

Trends and Issues in Missions in the Next Decade

(The following document is excerpted from a larger research paper written by Bob Houlihan if you would like a complete copy of this paper please email us and we will see that it is sent to you.)

As we look to the decade before us we must endeavor to understand some of the spiritual trends that will impact missions. There are many trends that will affect other areas in society but the ones we want to isolate will be those that will impact the plan of God to take the gospel to the whole world and plant the Church in every people group.

The spiritual trends that are focused on here are:

- From Territorial Ministries to Strategic Alliances
- From Specialized Evangelism to Holistic Ministries
- From Clergy/Laity to Community of Ministers
- From Denominations to Kingdom Communities
- From Communist China to Christian China
- From Cautious Acceptance to Open Persecution

A trend is a direction of movement. It's the flow of a tendency which gives an idea where society or the Church is moving. Trends are like rivers that run where there is little resistance and after time, begin to shape the landscape. They run a course in a direction that is not a straight line. "A trend is more than an opinion. It is based on analysis of what is actually happening, not something we only think about or anticipate. And a trend is not a prediction. The trend-watcher observes what is happening *now*, not what will happen next year .

Some in the Church criticize anyone for looking at trends and forecasting what may take place. But Jesus gave careful and clear biblical reasons for being aware of what is taking place, and then based upon that information, looking to the future.

He sighed deeply and said, "Why does this generation ask for a miraculous sign? I tell you the truth, no sign will be given to it." (Mark 8:12)

These spiritual trends that impact missions are not signs that test our faith or in anyway a prophetic prediction. Rather, they are reports of the signs of the time. They are not necessarily gospel truth, but rather give us indications of what may take place so that we can be prepared and do a greater work for God and His kingdom.

One of the sad conditions of much of the Church at the end of the twentieth century is that she is unprepared for what she is going to face in the twenty-first century.

Christians have not delved deeply into the culture in which they are living in order to understand the signs of the time. It is the responsibility for the leaders of the future to do everything possible to make people aware that they are living in a day where everything is changing and they must give themselves to the study of the Scriptures and its prophetic insight they give us into future events.

SPIRITUAL TRENDS

FROM TERRITORIAL MINISTRY TO STRATEGIC ALLIANCES

In the earliest phases of the modern missionary movement, the world was difficult to travel in and segmented by many different nations, clans, tribes and ethnic groups, missionaries tended to become identified with one part of the world. This is commonly known as “comity.” When missions agencies were working in a particular nation, they would divide up the nation into territories and different groups would take responsibility for certain areas of that nation. They would have a common agreement not to work in each other’s area and in this way, a particular agency would become the sole minister of the kingdom of God in that particular territory.

But with the growth of information and travel, the possibility of territorial ministries is unworkable. Today, God is moving the Church to networks which helps her to have a greater impact on the nations.

The day when missions can go alone is fast coming to a close. When the world was much “larger” and communication difficult, it was more acceptable for missions or missionaries to do their own thing. But the day of isolation has come to a close. Nothing done in missions is accomplished in a “corner” of the world. However, many missionaries and missions agencies do not realize that this day of territorialism is over.

What is emerging is the missions community are new strategic alliances. Much of the change is due to the tremendous growth of the Church and its ministries in the world. Specific ministries have proliferated. A young person seeking to minister in the world can find a track in almost any ministries by which he can fulfill the calling upon his heart. There are so many mission ministries being developed that it is impossible for a single individual to keep abreast of all that is taking place. In short, the missions structure networks and programs have become exceedingly complex and to do things alone is just a way of bringing your missions program to a soon end.

Since the worldwide Church has grown significantly—126 percent since 1970, when the world’s population has only increased by 60 percent—there are many two-thirds world missions agencies that are sending missionaries to the same target countries. In some nations, there are five or six national churches endeavoring to do missions work in the same receiving country from the same denomination.

