

By the Year 2000

By Thomas Wang

What is God trying to say to us today? Are we listening-with discernment? Recently, as we are drawing near to the close of this century, significant things are happening around us. Gigantic plans of evangelism on a global scale are being creatively conceived, planned, and to a degree executed by different groups and orders within Christendom. So much so that I think if only one or two of them succeed in all their objectives, they would truly turn the world upside down. What is equally noteworthy is that most of these movements take A.D. 2000 as their target year for an unprecedented world ingathering of harvest for the Kingdom. These are overwhelmingly significant happenings. What is God trying to say to us through them all?

Let me share with you a number of movements of evangelism that are currently either in the planning stage or are already in operation.

THE WORLD BY 2000

By the year 2000 the entire world will have the opportunity to hear the gospel through radio broadcast. This goal was set by a historic meeting between leaders of three major Christian broadcasting groups in the fall of 1985; they were Ron Cline (HCJB), Bob Bowman (FEBC) and Paul Freed (TWR).

A statement was jointly signed by the three presidents saying, "We are committed to provide every man, woman and child on earth the opportunity to turn on their radio and hear the gospel of Jesus Christ in a language they can understand, so they can become followers of Christ and responsible members of His church. We plan to complete this task by the year 2000."

"Technology is already in place to reach virtually every corner of the earth since short wave signals can literally travel thousands of miles," Cline explained. "Our signals can already reach the remote 'hidden peoples.'"

The three major Christian broadcasters are spreading the gospel in more than 100 languages. Cline estimates that more than 90 percent of the world's population can now hear the good news in a language they understand.

BOLD MISSION THRUST

This is the Southern Baptist denominational strategy on world evangelization which gives adequate emphasis to both discipling and evangelizing.

It is a "massive movement involving scores of denominational agencies, thousands of churches and millions of church members at home and around the

world. Its program emphasizes the importance of discipling, centered on the phrase 'evangelism that results in churches.'" Indeed, it has been labeled as "one of history's most extensive, most organized, most detailed and most determined evangelistic plans."

Its pronounced objectives include:

- To reach every living person in the world with the gospel by the year 2000
- To provide every person on earth the opportunity to hear the gospel by the close of the century
- To enable every person in the world to have an opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel of Christ by the year 2000.

CHARISMATIC INITIATIVES

1. Singapore Consultation (February 9-11, 1987)

Organized by Larry Christiansen, Director of the Lutheran Renewal Center, St. Paul, Minnesota, the Consultation took place in Singapore. It was attended by 30 charismatic leaders from a wide spectrum of denominations, including Roman Catholics, from many parts of the world.

A consensus was reached among the conferees that the Singapore Consultation is to be a "Consultation to consider a 1990 World Conference that would usher in a Decade of Evangelization leading up to the year 2000."

2. General Congress on the Holy Spirit and World Evangelization (July 22-26, 1987)

The Charismatic conference attended by 50,000 in Kansas City in 1977 was followed last year by "New Orleans '86: Leaders Congress," attended by 10,000 and sponsored by the North America Renewal Service Committee. This again will be followed by another huge gathering in July of this year-the North America Congress on the Holy Spirit and World Evangelization.

According to Congress Director, Vinson Synan, "Between 35 to 50 thousand members of over 40 denominations, ministries, and fellowships are coming to New Orleans in July to worship and to learn how they can work together to preach the gospel to all nations by the year 2000."

DAWN MOVEMENT

As a youth, Jim Montgomery had specific calling to commit himself to world evangelization. He served as a missionary for twenty-two years with Overseas Crusades in several overseas posts. In July of 1984 he had a clear calling from God to launch the DAWN (Discipling A Whole Nation) movement worldwide. DAWN's concern is that the whole church in every country work at the discipling of the whole nation, including all its people groups.

DAWN's nation by nation strategy is to communicate the DAWN vision to national leaders, identify the "John Knoxes" of a nation (Give me my country or I

die!), and serve as a consultant to him to fulfill the task.

The whole nation approach of DAWN has enjoyed successes in the Philippines and Guatemala. More national churches are requesting their service. Their recent status sheet said, "Worldwide movement is taking shape! Twenty-seven countries now involved!"

EVANGELIZATION 2000

Roman Catholics are planning a one billion dollar project called "Evangelization 2000," as reported by Julia Duin in the News Section of Christianity Today (February 6, 1987). "The ten year project will culminate with a worldwide satellite telecast on Christmas Day in the year 2000 when Pope John Paul II or his successor will speak to a potential audience of at least 5 billion people."

Tom Forrest, the Redemptorist priest who is in charge of "Evangelization 2000," said, "The project is to give Jesus Christ a 2,000th birthday gift of a world more Christian than not."

"Evangelization 2000," by using numerous portable satellite-receiving dishes, will convey "a papal message to Catholic missionaries around the world who will record the transmission on videotapes, then translate the audio into the local languages."

Forrest is also planning a retreat for the world's Catholic bishops in 1989. The conference will inform them about "Evangelization 2000" and provide them with books on evangelization. A worldwide conference for 7,000 priests is planned for 1990 with the same goals in mind.

EXPLO '90

On December 31, 1985, at the closing day of EXPLO '85 in Mexico City, Dr. Bill Bright, President of Campus Crusade for Christ, announced that a similar but expanded event will take place in 1990.

