

The Student Volunteers of 1886, Their Heirs, and the Year 2000

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The following thoughts were first presented in an earlier version to the June 17 dinner meeting of the 1986 session of the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals at the Billy Graham Center in Wheaton, Illinois, USA.

On the grounds of D. L. Moody's new girls' school at Mt. Hermon in western Massachusetts, 251 students from elite colleges in the East gathered with Moody in August of 1886, at the height of his career. One hundred of them, in an unplanned event toward the end of the conference, made a pledge of personal involvement in foreign missions. This event has commonly been considered the beginning of the mighty Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions.

INTRODUCTION

Our purpose in part is to trace that movement across the 100 years to the present. What a century! It would take many hours merely to recite the major events of this fullest century in all human experience.

In fact, in a broader sense, our purpose is no less than to understand this remarkable century from the point of view of what God was and is and is about to do. In this quest we are not choosing one of the side shows of the many exciting developments that crowd the canvas. Many treatments follow out such secondary or tertiary elements. We wish to focus on what is most likely to be the very backbone of God's agenda in this century. Little considered in conventional thinking, this element is also surprisingly absent even within our normal agenda of evangelical intellectual pursuits. To restore a better perspective of this century I have compiled a list of "other" events which are ordinarily not mentioned in secular or secularized treatments. This is placed at the end of the paper, but deserves consultation at many points throughout.

Most important, as was true with those students and their leaders at Mt. Hermon in 1886, our earnest purpose must be to peer in faith into the immediate future. We discover, with awe, that they looked forward fourteen years to evangelizing the world by the year 1900. Dare we look forward fourteen years to accomplishing the same goal—the evangelization of the world by the end of the century? For us, this goal is certainly much more reasonable than it was for them.

We do not have any sure knowledge about our own next fourteen years, but we do know a very great deal about theirs. And we are struck by the curious parallels in recent events to the significant momentum which, prior to 1886, had already been built up. Their prayers and sacrificial efforts back then constituted such a mighty "sprint" for the end of the century that, looking back, it can accurately be said that the year 1886 was a profoundly significant "threshold year."

Will 1986, like 1886, be another "threshold year"—a *final* threshold just prior to the End of History? This is no idle question.

I find it almost electrifying to look at graphic portrayals of so significant a factor in world evangelization as the rise and fall of student mission interest. As these drawings indicate, in this century there have been in the United States alone two major series of large student meetings emphasizing foreign mission endeavor. Each series reflects a movement affecting the lives of thousands of students on an almost daily basis, especially in the earlier period.

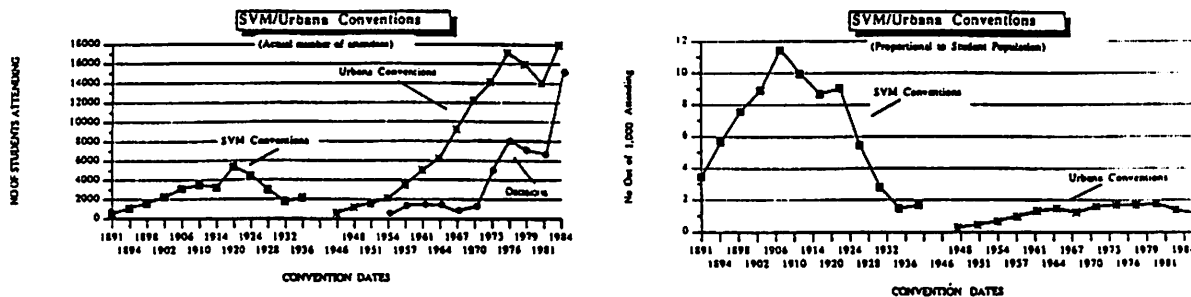


Figure 1 portrays the actual attendance at the two main series of nationwide student mission gatherings in the United States—the Student Volunteer Movement Quadrennials in the first half of the century and the SFMF/IVCF Student Missionary Conventions held mostly at Urbana in the second half of the century. (For simplicity I have omitted the sizable “Christmas Conferences,” the Houston and Kansas City meetings, and the December 1985 global satellite “Explo ’85” sponsored by Campus Crusade, as well as the significant build-up of the European counterpart to the Urbana series, sponsored by TEMA.)

Looking at the graphs, the record of attendance year by year at each of the two series of meetings is very interesting. But when we weight the attendance statistics to the population size of college students in their respective generations, as is done in Figure 2, certain facts become shockingly clear.

I was frankly amazed, for example, to see how relatively larger in their time were the SVM Quadrennials than have been the Urbana conventions in ours. The drastic difference between these two diagrams is due to the astonishing increase in the number of college students, going, as it has, from 2 per thousand citizens back then to 50 per thousand today. No wonder that in this second figure the graph of the 18,000 students at Urbana today appears much, much smaller than that of the 6,000 SVM students in Des Moines in 1920!

One might question, in fact, if it is really fair to compare the two. The SVM stressed *missions* alone, whereas only at Urbana does IVCF (the sponsoring organization) give full attention to that subject. Daily, throughout the year, the SVM students were immersed in missions input. By comparison, the record today of any organization promoting daily mission study is very weak.

Nevertheless, a comparison of the two series of meetings gives valuable insights into what God might be doing in our day. I have been studying the beginnings of the Student Foreign Mission Fellowship in 1936, now a part of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. But the more I have learned about the beginnings of the Student Volunteer Movement, the more I have come to realize that the proper comparison was not between 1886 and 1936, but rather between 1886 and 1986. In other words, we are just now in a comparable situation. Why do I say this?

For one thing, two of the three great currents (of which we are about to speak) which carried the SVM forward after 1886 were seriously absent in 1936. As a result, the SFMF struggled forward for many years and only recently has begun to benefit from those additional forces which are appearing once again.

We must, of course, be very grateful for the staying power of the Urbana stream in the intervening years and its promise of immense accomplishments by the year 2000. But it is more

reasonable to compare the unprecedented upsurge in missions *following 1886* to what we should look for *following 1986*.

In summary, then, we commemorate in 1986 the conference at Mt. Hermon, Massachusetts in 1886, which initiated the earlier of these two movements. We also commemorate the 50th anniversary of the somewhat less dramatic initiative which produced the Student Foreign Mission Fellowship, and later on, the Urbana series of meetings. (We could, if we wished, also commemorate the Haystack Prayer Meeting, which occurred 180 years ago, in 1806.)