With the dawn of a new missions era, the critical need for alliances is more evident than ever. The dominant role of western missions is fast disappearing. Already the majority of world missionaries are from non-western sending churches. God is raising up from the younger churches a vast army of workers who are as committed to world evangelism as any group that came before them. From Mainland China alone, there is

somewhere over 100,000 young people who are called to cross-cultural evangelism. For the young missionaries to go to the nations of the earth and accomplish effective ministry, it will be important for them to partner with other missionaries and agencies.

For the missions agencies and missions denominational groups to fulfill their purposes, they will need a deep look into their own structures and endeavor to apply some of these principles to transform missions from territorialism to strategic alliances. James Engel talks about the necessity of this kind of transformation, "I certainly do not have any kind of crystal ball, but some trends already seem to be evident. Here is what I think could take place as more and more agencies wrestle with organizational transformation."

1. Some agencies will probably cease to exist. Because of the difficulty of change in transformation and because they will not move from the old to the new, they will not be able to cope with the changes that are taking place in society. It is possible that there will be a continuation of the trend toward mergers of smaller agencies, but there is another more encouraging option. Agencies can retain their identity while still achieving the benefit of a broader resource base if they are willing to enter into working agreements and common strategy development. This is happening throughout the business world, especially internationally.
2. The emergence of 'niche' agencies. With the age of specialization upon us, it's only obvious to think that missions boards must move from being generalists toward concentration on a few things that they can do best. In order to accomplish those few things, there would need to be alliances with others that would fulfill other parts of the whole picture of world evangelization. This acceleration of new organizations, which are smaller and designed to address a particular need, will need the framework of more mature missions to work together so a greater end may be accomplished. The more established missions need the synergy and the proactive ministry of a newer organization which will bring life to the organizations so that the kingdom of God can go forward.

FROM SPECIALIZED EVANGELISM TO HOLISTIC MINISTRIES

From the beginning of the Protestant missionary movement, there was no division between "word and deed." As Protestant missionaries went out, they began to feed the hungry, help the poor, take in widows and orphans and minister to lepers. For example, William Carey learned several Indian languages, preached in these languages, supervised the translation of the Scriptures, established schools, studied the methods of the cultures and attacked the inhumane treatment of lepers who often were burned to death or buried alive. He also carried on a campaign against infanticide and the burning of widows until both of these evils were prohibited by the Burmese government.

Carey's model was followed by most Protestant missionaries throughout the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Missionaries set up schools, clinics and introduced

methods of agriculture. The first women's school in the nation of Japan was set up by Protestant missionaries. Missionaries went against the slave trade, the traffic of opium and the child labor methods which put children at risk.

What happened then to move evangelical missions away from this holistic emphasis? For the first part of the twentieth century, Protestant missions emphasized evangelism to such an extent that other parts of the Church's ministry were neglected. This move from holistic ministry to an emphasis on "evangelism only" is often called the "Great Reversal."

The theological shift back to a more holistic approach and the joining of "word and deed" began with a reinterpretation of the kingdom of God. Liberals used this term as a buzz-word, believing Christ would not return until they were able to bring Him back by their own social and political actions. Evangelicals, on the other hand, preoccupied with Christ's return, tended to only emphasize the spiritual aspects of the kingdom of God leading to "other-worldliness." Three corrections have taken place in theology which have led the Church to a greater emphasis in holistic ministry.

1. The kingdom of God involves both the present and future elements.
2. A second emphasis was brought about by John Howard Yoder, the author of *The Politics of Jesus*. His book examined carefully the social-political content of Jesus' action and message, especially as it relates to the kingdom of God. This emphasis was important because it moved the evangelical church away from the idea that the kingdom of God was only a "spiritual" kingdom with us in the world scene.
3. Third, the evangelical church began to come to the truth that the kingdom of God is transformational. This reemphasis has tended to again highlight social involvement for evangelicals. The emphasis in this message is that actions taken towards issues such as poverty and development help change the oppressive condition of the marginalized people of the world and by helping them, the Church reflects divine justice, reconciliation and love. "The transformationalist paradigm is a natural for fostering Christian involvement in development work, which even by secular advocates is intended to slowly transform society into a place where all can flourish.."

