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Chapter 1

In a Nutshell

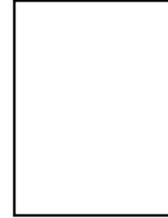
In 1881 an article was published in the *Missionary Review* entitled “Can the World Be Evangelized in Twenty Years?” This document set off a vigorous debate that would last until at least 1892. The focus of the debate was the question, “Can the World Be Evangelized in the Present Century (by the year 1900)?”, with advocates stressing a definition of evangelization that emphasized proclamation rather than conversion. Most of the widely circulated mission periodicals of the day joined in, either supporting or criticizing the idea. By the time it was no longer possible (by 1894-5), much ground had been covered.

The leading proponent of the idea, and the author of the pivotal 1881 article in the *Missionary Review*, was a pastor of a Presbyterian church in Philadelphia and a widely known missions advocate. Arthur Tappan (A. T.) Pierson continually set before the church of his day the idea that the Great Commission could be finished within a single generation, perhaps even by the turn of the century.

Pierson used statistics in his left hand and the Biblical mandate in his right to keep the church constantly aware that bringing the gospel to every creature was a distinct possibility if only it would wake up to the opportunity. To Pierson, this special opportunity and the responsibility that went with it was “the crisis of missions.” In 1886, he published a book by that title that remained at the center of the debate.

The appendix of *The Crisis of Missions* contained a document, titled “An Appeal to Disciples Everywhere,” that had been penned by a committee at D. L. Moody’s Northfield meeting in 1885. This appeal called for an ecumenical council in an international city where major church and mission leaders could meet to divide up the unevangelized world. Indirectly the appeal led to the London Conference of 1888. Here mission leaders congratulated each other on what had been done but never got around, as planned, to dividing up the remaining task.

After London, Pierson and many others continued to stress the possibility of an evangelized world by the year 1900, highlighting the potential significance of the last decade of the nineteenth century and the inauguration of the second century



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of modern missions (1892). Though the Church's awareness of the missionary task was heightened, the year 1900 came and went with the world not fully evangelized. Pierson attributed this failure to a lack of consecration in the church—evidenced by a lack of giving, faith, personal holiness, and, perhaps most of all, prevailing prayer. The result, in Pierson's words, was a "trifling with souls."

This story begins and ends with a world not completely reached. Today we face a similar challenge: Can the world be evangelized by the end of the twentieth century? When will every last unevangelized population be included in the plans of the Christian Church? Only when these questions are carefully considered by all Christians who have it within their power to change the world will the "crisis of missions" be confronted in our day.

Chapter 2

Early History (1818-1881)

Where did A. T. Pierson get the idea that the world could be evangelized in a single generation? He was certainly not the first person to voice this concern. Pierson looked back to several others who had helped him come to the understanding that the world could be speedily evangelized. Pierson gave credit to Dr. Joseph Angus, who preached a sermon before the Baptist Missionary Society in 1871 titled "Apostolic Missions; or, The Gospel For Every Creature." Angus suggested that 50,000 preachers supported by \$50-75 million a year might be able to evangelize the world in ten years. Though Angus' numerical scheme may have been an underestimation, the basic philosophy of the sermon put forth the feasibility of bringing the Gospel to every creature in a short amount of time. "The Gospel for every creature! Can we give it? Is it possible for the age to tell the age, for the Church to tell to the world the glad tidings of the kingdom? In ten or twenty years can repentance and remission of sins be preached through Christ to all nations? I believe that they can" (quoted in the *Missionary Review*, July 1892:485). Pierson wrote, "It impresses us as one of the boldest, wisest, strongest appeals for immediate and world-wide evangelization we have ever read...So far as we know, it was this address from which was drawn the motto of this new crusade [Student Volunteer Movement]: 'The World for Christ in our Generation!'" (*Missionary Review*, July

1892:542).

But this concept had been advocated by many others long before Angus made his appeal. In 1818 Gordon Hall and Samuel Newell, two of the first American missionaries, wrote a pamphlet entitled “The Conversion of the World: or the claims of Six Hundred Millions, and the Ability and Duty of Churches Respecting Them.” They wrote, “It is the duty of the churches to send forth preachers in sufficient numbers to furnish the means of instruction and salvation to the whole world” (p. 9). This idea of the church taking responsibility for the whole world became central in Pierson’s thinking.

In 1836 a document entitled “The Duty of the Present Generation to Evangelize the World: An Appeal from the Missionaries at the Sandwich Islands to their Friends in the United States” was sent to churches in the U.S. The missionaries urged the church that “the present generation can preach the gospel to the heathen. The men are already educated. Other means are ready. God requires it as a present duty...The world has long been under the influence of this scheme, of committing the heathen to the next generation” (p. 34-35). These missionaries hoped that the church would not wait for the next generation but take responsibility for its own generation.

Anthony Grant gave a series of lectures at the University of Oxford in 1843 entitled “The Past and Prospective Extension of the Gospel By Missions to the Heathen.” He stated, “We cannot contemplate the predicted fortunes of the Church, without seeing how strong an obligation rests upon each age to give effect to the implied charge of Christ, when He said that ‘this Gospel of the kingdom shall’ first ‘be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations; and then shall the end come” (Grant, 1910:23). He also said, “For neither the promise of its divine Author, nor any probability, would lead us to expect that it would be in all places at all times, nor in all places at any one time; but in some place at all times, and in all places at some time;—in a word, that it shall never fail from the earth, and shall at some period or other be preached over the whole world, before the end come” (Grant, 1910:29). Grant’s idea that the gospel would eventually be preached in all places was later quoted profusely in missions periodicals. Pierson used Grant’s words, coupled with Scripture, to show the universality of the gospel—that some day the whole world would be evangelized.

Pierson may or may not have been aware of an 1857 collection of sermons by John James Weitbrecht, a missionary of

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the Church Missionary Society in Burdwan, India. Of particular interest is the first sermon in this collection, "The Cause of Missions," preached in 1843. Taking Isaiah 52:10-11 as his text, Weitbrecht wrote,

...it gives a prospective view of the happy time, when the blessings of Christ's redemption are to be proclaimed to sinners, and enjoyed by believers, throughout the whole world. Now, the things which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of the prophet, and which the prophet beheld from a great distance, are being fulfilled in our days, and before our eyes. The word of eternal life is now published in every country, and in almost every language of the inhabited parts of the earth; and the Church of Christ is raising the banner of the cross in every land. From what the Lord has begun to accomplish in our days, through the instrumentality of His servants, and the blessings which have accompanied their efforts, the observer of daily events can safely infer, that the time is drawing near when the whole earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord and where is the Christian who does not rejoice in the fact, that the long reiterated prayer of the church, 'Thy kingdom come,' is now being answered and confirmed by the divine Amen; even by the conversion of a great multitude, which no man can number, of all nations and kindreds and peoples and tongues? (Weitbrecht, 1857:1-2).

Weitbrecht's words reflect an early instance in which the concept of "fulfilling the Great Commission in our day" is prevalent. This theme would become a major motivating force in the missions movement of the late nineteenth century. Weitbrecht placed the duty of waking up the church to its responsibility in the hands of the pastors.

Clearly and evidently as the historical facts concerning the establishment of the kingdom of Christ, and the conversion of people of different nations, present themselves before us; there are yet numbers who seem not to recognise them, or who are rather inclined to dispute the truth of them, or at least, feel no interest in them; and this, for the simple reason that they cannot appreciate the value of immortal souls, in comparison with the things of the world. It belongs therefore to the duty of the minister of the gospel, to direct especial attention to this great subject; for the glory of God- the welfare of his fellow-sinners,- and eternal interests are concerned with it (Weitbrecht, 1857:3).

In 1846 the Rev. Gardiner Spring affirmed that God's plan encompassed the whole world and that, for the first time since the time of the early apostles, conditions were ripe for the conversion of the world. He wrote,

Nothing is more certainly determined in the Bible, than that the heathen are given to the Son of God for his inheritance, and the utter-

most parts of the earth for his possession; that he must reign, until all enemies are put under his feet; and that the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. Tell me not of difficulties in the accomplishment of these purposes, for "the mouth of the Lord has spoken them." Say not that the world opposes itself to these designs of mercy, for "as I live, saith the Lord, all the earth shall be filled with my glory!" Why, then, should we take a more limited survey of the field than is taken by the Divine purpose? Why not include within our efforts all that is included within his? If his purposes are circumscribed by nothing but the world, why should our plans be so narrow as to retard and embarrass his career? If nothing else will satisfy the extent and largeness of his desires, nothing short of this may satisfy ours (*The Missionary Memorial*, 1846:360).

Spring went on to point out that in order for the world to be effectively evangelized, the work force had to be redistributed. "If we ever expect to send the Gospel to the world, there must be something like an equal distribution of the means of grace and salvation. This is the way in which the Gospel was first published...I am not for emptying Christendom of its ministers; but I am for distributing this immense disparity of her supplies...The world can never be converted at the heavy and slow rate at which the work is now going on. Centuries of darkness must roll over the earth unless something is done to secure a more equal dissemination of the Gospel" (*The Missionary Memorial*, 1846:365-368).

In 1858, Dr. Joel Parker, one of the leading pastors of New York, preached a sermon entitled "The Duty of the Present Generation of Christians to Evangelize the World." He said, "It is the duty of Christians to evangelize the whole world immediately. The present generation is competent under God to achieve the work. There are means enough in the power of the Church to do it" (pp. 21-22). That the church had sufficient resources to evangelize the whole world quickly was a basic premise of most arguments in the nineteenth century for the feasibility of completing the Great Commission.

From England, Joseph Hassell, in his book *From Pole to Pole: A Handbook of Christian Missions for the Use of Ministers, Teachers and Others*, published in 1866, was equally optimistic.