My hypothesis, however, is that the parallel to the Urbana period (1936 to present) is not the Quadrennials following 1886 but the relatively less spectacular events *preceding* the 1886 conference. We must realize that with all the hopeful signs today, we are really only in the *beginning* of a new, vast, youthful push into world service. The major proportions of this new movement are just ahead. And as we examine the outpouring from Mt. Hermon as those students looked forward to the year 1900, we might best compare it to what outpouring, under God, may develop as a result of our commemoration of that event this year, in 1986, as we look forward to the year 2000.

By now it will be clear why the two major divisions of this material are, first, the original Mt. Hermon meeting—and its hopes for the year 1900—and the commemorative Mt. Hermon meeting of 1986—and what its hopes might be for the year 2000.

MT. HERMON AND THE YEAR 1900

There was a clear-eyed vision back in 1886, so hopeful that it scandalized many people for many years to come. Later, when it became clear they couldn't complete the evangelization of the world by the turn of the century, first mission leaders and then the students began talking about evangelizing the world "in this generation." But in 1886 their target date was 1900. By 1900 that generation did, in fact, move mountains, you might say, though they did not quite cast them into the sea. In my judgment, theirs is the first and only time in history that a large country was moved so mightily by such a vision and accomplished so much in so short a period. There were several streams of influence making up this mighty outpouring. We must look at them closely and see if there are parallel streams leading up to 1986 which might allow us a similar vision as we look toward the year 2000... and, perhaps, the End of History?

We can note at least three major currents flowing into the 1886 event and into the movement which followed. One stream was the then-abounding vitality of the institutional YMCA movement, which would become for John R. Mott and his fellow students even more than what Roman citizenship had been for the Apostle Paul.

Secondly, there was the mood of secular America exerting momentous yet invisible cultural pressure upon every person present at that meeting in 1886, projecting an amazing mood for world expansion. This complex secular force did not so much dominate the group as allow it a carrier vehicle for its message.

Preeminent was a third force, a long-standing spiritual current traceable to the initiative of God Himself, not really to be described in institutional terms. This third factor was represented strikingly in the simple authenticity of Moody's spiritual life and the hundreds of thousands who shared in that evangelical reality. This was the enduring force. It is the one that has surged forward undiminished from then until now. It is the reality which, by God's grace, we share this day.

Those students in 1886 were primarily inspired by the 1806 example of a few students at Williams College, just a few miles away, in what came to be known as the Haystack Prayer Meeting. Each situation resulted from a similar collusion of secular and religious events. The students in 1806 looked back twenty-one years to the close of the Revolutionary War, even as those in 1886 looked back twenty-one years to the close of the even more devastating Civil War.

When the Haystack Five demanded to be sent as foreign missionaries (America's first), they precipitated the founding of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in 1810 when they threatened to go under a British agency if American churchmen refused to provide an American agency. Only two years later America was at war with Britain again, to no one's great surprise. Prior to 1812 many Americans (and certainly the rest of the world) considered it a pure fluke that the American colonies had barely, and perhaps only temporarily, won the Revolutionary War against one of the mightiest nations on earth. They assumed this was the result of Britain's preoccupation with Napoleon's ravages in Europe and feared that when that distraction was over, the British would be back again to stay.

The British did come back, and in force, but astonishingly were again driven off. Americans were elated, astounded, incredulous, and for the first time began really to feel secure as a people. Almost immediately, a profound change of perspective swept over this country which opened the way for Americans to begin seriously to 1) move West, in the single most massive migration of our history; 2) look out across the world with complex, expansive interests, preaching, especially in Latin America, the revolutionary significance of "the shot that was heard around the world"; and 3) support seriously the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, and eventually create a new, uniquely American structure in Christian history, namely, the denominational boards of mission. All of this was aided by the collusion of secular and Christian forces.

The students in 1886 had a similar optimism and sense of destiny. In the hands of secular historians, the period from the War between the States to the First World War, 1865 to 1914, has been called "The Confident Years." Obviously, no one felt very confident right after 1865. But nightmares are often quickly suppressed. Twenty years later, by the time of the Mount Hermon meeting in 1886, people in the United States were abounding in confidence again. This confidence was a secular, not merely evangelical, reality, and it would last for another quarter of a century.

Thus, as we view the institutional and social forces surrounding the stream of events that issued forth from the 1886 student gathering, we do well to reflect upon the presence or absence of similar factors in our present circumstances and try to see what God may be about to do in our time.

The Institutional Current

Clearly the most tangible current flowing into Mt. Hermon in 1886 was the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), itself a profoundly spiritual movement. While it had no lasting theological roots, it certainly had, by 1886, a significant financial momentum.

The conference in 1886 was not officially and institutionally a YMCA conference. Moody had actually suggested and preferred a conference for the general secretaries of the city YMCA's. After months of effort, and only with difficulty, was Luther Wishard, the Intercollegiate Secretary for the YMCA, able to persuade Moody to invite key students to a conference just for students. Perhaps Moody's increasing influence with students in England turned the tide for him so that he finally agreed. Moody himself was not an institution, and it was his conference. But this conference in 1886 was of Wishard's making and thus had pregnant institutional relationships.

In any case, the YMCA was the one strong institution in the wings standing ready to carry forward the results of this remarkable meeting. John R. Mott, one of the key students, was already a very successful YMCA student leader at Cornell. Following his graduation Mott was asked to be a Travelling Secretary for the Intercollegiate YMCA. The YMCA already had impressive momentum, and in yielding to this appointment, Mott immediately stepped into a gilded carriage. This boy from Iowa, on the edge of the Indian frontier, would be going first class for the rest of his life. He wrote home of swanky New York restaurants with sometimes a dozen millionaires in the meeting. When he married one of the illustrious daughters of Wooster College, his own parents may have been too poor financially to make the long trip from Iowa to

Ohio. Or they just may have felt too outclassed socially to feel presentable. Whatever the case, they didn't come.

Only a few months into his YMCA job, Mott and his bride took their honeymoon trip to the Pacific coast. At 26 it was not yet his personal reputation but his YMCA connections that brought out six of the college presidents and a number of faculty members from all eight Los Angeles area colleges to hear him. The free rail passes for that 5,000 mile trip for both him and his bride again were due to the well-established, well-connected YMCA backers, not the level of mission interest in railroad leadership. Shortly it would be the YMCA, once more, that would suggest that he head up what was now to be formalized—two years after the Mt. Hermon meeting—as the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, the SVM for short. And for years, the YMCA thought the SVM was theirs, while the SVMers thought it was theirs. What a fruitful symbiosis!