The world is going to become a more difficult place to live in. Chaos will continue to reign. There will be more wars, more floods, disasters and earthquakes. The Christian cannot just speak the word of God's grace into these situations. He must also put on his work clothes and minister to other people who are hurting. Some of the humanitarian ministries that are going to be important in the year 2010 will be feeding programs, drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs, medical programs especially in rural areas, AIDS awareness programs, health care literature and educational training, disaster and relief assistance, assistance in vocational training for street children and prostitutes, clothing distribution, and help for widows.

To fulfill the command of Christ, missions must provide programs to alleviate human suffering as we see the world move to greater chaos. This emphasis must not only be the objective of the sending church with its financial resources but also the strategy of the local national church. It must not be viewed as something only the “rich” can do, it needs to be included in the curriculum of the national Bible schools as well as the on-going pastoral training programs. There are thousands of formal and informal channels for ministering compassion to the millions of people in need. The local national churches can provide the necessary help to ensure that humanitarian ministries do not become the “tail that wags the dog.”

FROM CLERGY/LAITY TO COMMUNITY OF MINISTERS

In the New Testament, the word “elder” and “bishop” were equivalent terms. It was probably the emphasis of the Roman Catholic Church on the term “overseer” or “bishop” that separated it from presbyters (elders). This led into a hierarchical pattern of leadership that has become standard not only in the Roman Catholic Church but also in the historical and evangelical traditions.

With this development, the Church shifted from a New Testament pattern. The New Testament pattern is very clearly one of team leadership, a group of leaders or a community of ministers rather than an individual who carries the authority and responsibility. It has been shown by many that the New Testament pattern is one of a plurality of leadership rather than just a single leader who is the one responsible with the authority to give the directions to the laity.

Many mission agencies are arriving at this point. Gone are the days when there are individuals who will have the supreme role as leader of a national church or missionary working on a particular field. Rather, the missionary leader will be a “pastor of leaders” and will equip and enable others to do the work of the ministry, in effect, developing a community of ministers.

In the modern missionary movement, that which has been articulated in the sending church has tended to be over-emphasized in the receiving church. When missionaries have gone to the field, they usually hold the positions of authority. This can be emphasized to the extent that they become “spiritual dictators.” This reinforced the development of a “compound mentality” where a missionary could have his own kingdom and bring people into the kingdom. This would isolate the new Christians from the lost surrounding this small world.

By the year 2010, this kind of a missionary leader will probably cease to exist. To survive in the changing world that is taking place, missionaries will need to understand that they are “equippers” with the responsibility to develop a community of leaders who will evangelize the unreached of the target nation. These missionaries leaders will need to move away from control, authority and a top-down process which is institutionally centered, to an enabling model with an emphasis on mutuality, shared vision and bottom-up process. This kind of leadership will be inter-active and person-centered with a major emphasis on the growth and development of the community of

leaders, rather than just on the results of the number of people reached with the gospel. It is more of an organism than an organization.

FROM DENOMINATIONS TO KINGDOM COMMUNITIES

There is no doubt that the Church is in a state of chaotic change. This change is taking place so rapidly that it is difficult for people to adjust, let alone for large organizations to adapt quickly. As Alvin Toffler had stated, "Humanity faces a quantum leap forward. It faces the deepest social upheaval and creative restructuring of all time without clearly recognizing it. We are engaged in building a remarkable new civilization from the ground up." Whether the change within the Church is that drastic or not is up for discussion. However, the transformation changes that are taking place today are having a great impact on the growth of the Church. Many mainline denominations are in a state of decline.

Into this declining world of major denominations, there has been a significant growth in what is commonly called "parachurch" groups. It was just 1981 that the term "parachurch" was featured in *Christianity Today*. Even though it is widely used now, it's only a phenomenon that has come into prominence in the last 20 years. It is important to note that Robert Bork in his book, *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*, credited the parachurch organization, Promise Keepers, with doing more to restore the moral tone of society in a few years than traditional churches have achieved after decades of effort.

