

A WORLD VIEW OF MISSIONS

It seems essential in getting a worldwide picture of the Christian mission movement first of all to take note of its overall progress to date; secondly, to try to assess what some of its major problems are, and thirdly, to evaluate its prospects--that is, what it is that may happen in God's providence if we do our part as his obedient servants. This is a thrilling, sobering and challenging subject. As we look into some of the details we will note that progress has been incredible; the problems are only large, not impossible; and that the prospects, if we will be truly obedient, are staggering.

THE PROGRESS OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

A story full of lessons. Very few Christian believers are either trained or brought up in such a way as to see and understand that the Christian mission really is a single, continuous, unbroken 4,000-year-old cause and concern of the living God. It is so large a picture that it is hard to see it at a single glance. Children in Sunday School may painfully work their way through the Bible. Their lessons go too slowly to allow them to see the whole picture. Even so, rarely is the Bible studied from the specific perspective of the contribution of its events to a worldwide Christian mission. Seminary students return to the Bible and plumb its depths here and there, but may or may not be made conscious of the steady movement throughout its pages of the cause and concern of the Christian mission. While few Sunday Schools, even in the adult department, venture beyond the boundaries of the Bible, most studies of Church history, starting as they usually do where the Bible

leaves off, do not consciously tell a story which is a continuation. Thus it is a rare evangelical today, even among those who are serious and well educated, who can see the evident, clear, unfolding activity across 4,000 years which represents the unvarying purposes of the living God, a Christian mission to all mankind.

The story is actually longer than 4,000 years, but Abraham is the first person about whom we have any extensive evidence and who is very clearly involved in deliberate migration for the purpose of establishing a missionary nation. Once he arrived in Palestine, Abraham's first trip into Egypt is described by the Bible with brutal honesty as we see his shameful behavior wrecking his potential testimony among the heathen. Thus we learn in the early pages of the Bible that missionaries are not always perfect even though their lives may be basically obedient. It is quite possible at a later date that the faith of Israel did make some mark in Egypt. Is Iknaton's monotheism an evidence of that?

In any case, as the people of Israel are being reconstituted a nation following captivity in Egypt, it is certainly clear that their missionary status is fundamental to their calling. Characteristically, though, the concern of the children of Israel for their own survival looms larger than their awareness of their missionary obligation, and it is not until they are in captivity a second time that their national purpose is refocused. Looking back to their land from Babylon as part of the dispersion, they faced again the tension between the importance of reestablishing their nation internally and the fulfillment of their missionary obligation externally. This is always the tension for the individual Christian, the local church and even political states: which is more important, our survival and the survival of our nation or our service to other people and other nations?

By New Testament times we see these children of Abraham's faith subject to Roman power and this time captive in their own land. Shortly (in 70 A.D.) they are virtually obliterated as a nation state until, the creation of Israel in modern times. Just before this final catastrophe when the Roman emperor Titus destroyed Israel, God had sent his own Son to woo them, to win them, and to warn them one final time. Would they demand a messiah who would free them politically, or would they accept a messiah who would make them willing servants to all the nations? This choice was symbolized by the choice Pilate offered them between Barabbas and Jesus. They chose Barabbas. But the Great Commission was committed to a small group of believers who accepted it and treasured it and lived it or the very documents of the New Testament would not have been produced and preserved.

Looking back, we can see clearly that the Abrahamic covenant was in effect the Great Commission. It states (Gen. 12:2,3) that all the families of the earth were to be blessed, and that Israel was to be blessed not only because God loved her but because His blessing was to be a means for her to bless others. We again see the Great Commission in Exo. 19:4-6 which clarifies the fact that this nation was to be a nation of priests mediating between God and "all the earth". We again see the Great Commission in Isa. 49:6 where God does indeed promise the reestablishment of the nation but clearly makes that blessing secondary to His purposes for them as a missionary nation.

*Compare Isa. 49:6 to Gen. 12:2,3  
to see that it is all promise*

Once again we see the tension between their own national survival and their service to other nations. It is as though God is always suggesting, both to individuals and nations, that if they seek to save their lives they will lose them. This applies equally to the United States of America, to the ethnic Chinese of our world, to wealthy people as a class, and even to

poor families for whom survival may be a very pressing problem. Only the one who will lose his life for Christ's sake and the gospel will find it. The New Testament thus portrays the Jewish people as a nation that chose to seek survival more than to reach out in missions, and as a result God had to set it aside. The same applies to any other nation. God could and did raise up from the inert stones of the Gentile world children of Abraham's faith and once more it was only a remnant of the Jews and a remnant of the Gentiles that carried God's concerns forward.