Looking at the results which have been achieved, some persons may consider the work of evangelizing the world an hopeless task; others may say that we are not to expect such a consummation until after the return of the Lord Jesus to His Church. Without entering into the question of whether the blessed time predicted, when 'the earth shall

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be filled with the glory of the knowledge of the Lord,' is to be pre or post Millennial, let us look more fully at the success which has already attended the missionary efforts of the Protestant Churches.

Hassell saw the only limitation as the lack of workers,

Speaking generally, we think we may safely say, that God has given success proportionate to the efforts put forth...With such results as these, it surely is not too much to expect that if the Christian Church increased its efforts an hundredfold, God would vouchsafe His blessing in the same proportion; and then we might hope to see India, China—yea, the whole world—completely evangelized. Why should this not be realized? Seventy years have only just passed away since the foundation of Missions, and in that period the standard of the cross has been erected, and Churches founded, in almost every country of the world; the Bible has been translated into the languages of nearly all people; multitudes have been induced to cast away their idols, and worship the living God; and all this has been accomplished in what may be regarded as only a sowing-time—a seed-time, moreover, which was preceded by a long winter of ploughing—countries invaded, savages tamed, languages learned and reduced to order, and the Bible translated. The plough having done its work, the seed having been scattered, it only remains that the labourers enter the fields which are even now ripening for the harvest (Hassell, 1866:7-8).

Pierson was probably well aware of the last words of veteran missionary Simeon A. Calhoun, who had served with the American Board in Syria and died in 1875: “It is my deep conviction, and I say it again and again, that if the Church of Christ were what she ought to be, twenty years would not pass till the story of the cross should be uttered in the ears of every living man” (*Missionary Tidings*, May 1893:1).

In 1876, F. F. Ellinwood, a Presbyterian missionary, published a book entitled *The Great Conquest*, which ended with the statement,

And this thought should never be forgotten, that all that human agency can do for *this generation* of the heathen world must be done by the Christians of to-day. Our children, however faithful in their time, cannot help the 1,200,000,000 of the perishing who pass their probation with us. Going to India and China, they will only tread the graves of those who have perished through our neglect. The *generation now living is our stewardship* (Ellinwood, 1876:184) [Italics his].

During the following year, in a prayer meeting at a Presbyterian church in Detroit, Pierson himself, then a young pastor, for the first time voiced before his congregation his con-

viction that the world could be completely evangelized in the present generation.

The Shanghai Conference

Perhaps some of Pierson's enthusiasm was fired by the Shanghai conference of May 1877, where 120 missionaries representing most of the denominations working in China met to discuss the evangelization of that land. They produced an appeal which read, "We want China emancipated from the thralldom of sin in this generation. It is possible. Our Lord has said, 'According to your faith be it unto you.' The church of God can do it, if she only be faithful to her great commission" (*China's Millions*, October 1877:121). They also wrote,

Christian brethren, we may take shame to ourselves that we have felt so little and done so little for the millions of China. If the meeting to-night shall be the means of laying China upon our hearts more than it has ever been before, it will not be in vain; and if there shall go forth from this conference upon Missions an entreaty—an appeal—to the whole Christian church to wake up to its high, and glorious, and greatest work—the spread of the gospel throughout all the world, it will not be in vain that this Conference has been held (*China's Millions*, October 1877:167).

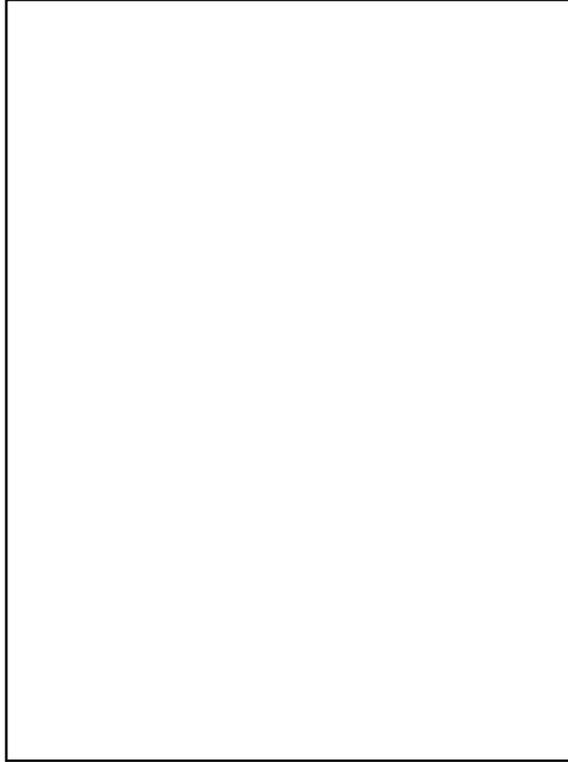
This document is particularly significant because, like the appeal from the Sandwich Islands, it reflected the faith of missionaries, not armchair strategists. Proponents of the speedy evangelization of the world were quick to point out that the concept was heavily supported by missionaries. They also pointed out that its most vigorous opponents were not!

In this colonial age, forces like the expansion of the British empire also fueled the belief in the possibility of the world being evangelized quickly.

An English preacher asked some British soldiers, "If Queen Victoria were to issue a proclamation, and placing it in the hands of her

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army and navy, were to say, 'Go into all the world, and proclaim it to every creature,' how long do you think it would take to do it?" One of



A. T. Pierson as he looked in 1878, a few years before his views on completing the task became widely known.

these men, accustomed to obeying orders without delay, and at peril of life, replied, "Well, I think we could manage it in about eighteen months" (quoted in *China's Millions*, January 1886).

If the Queen's word could spread this quickly, what could be said for the word of the King of the universe? This well-known vignette motivated many to deeper consecration to missions.

Wilder and the *Missionary Review*

In 1878 Royal G. Wilder, a veteran missionary to India, started the *Missionary Review*, a mission magazine intended to promote the idea of evangelizing the world in the present generation. In the opening issue, Wilder stated, “There has been a strange omission, for the most part, of all public discussion of the ways and means employed for evangelizing the world” (*Missionary Review*, January 1878:10). From the first issue the *Missionary Review* painted a realistic yet hopeful view of the missionary enterprise. Surrounded by so much pessimism in the Christian community following the Civil War, Wilder chose “Nil desperandum, Christo sub duce” (Nothing to be despaired of under Christ as leader) as a motto. Wilder’s first editorial was full of references of what could be done in a generation.

Wilder’s son, Robert, later documented his father’s influence in promoting the watchword, “The Evangelization of the World in This Generation.” “He believed in the Watchword, and that God’s plan was ‘that those of us living should do our utmost to carry the Gospel to those living then’” (Braisted, 1930:17). When Wilder was at Princeton in 1883-84, his father “impressed upon us the duty of seeking to evangelize the world in our generation” (Wilder, 1915:15). In a letter written to a colleague, Charles Ober, Robert Wilder wrote, “What later became the Watchword of the Movement, ‘The Evangelization of the World in this Generation,’ was frequently discussed in the Princeton group” (Ober, 1927:96). Thus Royal Wilder also synthesized earlier sentiments into a belief that the world could be evangelized in a single generation.

Proponents of the speedy evangelization of the world were quick to point out that the concept was heavily supported by missionaries.

Chapter 3

The Debate Begins (1881-1882)

All of these men’s ideas might have passed into history relatively unnoticed had not Wilder decided to publish Pierson’s ideas in 1881. The *Missionary Review* was only four years old but was already gaining popularity among people knowledgeable about missions. Pierson’s article, “Can the World Be Evangelized in Twenty Years?” came from many years of consideration and study. By 1881 his own idea of what could be done in the present generation was solidly conceived. Pierson’s article begins,

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Why not! These are days of giant enterprises in the interests of commerce, science, art and literature. Why not carry the spirit of sanctified enterprise into our religious life and work! I wish by voice and by the aid of the press to set forth a practicable business proposition, *namely that before the year 1900, the gospel shall be preached to every living soul!* (*Missionary Review*, November-December 1881:437) [Italics his].

Royal Wilder added his “amen” to the article by saying, “The above proposal is entirely feasible...The work may require more men and money than are here computed; but more can be furnished, and the church of God become all the richer for furnishing them” (*Missionary Review*, November-December 1881:439). Wilder also mentioned a similar plan set forth by Thomas D. Marshall of London “some years ago.” Evidently Marshall had also proposed

a special mission for the whole Heathen world. He wrote, “As by the good providence of God, doors are now opened for us into nearly every part of the earth, it is a question whether the time has come in which it would be practicable for some Christian men of statesmanlike and organizing capacity, to prepare a feasible plan for a *Special Evangelizing Mission to the whole Heathen World* (quoted in *Missionary Review*, November-December 1881:440) [Italics his].

Wilder praised the spirit behind Marshall’s plan but felt that the three years (!) it provided for were too short to effectively evangelize the world. Wilder concluded “Let this consecration of self, life and property, obtain in the praying, going and giving of believers, and this world’s evangelization in 20 years becomes practicable and easy” (*Missionary Review*, November-December 1881:441).

Pierson showed the practicality of his plan by calculating the number of workers that would be required to evangelize the world.

One hundred and eighteen millions belong to Protestant and Evangelical churches. If personally, or by proxy, every such believer should, during these twenty years, reach six souls with the gospel, the whole world would be evangelized. But suppose that only ten millions have real evangelical knowledge, faith and experience: let each of these during twenty years reach sixty new souls with the gospel, and the grand result is still reached. Think of it. We may take one in ten of the Protestant church-members, and bring the whole present population of the world to the knowledge of the gospel, if each one of that number shall in some way bring the gospel into contact with three souls who have not heard it each year for twenty years (*Baptist Missionary Magazine*, November 1881:381).