Willmer and Schmidt in their book go on to make some astonishing statements about the parachurch and its place in the future of missions. The missionary movement will be characterized in the future by three major factors: (1) the collapse of the traditional church culture, (2) a shift in thinking from ethnocentric concerns to kingdom eyes, and (3) the emergence of the megachurch.

The third significant change in the religious scene is the emergence of the megachurch. Nothing has a greater impact on the future of missions than the emergence of this phenomenon in the last several years. It is interesting to note that half of churchgoers in the United States attend the top 12 percent of the nation's churches, which means a large percentage of Christians attend a megachurch.

What is different about the megachurch from the large churches of the past? Large churches have tended to be part of the denominational structure which has headquarters in some other part of the country. But megachurches combine the strength of the traditional local church with that of the parachurch movement and at the same time tend to avoid the weaknesses of both. In this way, the megachurch resembles a constellation of generalized church ministries with specialized parachurch ministries

For the Church to reach the world, it will be important for the megachurch and parachurch communities to unite for a common goal. The synergy of the combination of these two recent phenomena within the Church at large will give the community of believers an avenue by which they can fulfill the call of God and the guidance of the

Holy Spirit to reach the lost.

FROM COMMUNIST CHINA TO CHRISTIAN CHINA

After a visit to China, *New York Times* correspondent Fox Butterfield gave this report:

I was not prepared for an energetic, candid, middle-aged Party member who was chairman of her local street committee, the lowest level of government organization. One evening when I stopped by her fifth-floor walk-up apartment, I found she was reading the Bible. I was incredulous.

She explained that recently a forty-five-year old man had knocked on her door, claiming to be a friend of a woman she knew. He wondered if she believed in God or had read the Bible.

In the end, my friend accepted his offering of a Chinese-language Bible. She was reading it with evident interest. "You don't know it," she advised me, "but Christianity is spreading rapidly in China because people are so disillusioned with communism." If she had been a political dissident, I would have been doubtful. But she was the neighborhood Party boss.¹

It has been noted almost in every newspaper of the world that China is becoming a great market economy if she can sustain her current economic momentum. There is little doubt that China will continue to be one of the major economies of the twenty-first century along with the United States, Japan and the European Economic Community. Even now, China is the third largest economy in the world. The change instituted by Deng Xiaoping had a great effect today. His legacy was to let economics not dogma determine the destiny of China. In 1994, China's economy was four times bigger than it was when Deng first made his economic reforms. And if China meets its 2002 target, its economy will be eight times bigger than it was in 1978. If this happens, China's masses will reach the economic level of Japan, Taiwan and South Korea.

Tens of thousands of missionaries worked in the pre-communist era in Mainland China. They planted the marvelous seed of the Word of God but by the best reports, there were around one million Christians when the missionaries had to leave because of the communist takeover under Mao in 1949.

The seed that was planted during that era has produced an incredible growth. Everyday 30,000 people become members of the kingdom of God in China. The most conservative reports today are that there are somewhere around 80 million believers in Mainland China, including the house church movement, the open church as well as the Catholic church.

¹Snyder and Runyon, 47.

Dr. James Hudson Taylor, the great-grandson of a missionary pioneer in China, Hudson Taylor, observes that China is undergoing some basic changes socially, economically, and politically. Taylor notes, “The agricultural segment of society has been released from the terror of the commune, and the family unit has been re-established as the basic unit of production in agriculture.”² This is very important because 80 percent of the nation is still rural. With the failure of pro-democracy movement a decade ago, Chinese young people have turned to more spiritual answers for the dilemmas of their lives. As one young person said, “I was born into a Communist family but I am totally disillusioned and feel like committing suicide—I don’t see any future in life. All I want to do is live for myself: that’s what I see everybody else doing.”³

But the growth of the Church in China is tied directly to the answers that the growing Church gives to a nation that has lost its moral roots. China is now undergoing the greatest revival in Church history. This growing Church will become a major missionary sending body by the year 2010.