In passing, however, it is an important corrective to us to realize that these were Jewish people at the time of Christ who were, as a matter of fact, fairly active in missions. Even Jesus refers to the missionary activity of the Pharisees who would "traverse land and sea to make a single proselyte." Jews today show no such tendencies to convert Gentiles into Jews. Jews will tell you their present attitude is a survival technique lest they offend the people within whose nations they live as a minority. But there is a considerable body of evidence that prior to Christ, the Pharisees engaged in extensive missionary activity. As Jesus saw it, their failure was not that they failed to send missionaries. The problem was that the missionaries they sent imposed a legalistic gospel. They failed to recall God's concern for circumcision of the heart and thus they did not understand that to preach an outward conformity--that is, to make "proselytes" by emphasizing mere external conformity--was both to lose the faith for themselves and thus inevitably fail to transmit it to others. As we see in Jeremiah 9:25,26 and in Romans 2:28,29, an outward conformity to the law saved no one. We therefore learn that sending missionaries is not in itself sufficient if those missionaries transmit a legalistic gospel. But the true faith did expand by one method or another, even before Christ.

Some devout souls, like Cornelius, simply accepted the true faith of Israel without yielding to the detailed instructions of the Pharisaic missionaries. In fact, there were in many of the synagogues of the Jews across the empire a group sitting in the back seats called the devout persons or the God-fearers. These were those with the right faith but who had not yielded to what the Pharisaic missionaries perceived as the right forms. Paul perceived that these people (and not the proselytes who had merely switched cultures) were the truly indigenous converts. This insight, amplified by Paul's extravagant obedience in the fulfillment of that vision, provided the bridge for the first major transmission of the Gospel to a non-Jewish nation. From the Apostle Paul to the present, the entire story of the Gospel is in some ways a variation between two extremes of missionary effort. On the one hand as the faith penetrated each new cultural tradition it tended to be indigenized to one extent or another and then became non-transferable to the next nation apart from a new re-indigenization process. The New Testament plainly tells us that there were both Jewish believers and Greek believers. The Bible warns us in Acts 21 that the two groups of believers did not always understand and accept the authenticity of the others. Only the leaders--Paul, Barnabas and the elders in Jerusalem--understood that the faith could be the same despite the difference in outward dress.

Thus, in subsequent history we see that all the various forms of Christianity bear cultural traces of the source of their faith. Thus the Archbishop of York today wears vestments that derive from Greek Christianity (via the Celtic church) while the Archbishop of Canterbury's robes derive from Latin Christianity. In the Reformation, the Latin forms of Christianity were considerably modified by the German believers who had been given the impression that Christianity only spoke Latin. But then the German believers--

the Lutherans--have in some cases been very anxious about other nations learning German or at least adopting the Augsburg Confession as their own. Thus from the beginning there have always been various kinds of Christianity, various manifestations of true Abrahamic faith.

We note that the most common thing in missionary experience is for the early converts to accept virtually unchanged the form of Christianity brought by the missionary and then gradually to study the Bible for themselves and eventually to undergo a "reformation" in which they rebuilt their faith and tradition through their own Biblical scholarship so as to be able to derive a faith that is both true to the Word of God and also sufficiently indigenous so as to expand readily into the cultural and social realities of their context. With proper caution, indigenization and contextualization are processes that are not only desirable but essential for the greatest impact of the Gospel.

On the other hand, it is necessary to point out that a purely national church is a heresy. No matter how indigenous a church is, it must retain external contacts both to minister to other Christians and to be ministered to by other kinds of Christians. This is one reason why all churches must send missionaries. Only as believers constantly strive to communicate their faith to other quite different people can they be sure to understand even for themselves the essential elements of their faith. This important fact is not widely understood. Thus we see that a non-missionary church very easily confuses the true faith (the essence of the Gospel) with its own forms and traditions and ways of doing things and thus loses the very capacity to evangelize or to send non-legalizing missionaries.

Thus, for example, when the early Jesuits penetrated to Peking, they were very lenient, perhaps overly so, about Chinese cultural traditions.