In January of 1882 responses began to pour in. Two such articles appeared in the *New York Evangelist* recognizing the feasibility of Dr. Pierson's proposal. The *Missionary Review* made reference to these in January 1882 and added that Dr. Angus (who gave the famous sermon in 1871) thought it would only take ten years to preach the gospel to every creature if there were 50,000 missionaries and \$75 million a year to support them. Wilder felt that this estimate was low, citing 100,000 missionaries and \$100 million a year as more realistic over a 20-year period. He then closed with the challenge:

Pierson asked, "Why not carry the spirit of sanctified enterprise into our religious life and work?"

Any live man, who will send us earnest words, aimed with point and purpose directly to the accomplishment of this work—the evangelizing of the world in 20 years—shall command our pages to any reasonable extent. It is the largest proposal, the mightiest and grandest, and holiest undertaking within the scope of human hearts and hands (*Missionary Review*, January 1882:43).

In 1882 D. L. Moody's brother-in-law also published Pierson's plea for the world to be evangelized "Within Twenty Years." Pierson urged the many readers of the *Evangelistic Record* that "by the year 1900, the Gospel shall be preached to every living soul. Of course, to evangelize is not always to convert; it is simply making known the Gospel" (quoted in Moody, 1970:349).

With the publishing of Pierson's paper the debate was underway. By the time the evangelization of the world by the year 1900 was no longer possible, thousands of pages in dozens of magazines and books would be published on the subject.

Chapter 4 The Meaning of Evangelization (1881-1882)

An early objection to A. T. Pierson's proposal was published in the *Presbyterian Monthly Record* in December of 1881:

Some writers speak of "evangelizing the world" in a few years. All Christians must desire to see the world converted at the earliest possible day; but a mistake may be easily made if the theory be adopted that this great change is to be made by simply announcing the gos-

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pel message... If the world is to be really converted, we must add to the idea of evangelizing that of making disciples of all nations, as our Lord's words teach us... This making disciples is not slight nor hasty work (*Presbyterian Monthly Record*, December 1881:416-417).

The *Missionary Review* picked up these words in March of 1882 and accentuated the difference between evangelizing and converting. In defense of evangelization as proclamation and witness, Rev. H. A. Nelson wrote, "No writer on this theme has ventured to calculate what time it will take to 'convert the world.' None of us assume that every inhabitant of any land will be spiritually renewed. Many may hear and refuse to accept the Gospel. But what we claim is that those who now have the Gospel and believe it, can make all men know of it within a calculable time—say twenty years—probably less" (*Missionary Review*, March 1882:95-96).

On this subject of which Pierson was to write much, he simply stated, "If the enterprise involved the absolute conversion of the whole world, it would indeed seem appalling, but 'to preach the Gospel to every creature' is neither appalling nor difficult" (*Missionary Review*, July 1882:251). Pierson felt that the preaching of the Gospel to every creature was the initial stage of fulfilling the Great Commission.

Under the title "What is Evangelization?," a writer explained why some people believed the gospel was to be brought to unevangelized peoples quickly:

Those who understand that "evangelize" means simply "to preach the gospel" are in haste to send the gospel messengers flying abroad "to every creature" as rapidly as possible. Heralds of salvation are to be sent at once into every portion of the earth yet without the gospel, that the world may be speedily "evangelized" in this sense; that is, may have the gospel preached, so that all who will hear may hear and be saved. It is presumed that they have this meaning in mind who speak of the world's "evangelization" as a thing to be speedily accomplished. To carry the gospel message to every part of the world not yet reached, within a few years, is a thing by no means impossible, and not even difficult when the strength and resources of the Christian Church of to-day are considered. In this view of the missionary work, methods are of little consequence: the great thing is to reach the "regions beyond" with the gospel as soon as possible (*Baptist Missionary Magazine*, November 1885:415-416).

The writer went on to explain that if evangelization meant more than preaching, then more time would be required to complete the job. Churches needed to be built up and

strengthened, schools needed to be established, governments needed to be reformed; in short, peoples needed to be *thoroughly converted*. This conversion process would be the work of centuries, not of a single generation.

The work of proclamation, on the other hand, required haste. Professor S. H. Kellogg wrote in to the *Missionary Review*,

God has foreordained the universal preaching of the Gospel as the absolutely necessary antecedent and condition of this glorious issue...It is clear as the sunlight that the Gospel 'must first be published among all nations.' To hasten this work, therefore, is to hasten the kingdom; to delay it is to delay the kingdom...Is not this sublime purpose of evangelizing the world within the present generation—suggested, I most truly and thankfully believe, by God the Holy Spirit—to be strengthened and encouraged in every way, till purpose shall take shape in action, and the close of the nineteenth century witness a sublime crusade of the united Church of Christ, which shall prepare the way for the speedy establishment on earth of the Kingdom of our Lord? (*Missionary Review*, March 1882:96-97).

Rev. G. H. C. Macgregor later wrote in *China's Millions*,

One of the best measures of the power of a king's word is the rapidity with which he can make it known to his people... The main business of a Christian's life is to make the Word of the Lord run and be glorified: *and the rate of running, and the measure in which the Word of GOD is glorified, are proportionate to the obedience of Christian disciples to this command of the LORD'S that they should be witnesses* (*China's Millions*, June 1896:71) [Italics his].

Missionaries were often the most well-aware of the haste needed to reach those presently alive. Eugene Stock of the Church Missionary Society, speaking at a meeting of the China Inland Mission, said, "If we are to serve 'our own generation,' there is no time to spare. Why, those who will be going into eternity between this quarter past nine o'clock and midnight, belong to this generation now! It is too late for you and me to reach them. There will be more going into eternity tomorrow. It is too late to reach *them*. Oh! let us lose no time in reaching those whom *we can* reach, whether at home or abroad" (*China's Millions*, March 1897:30) [Italics his].

In March of 1882, H. Grattan Guinness, editor of *Regions Beyond*, tried to further clarify the distinction between conversion and evangelization,

Eighteen hundred years of gospel preaching, and not one in ten of mankind as yet a Protestant Christian? At that rate all our efforts are

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futile, and eighteen thousand years at least must elapse before the world is converted! Such reasoning is false, such discouragement unfounded. We are not sent to convert the world, but to evangelise it.

The major implication of this definition of evangelization was the corresponding belief that the job could be speedily accomplished. Guinness felt that Scripture and the present opportunity pointed to this fact.

Nothing is clearer on the face of Scripture than that the sphere in which the redeeming grace of God operates among fallen men has increased and widened with each succeeding age, and is destined ultimately to embrace all mankind...Never was there greater obligation to do all we can to this end than now; never was there more evident certainty that in so doing we are working together with God. Never were facilities for reaching every part of the earth so great, never were volunteers for missionary service so numerous, or encouragements in it so abundant, and never before was the time in which to finish our appointed task so short, as now in 1882! God help us to be in earnest! (*Regions Beyond*, March 1882:385,387) [Italics his].

Guinness concluded that God commanded us to bring the gospel to every creature, implying that the task could be completed—no matter how daunting it might seem.

We must not let the immensity of the task paralyse us with discouragement. It is immense, but so are our resources... There is no doubt that the Protestant churches of England and America, of this last quarter of the nineteenth century, could give the gospel to the men of this generation, if they tried. And this only is our task; to evangelize the world, not to save it, is our responsibility. We are not called to aim at the impossible, we are not commanded to convert the world. We are told to evangelize it. This is a most important distinction, removing any sense of discouragement which might otherwise arise from the apparently insignificant results of missionary efforts (*Regions Beyond*, March 1883:224) [Italics his].

This entire article was reprinted in *The Illustrated Missionary News* in June of 1883, giving it a wider audience.

These attempts to explain the difference between evangelization and conversion helped to bring clarity to what Pierson meant by world evangelization. Because proclamation and witness in the regions beyond was central, said Pierson and his allies, the gospel was meant to go everywhere once before it went anywhere twice. Pierson wrote,

Some say that it is a very shallow thing this preaching the Gospel as a witness. They exclaim, "Why not thoroughly pervade all these na-

tions with the Gospel!” That is the thing to do, when we have first given the witness, but let us do one thing at a time. If we are to make a second proclamation, it is necessary to have a first proclamation, and this let us be eager to do (*China’s Millions*, 1890:111).

Chapter 5

Time and Evangelization (1882-1883)

In the March 16, 1882 issue of *The Gospel in All Lands* Eugene R. Smith commended Pierson’s view of history and salvation. “We are reminded that the past achievement is best viewed in its relation to the work to be done. So ought it to be. Forgetting the things that are behind, face the things that are before. The generation that now is, enters into the labors of that which is gone and going, with a vast accumulation of materials at its hand, a vantageground never before occupied by any body of Christian workers since the world began” (*The Gospel in All Lands*, March 16, 1882:121). Pierson saw continuity in the history of missions. He looked back to see how and where the gospel had spread, and he looked forward to the day when “the earth [would] be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”

Pierson’s “The Progress of Missions,” a lengthy article, was reprinted here as well. Pierson outlined the outstanding advances of missions in the previous eighty years and then, with optimism, took up the theme of the future. “I cannot resist the conclusion that the fulfillment of prophecy may be just before us...Whichever way we turn our eyes, the signs of the times are the sure tokens of a day dawn. We have passed the dull grey that is the first advance herald of the morning—even the purple and crimson tints that tell of the glory, hastening on; the east shews something more than dark clouds edged with gold—the sun of righteousness is rising on the world!” (*The Gospel in All Lands*, March 16, 1882:126-127).

According to Pierson, three things needed to take place for the evangelization of the world to be a reality. First, the *whole church* had to be involved in evangelization. Second, evangelistic zeal was needed in the lives of all believers. And lastly, a baptism of the power of the Holy Spirit was needed. Only then, was the goal realistic and reachable. Others concurred, “To do this work in twenty years, we must get more Gospel, more vitality...The church has money, brains, organizations, rivers of prayer and oceans of sermons, but she lacks

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in power” (*Missionary Review*, March 1882:132).