(In this first instance there is little parallel to the depression-years origin of the Student Foreign Mission Fellowship organized 50 years later. While it may be true that without the sponsorship of a few blueblood Southern women, Columbia Bible College might not have been granted the authority by the State Legislature to give degrees, thus establishing a slightly more respectable tradition than the degreeless Bible Institute tradition, nevertheless McQuilkin certainly had to pray for money, as we say, far more than did Mott. The differences are very nearly total.)

The aristocracy of England had been shocked when the Cambridge Seven, all well-to-do, sailed as missionaries to China. It was also shocking to the elite families of America when, a year and a half later, 100 of their best young people proposed something similar. Looking back, however, it would seem that the phenomenon of the Cambridge Seven, their fellow cricketers, and all the other converted aristocrats like J. E. K. Studd, did not so much introduce missions to the upper classes of England as introduce a lot of upper-class people into the leadership of the new, brash China Inland Mission, which had struggled along for twenty years with no such social pretensions.

By contrast, due to its links with the YMCA, the Student Volunteer Movement was from its very outset a socially mainstream movement. In the outflow from Mt. Hermon, a mission concern that earlier had been lumped together with mere "mysticism and millenarianism" was now made respectable, at least for a time. The mission movement had hitched its wagon to a star.

The Secular Current

A second major force undergirding those students at Mt. Hermon was secular: the growing expansionist sentiment in the U.S. It was mainly based on political ambitions, but also reflected the genuine shock experienced by evangelicals as they became more aware of the spiritual situations overseas. To change metaphors, the SVM not only hitched its wagon to a star, its sails felt the surge of a powerful secular gale.

For the thirty years preceding the Civil War, Adoniram Judson and his wife, Ann, had been national heroes. His unjust imprisonment by the Burmese government during the Anglo-Burmese war had been faithfully chronicled by Ann and ran like a soap-opera serial in all the major American newspapers of the day. Her own role as a political advocate in a heathen court both stunned and challenged her American sisters.

Then the Civil War came with its devastation of the male population of this country, leading to a significantly new depth of women's activism in missions (as well as secular life). Add in the Moody revivals. Add the fact that most of the non-Western world was now part of the colonial empires of European nations. (The U.S. would soon have its own overseas territories.) And the existence of colonial governments hopefully meant open doors for missionaries.

But it was the "heathenism" which touched the hearts of women in particular. One secular author paints a vivid picture of what they saw:

One of the strongest appeals to women to enter missionary work was to be found in their conviction that foreign women, or more specifically, non-Christian women, lived lives of hopeless degradation. Reading their letters and journals one finds that they were obsessed by the harem and seraglio; purdah, odalisques, bound feet, concubines, and male prostitution dismayed them. They stood down enraged Zulu fathers whose daughters had fled to mission schools to find refuge from detested marriages. In India they found wife-killing a common practice. Indians who would not kill a cat or a dog or a sacred cow did not hesitate "on the slightest quarrel" to hack their wives to death. They were perfectly aware of incidents such as that described by Sir Charles Napier where a seventeen-year-old girl was suspected of being unfaithful to her thirteen-year-old husband. "Her father led her to the front of his house... twisted her long hair in his hands, and holds her on tiptoe while her brother hacks off her head! This was all done openly," Sir Charles noted. Unwanted daughters in many Eastern societies were killed. The Ameers of India gave their mistresses potions to cause miscarriages and if that failed "they chop up the child with a sword.... In Clutch they kill daughters who do not marry quickly." In Todas, near Goa, "infant daughters were drowned in milk or trampled to death by water buffalos and among the Belochis the girls were killed with opium" (Smith 1970:187,188).

Present day feminist sentiment is more focused on inequities at home than continuing tragedies abroad. But expansion was not just a theological burden. After the war of 1812, masses of Americans had begun moving in wagon trains numbering in the thousands out to conquer the western frontiers of Indiana, Iowa and Michigan. Others cast their eyes on Mexico and Central America. By 1886, well after the War between the States, the Mt. Hermon impulse had become part of an even more powerful mood of expansion that would serve incidentally, for awhile, to enlarge the cause of missions. Having battered themselves senseless in their own war, Americans were now, curiously, ready to expand and save the world.

Shortly after the 1886 conference, six new states were admitted in two years. Never since the twelve colonies became states had so large an accession happened in so short a time. We note that these new states secured our border in the West against Canada..

Shortly we were to plunge southward to take over Cuba and Puerto Rico. (To this day the territorial responsibilities of some of our home mission boards still include Cuba and even Central America.) Within months we had reached clear across the Pacific to seize Guam, the Philippines, and half of the Samoan Islands.

As Princeton's young Woodrow Wilson observed, expansion was "the natural and wholesome impulse which comes with a consciousness of matured strength." President McKinley, that kindest of men, believed there was even more to expansion than that—it was the least we could do for less fortunate peoples. On the question of annexing the Philippines, he had prayed to God for guidance, and it came to him in the night: "There was nothing left to do but to take them all and to educate the Filipinos and uplift and Christianize them and by God's grace to do the very best we could by them as our fellowmen for whom Christ died" (Lord 1960:39,40).

But as war clouds gathered in 1898, so did the SVM young people for their Third Quadrennial, once again at Cleveland. Only one week before their meeting, the U.S. battleship *Maine* had been

sunk in a Cuban harbor. The opening session was referred to as a council of war. Mott's closing words were framed in war terminology.

Let me give a long quote just here, not merely to portray the influence of this war theme in their thinking, but to give an in-depth look at this man whose mind and spirit so faithfully reflected the SVM tradition in the early days, and to show the non-secular twist added by the gospel:

"Where is the war?" Mott asked in the final session. "Tomorrow morning we shall fling out the battle line through all the length and breadth of the United States and Canada, and within a few months... it will be extended to the very ends of the earth. [Where is it?] It is in the Turkish Empire—a war against violence and bigotry and sensuality. It is in the vast continent of Africa—a war against cruelty, slavery and the dense superstition. It is in Japan—a conflict against impurity, materialism and skepticism. It is in China, with her multitudinous inhabitants—a war against avarice, pride and dishonesty, against misrule, against the enslavement and debasement of nearly two hundred millions of women. It is in South America—a strife against ignorance, against blinding and blighting superstition, against gambling and gross immorality. It is in India, that great continent in itself—a war against caste, against conditions enforcing grinding poverty, against false religious faiths, against child widowhood and the degradation of woman. Yes, it is an awful conflict, involving the temporal and spiritual welfare of two-thirds of the human race...."