They studied and memorized the Chinese classical writings. They dressed like Chinese scholars and affirmed the cultural inheritance of the Chinese people. At that time they were a young and flexible organization. They were similarly flexible not only in China but also in India and in Japan such that Matteo Ricci, Roberto de Nobili and Alessandri Valignano stand out in these three countries respectively as great examples of missionaries who took the indigenous culture seriously. But when the Franciscans arrived in Peking, their Christian tradition had existed for over three hundred years and they had arrived with very fixed ideas of the form and shape of Christianity. They quarrelled with the Jesuits and an argument about Chinese respect for their ancestors began which eventually led to the expulsion of all missionaries from China and produced an issue which is not yet resolved. David Liao in his book The Unresponsive: Resistant or Neglected, has made a good start in facing that issue again.

The lessons of the story. As we consider the progress of the Christian mission across the centuries and across the continents, there are many lessons that force their way into our attention. Because our space is limited, we can only briefly mention some of them. In Abraham we saw how human weaknesses have limited success. In the case of the Pharisees who assisted in the establishment of synagogues all over the Roman empire and were eager to convert Gentiles to their faith, we saw people who often misunderstood the heart of the gospel and we saw the tendency to carry a cultural package with no circumcision of the heart within it. We saw how Paul enabled the heart of the gospel to wear Gentile clothing and thus established a missionary strategy for all time, if we can somehow figure out how to apply it in the specific circumstances of our time--in dealing with ancestor-worshipping Chinese, caste-conscious Hindus, and baptism-rejecting Muslims.

I don't believe it is possible to improve on the approach represented by Paul's missionary team, which possessed the authority of a traveling church. The church at Antioch approved of it but did not seek to control it. This was essentially the same type of mission structure that the Pharisees used. Paul was not ashamed to borrow that pattern. Thus we must be very creative in borrowing patterns as mission structures today. The early church, for example, did not mind borrowing essentially the synagogue pattern for their settled worshipping committees. It is a great mistake to think that the New Testament teaches us either that we can get along without specific structures for worship and for mission or that we must accept the particular structures Paul employed. I believe we must come to the place where we recognize, for example, that the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association or any mission society structure is just as much the church as is a denominational headquarters. We must realize that the church is the people of God wherever they are and however they are organized. The kaleidoscope record of history certainly does not teach us that any one organizational form is properly called "the church".

We also learn from the story of the progress of the Christian mission that God sometimes uses methods which are obviously not his first choice. When the church in the fourth century quarrelled and exiled from the Roman Empire the Arian bishops whose theological views had eventually lost the vote, God was forced to use those exiled bishops as missionaries. This is how it happened that a large number of the tribal peoples outside the empire were brought to the Arian form of Christianity. When Roman Christians were not actively reaching out to them, those tribes learned still more about the Christian faith by invading the Roman empire. The same thing happened later on when the savage Vikings invaded the Christianized Germanic tribes. Thus

the faith was transmitted more by invasion than by missionary outreach. The ancestors of the people we call Scandinavians today were brought to Christ originally by the word of testimony of beautiful girls taken captive by the Vikings more than by the preaching of missionaries sent to them. The same thing happened later on when the savage Vikings invaded the Christianized Germanic tribes.

The only example of a missionary nation in the first millenium is seen more clearly in very recent research. Neither Roman Catholics nor Anglo Saxon Protestants have been active in giving credit to the amazing missionary work of the Celtic missionaries and the missionary tradition established by them which missionaries like Boniface, not himself a Celt, drew from and built upon. The very existence of dozens of scholarly mission centers to which thousands of students went for study, the very existence of hundreds of Celtic missionary teams fanning out across England and the continent emphasizes for us the striking contrast between the missionary nation and all other nations. In modern times many nations have been active in missions--Norway and New Zealand leading the way. It is nevertheless true that English speaking missionaries, who may be drawing unconsciously upon the Celtic tradition in their past, have had a disproportionately large share in modern missions.

This does not mean that English speaking people are more saintly; it does mean that there is such a thing as missionary awareness within a nation. And it urges us to do everything within our power to build that awareness. I see, for example, the evidences of a new missionary awareness gradually appearing in Korea, in Brazil, in South India, in Nigeria, and in many parts of the worldwide Chinese dispersion. When will North East India gain a marked mission awareness? When will Americans wake up to the fact that in very few instances are they still sending pioneer missionaries? But we are getting ahead of ourselves.