Yet some did not feel so confident that twenty years was an adequate length of time for the world to be evangelized. Referring to A. T. Pierson’s article, a writer in the *Reformed Missionary Herald* wrote, “Had he said 20 decades he would have been nearer the region of possibility. It took that long for Christianity to gain victory over the old Greek and Roman worlds” (Quoted in *Missionary Review*, May 1882:186). This quote reflected the continuing confusion over what was meant by the term *evangelization*.

In response, Royal Wilder emphasized the possibility of completing the Great Commission quickly: “Is there the slightest doubt of the *possibility* of evangelizing the world in 20 years if the church would concentrate her forces as intimated, and seek God’s help?” He further emphasized, “The question, we submit, is not what will be done, but what *ought*, and *can* be done” (*Missionary Review*, May 1882:187) [Italics his]. This is a key concept: both Wilder and Pierson always spoke of what *could* and *should* be done and never of what *would* be done. Nonetheless, they were accused of setting dates for the completion of the task in a prophetic manner.

The fact remained, however, that the church *did* have the resources to finish the job. Dr. William Butler wrote in *Zion’s Herald*, “It is a fact, and a wonderful fact it is, that we have reached an hour when the Christian church is strong enough and rich enough to save this whole world in a very few years, would she only realize her ability and put forth the requisite efforts to accomplish her duty” (Quoted in *Missionary Review*, May 1882:187).

Finally, Wilder clearly stated why it was unacceptable to believe that evangelization was a process meant to take centuries:

Those dear brethren who seem to think and argue that some minds are too ardent on this subject, that this work must be prosecuted for generations and centuries and ages yet to come, before we can expect its completion, overlook the fact that thousands of heathens have been fully enlightened and won to Christ within the current generation who never before heard a word of Gospel truth; that if a sufficient Christian force were enlisted the whole 800,000,000 of heathens might have been as thoroughly evangelized as these thousands, in the same period of time; that the life-time of one generation is all the time possible for evangelizing that generation; and the theory of occupying centuries in

evangelizing the world deliberately consigns the intervening, unreached generations of heathens to eternal heathendom without their knowing that Jesus died for them (*Missionary Review*, May 1882:188).

Alternate Plans

Several other articles appeared that offered alternate plans—some only requiring ten years. On April 27, 1882 an article appeared in the *Presbyterian Journal* entitled “Speedy Evangelization.” The writer set forth a plan whereby, “Let each Christian during ten years be the means of reaching fifty souls, or five new ones a year, and the work is done. The commission is fulfilled; our duty is done, and God will thus gather out of the Gentiles a people for his name. Acts xv. 14. The enterprise is practicable, and I do not doubt that men of the world would not fail to accomplish a similar enterprise if they saw gain enough in it. We can do it if we have a mind to do it” (Quoted in *Missionary Review*, July 1882:250). A. T. Pierson wrote, “Let it be fully known that the church of God to-day has ample means in men and money for the thorough evangelization of the whole world within ten years, without sacrificing any of the necessities or comforts of life, or crippling the work at home” (*Missionary Review*, July 1882:251). The *Christian Missionary* of the Disciples of Christ concurred, “Surely this is not an impossible task...More than eighteen hundred years have passed since Jesus said, ‘Go into all the world’; and why should the church wait a hundred years longer before inaugurating a work that will reach every nation, tribe and people?” (Quoted in *Missionary Review*, July 1882:251).

Problems

In this same issue of the *Missionary Review* Pierson outlined some of the particular problems associated with preaching the gospel to every creature in a single generation. First of all, a generation only lasts 30-33 years; that is all the time allotted for the job to be finished. Pierson used the end of the century as a goal because he counted from the beginning of his generation—from the late 1860’s—the years when the world began to really open up to the gospel. Secondly, in order to effectively feed the missions movement, the church had to hold its own in membership—it couldn’t decline over the period, but had to outstrip population growth. Thirdly, more converts needed to be made to keep pace with world population growth. Lastly, the church lacked spiritual power.

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Pierson continually turned to the lack of spiritual vitality in the church as a root cause of its inability to evangelize the world. The church needed evangelistic zeal and a baptism of power from the Holy Spirit to effectively evangelize the world by the year 1900. The *Missionary Review* also continued to emphasize this point. “The chief hindrances to this greatest, noblest, holiest enterprise among men are not the superstitions or depravity of the heathen, but the infidelity and mistakes of Christians” (*Missionary Review*, May 1885:258).

Arthington

At this stage a famous British missions advocate, Robert Arthington, wrote in. He agreed with both Dr. Nelson and Professor Kellogg “that we should at once, as evangelical Christians, proceed to apportion the entire globe as fields for evangelization” (*Missionary Review*, July 1882:255). Arthington went on to detail how this might work, underlining the feasibility of finishing the job in the present generation. Kellogg and Pierson responded positively to Arthington’s suggestions, corresponding with him frequently on his plans.

As a result of Arthington’s plan, the *Missionary Review* began to carry a special section on some portion of the unevangelized world, giving details of the progress of the gospel. The *Illustrated Missionary News* also took Arthington seriously and published an appeal in April 1883,

To Missionaries in Heathen Lands and All Who Possess the Knowledge, being strongly advised by Robert Arthington, Esq., of Leeds, we desire to ask for the following information.

1st. As to such tribes, peoples or lands to who or where the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ has never been preached.

2nd. Respecting all populations, consisting of ten or twenty thousand persons, in any part of the globe, who have not even one copy of the written or printed Word of God, or any single portion thereof (Illustrated Missionary News, April 2, 1883:38).

In January 1883, Rev. Charles Lee wrote an article outlining the unoccupied fields of the world. He then gave a historical sketch that showed that “Christianity has gained more in the last eighty years than in the previous eighteen centuries. This is a striking commentary on the boast of Voltaire that he uttered in 1760: ‘Ere the beginning of the nineteenth century Christianity will have disappeared from the earth’” (*Missionary Review*, January 1883:6).

After reviewing Lee’s sobering look at the unevangelized world, Wilder commented, “It is time that those of us

who hope and pray for this world's evangelization learn to look upon the work in its entirety; that we consider it in its full extent and difficulty; that we look heathenism in the face, despite all its horrors; that our look be steady and prolonged till we can fully fathom its depth and extent, and estimate rightly those forces needed to grapple with it and overcome it" (*Missionary Review*, January 1883:8).

More Statistics

In this same issue a brief report showed how the church needed to grow ten times faster to keep up with world population growth. "Surely this outlook is one to drive every Christian to God in earnest cries for help, while plying his own energies and efforts with tenfold effectiveness" (*Missionary Review*, January 1883:62).

In May of 1883, Wilder reported that Joseph Cook had advocated that the church should supply one missionary for every 50,000 heathen, or a total of 20,000 missionaries for the 1,000,000,000 unevangelized. Wilder commented,

Mr. Cook's number is altogether moderate. With a resolute purpose to evangelize the world in the present generation, his proposed number of Missionaries should be quintupled. A hundred thousand Missionaries is not a man too many for the work, nor are they too many for the Protestant Churches of Christendom to send out and support, till the world's evangelization shall be completed. Let Protestant Christendom take hold of this work with a will, as wealthy capitalists do with the work of building railways and ocean canals; let Christian young men and women obey Christ, and go, fired with love to Christ and souls, and let those who stay by the stuff pray and plan and work for this highest and holiest purpose in the scope of human effort, and 20 years will suffice to preach the Gospel to every creature (*Missionary Review*, May 1883:235).

Ambrose

In September of 1883 another important issue was raised—again in response to Pierson's assertion that the world could be speedily evangelized. This time a church leader named Ambrose wrote,

Over and against the project of hurrying up the conversion of the world, there stands an array of difficulties which it seems worth the while, at least, to look at. 'The whole earth can be covered with the Gospel proclamation in twenty five years,' say the ardent and the sanguine. Perhaps it can. But to preach is one thing, and to convert is another thing. After pondering awhile, I find myself asking the question, If anything is to be certainly gained by haste in the matter of Gospel-

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ling the world? I mean to ask if some *time* is not truly a necessity of Missionary progress as a supply of instrumentalities? (Quoted in *Missionary Review*, September 1883:335).

Pierson continually turned to the lack of spiritual vitality in the church as a root cause of its inability to evangelize the world.

Wilder gave an unusually harsh commentary on Ambrose's thoughts—dealing with both the meaning of evangelization and the time required to complete it.

We knew this sacred work was being hindered by such sentiments in Christendom, but we did not think any pastor would avow them—least of all “Ambrose,” many of whose sententious utterances we have long admired...“Is anything certainly to be gained by haste?” etc., says “Ambrose.” Most assuredly. If the living generation of heathens are to have the Gospel, there is not a moment to lose...The great hindrance to the world's evangelization hitherto, has been this lack of definite aim and fixed purpose to do the work. Men, like Ambrose, prefer to look at the work and its difficulties in the misty distance rather than to grapple with them near at hand and in dead earnest. They prefer to say, “God only can convert souls,” and wait for Him to convert; rather than to say and feel, “To preach the Gospel to every creature, as Christ commanded, *is wholly in man's power, and this must and shall be done*” (*Missionary Review*, September 1883:335-336) [Italics his].

Besides haste, hope was an essential element of the church's responsibility to finish the task. Dr. S. F. Smith wrote, “I seem to see the work of reducing the whole world to the sway of Christ, no more a thing of anticipation, but of actual fulfillment...Men do not like to embark in an enterprise which may prove to be a forlorn hope and end in disappointment. The enterprise of missions to the heathen is one enterprise of earth, which is sure not to end in disappointment” (*Baptist Missionary Magazine*, Oct. 1883:348).

Chapter 6 **Missionaries and Evangelization (1883-1885)**

At this critical point in the debate, missionaries began writing in from the field to say that evangelization in their countries was possible in a short amount of time.