In the House Church movement, sometimes called the unofficial church, there are somewhere around 65 million believers. From this segment of the Church, there are at least 100,000 young people who feel called to cross-cultural missions. This call to cross-cultural missions is a fulfillment of what they believed is God’s call to the Church to complete the task of evangelism. Young Chinese believers believe they are called to take the gospel through the 10/40 Window all the way back to Jerusalem and then that will complete the Church Age.

The significance of this number of young people who are willing to give their lives for the gospel of Christ will have a great impact, not only in China, but all of Asia. The Church in China has had to become a community of ministers. Because of the persecution of the leaders and their imprisonment, all believers must become ministers of the gospel. There is widespread lay leadership with women taking over the many responsibilities.

James Taylor has highlighted the significance of the lay leadership in China:

²Ibid., 48.

³Ibid., 49.

If anything stands out in the history of the past 35 years, it is the importance of lay witness. It is humbling to see what God is doing in China without the help of any missionaries, as pastors were imprisoned and the responsibility to witness fell upon laypeople. Laypeople are witnessing effectively for Jesus Christ without any kind of church building in which to worship.⁴

In my own experience with the House Church movement in Mainland China, I have witnessed a vitality that far exceeds anything that I have seen in other national churches. This vitality undoubtedly has come because of persecution and difficulties the churches had to go through. Since the Cultural Revolution, many of the people who suffered disgrace at the hands of the Red Guard, searched for answers to the ultimate meaning of life and have found the answer in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The House Church movement has given young people a sense of meaning and belonging in a very changing society. The Church has brought about the stability that they have been searching for which had been sadly lacking in the communist movement. The promises of the communist movement for a classless society have failed to bring about the reality of lifting people from the lowest level and giving them a sense of meaning that is so desperately needed. The character of the communist leaders is so faulty that it has caused people to turn to the Church to find men and women of God who revealed true integrity.

Since the Church in China will play a large part in the future of God's witness in the world, it is incumbent upon the Church in the west to help raise up leaders in China who will be able to complete the task of evangelism. If the missionary witness in the world moved from Europe to the Western Hemisphere, it is also possible that God is moving the leadership of the Church from the west to China in the twenty-first century. For this reason, the greatest responsibility on the Church today in the west is to transfer leadership to this emerging Church so the missionary task of the Church can be completed in the first part of the twenty-first century.

FROM MINISTRY TO THE EVANGELIZED TO REACHING THE TRULY LOST

⁴Ibid., 53, 54.

At the end of the twentieth century, there is a hunger for God that far exceeds anything noted in the last 30 years. This is not just an American phenomenon but the search for God is taking place worldwide in a variety of ways and it is unprecedented in its scope and intensity. Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, recently told the *Washington Times*, "I believe the greatest spiritual awakening of all time is taking place today. More people are hearing the gospel, more people are responding to the gospel."⁵ Martin Marty, director of public religion projects, states that moral decay, financial disasters and the emptiness of materialistic cultures are causing people to turn to religion for answers. Many more people are reading religious text, such as the Bible and the Koran, studying at seminaries, meeting in prayer groups and attending healing services.⁶

Tom Phillips in his book, *Revival Signs*, highlights some of the national and international reports of this current spiritual renewal.

- "God is calling the Church to a time of consecrated prayer and fasting," said Thomas Trask, General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God. "This is the beginning of what has to happen."
- When revival comes, "Sinners will race to the Church instead of the Church racing to save sinners," said Nancy DeMoss of the DeMoss Foundation.
- "God is visiting the earth," broadcaster Pat Robertson said.
- David Bryant of Concerts of Prayer International said fasting is not an end in itself, but involves setting aside our "ordinary way of living, because something extraordinary is about to happen."⁷

The number of evangelical Christians has grown 126 percent since 1970 while the world population has increased 60 percent since then. Today, Christianity had somewhere less than 2 billion adherents and has become a major non-western religion. It is interesting also to note that pentecostal churches have 410 million members and

⁵*Religion Today* (Current News Summary, 2 December, 1998) [database on-line].