"There is a great worldwide excitement that EXPLO '85 will accelerate the fulfillment of the Great Commission," Bright stated. "Because of this overwhelming response . . . (we) have decided to announce to you . . . our plans for a greatly expanded EXPLO '90."

EXPLO '85 leaders were encouraged with the success of a worldwide video conference through 18 commercial satellites, linked up with almost all the 94 sites in 54 countries. Simultaneous translation was provided in more than 30 languages. A continent-by-continent follow-up training course is being conducted.

PENTECOST '87

This is called "A National Satellite Celebration of Catholic Evangelization," scheduled to take place across America on June 6, 1987. It is developed by the Paulist National Catholic Evangelization Association and sponsored by over 75 Archdioceses and Dioceses in America.

Using Pope Paul VI's "On Evangelization In The Modern World" as a guideline, Pentecost '87 will give special focus to (a) evangelizing the 75 million unchurched of America, (b) evangelizing the 15 million inactive Catholics, and (c) evangelizing 52 1/2 million active Catholics in America.

The event will use the Catholic Telecommunications Network of America's (CTNA) satellite to offer training courses to the 60,000 Catholic evangelizers in one day.

This carefully designed media event, partially pre-recorded and partially live, will be aired with new and expanded contents on every Pentecost Saturday until the year 2000.

MISSION 2000

For discussion purposes, the U.S. Center for World Mission has proposed a 15-year plan called "Mission 2000" to chart the course of cooperative mission effort (as reported by Missionary News Service, February 1, 1985).

Director Ralph Winter spelled out the underlying convictions of Mission 2000 (Mission Frontiers, April-June, 1985) as follows:

- "1. We believe that those who are blessed by God are automatically obligated to be a blessing to all the other peoples of the world (Gen. 12:1-3).
- "2. We believe that 'to be a blessing' means to spread the news of the saving power and sanctifying Lordship of Jesus Christ.
- "3. We believe that the best way to do this is to plant the church within each and every one of the world's peoples.
- "4. We believe that this unique, 'pioneer' church-planting activity is the most fundamental goal of missions. We are encouraged by the fact that a broad consensus of mission scholars and leaders is in agreement with this conviction.
- "5. We believe there are ample evangelical resources in the world community (i.e., 147 congregations per group to be reached!) to make a serious attempt to plant the church within every people by the year 2000, and that such a goal for

the year 2000 is therefore a reasonable goal to work and pray for.

"6. We believe this task is thus more readily within our grasp than ever in history, and that the very end of history may therefore be near."

WHAT IS GOD TRYING TO SAY?

The above is an impressive list But it is only a portion of the whole. Some are still in the embryo stage pending further decision, such as the International Satellite Mission of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Some are in the early planning stage, such as the book distribution plan of the World Literature Crusade of putting two books on salvation and Christian growth in the hands of every home on earth in their own language before the year 2000.

To these tremendous happenings David Barrett, author of World Christian Encyclopedia, and his friends have coined a new term, Global Evangelization Movement (GEM). But Barrett also gave his caution here. Throughout the history of the church there have been at least 300 plans of world evangelization. Most of them have fizzled out and about 30 of them are still in existence today.

What were the reasons for these failures? Barrett has this to say,

Perhaps the major reason for the failure has been the absence of any attempt either to structure the objective or to deal realistically with the major obstacles Pious hopes have been allowed to substitute for determined organizational and logistical investigation and action on the part of thoroughly well-informed global missions leaders meeting and acting regularly together, with all the facts in front of them. We need to structure this global movement somewhat more realistically.

He further added, "The extraordinary thing is that most of these plans are operating in comparative isolation and in virtual ignorance of the existence of the other 30 or so plans."

Now, coming closer home, what do all of these mean to the Lausanne movement? What is God saying to us as leaders and partners of the LCWE? We are catalysts. We are networkers. Our most up-to-date definition for ourselves is "a movement of people in Christ who covenant together for biblical world evangelization."

With the current world evangelization happenings before us, what should be our role? How should we chart the course of the Lausanne movement for the next decade, or "unto the year 2000," in order to be more creatively useful and instrumental to the total task of world evangelization?

More urgently, how should we plan the program for Lausanne's '89 Congress so that it would not be a mere repetition or near repetition of 1974, but a dynamic and creative encounter of 6,000 "evangelizers" (and millions more around the world if satellite communications are to be used) whom God has destined to use for the ultimate fulfillment of spreading His redemption plan?

What is God trying to say to you and me?

Scientists and astronomers have built clusters of giant listening devices called the "Big Ear" to listen to radio signals from outer space in order to probe the mysteries of the universe. Are we today tuning our "big ears" to the Creator of the universe who is the Keeper of all mysteries?

We are all busy preaching, speaking, teaching, researching, writing, publishing, broadcasting and telecasting. But are we listening? Has our frantic way of life made our relation to God a one-way street? Again, what is He trying to say to you and me through all these happenings around us today?

Perhaps we should all come before the Lord like young prophet Samuel did and say to God, "Speak Lord, for thy servant is listening."

I will be most happy to hear from you and to know if God has something to say through you to the church, to the parachurch, to the Lausanne movement, and to us all. I welcome your response.

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