But he went deeper than that:

[There is another battlefield]...."That field is in our own hearts, and the war is against pride, against hypocrisy, against selfishness, against slothfulness and irresolution, against prayerlessness, against disobedience to heavenly visions and voices.... If we can win the battle in our own hearts we shall have victory on all other fields."

Now, even more personally:

"The secret of triumph here consists in taking one day at a time. Let us adopt as a practical thing the words which Wesley placed on the flyleaf of his Bible, 'Live today.' If we would live and fight today, triumphantly we must, at the very beginning of the day, put on the whole armor of God.... If we keep the morning watch tomorrow as we turn our faces from Cleveland, it will be much easier to observe it the next morning. Thus, morning by morning let us go forth to the day's conflict in vital union with the Lord Jesus Christ. The inevitable result will be that His mighty Spirit will continue to surge into and through these hearts of ours, the colleges of this continent will be shaken, the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God" (Hopkins 1979:229-30).

Where did this kind of spiritual element come from? We turn now to the third stream flowing into the movement.

The Spiritual Current

The spiritual stream flowing into the 1886 conference at Mt. Hermon came from many quarters. The Haystack Prayer meeting stood behind it, with direct links forward to the key figures of the

SVM's origin. A vast women's missionary movement had surged to new heights after the War between the States, symbolized by the formation of the Women's Union Missionary Society in 1860. Even the immensely influential Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor, beginning in 1881 in Boston, had already by 1885 formed a national office, and by 1886 had no doubt sent many students into college with a missionary vision. Who knows how many of those Mt. Hermon 100 had belonged to the mission committees of their home church YPSCE group? How many had mothers who were active in women's mission fellowships? That research has yet to be done.

The meeting at Mt. Hermon in 1886, where the number of student volunteers first reached 100, was admittedly the beginning of something momentous, more momentous certainly than the completion of the Statue of Liberty that same year. Yet the meeting itself was only a small event within a far more momentous spiritual awakening long in progress in which a key figure was D. L. Moody. That awakening outlasted the SVM and forms the bond of continuity in evangelicalism and mission interest to this day. Indeed, as I have implied, I believe that the increasing vitality of the movement that preceded and flowed into Mt. Hermon 1886 is best compared to the Urbana movement which has preceded and is flowing into 1986.

Here are some of the specific events preceding Mt. Hermon 1886: the sovereign work of God which lifted Moody into prominence in a hostile Scotland and England; the unusual revival at Princeton University in 1875, that brought Luther Wishard into a deep commitment to Christ; the initiative of God's spirit in leading Wishard to Williams College, where he knelt at the monument of the Haystack Prayer Meeting which took place there in 1806; the return of a missionary, Royal Wilder, from India, who not only founded the *Missionary Review of the World*, but whose son Robert and daughter Grace so earnestly carried forward the missionary vision; the formation of the Princeton Foreign Mission Society shortly after Wishard's graduation; the founding and first meeting of the Interseminary Missionary Alliance in 1880; and the spectacular sailing to China of the Cambridge Seven in February of 1885, which shook England far more than the Mt. Hermon 100 moved America 18 months later. All of these things and many more were part of the strong spiritual current of the times when Moody finally yielded for the first time in all his ministry to hold a summer conference for a group of college students.

But possibly more immediately important than any one of these events was another Moody meeting held just a year before in nearby Northfield, Moody's larger conference center just to the South, where a thousand people gathered for the third in a series of conferences. We note that a godly mission-embued, high-born famous cricketer was present, himself a product of Moody's phenomenal impact on England—J. E. K. Studd, the older brother of C. T. Studd.

This 1885 conference was almost exactly a year before the student conference at Mt. Hermon. In the midst of this conference, Moody uncharacteristically declared a day of special recognition of missions and turned things over to A.T. Pierson. Two very significant younger men were present: not only J. E. K. Studd, but Luther Wishard, who was both the founder and the head of the new Intercollegiate Division of the YMCA.

In expansive purpose and vision, although in language evangelicals much later would come to distrust, A.T. Pierson stood up to plead for

...an ecumenical council, representing all evangelical churches, solely to plan [a] world-wide campaign and proclaim the good tidings to every living soul in the shortest time! Let the field be divided and distributed with as little waste of men and means as may be. Let there be a universal appeal for workers and money, and a systematic gathering of offerings that shall organize the mites into millions (Pollack 1983:277).

At this point, John Pollock says, "Moody jumped to his feet and with force and enthusiasm called the conference to vote their approval by acclamation." An intensely practical man, Moody appointed a committee of seven besides himself to draw up "An Appeal to Disciples Everywhere," which he read out to the crowd three days later. In part, we note,

The whole world is now accessible... yet the church of God is slow to move in response.... Nearly a thousand millions of the human race are yet without the Gospel; vast districts are wholly unoccupied (Pierson 1886:367).

The committee's statement went on to implore

...a new effusion of the Spirit in answer to prayer.... If but ten million out of the four hundred millions of nominal Christians would undertake such a systematic labor as that, each one of that number should in the course of the next fifteen years [remember, this is in 1885!] reach one hundred souls with the Gospel message, the whole present population of the globe would have heard the glad tidings by 1900 (Pierson 1886:367).

One of the committee of seven which drew up the document was J. E. K. Studd. This is especially interesting because, as our story unfolds, a few weeks later at Cornell he was to stop John R. Mott in his tracks and bring about a profound transformation in his life. Mott was already recognized as an extraordinarily capable young man. As we have seen, his leadership in the collegiate YMCA at Cornell would bring him a few months later to the unique, first Moody-sponsored, student summer conference in 1886.

J. E. K. Studd, going back to England later to become Lord Mayor of London, was also instrumental in making sure "The Ecumenical Conference" of which A.T. Pierson spoke actually happened. And it did. The Ecumenical Conference of 1888 was the largest international mission conference thus far in history!

Thus many spiritual streams flowed in and around that historic meeting in 1886. Very specifically: Wishard and his nationwide institutional resources and connections coupled with his missionary vision; Robert Wilder, son of Royal Wilder, the editor of the influential *Missionary Review of the World* and a leader of the Princeton Foreign Mission Society; the missionary pledge that had been hammered out by the Princeton students and that was now ready for wider use; John R. Mott, newly renewed in faith and commitment—and so on.