⁶Ibid.

⁷Tom Phillips, *Revival Signs* (Gresham, OR: Vision House, 1995), 227, 228.

are growing at about 20 million people a year, especially in the non-western world: Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Young people increasingly find religious communities in cyberspace. The Internet carries approximately 140 million pages related to religion. By the year 2010, ten to 20 percent of the U.S.A. population will rely primarily on the Internet for religious purposes and will never attend a local church again.⁸

These revival signs are marvelous and an encouragement to the Church. But one of the things that tends to plague the Church in its missionary outreach is that it has continued to evangelize the same fields repeatedly. Even though missions agencies believe in the indigenous church principle, they have tended to send their missionaries to the same receiving countries of the world which has stunted real church growth. In the next ten-year period, the Church's missionary endeavor will be from those who have already been evangelized to reaching the truly lost people in those countries that are unreached.

Darrell Guder in his book, *Missional Church*, states:

This is a time for a dramatically new vision. The current predicament of churches in North America requires more than a mere tinkering with long-assumed notions about the identity and mission of the church. Instead, as many knowledgeable observers have noted, there is a need for reinventing or rediscovering the church in this new kind of world.

⁸*Religion Today*, 2 December, 1998.

Two things have become quite clear to those who care about the church and its mission. On the one hand, the churches of North America have been dislocated from their prior social role of chaplain to the culture and society and have lost their once privileged positions of influence. Religious life in general and the churches in particular have increasingly been relegated to the private spheres of life. Too readily, the churches have accepted this as their proper place. At the same time, the churches have become so accommodated to the American way of life that they are now domesticated, and it is no longer obvious what justifies their existence as particular communities. The religious loyalties that churches seem to claim and the social functions that they actually perform are at odds with each other. Discipleship has been absorbed into citizenship.⁹

⁹Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 77, 78.

What is now taking place in the Church theologically is a shift from a church-centered view of missions to a God-centered view. Missions as a church-centered enterprise characterized missions thinking in the early part of this century. Missions had been considered to be an activity arising out of the church with an aim to extend the church or plant it in new places. Missions was thought of as a department of the church. Today, a change is taking place where missions is not a part of the church but is the very existence of the Body. It is for which it lives and dies. This change of emphasis theologically brought a more *theocentric* position which stress “the mission of God” (*missio Dei*) as the foundation for the Church. The Church became redefined as the community spawned by the mission of God and gathered for that mission. The Church is now beginning to understand that in any place, it is a community sent by God. “Mission” is not something the Church does or a part of its program. Rather, the Church’s essence is missional, for the calling and the sending action of God forms its identity. Mission is founded on the mission of God in the world, rather than the Church’s effort to extend itself.¹⁰

It is estimated that 95 percent of the world’s unreached people live in an area that is commonly referred to as the 10/40 Window. This spiritually dark part of the world is located 10 degrees to 40 degrees north of the equator, spanning the globe from North Africa through the Middle East and Central Asia to East Asia. This Window includes approximately 60 countries but is also the heart of major religions of the world: Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Animism. It is also the home to 85 percent of the world’s poorest of the poor. It is staggering to note that 3.6 billion people live in this Window. They represent two-thirds of the world’s population. However, they have been neglected by the Church in its missional outreach in the last 50 years. It’s only recently that the “truly” lost have now begun to be seen as reachable.

While people in the countries of the world have innumerable opportunities to be exposed to the gospel, the likelihood of someone hearing the gospel within the 10/40 Window is almost nil. It is estimated by the year 2000, that more than 77,000 people each day will die in the 10/40 Window without ever having an opportunity to hear the gospel in their own language and culture. In India alone, 23,000 people die daily, many never having the opportunity to hear the good news.¹¹

For the Church of Jesus Christ to fulfill the Great Commission, it is important that the truly lost people of the 10/40 Window will have an opportunity to hear the good

¹⁰Ibid., 81, 82.

