted the Corinthian church (II Cor. 8:13-14). Only then will we begin to have authentic Biblical partnerships.

WHAT ABOUT FOREIGN MISSIONARIES?

By this time you may be asking yourself: “*Is there still a need for Foreign Missionaries?*”

After following my reasoning to this point, some of you may also think that I am totally *anti-missionary*. That is certainly not the case at all! Please *do not* jump to that wrong conclusion about the theme and intent of this study. In my introduction, I tried to give a strong WARNING about not jumping to that wrong conclusion about the thesis of this book. To come to that extreme conclusion would be to miss my heart – to say nothing about the heart of this important study! It would only cause further misunderstanding and polarization about this very important subject of partnership in missions.

So let me clearly say again in closing: This is not an apologetic *against* sending and supporting foreign missionaries. Rather, it is an apologetic *for* equal partnership with national missionaries. I believe they are two sides of the same Great Commission coin.

I have written this book in an attempt to level the mission playing field. It is a call for the Body of Christ to see national partners as “varsity players” alongside the expatriate missionaries – rather than “junior varsity” players in the worldwide mission enterprise. These final innings we are now playing in the global competition for the souls of man are far too crucial to see the nationals as “second string players.” This game of life is far too important to let our highly qualified and motivated national brothers and sisters “sit on the bench” and either watch the missionaries play the game – or only be put in the game when the missionaries are not able to play! They must be seen as varsity players right alongside the missionary. And in many cases they need to be seen as the “star players” – and even the *coach* of the ministry team.

This book then, is a clarion call for more balance and equity between the missionary and national at every level of the global cause of Christ. It is a loving exhortation for far more *interdependence* and less *independence* on both sides of the mission equation. Only when each sees the other as a full *equal partner* in missions, will the work of the Kingdom move forward with greater love, power and unity.

As I have elaborated in the previous chapters, nationals can generally do the work of evangelism and church planting in his own country far more effectively than the foreigner ever can. And when properly trained and equipped, they can do so with greater time and monetary efficiency. Understandably, there is generally a far lower attrition rate from nationals on the field than among expatriate missionaries. There is also less adjustment required by the spouse and children of the national workers. That’s because they are “at home” where they are living and ministering rather than in a foreign country and culture.

Does this mean that the national missionary is perfect? Am I suggesting that the indigenous church is faultless? Are there no problems in national organizations? No! Far from it. Whether we are nationals or expatriates, we are all cut out of the same human fabric that is fallen, frayed, frail and prone to failure! But empowerment of the national is still the more Biblical model of leadership, evangelism and church planting – as I have tried to demonstrate in this study through many Biblical principles and supporting Biblical references.

So is this approach to missions perfect and problem free? Emphatically not! Do national pastors and indigenous missionaries make mistakes? Absolutely! Do they ever become prey to theological error and heresy? Certainly! Do they ever experience moral failure or monetary impropriety? Yes! But to no greater degree than their Western counterparts. People are people whether they are nationals or missionaries. As I have already stated, we all come from

the dust of the ground – not from heaven! So we all have the same strengths and weaknesses...assets and liabilities...potential and problems. No people group has a corner on either virtue or foolishness. We are all a mixture of *dust* and *divinity* – and our earthiness and flesh pulls us all down from time to time. Both history and experience clearly show that we are all the same when it comes to both the good and evil in our humanity.

Therefore, the important question is: “*Do we really trust Christ to be Lord of His own Church? Do we trust the Holy Spirit to indwell and guide the national to the same degree that we trust Him to do so with the foreign missionary?*” The birth, growth, and purity of the indigenous church are ultimately the responsibility of the Holy Spirit working through local Spirit-filled national leaders. It is not the responsibility of the expatriate missionary or foreign mission board.

My challenge then, is that we go back to the Biblical model of evangelism and church planting. Let us be as fully committed to supporting national missionaries as we have been in supporting foreign missionaries. Let us be as committed to building the indigenous church abroad as we have been in building up our own local churches at home.

Even though these “10 Reasons” focus on the need to support national missionaries, *there is still a desperate need for the expatriate missionary in many parts of the world today.* And that will be true until the Lord returns and drops the curtain on global missions and the Great Commission. So again, *I am not in any way anti-foreign-missionary.* I am just seeking more Biblical balance when it comes to missions.

So please do not interpret my strong emphasis on supporting national leaders as one of hostility to missionaries! As I pointed out in the introduction of this book, I come from a long line of expatriate missionaries – and I am one myself! So to criticize and excise them is to criticize and eliminate myself from the mission equation. What I long to see and have been a life-long advocate for is for our national missionaries to receive the attention, prayers, and support they deserve – and that God wants them to have.

I am still very much supportive of sending foreign missionaries where they are legitimately needed. And since there are scores of books written on this subject, along with many excellent monthly missionary magazines and periodicals, there is no need for me to write about this clear Biblical mandate. But since there are so few books written in behalf of partnership with the nationals, I have written this book to speak into that missiological vacuum. And this is also the mission paradigm that the Lord has called me to for over 4 decades. So I have been writing from my own experience.