Mission awareness in the Protestant tradition is the result not so much of the Reformation as the Pietist movement. Long after the Reformation, profoundly spiritual cells of renewal began to appear in Germany and Scandinavia and finally in England and America. John Wesley met Pietists on his trip to America and later in England. Theodore Freylinghuysen, a Pietist Dutch minister in the middle colonies of America, helped to start the Great Awakening which then George Whitefield fanned into flame. The saintly Jonathan Edwards entered into essentially a Pietist experience of the gospel and his writings were read by both Wesley and William Carey. Men of the spiritual caliber of David Brainerd clarify to us the importance of profoundly spiritual moorings in any attempt at mission. When the Evangelical Awakening flowed in full force through England and America, a massive second reformation had effectively taken place, and Protestants were now prepared spiritually for their delayed entrance into mission awareness and world mission.

It took another revival in New England to get the famous haystack prayer meeting into existence and as a result the first foreign mission board in the United States was formed. Without this kind of spiritual foundation, the specific organizational proposals of William Carey would have been useless. Yet it is hard to overestimate the practical impact of his eminently reasonable analysis of the situation. His Enquiry may underlie more of the modern expansion of the gospel than any other book outside the Bible. He described carefully previous efforts in missions. He set down statistics of the unfinished task, and lastly he proposed very specifically that missionary societies be organized in addition to church structures. He then went out and did as an example what he was recommending for others to do. I'm reminded of Philip Teng's decision to give a personal example by actually going as a missionary to Indonesia.

In terms of the 2,000 years of missions, Protestant missionary experience is so recent that its entire 180-year record lies before us as virtually a contemporary event. The record indicates that even with spiritual fire and practical knowledge about mission structures, there were still many, many problems to be solved.

#### THE PROBLEMS OF THE CHRISTIAN MISSION

Problems of education and support. William Carey soon discovered that the people back home who ran his new mission society could not be relied upon either to understand what his field problems were or to remit support to him regularly. Like the Apostle Paul, he was forced by practical necessity to support himself on the field, although neither he nor Paul felt such an approach was ideal.

Moravian missionaries, by contrast, planned in the first place to support themselves. They were the Pietist forerunners of English-speaking efforts. *at the time they got started* ~~In their day~~ (the 18th century) to expect support from back home was all the more unreasonable and impossible than in the 19th century. They in effect established industrial villages, many of which have grown into major cities today, both in America and in other countries. Their efforts were not so much attempts to indigenize the gospel as to transplant a profoundly spiritual pattern of European village life to foreign soil where it would bear its own testimony. Their strategy is somewhat similar to the Seventh Day Adventist approach today. The S.D.A. seems more effective than any other U.S. mission in planting new communities, new businesses and schools that are completely self-supporting.

The greatest single obstacle to missions in Protestant experience has been the imperfect understanding of the enterprise by the people back home,

whose prayers and gifts are essential to the support of the enterprise. To this day some organizations are more effective in missionary work than they are in raising funds, while others are more effective in raising funds than they are in missionary work. It seems almost impossible either for people to give to work they don't understand or to understand the work the mission agencies are asking them to support. It is undoubtedly true that the greatest single missing element in missions in 1978 is the absence of organizations such as the Student Volunteer Movement, which educated thousands of students on campuses, and the Laymen's Missionary Movement which educated millions of people in churches. The precious mission seed will fall on dry and infertile ground if there is not more effective education at the grass roots level.

The Roman Catholic tradition has several societies that do nothing but raise funds for other societies. Many Protestant societies today have a layman's auxiliary to raise funds for them, such as Wycliffe Associates, Men for Missions, Men with Vision, etc. For many years (beginning in 1813) women's missionary societies in local churches carried a major load in mission fund raising. Today American women have gotten busy in many other things. It is time again for a major new effort like the Laymen's Missionary Movement to sweep into existence, and into organized impact, the thousands of keen people at pew level whose concerns and prayers are like a tinder box waiting for a spark.

Problems of authority in administration. The earliest missionaries suffered under very difficult conditions of communication. For example, it might take three years for a letter to go from London to Fiji and an answer to return. One advantage to this difficulty was the simple fact that the major decisions had to be made on the field. This is one reason why the Chinese Rites controversy was discussed for 70 years before the (wrong) conclusions were made. Eventually transatlantic and

transpacific cables were established and huge code books allowed a measure of economy to be maintained while condensed, conventional and cryptic messages were sent back and forth. Gradually, however, a major change in modern times effectively moved mission strategy from the field to the home offices. While this change was greatly facilitated by the vastly increased efficiency of international mail, cables and even telephone linkages, thanks to satellites, the real reason was the rise of the national church.