George King of the China Inland Mission added fuel to the fire by asking the question, “Shall the Gospel Be Preached to This Generation of the Chinese?” This document was sent to *The Christian* for publication and was printed in *Regions*

Beyond in May 1883. Hudson Taylor also printed it in the January issue of *China's Millions*:

The Gospel preached to *this* generation? Then there is not much time to lose if *that* is to be done. "The King's business requireth haste." ... Preach the Gospel to this generation? Yes, dear friends, it is neither impracticable nor impossible... Now the first step is a thorough and general stirring up of believers, so that the great duty of the Church to disciple all nations may be recognized as *the* burning question of the day. We may be sure GOD never intended that a mere sprinkling of earnest souls—a few here and a few there—should be the only ones possessed by an intense longing for the salvation of the heathen (*China's Millions*, January 1884:2-3).

Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission were constantly raising the possibility of the speedy evangelization of China. Taylor had provided much of the initiative in the Shanghai conference in 1877. Here his promotion of George King's ideas kept one all-important factor in the forefront: If missionaries on the field believed the world could be evangelized quickly, who could doubt its validity? This kind of thinking also inspired missionaries in other fields to believe the same.

Pierson used historical models of missions to challenge the church. Taking the Moravians as an example, in *The Gospel in All Lands*, January 1884, Pierson asked the question, "What Hinders the World's Speedy Evangelization?"

It has been often and clearly shown to be mathematically possible, and practically feasible, to preach the gospel to every creature now living, within twenty-five years! The Moravians give one in fifty-eight of their numbers to the missionary work, and their converts number four times as many as their own Brotherhood. What if all the Protestant Evangelical Christians did the same! We should have two million missionaries, enough to gather all the heathen under easy supervision, giving only a few hundred to each missionary; and if the converts should ever bear the same proportion to the laborers, as with the Moravian missionaries, there would be over 464,000,000! (*The Gospel in All Lands*, January 1884).

Also in 1884, Pierson's article "God's Hand in Missions" was published as a foreword to a reprint of David Brainerd's memoirs. Here Pierson eloquently affirmed that the time had come for the world to be evangelized.

The fullness of the times has surely come for the last great crusade against the powers of darkness. Everything is providentially ripe and

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ready. Nearly fourscore missionary societies enclose the globe in their golden network. The walls of the nations lie flat, and challenge us to move from every quarter, and move together and at once, and take the very capitals and centers of Satan's dominion. The word of God may be had in every leading tongue, and the miracle of Babel is reversed, and the miracle of Pentecost crystallizes into permanence! The coffers of disciples contain wealth so vast that a tithe of it would furnish all the funds for a world's evangelization; and the numbers of disciples are so vast that a tithe of them would give one missionary to every one hundred of the population of the globe! Time and space are practically annihilated and all nations are neighbors. And in addition to all, from out the shining pillar of a luminous and leading Providence rings out the trumpet voice of God, bidding us "go forward!" (Sherwood, 1884:lxix-lxxx).

The *Regions Beyond* continued to provide food for thought on this subject.

The question is really this. Is it the will and purpose of God, that one race of men should be evangelized ten thousand times over, and another never once hear the glad tidings? or is it His will and purpose that all nations should receive the good news of forgiveness of sins and eternal life through Christ?... It is of the very essence of Christianity to extend itself till it has embraced the world, and it ceases to be pure and powerful in proportion as it ceases to expand... We need to realize more than we do the breadth, the width, the all-embracing character of our blessed faith—its *missionary* nature. There is nothing narrow or limited or even bounded at all, save by the limits of humanity, about it. It is not local to any land, special to any family of the race, but wide as the world, universal, eternal!" (*Regions Beyond*, January 1884:18).

Looking back to the Old Testament, missionaries found encouragement that, if they took their job seriously, their task could be completed by the year 1900.

If about 2,400 years ago two separate messages from Ahasuerus, King of the Medes and Persians, could be translated into various languages, written and delivered, at different times, in 127 provinces, and both messages delivered in one year (see the book of Esther), how long ought it to take Christians now to obey the command of their King, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords, to translate, print and deliver to every creature in all the world his one message? (From *The Christian* quoted in *Baptist Missionary Magazine*, February 1885:50).

National Christians also caught the vision for evangelizing their countries—believing that it could be completed in a short amount of time. "The Japanese Christians are praying and working that their country may be wholly Christian by the

year 1900” (*Baptist Missionary Magazine*, February 1885:51).

Chapter 7

The Northfield Meeting (1885)

On February 4th, 1885 a large crowd filled Exeter Hall in London to hear the testimony of seven young Cambridge graduates who explained why they were leaving for China the next day as missionaries. These seven young men represented the cream of the crop in athletics and education. The fact that they were leaving their bright futures for a “hopeless” task in China shook the foundations of the nation. These seven had not simply disappeared after their decisions but traveled widely in the British Isles with their message of consecration and mission.

One of these seven was Charles T. Studd, a famous cricketeer. Though beginning his career in China under Hudson Taylor, he would eventually go on to start the World-Wide Evangelization Crusade, a mission whose object was “the evangelization of every part of the unevangelized world in the shortest possible time” (Grubb, 1933:239). His brother, J. E. K. Studd, took the fervor of the Cambridge Seven with him to America in the summer of 1885.

D. L. Moody considered no person under thirty with as much respect as J. E. K. Studd, who was “of fine ability and promise, and very popular with the gentry, an out-and-out Christian” (Pollock, 1983:275). Moody invited Studd to Northfield, Massachusetts for his monthly summer Bible camp. August 11th was set aside as a special day of prayer for missions. A. T. Pierson, who was also a close friend of Moody, gave the main address to a crowd of about a thousand. Pierson urged his listeners to believe the world could be evangelized by the year 1900 and suggested a special conference be held in a major city to divide up the world for evangelization.

Moody jumped to his feet in agreement and set up a committee to draft a document with these concepts. Three days later the committee presented the document, which was promptly endorsed by the conference and signed by the authors. “An Appeal to Disciples Everywhere” declared, “If but ten millions, out of four hundred millions of nominal Christians, would undertake such systematic labor as that each one

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of that number should, in the course of the next fifteen years, reach one hundred other souls with the gospel message, the whole present population of the globe would have heard the good tidings by the year 1900!" (Pierson, 1886:367).

Endorsing the idea of an ecumenical council, the committee wrote,

If at some great centre like London or New York, a great council of evangelical believers could meet, to consider the wonder-working of God's providence and grace in mission fields, and how fields now unoccupied may be insured from further neglect, and to arrange and adjust the work so as to prevent needless waste and friction among workmen, it might greatly further the glorious object of a world's evangelization; and we earnestly commend the suggestion to the prayerful consideration of the various bodies of Christian believers, and the various missionary organizations. What a spectacle it would present both to angels and men, could believers of every name, forgetting all things in which they differ, meet, by chosen representatives, to enter systematically and harmoniously upon the work of sending forth laborers into every part of the world-field (Pierson, 1886:368-369).

Moody had strongly supported foreign missions before this meeting, but the significance of his involvement in this particular plan cannot be understated. Two years later a famous missionary to Syria, Dr. Henry Harris Jessup, wrote, "For years I have been waiting to hear Brother Moody's voice on this great subject of Foreign Missions, and now that he has thrown his heart and help and voice into the work, the Lord has granted a rich blessing. Your plan of apportioning out the unevangelized world among the Christian churches is a grand one" (*Missionary Review*, January 1888:49).

"An Appeal" was a significant document that was reprinted in many publications in the year following its first appearance. *China's Millions*, the official organ of the China Inland Mission, featured it on the cover of its December 1885 issue with the following comments: "The following appeal is a cause for praise to God, and yet a very solemn message to every believing reader. Will the Master say of each of us that we have done what we could—all we could to carry out his parting command to preach the Gospel to every creature?" (*China's Millions*, December 1885:147).

Part of "An Appeal" was reprinted in *The Gospel in All Lands*, December 1885, with these comments, "There ought to be enough of spirituality in the different branches of the Church of Christ to produce harmony in the efforts being made to evangelize the heathen world...The great need of urg-

ing forward at once the army of Christ in its contest with heathendom, ought to overshadow all minor considerations, and we welcome any plan which will the more speedily bring about the desired result” (p. 517). The *Missionary Review* also published the appeal in its January 1886 issue.

More support came from *The Gospel in All Lands* in 1886. “We are in hearty sympathy with the plan proposed by Dr. Pierson, of Philadelphia, Mr. Robert Arthington, of Leeds, England, and others, of ‘mapping out the whole world in portions, in its heathen parts, and allotting it amongst all missionary societies’” (*The Gospel in All Lands*, 1886:228).

The Presbytery of Philadelphia also lent its support. In response to a letter from Pierson entitled “The Problem of Missions and Its Solution,” they wrote, “We fully agree with him that we ought not readily to acquiesce in the slow progress which Christ’s kingdom is making; that we ought to be far more impatient than we are for the coming of the day of promise and prophecy, when the whole world shall be filled with a knowledge of the glory of God” (*The Gospel in All Lands*, 1886:228).

Dividing up the World

Before the Appeal had been published some writers had already pointed out the strategic importance of an ecumenical conference to divide up the world for evangelization. The August 18, 1884 issue of the *Missionary Review* contained an article by a Dr. McDonald from Maryville, Tennessee, who suggested that the reason the world had not been evangelized

...is because we have never attempted to carry out our marching orders in their entirety...Christendom has in an unsystematic way attempted to go into *parts* of the world, and to preach the gospel to *some* creatures but I have never heard of Christendom, or a part of it, in Council or Evangelical Alliance, taking a map of the world and laying it out before God and themselves, divide the world-field into sections, apportioning to each country or denomination their particular division and then entering on the work with the intention and determination that it shall be prosecuted vigorously and ceaselessly until ‘every creature’ shall have heard the Good News, instead of waiting until opportunities offer (Quoted in *Missionary Review*, January 1885:13-14).