In essence, these many spiritual streams were all part of the one steady current that belongs to no human institutional tradition. They were the initiative of God. This mysterious, virile, redemptive current in all history tends to flow on the margin of, or even out of sight of, the main events that occupy public attention, and even historians' attention. But we recognize that this current is no more marginal nor less significant than the mystery of that moment when Jesus, very much alone although in the presence of twelve others, looked out upon Jerusalem and wept because that city back then did not, in the main, know the time of God's Visitation. They would not acknowledge their obligation to share their blessings with all of the families of the earth. Although this was absolutely nuclear to their calling in Abraham, nevertheless, the whole Bible and all history records that they and the Christians who across the centuries sprang from the same roots rarely ever thought much about it. I am convinced that the only true continuity of mission vision in the annals of human events is the hand of God Himself. He is the only common denominator in the "proliferation of new movements" which Kenneth Scott Latourette regarded as the most useful measure of the vitality of the Christian movement in human history. Metaphorically, the

discernment of the mystery of mission presents us not only with a moving target, but the horse carrying the rider keeps changing from generation to generation.

MT. HERMON AND THE YEAR 2000

In 1986 at least four meetings have been designed to ponder the implications for today deriving from the train of events that resulted in and issued from the student gathering at Mt. Hermon in 1886.

The institutional current of the YMCA is gone. No single Christian organization is now on college campuses to act as a current for mission interest, although the combination of different groups is vital and impressive, especially when they unite behind an outside speaker.

The particular secular current is mainly gone. Reagan is no Teddy Roosevelt. Yet the mood of hopelessness is not as deep as it has been earlier in this century, and in many ways "internationalism" is at an all-time high.

The mighty spiritual current that flowed into 1886 is substantially what it was then. The constantly more vital mission implications of the Urbana series, the Campus Crusade global type of conference, and a rustling in the Navigators is a parallel on campus. The emergence of the Association of Church Missions Committees and the charismatic analogue—the Association of International Mission Services, the plans for doubling of some agencies (SIM) and at least one tripling (Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod), the goal-setting of many agencies in terms of people groups to be reached, the spreading flame of Third World mission agencies, the formation of Theological Students for Frontier Missions and the Caleb Project, the very fact that this year is being noticed by the American Society of Church History, the Institute for the Study of the American Evangelicals, InterVarsity, and Campus Crusade—all this is evidence that the amazing tinderbox into which the Mt. Hermon spark fell is quite possibly with us today again, and with far more reason than ever, in terms of the closure of mission process and the end of history itself.

At this point we can attempt to draw several tentative conclusions.

Sober Reassessment of the Past

The SVM, capturing as it did for a time the leadership of the mainline denominations, brought to an already strong mission commitment within those groups a new wave of young leadership, and did so at what could have been the most favorable moment in 50 years in either direction. The stage had been set. The college student bodies were in particular a tinderbox. The SVM rode on the crest of a wave. All kinds of metaphors could apply.

But World War I cut the nerve of self-confidence in the Western nations. The mission experiences of the earlier volunteers fed back complex factors never before considered and began to blur the earlier simplicity of goal—such as the virtual completion of geographical coverage of the earth and the "disappearance" of the mission field.

The affluence of many in the 1920's made sacrifice unnecessary and undesirable, and mission giving dropped precipitously, much more so than in the deep economic depression that was to follow.

Before long, unresolved tensions in the West led once more to renewed fratricidal conflict in World War II, and in the process the Western colonial powers lost their fruit baskets of overseas possessions along with their moral right to govern foreign populations, so many people felt. Students at SVM quadrennials in the 1920's and 1930's had complained that they did not know what message should be taken, so why go? Later in the 1950's and especially the 1960's, the very idea of going abroad to "fix things" in a significant way seemed naive, arrogant, absurd, or all three.

One significant result of all this was a momentous, apparently irretrievable shift of power at the top—in politics, religion, education, media—you name it. Committed, hopeful people were no longer in charge. The Teddy Roosevelts were only a nightmare of the past.

Actually there was nothing new in the mounting doubts about everything from the Bible to the mission of the Bible. Liberalism was not new. It was simply now in the majority and thus in power since only a slight shift within democratic structures can topple the leadership of a shrinking group. World events no longer allowed optimism to be the majority perspective, even in the church.

But we must be careful to distinguish between a denomination led by liberals and a liberal denomination. (How else can we explain that for many years now by far the largest bloc of students at Urbana have been Presbyterians?) We must also realize that even those who continued to hold to conservative theological positions could lose their hope for evangelizing the world; even among so-called evangelicals, a preached gospel could no longer compete as easily with the logic of sending powdered milk and well-digging machinery.

Then, in the 1950's, Reinhold Niebuhr and others began to construct theologies of despair. With the closing of China a whole new literature developed around the assumption that missionaries had done it all wrong. Earlier magnificent hopes, aspirations, and purposes were now tarnished and invalidated by the realities of unresolved, and apparently unresolvable, mounting evils.

It is a wonder if in all this anything of faith survived. The dominant leadership in the denominations and the secular world had sensed failure. Their message to the besieged minority of continuing evangelical faith went like this: "If we have failed politically and even militarily, how can you go out across the world and succeed spiritually? Come off it. Let's rewrite our theology."

However, we cannot make this simply a theological problem. If we impute to Mott's early days the kind of theological polarization that is prevalent today, how do we explain that the first offices of the SVM were in the buildings of the Moody Bible Institute? Indeed, a good deal of the increasing polarization between the mainline denominational missions and the interdenominational missions was due to cultural snobbery, not theology. Simpson in New York City (and Moody in Chicago, not in New England) dealt with poorly educated people and then committed the unpardonable sin of thinking such people could be pastors and missionaries without the help of the Yales and Princetons.

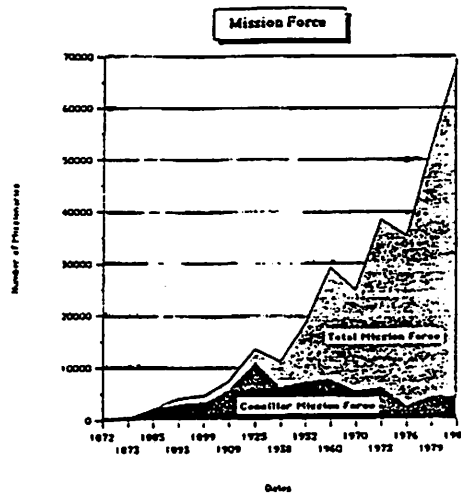
The irony is that the reply to the fearful political and social proposals (and the liberation theologies) being heard within evangelical circles today could well have come from the SVM leaders themselves as in latter years similar forces surrounded them and forced them out of power in the twenties and thirties. Yes, the institutional carrier vehicle had passed into other hands. And yes, the secular mood of world outreach had been destroyed forever.

However, the spiritual current of which we have spoken continued to flow, even if it no longer flowed in high places and in leadership circles.