In all places where missionary work has been successful, first dozens, then hundreds, then thousands and hundreds of thousands of believers have developed into a new community structured as churches and denominations. The leaders of these "younger churches" have quite naturally resented the continuation of field decisions in the hands of missionaries on the field. Insofar as funds are transmitted to the field and missionary work assignments are determined, a great deal of these decisions have fallen both on the shoulders of the national church and the executives in the mission headquarters back home. The people back home, no matter how wise, cannot possibly speak all the languages across the world wherever their missionaries are sent, nor keep up with all the details of the local situation. It is likely that a distinct deterioration in strategic decision making has occurred as decisions have moved from field to the home offices. On the other hand, the leaders of the national churches often think of refreshingly different and new ideas which the foreign missionaries might not have ever thought of.

In the last analysis, foreigners have no business making decisions for the national church. All churches everywhere in the world are "national churches" and churches, wherever they are, need to have the freedom to obey Christ in His service. If they want missionaries to come and help them, that is their decision. Let them say so. A sister church across the water, whether it is a "sending" or

a "receiving" church must not attempt to dictate the internal affairs of another church elsewhere. The autonomy of the mission when the national church is coming into existence is not questioned, and the autonomy of the national church once established is not to be questioned.

All of this however makes things considerably more complex for the mission. As the national church grows into existence, there may be no easily defined, clear-cut point at which the national church decides things and the mission ceases to decide things. And then there are almost always new areas yet to be evangelized for the first time. If the missionary decision making is limited either to the vision of the national church or to that of the home office of the mission, there may be many opportunities for outreach that are overlooked on the field. Thus problems of authority are closely involved with problems of strategy.

Problems of strategy. In my opinion, the greatest obstacle to the fulfillment of the Great Commission in the world today is a basic misunderstanding about the first priority of a mission agency. Everyone agrees that when missionaries go where there is no church, their first priority is to establish a church. But once that church is established and national leadership emerges, what then becomes the highest priority of the mission agency? Is the agency no longer to retain the purpose of planting churches in communities where there is no witness? Does it now have to have a new mandate to become an organization for the care and feeding of the churches that are already established? Donald McGavran has done everyone a great favor in stressing the primacy of new church planting over church care and feeding. However, when even church planting can be done more easily by a national leader than by a foreign missionary, what is the mission agency now to do?

It is obvious that once a national church is established, the new church itself must become interested not just in church planting within its own local

area, but also in missions to other areas where there is no witness yet at all. We are willing to recognize that it is helpful for missionaries to teach in seminaries overseas and to help national churches train their own leadership. I have personally been very active in the movement toward theological education by extension, which hopes to accelerate the process and to improve the selection of new ministers for expanding national churches. We are willing to recognize that it is important for missionaries to do whatever is necessary to make sure that the church expands and encompasses more and more people into its membership. But what about the other sheep that are not of this fold? Followers of Jesus Christ are come, as He was, to seek and to save that which is lost.

Thus, the greatest strategic error is to assume that the advancing front of the Christian movement, once a national church has been established, can continue on without the national church providing missionaries of its own who will learn how to speak other languages and how to penetrate other cultures that are still beyond the social sphere within which the national church is found. Many people in the United States have the distinct impression that there are enough Christians now scattered all over the globe that no one needs to learn a foreign language any more. "National evangelists" is their cry. All we need to do, they feel, is to make sure that all the national churches are sufficiently evangelistic in their own neighborhoods. Here is where studies in cultural anthropology have dealt such easy assumptions a shattering blow. The normal kind of evangelism that adds members to existing churches is almost never successful where the non-Christians being won represent a distinctly different language, culture or economic sphere. It is a rudimentary theory of missiology that we must use the vernacular language of every group and be sensitive to local cultural differences. This rule is not suspended once foreign missionaries have successfully established a national church

in a single component of society. Fully two-thirds of the people in Japan, for instance, live in sectors of society within which there is no Christian church, and the task of planting new churches in these new untouched social strata is very much more difficult for the national church to do than it is to extend new churches among people of the same kind as those who are already brought into Christian faith. As another example, just because churches have successfully been established among speakers of Minnan Chinese in Taiwan does not mean that new and very special "missionary efforts" are not necessary to reach Hakka speakers. By "missionary" we do not necessarily mean Westerners.