¹¹Luis Bush and Beverly Pegues, *The Move of the Holy Spirit in the 10/40 Window* (Seattle, WA: YWAM Publishing, 1999), 28.

news of the kingdom of God's reign in their own language. This will become a major emphasis of the Church at the year 2010. Along with the missionaries from the west, many missionaries will be sent from the two-thirds world churches, Asia, Latin America and Africa, to the 10/40 Window. This doubling of the efforts of missions will complete the task so that Matthew 24:14 could possibly be fulfilled by the year 2010, ". . . and this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all of the world as a witness to all peoples (people groups) and then the end shall come."

FROM CAUTIOUS ACCEPTANCE TO OPEN PERSECUTION

When the Church was born in Jerusalem, a spiritual battle was ignited. The god of this world, Satan, opposed the new Church and Christians were persecuted, forbidden to preach or teach the good news. Those who did not stop were imprisoned and maligned. Many were ex-communicated and put to death. Jesus warned His disciples that this would happen. But it was at Pentecost that full-scale warfare came against the Church because of the dispersion of Jewish believers to Samaria and other parts of the known world. This body of believers, full of the Holy Spirit, immediately came into conflict with satanic powers. Again and again, there were clashes between the gospel and satanic forces but the triumphal procession grew as allegiance switched from the god of this world to the One true God.¹²

As the Church moves into the areas where the truly lost live, the enemy will continue to strike back. We see this trend happening as the gospel moves forward in the 10/40 Window. After the gospel spread from Jerusalem to Rome, it was more or less accepted when it became the national religion under Constantine. Even though the Church was persecuted in some parts of the world, there was a cautious acceptance of Christianity. Satan changed his tactics and began to attack the Church by bringing doubt to the faith, distrust to the revelation of God and attacks against the character of the leadership.

¹²Michael Harper, *Spiritual Warfare* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1970), 24.

Worldwide, Satan is working to render the Church ineffective. Dissension between evangelical, charismatic and Pentecostal groups is ripping apart the church in many nations, especially in Japan. At the same time, Orthodox and Catholic churches seem intent on battling evangelicals as they gain prominence in many countries, including Ethiopia. Satan is also using materialism to lull the Church to sleep. In many countries, such as the United States, South Korea, Singapore, the churches are big and comfortable. Millions are spent on buildings. Some churches in these countries expend considerable energy, time, and resources competing with one another . . . In Africa, for instance, witchcraft is mixed with Christianity. In some Eastern nations, animism is combined with Christianity. Another damaging influence has come through the resurgence of worldly attitudes and lifestyles filtering into the Church. We are losing a sense of holiness or separation from the practices and thinking of the unsaved people around us.¹³

But today, it is once again open persecution of the Church and this will intensify as the end of the world is in view.

In China, in March 1993 . . . five Protestants from Shaanxi were detained and severely tortured . . . “without a word of explanation.” They were singled out because the authorities suspected them of contact with foreigners. According to one eye-witness account . . . “The officers stripped three brethren naked from the waist down and forced the women to stand with them. Not only did they then beat them, moreover they forced each of the twenty-six local people to beat each one a hundred times with bamboo rods.

In Sudan, January 2, 1995 . . . the village of Wud Arul . . . was attacked. Raiders came at dawn, storming through the whole area, looting and burning homes to ashes; kidnaping women and children (even babies); killing old men and women. About 150-200 men came, some on horseback, some on foot, and took away sixty-three women and children, as well as four hundred head of cattle.¹⁴

Paul Marshall has noted that communist authorities have seen the connection between the Church and freedom. The Church gives freedom not only spiritually but

¹³Bush and Pegues, 193.

¹⁴Paul Marshall, *Their Blood Cries Out* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1997), 13, 14.

also politically.