Figure 3 shows that the decline in giving and going, universally characterizing the so-called mainline denominations, was really true only for those particular structures of society. The YMCA, which had been a wonderful catalyst of cooperation in the days when it could presume upon relatively solid foundations in the upbringing of students on campus, now began to shift to other kinds of services which would attract people not very inclined to religious faith.

The massive juggernaut of mission educational literature, finally unified in the Friendship Press, began to lose its focus and spiritual content. Other issues were more widely understandable.

In the very darkest hour of the depression and the returning clouds of conflict in Europe, a revival at Wheaton College plus the continuing flame of vision in the spiritual stream brought into existence the Student Foreign Mission Fellowship. And following the second World War, in the release of new energies backlogged by the war, the Urbana series of meetings was started.



Chastened Hope for the Future

Bravely the Urbana series was begun. Heroically it pushed on. Rising attendance from meeting to meeting may have disguised falling percentages of Student Volunteers in this new institutional stream (certainly not liberalism in IVCF leadership!). But it is true that by the end of the 1960's, the missionary response rate at Urbana was forced down to 7%, so great were the corrosive acids of secular pessimism upon even the Bible-believing populations regrouping after the demise of evangelical leadership in the mainline tradition. We delude ourselves if we think our theological conservatism can by itself counteract the forces of society.

But God's initiative was still there, and suddenly between Urbana 1970 and Urbana 1973 an incredible shift took place. The response rate that had fallen to 7% now jumped to 28%, and then in 1976 was 50%, and has kept going up since then.

Thus, for many years nothing took the place of the YMCA. Then, after a decade, InterVarsity somewhat limply took in the SFMF on the analogy of the YMCA taking on the SVM. But the SFMF had neither the tinderbox to work with on the campuses nor the political mood as wind in its sails in secular society.

But SFMF also lacked the autonomy of the SVM. While the SVM carefully cultivated the backing of all three national-level campus movements, SFMF has been confined to one, and even there as a stepchild. By the decision of InterVarsity, the SFMF works mainly within Christian colleges, while 90% of evangelical young people, including the vast majority of those who go to Urbana, are on the secular campuses. That is, SFMF has mainly worked with 100,000 while IVCF has worked with 3,000,000.

However, we understand by now that the parallel between the SVM and the SFMF is nowhere near as important as the parallel between the relatively flimsy student mission initiatives prior to 1886 and the SFMF. Our basic thesis here is that we need to ask with open hearts just what might happen between now and the year 2000 that could be parallel to the SVM.

This century's D. L. Moody, Billy Graham, has not been inattentive. Actually he is far more involved on a world level and in the mission movement itself than Moody ever was. He has often spoken at Urbana.

Very significant were his initiatives in Berlin 1966, Lausanne 1974, Amsterdam 1983 and Amsterdam 1986, the many regional congresses on world evangelization, and his willingness to spare Leighton Ford full-time to a structure highly visible and widely accepted in high circles around the world—the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization.

Finally, any parallels between the SVM and today must take into account that the arena of significance is no longer the Western world but the vast base of Christian faith, thanks largely to the SVM, in all the world. Mott welded the churches of the world into National Christian Councils (which were highly missionary but which degenerated into councils of churches due ironically to the growth of the national churches!). The Lausanne Committee seeks to draw churchmen into meetings that are focused specifically on the completion of the task of world evangelization, even though those meetings are dominated by church leaders, not mission leaders.

Indeed, we need to take a deep breath and take a look at the past with new realistic faith.

When the Statue of Liberty was first erected back in 1886, millions of immigrants had already come to this country, just as many, in fact, as would come in the massive immigration of the next 30 years. But there would be a startling new factor. In 1860, immigrants from southern and eastern Europe made up only 1 per cent of the foreign-born population. By 1910 their percentage had become an astounding 38 per cent! The earlier arrivals were predominantly Protestant. The new element was mostly Catholic, Greek Orthodox, or Jewish. These new people would be remarkably more difficult to assimilate into the Evangelical Consensus.

This great shift in immigration would not immediately damage the Consensus. For the next 30 years, that reigning cultural tradition would allow unprecedented collaboration in missions and many other things.

However, the first World War, then the excesses of the 1920's (when mission giving dropped even more than in the following Great Depression), then the hardships of the Depression, then World War II, the collapse of the colonial empires and the resulting hopelessness of Western man as to any further "control" over world events, then the counter-cultural chaos of the 60's... so what happened?

Yes, WASP (White-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant) control was gradually lost all throughout civil life, in the universities, in media, in public life, even as evangelical control slipped from the majority in the mainline denominations. Fifty years ago was no time to expect new hopes and grandiose plans.

But, looking more closely, even World War II had many positive effects. We were forced into feverish rebuilding, inventing, travelling. Eleven million Americans were sent out across the world. Their acquired knowledge of the nature of the earth contributed dramatically to mission structures. Structural leadership in some spheres may have been lost, but there was still the irresistible power of the Spirit of God springing up in many new, "unofficial" ways—many new denominations, thousands of new congregations, and 358 new mission agencies since 1950 alone.

Youth For Christ appeared out of nowhere, and generated a whole new generation of leaders ranging from Torrey Johnson to Billy Graham. Inter-Varsity, Campus Crusade, and the Navigators took up the slack on the college campuses. New publishing houses like Gospel Light/Regal, Zondervan, and Scripture Press became immense enterprises. New seminaries—like Dallas, Fuller, Talbot, Trinity, and Gordon-Conwell—came into being as many older seminaries dwindled in enrollment. One of the most impressive evidences of irresistible mission vision has been the Urbana meetings we have already noted.

There has not been anything like the sweeping revivals of the 1858-1859 Awakening, but after a time of uncertainty, nationwide church membership has climbed higher than ever in our country's history, and a new powerful consensus is here again. Many of those Italianic and southern Europeans have now been absorbed into evangelical churches.

Can we look back on 100 years and believe that the most massive "digestion" of immigrants has been largely successful? Can we believe that we are now on a new, final threshold leading to the End of History in the year 2000?

How, then, shall we face the pregnant parallel between the goal back in 1886 to reach the world by 1900, and the plausibility of a similar goal in 1986 to reach the world by the year 2000?

In A.T. Pierson's precise words in the runner-up meeting of 1885, and again in his presentation at the Mt. Hermon meeting itself, the goal was "to proclaim the good tidings to every living soul." In his day it would take 10,000,000 people "to reach 100 souls with the gospel message... by 1900." Ten million had to reach 100 souls in 15 years.