Two truly shocking facts are that 1) if cultural distinctions like these are carefully observed, we will find that most of the non-Christians in the world today are beyond the evangelistic range of existing national churches, and 2) yet very few efforts in most countries (if there are any at all) are focused on these people who are hidden from our view by invisible cultural barriers. Who, then, will reach these people who are beyond if it is not the mission agencies? However, at the present time, almost all missionaries are occupied in some way or another with helping national churches in local work rather than pioneering new work beyond the remaining frontiers of cultural barriers. Thus, as national churches have been established, mission agencies have gradually shifted in their function from pioneering to nurture and to assisting the national church in local evangelism. Strangely, missionaries have rarely taught the national church to be interested in missions to other places, nor have their own agencies continued to extend new workers to new fields. This is not to imply that foreign workers are of no value once a national church is well established. It is rather to insist that the appearance of a national church within one cultural grouping must not obscure from our vision the millions of other people within whose daily

life there is no culturally relevant church. It is a case of both/and, not either/or.

Problems of morale. We have just noted that many Christians in the Western lands are beginning to forget about missions because they erroneously think that there are national churches within every cultural unit of mankind. Now we must note that still other Christians in Western lands are giving up on missions because they have the equally erroneous idea that after 2,000 years the Christian movement is dying out and we live in a "post-Christian" world.

The fact is that we live in a "post-<sup>Constantinian</sup>Constantian" world, not a post-Christian world. We now know the weakness and impermanence of Emperor Constantine's impetus which eventually led to an official political form of Christianity and, by comparison, to all "State Church" varieties of Christianity. Thus, as the registered Christians in East Germany have declined from 80% to 60% in the last 30 years, some people <sup>have</sup> concluded that Christianity is dying out. For 1,500 years many people have had the idea that "official Christianity" was biblical Christianity, and they have therefore concluded that we are losing ground as the Emperor Constantine's concept of a Christian country has been undermined in modern times wherever there is a decreasing percentage of people who are mere digits in the membership rolls of a state church.

But something else is also happening. There are evidences all over East Germany, especially in the south, that the number of truly committed Christians today is higher than it has ever been. Careful studies indicate this same situation to exist in country after country where communism has succeeded merely in reducing "official Christianity" and has not even been entirely successful at that. We may soon find out whether there are more true believing Christians in the Peoples Republic of China today than there were in 1951.

A second aspect of this problem derives from a misunderstanding of arithmetic. Some mission leaders, being eager to stress the largeness of the unfinished task have stated that the percent<sup>age</sup> of Christians in the world is getting smaller due to the population explosion. What they do not understand is that Christian populations grow evangelistically as well as <sup>biologically</sup> normally. If you will allow me to use one technical example, suppose that during a given period of time India's statistics (in millions) were to have changed as follows:

	<u>Date A</u>		<u>Added</u>		<u>Date B</u>
Non-Christians	346	+	219	=	565
Christians	<u>9</u>	+	<u>7</u>	=	<u>16</u>
Totals	355	+	226	=	581
Percentage of Christians	2.5%				2.75%

What does this mean? Is Christianity going forwards or backwards? One answer is that there are 219 million more non-Christians and only 7 million more Christians. But a more significant answer is that Christians were once 2.5% of the population but are now 2.75%. This may seem hard to believe, and as a result thousands of people, especially young people, are wondering if it is any use to send missionaries if the percentage of Christians is getting smaller. The fact is there is no known country where <sup>now constantly</sup> the percentage of Christians (by hard evidence) is getting smaller, and there are many countries--indeed every country where we do have hard evidence--where we know the percentage of Christians is getting larger, at least slowly larger if not rapidly larger.

Problems of general perception. We have pointed out how easily it is possible to overlook the "regions beyond." This is because almost all individual Christians and local churches and denominations tend to look inwardly. As a result, they must constantly be revived and renewed in their vision and commitment to a lost world. But it is a first-rate tragedy when a certain kind of

mis-perception becomes so common and widespread as to become accepted almost universally as truth. We face that tragedy in America at this very moment. The average person today believes that with the exception of a few jungle Indian tribes, there is no great need for pioneer missions anymore. In order to contradict this kind of nearly universal misunderstanding, we must face the future with realistic plans that must include widespread rebuilding of pioneer mission perspective. This leads us to our next section:

### THE PROSPECTS OF THE CHRISTIAN MISSION

Our first prospect is that of neutralizing and ultimately reversing the thirty-year trend toward the elimination of pioneer missions. Our second prospect is that of dealing adequately with both the positive and negative features associated with the incredible achievement that has in some way brought one-third of the world's population into the Christian movement. Our third prospect is that of dealing decisively and sacrificially with the staggering challenge of the remaining two-thirds of the world, five-sixths of which is beyond the reach of any existing church or mission.