Wilder concurred, “Any enterprise undertaken by men must be studied and grasped in its entirety, or it will never be achieved” (*Missionary Review*, January 1885:14). He also agreed that a council was needed to divide up the world for the purpose of preaching the Gospel to every creature.

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Even as the Appeal was published in circulars all across the country, Pierson published his “Plan to Evangelize the World” in the September 1885 issue of the *Missionary Review*. Here are some key extracts from that plan:

After twenty years of almost constant thought, study and prayer over this missionary problem, I ask my brethren to consider the entire feasibility of the following measures: First, an ecumenical council, called in some of the great world centers, like London, New York...Let the representatives of every missionary field and work of the world be present... rehearse all that God has done with them, and how he has opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. Then let the whole world-field be mapped out, and divided and distributed among the evangelical denominations of Christendom, so that every province and district shall be under competent and responsible care...let the great purpose and motto be, *occupation* of destitute fields and *evangelization*, where, as yet, no missions have reached...But above all, let no field be left unprovided for in all the world (*Missionary Review*, September 1885:369-370) [Italics his].

Shortly after this, Rev. J. M. Driver of the Methodist Episcopal Church stated similar views in a lengthy article published in *Zion's Herald*. Concurring with Pierson, he added that the outcome of a world council would be the “speedy occupation of *every field*.” He added that “being all together ‘with one accord’ as touching plans and purposes, and agreeing ‘as touching’ one point, the Lord would mightily baptize His church as He did aforetime, and nations would be born in a day, that being the burden of the hourly prayer of God’s people” (Quoted in *Missionary Review*, November 1885, 465-466) [Italics his]. Wilder added that the council should not require a large investment of funds for itself but that all interested parties should pay their own way. The council should not attempt to do anything by authority but “the plans proposed will enforce themselves by their own weight and worth.” He continued,

Hence we suggest, that Bros. Pierson and Driver, and others like-minded among the leaders of the different evangelical churches, bend their minds and energies at once to the drafting and perfecting of such a programme of plans and apportionments as shall command the consensus of Christendom. As preliminary to the gathering of any such council, such a programme should be placed before all Christian minds, have the benefit of fullest discussions and suggestions, and the most reliable information from all mission fields, and from all parts of the unevangelized world (*Missionary Review*, November 1885:468).

Chapter 8

The Crisis of Missions (1886)

A book was published in 1886 that added considerable fuel to the debate. Pierson's *The Crisis of Missions* described both the opportunity and the responsibility associated with the end of the nineteenth century in relation to preaching the gospel to every creature. Toward that goal, the book repeated the call for an international conference of mission agencies in which the unevangelized world would be divided up between agencies. Pierson declared,

The crisis of missions is now upon us. What is a crisis? It is the parting of the way, where opportunity and responsibility meet; where the chance of a grand success stands opposed to the risk of awful failure. We call this THE CRISIS; for never, in the whole history of missions, have such opportunity and such peril confronted the Church of God, and entailed such fearful responsibility (*The Gospel in All Lands*, 1886:516).

Pierson had stressed the theme of opportunity again and again over the years in the *Missionary Review* and other mission periodicals, and now he took the theme even further. "These two classes of facts, then, will command our attention: the providential opening of doors, and removal or subsidence of obstacles and barriers; and the gracious manifestations of transforming power in individuals and communities in heathen lands abroad, and of reforming power in our church life at home" (Pierson, 1886:15). The opportunity consisted of the opening of the world, the revivals in the churches, the advances in technology, and a host of other factors that pointed to a world that could be speedily evangelized.

Most missionaries and mission executives agreed with Pierson on the opportunity facing the church. Bishop Thoburn of India expressed it like this:

During the comparatively short period which has elapsed since I became a missionary obstacles of various kinds have been taken out of the way, until now I can look abroad and see a way of easy access to seven hundred millions of the human race, all of whom would have been beyond my reach had I desired to go to them in the days of my youth. And this process is still going on. High walls are falling into ruins at the quiet approach of Christ's messengers; remote regions are coming nearer; hostile people are becoming friendly; prejudices are melting away, and thus the opportunities set before us make it possible

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to accomplish things which would have been considered wholly impossible even as late as the middle of the present century (Thoburn, 1895:57-58).

Secondly, *The Crisis of Missions* emphasized the responsibility that came with the opportunity. What would the church do in light of all the doors that God was opening? A heavy responsibility accompanied this opportunity, and the church would be strictly judged if she failed to respond.

The command of our ascended Lord, the voice of an enlightened conscience, the impulse of the new nature, the leading of the providential pillar, the working of transforming grace, the grandeur of the opportunity and the peril of delay—all these converge like rays in one burning focus, urging us onward and forward to the outposts of civilization and the limits of human habitation with the Word of Life (*The Gospel in All Lands*, 1887:325).

This responsibility was unlike that given to earlier generations. Reginald Radcliffe, speaking at an annual meeting of the China Inland Mission, put it this way,

We are to redeem the time. We are to appreciate the responsibilities of the day in which we live. The responsibilities of our fathers were not like our responsibilities. They were born, I repeat, into a world locked against the gospel. Now we are living in a world thrown open to the Gospel, and we are now to redeem the time, and seize our opportunity (Broomhall, 1887:73).

Mrs. H. Grattan Guinness, founder of the East London Institute for Home and Foreign Missions, wrote,

True Christians were never so numerous in the world as they are this day, and it is easier for them to travel and dwell among the heathen in every corner of the earth than ever it was before. The printed gospel exists in hundreds of languages, and the Church has never been so rich in material resources. There is no question that living Christians *could give the gospel to their own generation if they tried*. The demand for labourers is enormous, but the supply is equal to meet it, if every man and woman who *could* and should be a missionary would become such (Guinness, 1886:246) [Italics hers].

Many held the conviction that the church was disobedient to the Great Commission and was thereby delaying the evangelization of the world. Dr. Judson Smith gave an address to the American Board in which he asked,

What hinders the immediate effort to plant the Gospel in every na-

tion and island and home in all earth within the next few decades? Nothing but the faltering zeal and purpose of the mass of Christian believers now on the earth. That precisely is the critical question. Are we, the Christians of to-day, awake to these facts and responsive to the claims of this glorious work? Do we understand that his vast responsibility rests upon us? That it is possible now as never before in the world's history, to preach the Gospel to all nations? And do we mean, God helping, that his work shall be done ere we die? This is the deep significance of the hour to this generation. We—the Christian people of this land—we are on trial; the reality and power of our Christian faith are put sharply to the test. Favored beyond all past generations in our opportunities to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth, are we equal to our privileges? (*The Gospel in All Lands*, 1887:505).

Dr. Josiah Strong, General Secretary of the Evangelical Alliance in the United States, wrote in 1885,

We have seen that there is no lack of wealth; there is money enough in the hands of church-members to sow every acre of the earth with the seed of truth; but the average Christian deems himself a despot over his purse. God has intrusted to His children power enough to give the gospel to every creature by the close of this century; but it is being misapplied. Indeed, the world would have been evangelized long ago if Christians had perceived the relations of money to the Kingdom, and accepted their stewardship (Strong, 1885:203).

“An Appeal to Disciples Everywhere” appeared as an appendix in *The Crisis of Missions*. With the opportunity and responsibility thoroughly explained, “An Appeal” offered practical suggestions on how the church might respond to the challenge posed by the book.

The Crisis of Missions was very well accepted and received stirring reviews in practically every missionary periodical. The *Illustrated Missionary News* said, “This book is worthy of attentive perusal by all thoughtful Christians, being carefully written by one who has the subject deeply at heart, and whose scholarly pen arrays his arguments and facts so that the mind may not be wearied while taking the deep import of the matters discussed” (*Illustrated Missionary News*, January 1887:15).

Arthington's Resolution

On February 11, 1886, Robert Arthington of Leeds, who made regular contributions to the *Missionary Review* and other mission periodicals, put forth a resolution at a meeting of the Church Missionary Society. The resolution, promoting some of the same ideas as *The Crisis of Missions*, read as follows:

*Supporting
the proposal
for an ecumenical
council
to apportion
responsibility
for world
evangelization
, Wilder de-
clared, “Any
enterprise
undertaken
by men must
be studied
and grasped
in its entirety
or it will never
be*

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This meeting, deeply sensible that far greater missionary effort is needed in order to fulfil the parting command of Christ to his disciples, resolves that the time has come to map out the whole world in portions, in its heathen parts, and allot it amongst all missionary societies—whose aim it is to give a whole Bible to a whole people—thus enlarging the fields already occupied, and giving new spheres to each society, so as to cover the entire globe. And further it is resolved—that a request be sent from this meeting to the Committee of the society originating these conferences, asking that they will confer with the various missionary societies in Europe and America—with the view thus to map out the world and devise by mutual suggestion, a plan for general adoption (*Missionary Review*, May 1886:194).

Pierson, upon receiving Arthington's resolution, suggested that this should be carried out by 1992, the 100th anniversary of the Baptist Missionary Society. Dr. Driver, who also put forth plans to evangelize the world, concurred as well.

In October of 1886, Arthington wrote a letter to all the missionary societies of Europe and America, pleading with them to "lose no time" in dividing up the world for the preaching of the gospel. His letter began, "It may be assumed that all real Christians would rejoice in heart if every living person was a Christian indeed. But do we indeed expect that more than a few comparatively, in any one locality, will ever be real Christians? Look to the Scriptures and to secular history for the answer. Of course, as seen at the last, the saved are an innumerable multitude, coming out of every nation and tribe" (*Missionary Review*, January 1887:18).

—Arthington continued by suggesting that if the world were divided up, success would be sure—nothing would be lost by trying. He then made specific suggestions of how this might be done, making reference to continents and societies. "Thus a great advance could be taken by missionary Societies all over the world, and the Gospel message far more extensively diffused and accepted,—for the saved in the vision were gathered,—they *came out of every kindred and nation, tongue and people*" (*Missionary Review*, January 1887:19) [Italics his].