Today there are three times as many nominal Christians in the world and quite possibly on the order of 280 million committed Bible-believing Christians. Using Pierson's approach, this mighty force today would only have to reach 10 people each in the next fifteen years.

But this is being playful. Today we have many additional things in our favor, and a far clearer idea of what specifically needs to be done.

Today in mission circles it is common to look at the world not as a single massive bloc of billions of unsaved individuals, but rather to see it as a surprisingly small number of doors to be opened. The Biblical emphasis upon peoples is finally beginning to sink in. It seems all very obvious now that what needs to be done is to utilize carefully planned mission strategies to open the way specifically into the remaining 17,000 or so unreached people groups. Rephrasing Pierson's passion in contemporary language, then, we could say, "It will only take a handful of missionaries to deal effectively with each one of these 17,000 groups, which, by the way, average about 150,000 members."

We now recognize that the evangelistic process building upon the breakthrough of a specifically missionary process can easily and quickly offer to everyone a real chance to say "yes" to Jesus Christ. What stops us? What holds us back? We do not need, though we would welcome, the money of a YMCA movement. We do not need the political support of secular expansionist fantasies. If only one church—one Bible-believing congregation—out of every ten such congregations were to get involved in the next ten years, that would still mean 15 such congregations per people group to be reached. Both the funds and the personnel could easily be supplied to do the job by the year 2000.

A major truth, however, we must face.... The reason why what Pierson wanted to happen by the year 1900 did not happen was not because his proposal itself was unrealistic or implausible (even though it very well may have been ten times as difficult as the challenge we face today in regard to the year 2000). No, the reason it failed is because Christians did not respond. Three of the four young men who were appointed at the Mt. Hermon conference to travel to other campuses in the following year begged off. In the late 1960s five students dreamed up an inter-regional coordinating committee—but all five decided to let someone else do it while they went to the field. More recently the National Student Mission Coalition was formed, but the students elected to leadership also lost that vision and went to the field.

This is not the time or the place to spell out organizationally what will be required by the goal adopted by the Edinburgh '80 conference of "A Church for Every People by the Year 2000." But we can be encouraged to know that a great deal of thinking is being focused on this subject.

The same spiritual current is flowing mightily today. David Barrett says there are 30 different proposals for the year 2000. His own is one of them, and he suggests that we all speak of a Global Evangelization Movement (GEM). Time fails me to mention Patrick Johnstone of WEC, Robert Waymire of the Global Mapping Project, Sam Wilson of MARC/World Vision, Graham Kerr of YWAM, Howard Foltz of that brand new coordinating agency in the charismatic sphere—AIMS, and on and on. Not least are the major events in which Third World mission leaders are prominent if not dominant.

Already, at the Edinburgh meeting in 1980, one third of the 171 mission agencies from all over the world were Third World initiatives. In 1986 the Asia Missions Association will meet in the U.S.A. as a conveniently central location in order to invite Latin American and African mission leaders in what will be a first world-level conference of mission leaders organized entirely by Third World leaders. In 1987 the \$2 million-budget COMIBAM'87 will meet in Brazil—another Third World initiative that will bring mission leaders from all Spanish and Portuguese-speaking countries of the world.

CONCLUSION

Little did Constantine realize when he became the first Roman emperor to adopt the Christian faith that he would eventually give his name to what many have considered a sinister process whereby Christianity gains official but superficial power and corrupts itself in the process; "constantinianism" is the term. The term "establishment" is another word for roughly the same thing, but with more precisely defined meaning in certain circles.

Donald A. McGavran has stoutly questioned whether it is an altogether evil thing for social and secular forces to undergird the Christian tradition—as in the case of Rome with the result of Constantine's ancient decision. Perhaps we need cautiously to respect, not despise, such forces.

The past century could be described as a lengthy process of "deconstantinianization" or "disestablishment," as the cultural and political forces undergirding the SVM have gradually evaporated. We have learned to live without such social sanction, and have begun to see that even the harsh opposition to the Gospel in the Soviet Union and China has only resulted in firmer faith and deeper roots for the Gospel. Good.

But maybe it is time to recognize and welcome the existence of a New Consensus (heralded by *Newsweek* in its cover story, "The Year of the Evangelical"), and consider its significance for the expansion of the Gospel today. Oppression, whether in the Soviet Union or California public schools, may deepen people's faith, but it does not effectively serve to send out many missionaries. The new consensus in the next fourteen years may profoundly aid the global mission.

What will it look like? It is already bringing about unprecedented kinds of interorganizational collaboration. "Back then" the SVM leaders, when they got to be twenty years older, contributed so effectively to magnificent national and international collaboration that "unity" for many gradually became more important than "unity in mission." That can warn us, caution us, but not deter us today from the many amazing new ways in which global collaboration in mission is growing. The Lausanne tradition is one. The new, rejuvenated World Evangelical Fellowship is another. The sudden joint planning of the international missionary radio technocrats is still another.

But do specifically student mission activists need the backing of the major Christian organizations? The Caleb Project's "Travelling Teams" eliciting collaboration of a number of different agencies presents an achievement that even the SVM lacked in their early period. On the other hand, the SVM's early, strong backing by five national campus Christian organizations has no effective parallel today.

But increased collaboration is in the very wind. Who knows what Christian faith, hope, love, and ingenuity will devise, both nationally and internationally, in the next few months?

Mt. Hermon and the Year 2000? Today, as in 1886, "the future is as bright as the promises of God."

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APPENDIX: "1886: THRESHOLD TO THE YEAR 2000"

The "Coastlands" Era Begins

- 1792 William Carey founds the Baptist Missionary Society
- 1795 The London Missionary Society is founded "for all evangelicals"
- 1796 The Scottish Missionary Society is founded
- 1796 The Glasgow Missionary Society is founded
- 1797 The Netherlands Missionary Society is founded
- 1799 The Church Missionary Society is founded
- (***** A Student Movement Explodes)
- 1806 The Haystack Prayer Meeting launches students into action
- 1810 American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions founded
- 1858 Awakening of 1858-9 (Fulton Street Prayer meeting)
- 1861 Women's Union Missionary Society formed, soon 40 others