The prospects, in view of the loss of pioneer perspective. Fundamental to any step forward is the need for a new wave of missionary education. It will not be easy to build again a pioneer missions perspective. The churches in the West have dropped missions out of the Sunday School curriculum, out of the materials for young people's meetings, to a great extent out of general church life, and even the women's missionary societies have considerably lost their focus upon pioneer missions. With patience and painstaking care all of this must be replaced.

The churches that are the product of missions, mainly in the non-western world, are ironically without even the background and foundation of missions which the Western churches have. In most cases it is a matter of building, not rebuilding pioneer mission perspective. Today so many national Christians are so well advanced that the only missionaries they know are not at all pioneer missionaries,

who may have passed out of existence before the present national leadership was born. The only missionaries they know are coming to help churches, not learn languages spoken only by non-Christians. Indeed, the very word missionary has sometimes come to mean "foreigner who comes to work with <sup>our</sup> out churches." I have been told by some national leaders, "We are doing just what the missionary is doing. Why aren't we called missionaries too?" The first generation of new Christians has now passed on to their graves. Only they knew what a pioneer missionary was like. Seminaries established overseas have even less emphasis on missions than U. S. seminaries. Recently it was discovered that one of four symbols on the monogram of the Gujranwala Seminary in Pakistan referred to missions, but no one could remember when a course on missions had ever been taught there.

Pioneer mission perspective must also be rebuilt within the student world. The three major campus organizations within the U.S. -- Campus Crusade, Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, and Navigators -- have little contact with the mainstream cause of missions and for the most part critically lack veteran missionary leadership within their organizations so as effectively to attract to pioneer mission perspective the tens of thousands of students the Lord has entrusted to their care. But students both in the U.S. and in the non-western world are apparently eager to learn and willing to go. Rarely, however, do they have sufficient knowledge available to them in order to undergird them in a career decision.

Pioneer mission perspective is not prominent even in the general mission agencies of the Western and non-Western world. Many an Asian society thinks of mission work as sending an Asian couple to a foreign country where they perhaps will join the faculty of a seminary established by a Western society, and work alongside a missionary sent by a Western society. I am afraid that the new Asian societies may follow the pattern of present day Western missions rather than gain pioneer mission perspective. Another mistake is to think we are doing

tradition<sup>al</sup> mission work when all we're doing is sending people overseas to work with our own countrymen. I think of Americans going to be pastors of "American churches" in the non-Western world, or Chinese from Hong Kong going to work with Chinese in Toronto. This is good to do, but it is not necessarily pioneer mission work.

On the other hand, to develop pioneer mission perspective on the part of mission agencies is the least of our problems. Here our prospects are superb. I have not yet met a mission executive who was not instantly interested in pioneer mission effort. Some of the mainline denominational boards are exceedingly unlikely to move in the pioneer direction on their own initiative. But even they are not opposed. They are simply so completely absorbed in church-to-church relationships that their support base has been eroded to the point where the very possibility of additional funds and people for pioneer work seems unthinkable. Ironically, if they were merely to announce the possibility of new work of a pioneer nature, the announcement alone would go a long way towards eliciting both funds and personnel. By now, however, they lack the veterans with pioneer mission experience to head up any new pioneer work. The lack of veterans is a major problem for third world missions as well.

The prospects for building pioneer mission perspective are good. The chief obstacles are 1) to clearly understand that pioneer mission means to penetrate cultures where there is no church, and 2) to acknowledge the necessity of taking the necessary steps to work at the task: it will not happen without patient, prayerful, deliberate and organized efforts.

The prospects in view of the incredible achievement. In the history of Christianity there have been desperate moments. There is not space here to reflect upon the many times when even the most faithful followers of Jesus Christ might have had good reason, humanly speaking, to have wondered if the Great Commission were possible to fulfill. Imagine the original eleven when they first heard

Jesus restate and reinforce a command as old as Abraham's covenant. Imagine the saints in the catacombs during the decade of Diocletan's persecution. Imagine the saints in Rome when first Alaric the Goth and then Attila the Hun ravaged deeply into empire territory. Imagine the dismay in the ninth century when Viking invaders slaughtered, plundered and burned their way through the missionary centers and library treasures of Ireland, England and the continent. Imagine Europe prostrate after the Black Plague had swept through and eliminated nine out of ten of the godly leaders, who were willing to visit the sick. Imagine the hopelessness of the Bible believers in Europe after the religious wars had again decimated all sides, and so on.