If this connection has not been clear to western observers afflicted with secular myopia, it has been all too clear to the Communist authorities in China and Vietnam. As brutal practitioners of power, they are perversely aware of the power of the human spirituality, and so take religion with deadly seriousness. In 1992 the Chinese state-run press noted that, “the Church played an important role on the change” in Eastern Europe and warned, “If China does not want such a scene to be repeated in its land it must be strangle the baby while it is still in the manger.”¹⁵

With the growth of the Church and the fact that 80,000 people are becoming Christians everyday, which includes 30,000 people in Mainland China, 15,000 in India, and 20,000 in Sub-Sahara Africa, it is only natural to think that Bible believing Christians are going to be attacked by the god of this world. The major challenge for the Church of the twenty-first century is how it responds to open persecution. Much of the western church has been lulled to sleep by the sirens of the enemy and it is not aware of the persecution many Christians in the two-thirds world are suffering. But with the resurgence of missional responsibility, the Church of 2010 must participate and be fellow-heirs with those who are going through times of persecution.

CONCLUSION

As stated above, trends are not necessarily prophetic proclamations. Rather, they are indications of the way the world and the Church are moving which gives hints of what may come to pass. As the king said in Ecclesiastes, “he who considers the wind will not sow and he who regards the clouds will not reap.” (Eccl. 11:4). It is important that we look at the signs to help us understand how best to flow with the movement of the Holy Spirit.

In conclusion, let me make a few remarks about the importance of the year 2010. First, the Church needs to declare the whole gospel. People are whole beings: body, soul and spirit, and their total person must be ministered to. Pain is the same the world over. Material poverty is also a spiritual problem. We who formed the community of the King must minister not only to the spiritual man but also to the physical needs of God’s creation.

Secondly, we must bring the good news of the gospel to the poor. The poor and those who are marginalized are outside the progress of their own countries. They are

¹⁵Ibid., 10, 11.

the “untouchables” of societies. The Church must focus its attention on the poor if for no other reason than to fulfill the command of the Lord Jesus Christ.

For the Church to do this, it will necessitate the redistribution of the Church’s wealth. It is interesting to note that 80 percent of the Christian wealth of the world is in America. This is a call for American Christians to work alongside the developing church so the poor may be helped.

Also, we must recognize that there is a new center of Christian gravity in the world. The main focus of the Church of Jesus Christ has moved from the western world to the developing world, from America and Europe to Africa, Latin America and Asia. Not everyone in the western church has adjusted to this fact. There is the need to develop international relationships that will bring about the global identity of the Church rather than just its national identity. Obviously, not every part of the Church has the same thing to offer. Some parts have resources, others have people; but if the Church is to fulfill its global commission, then all of the gifts of the Body of Christ from every nation must be fitted together.

Further, something is out of balance when 90 percent of the Church’s missionary force is working in nations of the world that have been evangelized. This doesn’t mean that any unreached people group in those evangelized nations would be abandon, but when 95 percent of the truly lost people live within the 10/40 Window, then there must be a call for a more strategic balance of the missionary force. Today, one billion people live where there is little possibility of ever having a chance to hear the gospel of Christ. This must change.

Possibly, one of the greatest forces for missions in the year 2010 will be volunteers. These are the people who are highly trained professionals but not necessarily trained in missiology. They are talented, intellectual and committed to bring about a completion of God’s command.¹⁶

To make 2010 the greatest year in the history of the Church, it will be necessary for the Church of today to listen. First, we must hear the voice of God and His call to fulfill the command to go to all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Then, to listen, we must be responsible to the word of God and to the Body of Christ worldwide. In so doing, if we humble ourselves, then the Lord will be able to fulfill through the Church His plan for the ages.

It would be good for us to also listen closely to the words of Kenneth Cragg in his poem, “Our First Task”

Our first task in approaching
another people
another culture

¹⁶Byrant Myers, *The New Context of World Mission* (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1997), 56.

another religion

Is to take off our shoes
for the place we are
approaching is holy.
Else we may find ourselves
treading on another's dream
more serious still,
we may forget . . .
that God
was there before our arrival.¹⁷

¹⁷McKaughan, O'Brien and O'Brien, 86.