In many countries today, there are still hundreds of unreached people groups who are the “hidden peoples” of the world. These are the *unreached, under-reached* and *out-of-reach people*. In hundreds of thousands of villages across the globe, there is no Christian witness or presence at all. Not a single Christian Church exists. In other places, the Church is still in spiritual infancy and in need of more parenting. In other areas the national leadership has not yet been adequately mentored and trained to the degree that they can be in full apostolic and authoritative leadership. So what is true physically is also true spiritually: *parents are still needed until the baby is born and the child matures.*

Also, there are still many languages and tribal dialects without a single portion of the Bible translated into their mother tongue. Few nationals have received the technical linguistic training to do such translation work. *So there is still great need for foreign missionaries to help do*

pioneer evangelism, Bible translation, infrastructural development, leadership mentoring and church planting.

All over the world where the church is growing exponentially, there is a great need for practical pastoral training of the nationals. There is still much need for education, literacy work and medical ministry. And there is a crying need for relief and development work in the wake of wars, tribal genocide, natural disasters, diseases and epidemics. Few nationals have the resources to adequately address these problems in a large way. This is where they need the proactive partnership of American Christians whom God has entrusted with much of the financial resources to meet these needs. But all of this must be done in such a way to create spiritual and physical independence and interdependence – rather than dependence upon the presence and pocketbook of the foreign missionary!

Even though the National Church is generally active, dynamic, and growing, it still can benefit from the education and experience of the older historic churches in the Western world. The ministry of our national brothers can also often be greatly strengthened by the organizational and administrative skills of the foreign missionary. Without this help in building infrastructure, spiritual and organizational maturity often comes much slower to the national church. However, this co-ministry must be based on partnership – not paternalism.

“Will the American Church seize this timely opportunity of spiritual partnership with our national brothers?”

The days of colonialism are over. There is no place for any form of superiority, racism, or apartheid in the Church of Jesus Christ – in attitude or action! This is the day of *sanctified nationalism* within the Body of Christ.

So thousands of foreign missionaries are still needed in many parts of the world. The fields are still “white unto harvest” while the “laborers are few” (Jn. 4:35). However, these missionaries must be a “new breed.” They must go in as servants, partners and friends of the national leaders. They must minister as *brothers* – not as *bosses*.

Nor should expatriate missionaries go abroad to secure lifelong positions of leadership for themselves. They should go to secure the position, power and profile of indigenous leadership. They must see themselves as facilitators and supporters, not controllers. Most must go in on special short-term assignments to accomplish certain predetermined goals. Then as wise parents do, they must “work themselves out of a job” as quickly as possible. They must totally *empower* the national to fully lead the church in their country and culture.

So we must send and fund foreign missionaries where they are legitimately needed. Today there are approximately 200,000 Protestant and Catholic foreign missionaries around the world – and more than 60,000 non-Western missionaries.²

Many experts estimate that in a few short years, *the number of missionaries from the Two-Thirds World will exceed the number from the Western Nations*. In reality, that has already happened. Today there are some 7,000 indigenous Protestant missionaries from India, 41,500 from Latin America, 17,000 from Africa, and 17,500 from Asia. Korea alone already has missionaries in 50 countries of the world, with a goal of having a missionary in every nation

²US missionaries make up only 30% of the world’s missionaries. Our slightly declining annual number is being overtaken by increased participation from Africa, Latin America and Korea.” <http://www.houstonperspectives.org/missionstrivia.html> February 22, 2003. 60% of unreached people groups live in countries closed to missionaries from North America.

within a few short years! Already Korea is rapidly becoming one of the leading sending and funding missionary countries in the world!³ In fact, *Korea and Brazil have now surpassed America as the largest missionary sending countries!*

Also, studies show that most of the Western missionaries today are living and ministering where the Gospel has already been preached and where Christian churches have already been planted. They are largely building on other missionaries' foundations, rather than preaching where Christ has never been preached (Rom. 15:20). In reality, then, many expatriate missionaries are primarily doing custodial mission work – which could just as well be carried out by the nationals.

Today, more than half of the world's population is effectively "closed to foreign missionaries." That's a staggering reality! And I believe that the greatest hope of reaching those countless millions is the national missionary. Therefore, let us believe in them...love them...pray for them...support them...partner with them – for God's Kingdom and glory!

Dr. J.L. Williams
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Impact of Hope International
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³ 40% of the church's entire global foreign mission resources are being deployed to just 10 oversaturated countries already possessing strong citizen-run home ministries. *World Christian Trends*, William Carey Library, David Barrett & Todd Johnson, <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/newslinks/statewe.htm>, "In 1982 there were 321 Korean Protestant missionaries. By 1992 that number had grown to 2,576. In 1995, the South Korean Church dedicated 105,000 young people for at least two years of mission service. Another 3,000 Korean missionaries are now being trained to go into China." <http://www.clpc.org/gstatistics.htm>