But today nothing can obscure the incredible achievement if anyone will only note that there are more Baptists in India than in England, more Presbyterians in Indonesia than in the U.S., three times as many registered Christians in Russia as communist party members, when there are a thousand new churches opening each week in Africa and Asia, and in sum, one out of three people in the world claims to be a Christian.

As we have already seen, for some people the prospects for Christian mission are dim precisely because there are more people who profess Christianity nominally than there are those who are committed. As Western colonial empires collapsed, pessimists assumed that Christianity outside the West would collapse also. But the evidence clearly shows that neither in the Western world nor in the non-Western world has the number of committed Christians as a percentage of the population decreased. And in the total absence of colonial protection, the indigenous roots of Christianity have proven stronger than ever. Christians can be killed off, as in North Korea and Cambodia, but regimes like China, Russia and Vietnam do not seem to have found it possible to reduce the number of committed Christians by any other technique. Indeed, as in ancient times, the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.

Nevertheless, the presence of vast numbers of nominal Christians is a severe handicap to vital outreach in two ways: 1) It not only diverts a great proportion of all evangelizing energies (In India one report has it that 98 percent of all evangelism is focused upon nominal Christians.), but 2) it also detracts from the quality of the message for so many to "profess but not possess." /the fact remains that each day that passes there are thousands and thousands of additional committed Christians in the world, and these are a gradual but increasing percentage. In every situation in the world today where statistical studies are possible, one is especially impressed by the strategic role which non-Western Christians are increasingly able to play. This would seem to be an irreversible gain as a foundation for a new thrust in world mission.

The prospects in view of the staggering challenge. Knowing that the Christian movement today includes a larger virile element than ever before, work is more widely dispersed in more cultures than at any previous point in history. And knowing that God has never asked us to do what we could not do, the staggering challenge of 2.9 billion non-Christians plus one billion nominal Christians must not be considered impossible. In view of the great increase of interest in Third World initiative, we must be more optimistic about the future than at any previous time.

We are sobered by the thought that three mammoth cultural traditions--the Hindus, the Chinese and the Muslims--have yielded very little to the Christian movement. This is true also of smaller blocs such as the Japanese and others of Buddhist tradition. There is not space in this paper to reflect upon the special problems each of these groups presents. Nevertheless, the world of missions today is fairly flooded with new and enterprising proposals for renewed approaches to these blocs.

The most serious limitation to our prospects does not lie in our spiritual or our physical resources but in our vision and our willingness to obey. The majority of Christians are not interested seriously in people who are out of

sight, and they never have been. But a large and faithful minority is held back today, not because of a lack of will but because of a lack of vision. It is crucially important for us to realize that less than 500 million of the 2.9 billion non-Christians in the world today are within the range of normal evangelism on the part of any church or mission. We must realize that only complex, cross-cultural techniques will be capable of effectively planting the church of Jesus Christ among the remaining 2.4 billion. In January of 1980 there will be another major consultation on worldwide evangelization, and there will be regional meetings between now and then. Following the January conference in 1980, which will cover the entire spectrum of evangelistic challenge, we look forward to a conference in August in Edinburg, Scotland which will focus exclusively on missionary work among non-Christian peoples--that is to say, work among the 2.4 billion peoples within whose cultural traditions there is no relevant church. This conference was proposed formally in 1974 by a group of missions professors meeting at Wheaton College, including one Asian--David Cho. It is to follow the pattern of the 1910 conference which was constituted basically as a meeting of representatives of mission societies (not churches) and was noted for its exclusion of missionary activities, directed to groups of people within which there was a substantial Christian witness. It seems crucially important to keep strategically separate those efforts <sup>that</sup> are <sup>truly</sup> pioneer missions and those that are buttressing and extending existing Christian communities lest we at any point lose sight of the far larger task which is still the pioneer task.

As we look to the future, we must "expect great things from God and attempt great things for God," as William Carey put it. We must do this because, as Adoniram Judson <sup>said</sup> ~~said~~, "The future is as bright as the promises of God."