The spirit of these documents was once again affirmed in other sources. The editor of the *Baptist Missionary Magazine* wrote, "Where is the man so faint-hearted as to doubt the future of an accomplished work like this? Where is the Christian, who, if the Lord were to put the decision of the whole matter into his hand, would say aught but that this work must go on till prophecy be accomplished, and the earth be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea? The

great danger and anxiety for all Christian hearts today is, lest we may awake to the finished triumph of this glorious work, in this world or the hereafter, and find that it has gone on by us, beyond us, and without us" (*Baptist Missionary Magazine*, December 1886:446-447).

This time, Arthington was heard. In 1887, in response to his urging, a Missionary Intelligence and Registration Office was set up in London for the express purpose of keeping track of occupied mission fields in order to better ascertain where new efforts were needed. Royal Wilder encouraged his readers to pray that such an office would be set up in the United States, without tapping into current mission funds.

The Crisis of Missions highlighted the twin themes of opportunity and responsibility.

Hope and Success

Hope seemed to be an essential element of such a plan. "Men always work better when they are assured of the possibility and even certainty of success. Listlessness and indifference are the offspring of despair. Men will not long continue to labour at hopeless tasks, and a new spirit of enterprise would fill the hearts of us all, if our minds were to grow assured, not only of the ultimate, but of the near approach of the triumph of our Holy Faith" (*The Chronicle*, November 1886:458).

Certainty of success was another prominent feature of the discussions of the day. "It is a work in which there is certainty of success. Whatever our views of the second Advent, whether it is to be before or after the millenium, we are made absolutely certain by the word of God, that the whole earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord, that all nations shall serve him" (*The Missions of the World*, March 1894:3).

Others were not so hopeful about what might be accomplished. Although he emphasized that the task of world evangelization could be finished, Dr. D. M. Welton wrote that a review of the history of missions in the previous fifty years suggested that "we have reason to believe that in another hundred years, or about the year 2000, the whole world will be thoroughly evangelized" (*Missionary Review*, March 1887:165).

The Rev. Joseph Edkins preached a sermon in Peking, China in June of 1888 entitled, "Final Success of Christianity as seen From a Missionary Standpoint." He said, "Next century, therefore, we may expect to see the work of the Church ten-fold. It is not utopian to believe that those sums now devoted to mission work are small compared with what will be devoted to this purpose next century. The work of conversion

will then advance with accelerated speed. Thus the attitude of the Church now favors the probability of the ultimate victory of Christianity" (*The Gospel in All Lands*, 1888:453).

Chapter 9 **The Role of the Student Volunteers (1886-1900)**

In 1886, at Mount Hermon, Massachusetts, a few miles from the Northfield campus, 251 students gathered to study the Bible. Moody had half-reluctantly agreed to host this conference, but by the middle of the time he was convinced of its value. Moody felt that A. T. Pierson should speak on missions. Pierson gave his "crisis of missions" talk and then told these students that "all should go and go to all." One hundred signed a pledge saying that they would become foreign missionaries if God permitted. Within a few years this small band grew into a mighty army, so that by their first quadrennial convention there were over 5000 signers of the pledge. This band, known as the Student Volunteer Movement (SVM), adopted as their motto, "The Evangelization of the World in This Generation." One would get the impression that these students would get behind the drive to evangelize the world by the year 1900. But this was not so.

A. T. Pierson believed that the world could be evangelized in a single generation—the generation of the late 1860's-1900 in particular. But the SVM leaders represented a generation that would extend well into the twentieth century, and it was obvious that many students would not even reach the field by the year 1900. This may have discouraged them from joining the older generation in their crusade.

Though the student volunteers believed in the evangelization of the world in a generation, the crucial question was "When did a generation begin?" John R. Mott, who led the Movement for many years, expressed this dilemma well in an address he gave in Victoria, Australia in 1898. He said, "Is there a starting point in time of the 33 years? If there is, then later movements have a less and shorter chance of fulfilling it than earlier movements. If there is no definite time limit then it is unmeaning and means no more than, as one man put it, the 'Back in 10 minutes' card left on one's door" (Mott papers, Yale Divinity School Library).

John C. Pollock, in his biography of D. L. Moody, described the attitude of the young volunteers in this way:

If the evangelization of the world by 1900 (the date suggested in the Northfield Appeal) had slipped from the church's grasp, the volunteers of the nineties believed it to be truly possible in their generation that, by the time they were old (in the 1940s or early 1950s), the gospel should have been presented to every soul in the world, by Westerners to nationals and nationals to their own folk, in such a manner that, in [Robert] Wilder's words, "the responsibility for what is done with it shall no longer rest upon the Christian church, or any individual Christian but shall rest on each man's head for himself" (Pollock, 1983:283).

Alexander McLeish, in his book *Jesus Christ and World Evangelization*, gave a recap of the views expressed by the leaders of the SVM:

[The words, "in this generation"] do not imply a prediction, nor do they set a time limit to the purposes of God, but they seek rather to express the conception under which the work has to be done. They set a time limit to the worker rather than to the work, and define the horizon of his outlook. "In this generation," in short, is a time idea when applied to the work; a time limit when applied to the worker. This is pre-eminently an ideal for the worker, for it sums up his responsibility and duty from the viewpoint of the faith of Jesus Himself, and he is called to work, not under the conception that he is merely touching the fringe of a task which centuries will see still unfinished, but with the assurance that he will himself see the work completed. It is the prophetic outlook, and it shuts out all thought of the distant future. It seeks to concentrate all resources, both material and spiritual, upon the accomplishment of the work within the limits of a single generation (McLeish, 1930:140).

This Generation

Nonetheless, the Student Volunteers, when trying to press the urgency of the task, pointed to Simeon Calhoun's dying words, the Earl of Shaftesbury's famous quote, and the desire of the Shanghai conference of 1877 to reach their generation. All of these words pointed to finishing the job by the year 1900, but the Volunteers looked to them primarily for inspiration to reach *their* generation.

This letter from the SVM leaders appeared in the *Missionary Review* in November 1887,

Some give a discouraging report of the land to be possessed. But "Let us go up AT ONCE and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it." Shall the world be evangelized in our life-time? Is the idea

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tual sugges-
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adoption."*

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chimerical? The Earl of Shaftsbury said, "During the latter part of these centuries, it has been in the power of those who hold the truth... to evangelize the globe fifty times over." One hundred and twenty of the missionaries in China, representatives of twenty-one Protestant missionary societies, say, "We want China emancipated from sin *in this generation*. It is possible. Our Lord has said 'according to your faith be it unto you.' The church of God *can do it*." The Israelites took forty years for an eleven days' journey. Is the sin to be repeated? (*Missionary Review*, November 1887:668).

Thus they *were* inspired by all the excitement generated by their elders. They wrote, sounding a great deal like Pierson, "Though in some generations the carrying out of such an enterprise might have seemed like a march up to the Red Sea with the command to cross, it is not so in this. Every door is wide open, all peoples can be reached, all mission boards are calling for more men" (*Missionary Review*, July 1889:517).

Like those mission leaders who looked at the task and tried to determine how many workers were needed to finish the job of world evangelization, John R. Mott spoke of the need for 20,000 laborers to evangelize the world in his generation. That would give one missionary for every 50,000 of the unevangelized. Interestingly enough, this was very close to what the SVM would eventually thrust into the field!

The responsibility for their generation would be brought home to them time and time again over the years. Reporting on the Northfield meeting of SVM leaders in June of 1890, Max Moorhead wrote, "Scarcely a speaker during the ten days which followed failed to recognize the fact that personal responsibility in regard to the evangelization of this blood-bought world was the problem uppermost in the minds of the majority of the men present... One of the most vigorous and stirring addresses ever heard in Northfield was ...by A. T. Pierson. With great earnestness and power he bore in upon the hearts of men his own deep conviction that *the world can be evangelized in this generation*" (*Missionary Review*, September 1890:685) [Italics his]. In that address, Pierson tried to tie the end of the century into the students' plans for their generation.

At the end of the nineteenth century we have covered only a tenth of the earth. What is the matter? We have not enough enterprise. Let there be secular spirit, secular capital and secular gain back of it, and the gospel would be brought to the knowledge of everyone in ten years. If God should touch the hearts of the young generation, who have not family, business or any other ties yet, we would give the gos-

pel to the entire world before the end of the century (Norton, 1889:242).

Pierson then went on to cite the illustration of King Ahasuerus' decrees as recorded in the book of Esther, and concluded, "What reason is there why thirty million Christians should not carry this gospel to thirteen times as large a territory in thirteen times as many months? With no vain and unintelligent enthusiasm, I suggest that the young men of this generation rise in their might and solemnly covenant with God that, while they live, they will see the gospel carried to every inhabitant" (Norton, 1889:243).

Yet there were many who criticized the Student Volunteers and all others who suggested that the world could be evangelized in a single generation. "They objected that this ideal of missionary enterprise set a time limit to the purposes of God; that it contemplated a method of evangelization quite alien to that shown in history; that the method indicated implied a lack of thoroughness in the work to be done; and that, if it gave a more hopeful outlook on the world, it was because it tended to overlook or to minimize the difficulties rather than to do anything to multiply means" (McLeish, 1930:132).

The Students' Contribution

John Nevius, a missionary to China, credited the student volunteers with an increased awareness of missions in the churches: "It is due largely to the influence of the volunteers that the attention of the Church, and especially of young men and women, has been roused to consider the prominence given to missions in the Bible, and to understand more fully the responsibility resting upon all Christians of giving the Gospel without delay to unevangelized nations" (*Missionary Review*, May 1892:337).

Early on in the movement, there were those who saw these Student Volunteers as the answer to the evangelization of the world by 1900.