The "Inland" Era Begins

- 1865 Founding of the China Inland Mission by J. Hudson Taylor
- 1875 Revival at Princeton, forms Princeton Foreign Mission Soc.
- 1878 *Missionary Review of the World* founded by Royal Wilder
- 1880 NJ: 250 stud. from 32 seminaries found Intersem. Miss. Alliance
- 1881 Founding of the Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor
- 1885 "Cambridge Seven" go to China under the China Inland Mission
- 1885 Northfield Conf adopts "An Appeal to Disc Everyw." & 1900 goal
- (***** A Student Movement Explodes)
- 1886 D.L. Moody & 100 "Student Volunteers" at Mt. Hermon, Mass.
- 1886 A.T. Pierson's *Crisis of Missions* pub incl "Appeal" & 1900 goal
- 1888 London "Ecumenical Missionary Conference"—response to 1885
- 1890 Decade of the "Faith" Mission phenomenon
- 1891 First Nat'l Conf Stud. Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions
- 1892 Foreign Mission Conference of North America founded
- 1900 Ecumenical Missionary Conference, New York
- 1906 Laymen's Missionary Movement
- 1910 World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh
- 1914 Beginning of the *International Review of Missions*
- 1917 Founding, Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association
- 1921 Lake Mohonk, formation of International Missionary Council
- 1922 Wm. Cameron Townsend and Donald A. McGavran join SVM
- 1928 Jerusalem meeting of the IMC 1932 Laymen's Foreign Mission Inquiry
- 1928 Motu pushes for study of Indian mass movements
- 1933 Pickett's *Christian Mass Movements in India*

The "Unreached Peoples" Era Begins

- 1935 Founding of the Wycliffe Bible Translators (Townsend)
- 1936 Pickett/McGavran's *Church Growth and Group Conversion*
- 1936 Latourette recognizes People Movement importance
- 1936 Founding, Student Foreign Miss. Fellowship (Col. Bible College)
- 1939 Founding, Gospel Recordings, Inc.
- 1941 WW II—11 million Americans study missions "on location"
- 1945 Founding of NAE & EFMA
- 1946 IVCF/SFMF Student Missionary Convention at Toronto (pre-Urbana)
- 1955 Publication of *The Bridges of God* by McGavran
- 1960 (IFMA) World Missionary Conference, New York
- 1964 IFMA/EFMA founding of *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*
- 1965 Founding of the Fuller School of World Mission
- 1966 Collapse of the Inter-Regional Coordinating Committee
- 1966 Wheaton (IFMA/EFMA) Conference on World Mission
- 1966 Berlin, World Congress on Evangelism, CT & BGEA
- 1969 Founding of the William Carey Library
- 1971 Greenlake, Congress on the Church's Worldwide Mission
- 1972 Founding of the American Society of Missiology
- 1972 Founding of *Missiology, An International Review*
- 1972 Copeland's Proposal for a 1980 Conference like 1910

1973 Founding of the Association of Church Missions Committees
 1973 Founding of the Asia Missions Association
 1973 Urbana Reversal: 8% in '70, now 28% of students sign cards, see 76
 1973 "Seeing the Task Graphically"
 1974 First Summer Institute of International Studies (IIS, a la SIL)
 1974 The formal "Call" for a World Missionary Conference in 1980
 1974 Lausanne, Switzerland, Int'l Congress on World Evangelization
 1976 Kansas City, IFMA/EFMA Joint Executives Retreat, Coggins, Winter
 1976 Founding of the USCWM 1976 Urbana, 50% response, see 79
 1976 250 stud. in IIS studies (now "Perspectives" course), see '85
 1977 First IIS (Perspectives course), on West Coast, at USCWM
 1978 ISI loans Leiton Chin to manage WCFM/1980
 1979 EFMA Exec Retreat on Unreached Peoples—5208 projected by 1990
 1979 "A Church for Every People by the Year 2000", McGavran/Bliss/Gill
 1979 Urbana, 75% response, see '81
 1980 Melbourne, WCC/CWME Conf. on World Mission and Evangelism
 1980 Pattaya, Thailand, Congress on World Evangelization
 1980 Edinburgh, World Consultation on Frontier Missions
 1980 International Student Consultation on Frontier Missions
 1981 Frontier Fellowship begun, *Global Prayer Digest* follows
 1981 IFMA Frontier Peoples Committee formed
 1981 Urbana, 90% response, see 73
 1982 March: Chicago agreement on def. of Un.R Peoples, Hidden Ppls
 1982 Publication of monumental *World Christian Encyclopedia*
 1983 Bryant/Concerts of Prayer confab, Chicago
 1983 Amsterdam '83, 5,000 itinerant evangelists study evangelism
 1983 "Wheaton '83" (World Ev. Fell.)—3rd track stresses frontiers
 1983 Both IFMA and EFMA exec retreats emphasize the Unfinished Task
 1984 IFMA/EFMA/AEPM retreat, at USCWM, confirms frontier interest
 1984 Founding of the *International Journal of Frontier Missions*
 1985 "Perspectives" course expands to 59 centers in U.S. and abroad
 1985 First national-level, true mission conferences in Latin America
 1985 Unprecedented "Explo'85" mtg by CCCI, with global satellite TV
 1985 McGavran gathers missiologists/consider Giant Step/Mission 2000
 (***** A Student Movement Explodes??)
 1986 Mandate '86 (800 students in Illinois), nine other regionals
 1986 Caleb Project meets 13,000 students, works with agencies
 1986 Celebration of 1886 meeting: by Am Soc of Ch Hist, Fort Worth
 1986 " by Inst. for the Study of the Am. Evangelicals, Wheaton
 1986 " by Intersarsity, at Ben Lippen
 1986 " by an ad hoc group at Mt. Hemmon, MA (the original site)
 1986 Amsterdam '86, 8,000 pastor/evangelists challenged
 1986 Asia Missions Association meets on world level in USA
 1986 Mission '87 (7000 TEMA students will meet at Amsterdam)
 1987 ?IVCF,CCCL,Navs,So Bap,Chi Alpha back student mission consortium
 1987 COMIBAM '87, First Latin American Congress on Missions
 1987 ?1st world-level mtg of Global Network of Centers for W. Mission
 1987 ?First world-level mtg Association of Third World Missions
 1988 ?International Student Consultation on Frontier Missions, and
 1988 ?2nd meeting: World Consultation on Frontier Missions
 1988 ?First Intl mtg of Theological Students for Frontier Missions
 1989 Lausanne: 2nd International Congress on World Evangelization
 1990 ?Joint IFMA/EFMA meeting approves specific allotments for 1995
 1995 ?All 17,000 people groups initially "engaged" by miss. outreach
 1995 ?3rd mtg: World Cons. on Frontier Missions (mission executives)
 1995 ?World-level Lausanne meeting rejoices in progress
 1999 ?World-level meeting representing all people groups on earth

("This Gospel must be preached... as a testimony to all peoples, and then shall the
 end come.")