The wonderful wave of missionary zeal which has swept through our American colleges during the last eighteen months has moved about 1800 young men and 600 young women to offer their lives in service to Christ as foreign missionaries. If all these could be sent out and supported in the field as rapidly as their education may be complete, the next ten years would witness a missionary advance and success such as has never been known (*Missionary Review*, July 1888:531).

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Some saw the simultaneous uprising of youth in the Student Volunteer Movement, Christian Endeavor and the YMCA as providential. “Thousands of young missionaries going into all the world to preach the Gospel to every creature; and thousands of Christian Endeavor societies, in all parts of the world, with millions of members, ready to encourage, give, pray, and aid in every way—what does it mean? Is God at the same time raising up the commissioners for this chief work, and the constituency that is to send and support them?” (*Missionary Review*, July 1893).

Some workers did go out in haste: “Notwithstanding contrary statements, there are positive and encouraging facts to prove that the more and more fully each year the movement is realizing its supreme purpose—viz., the hastening forth of volunteers to accomplish the evangelization of the world in this generation. More volunteers sailed during the two years following the Cleveland Convention of 1891 than during the preceding five years” (*Missionary Review*, December 1893:929).

Others believed in haste but felt that the volunteers would impact the next generation, not the one ending by the end of the century. “And the spirit of God has so moved upon the young people in the Church of God in this land, that as a class of Christians they say to-day to the Church of God, ‘We are ready to go. We are eager to try within this next generation to fulfill the glorious command of Christ and “make disciples of all nations”’” (*Missionary Review*, January 1892:16). In October of 1892 a special day of prayer was held all across the United States to ask for volunteers who had completed their schooling to depart for the field immediately to meet the crisis and opportunity of the unevangelized fields.

*SVM leaders
never got be-
hind the drive
to evangelize
the world
by 1900.*

Less than a year after the Mount Hermon meeting, A. T. Pierson was defending the Student Volunteer Movement, seeing it as the catalyst the church might need to wake up from its slumber. He wrote,

Perhaps it is His will to produce such an army of volunteers to knock at the gates of the Church and say, ‘Here we are! Send us!’ that the Church, long apathetic and lethargic, shall wake up to the fact that her present agencies and instrumentalities are inadequate; that her present gifts are disgracefully disproportionate to the needs of the work and the destitution of perishing millions; that the world never can be evangelized at the present rate of progress; that after long and patient waiting, God is taking the matter out of the hands of those who are older, more conservative, over-cautious, and who lack the daring

of a courageous faith, and Himself leading on the younger men of our generation to take up the great work of evangelizing the world (*Missionary Review*, May 1887:354).

Chapter 10

The Evangelisation of the World (1887)

In 1887 “An Appeal to Disciples Everywhere” made what was possibly its most significant appearance—this time in a British book edited by B. Broomhall titled *The Evangelisation of the World*. This book was essentially an earlier book, *A Missionary Band*, lengthened by 100 pages. *A Missionary Band* was a record of the Cambridge Seven, those seven young, aspiring British students who a few years earlier had left for China with the China Inland Mission. Because so many Christians on both sides of the Atlantic knew of the Cambridge Seven, this book, and consequently the appeal, was widely read.

The Evangelisation of the World came highly recommended from mission agencies. The *Church Missionary Intelligencer* said, “It should lie on every drawing room table, be within reach in every clergyman’s study, and be given as a present to every Christian young man” (*Church Missionary Intelligencer*, February 1888:120).

The latter half of this book is a series of articles on the evangelization of the world. An introduction to “An Appeal” was taken from *The Christian*:

These remarkable and undeniable facts were used by the speaker to press home an earnest appeal for a final and united effort to carry the message of the Gospel to the parts of the heathen world as yet unevangelised. This may be done during the remainder of the century, Dr. Pierson believes, if the whole Church of God will but brace its energies to the task. In order to its accomplishment, however, there would have to be a laying aside of all denominational jealousies, a sensible shortening of the time demanded for preparing missionary students, and a spirit of prayerful consecration in the Church as a whole” (Broomhall, 1887:71).

The Evangelisation of the World promoted the concept that the world could be evangelized by the end of the century. Speaking of the role Scotland could play in this drama, A. N. Sommerville wrote,

Much may be done ere the century close. Fourteen years! What may not be accomplished in fourteen years? From the dark hour of the death of George Wishart—burned at the stake at St. Andrews—till

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1560 when the first General Assembly was held in this city, and Protestant truth prevailed over Scotland, was just fourteen years. Shall not then the entire churches of Scotland, and all that will associate with them, fixing their eyes on the Lord's promised inheritance, say, like Caleb when he stilled the agitated people in the wilderness, "Let us go up at once and possess it, for we are well able to overcome it" (Broomhall, 1887:142).

Responsibility

A year after the publication of *The Crisis of Missions*, A. T. Pierson was laying even greater emphasis on the great opportunity of missions. "And we repeat, that we may burn it in, that the critical hour of missions is not simply approaching; it is even now upon us. This hour is the turning point of history. The crisis of missions is found in the *peril of failure*. These open doors demand *immediate entrance and occupation*. Delay is not only danger but disaster" (*Missionary Review*, April 1887:192) [Italics his].

Pierson reemphasized again that if the church would recognize its responsibility to the present generation and consecrate itself, the job could be finished by the year 1900!

Evangelization ought to be pushed with such a spirit of consecrated enterprise, so systematically, so constantly, so rapidly, that *every generation of disciples would actually see to it that their fellow human beings of that same generation should have the gospel at their hands*. It can be done. The church of Christ needs only consecration, to insure such a result within the bounds of this century!" (*Missionary Review*, April 1887:194) [Italics his].

That Pierson equated the end of the nineteenth century with the end of his generation is clear from his book *Evangelistic Work in Principle and Practice*, where he stated,

The opportunity of evangelization is practically limited to the lifetime of each generation, which is about one-third of a century. Within that short period every new generation of Christian workers must accomplish whatever work they are to do for their fellow-men, for both they and the souls for whom they are held responsible are rapidly passing away. The great bulk of disciples now living must contribute their part to the solution of this evangelistic problem within the bounds of this present century (Pierson, 1887:3).

Chapter 11
The Church's Responsibility (1887-1888)

The church's responsibility for the present generation was Pierson's constant theme. "In every generation a distinct and definite plan of Providence may be detected by the careful observer of God in history; and the true seers, the wisest and greatest in His eyes, are those who seek first to find out that plan and then fall into their place in it, and so serve their own generation by the Will of God" (*Missionary Review*, August 1887:453).

Pierson continued to bemoan the low spiritual life of the Church, "Oh, for some new Luther or Wesley to sound the trumpet of this new Reformation! to provoke to love and good works a torpid, listless church. The scriptural idea and ideal is a whole body of believers at work for souls; universal activity and world-wide evangelism. Every believer must be a preacher, witness, herald. *It took a whole Christ to redeem, it will take a whole church filled with the Holy Ghost to evangelize the world*" (*Missionary Review*, August 1887:457) [Italics his].

In his book *Evangelistic Work in Principle and Practice*, published in 1887, Pierson affirmed, "Because this movement is of God it cannot be stopped; the waves will not be swept back and the tide is fast rising; the very roar of the surf is God's voice of thunder calling His people to leave no human soul to live and die without the gospel" (Pierson, 1887:100). He also reiterated his belief that if every believer, not just professional missionaries and church workers, participated, the world could be evangelized by the year 1900.

The whole body of believers must accept the duty of telling the old, old story. Each one of us is his brother's keeper. To have heard the message is sufficient qualification and authority for sounding it in the ears of every unsaved soul. Let every hearer therefore become a herald. This is the theory of evangelism in a nutshell; and believers have only to put this theory into practice, *to bring the gospel into contact with every living soul before the Bells of God's Clock of Ages shall ring in the natal hour of a New Century!* (Pierson, 1887:235-236) [Italics his].

Pierson's plan in this book for evangelizing the world by utilizing laymen received hearty support from the Christian community. One man later wrote in, "[Your plan] seems practical and practicable. Why not make some attempt to carry the plan into execution?... The 'student volunteers' might enlist in such a movement, and greatly aid it by their consecrated enthusiasm." He then included a pledge that could be made by

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believers who wanted to join this movement.

Believing in Christ as our only hope, and in the urgent need of many Christian workers engaged in personal effort, in humble reliance on Divine grace, I hereby pledge myself:

To make an honest effort to lead to Christ at least one person every year.

To earnestly endeavor to induce other Christians to subscribe to this pledge, one every month, as long as practicable (*Missionary Review*, March 1889:210).

Wilder agreed in his editorial in October of 1887,

God needs every believer in the work of discipling others. This is not limiting God: what He might do, and what He will do, are two different questions. His declared plan is, and always was, to use the disciple as a witness for Him and a winner of souls. There never was or will be a body of ordained preachers large enough to evangelize this world without the help of the great body of disciples. Generals and captains may plan a campaign and conduct an engagement, but it is the rank and file that do the marching and the fighting. Every torpid church, or idle christian, is a hindrance to God's cause, and a help to the enemy of God and man, a dead weight upon the usefulness of those who are willing to work and a block upon the chariot wheels of God. He who anywhere neglects work, everywhere delays work. The church at home is the engine of the whole machinery of the work abroad. What if there be no adequate motor to keep the wheels revolving! and what of the indifferent disciples who throw on the fire more water than fuel! (*Missionary Review*, October 1887:593).

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The year 1888 opened with a great deal of enthusiasm about what could be done. "Each closing year of this nineteenth century seems to urge us, as it comes, to make the very most of it. From many corners we are hearing the question, will the world in its present state last another century?...The missionary movement...has grown more in the last ten years than in the previous seventy, and most of all in the last year or two, while it is promising to grow within the next few years as never before... Never were the prospects of the world's evangelization so hopeful" (*Regions Beyond*, February 1888:35-36).

Chapter 12
The Centenary Conference in London (1888)

In October of 1887, on the very day he passed the editorship of the *Missionary Review* to others, Royal G. Wilder died. A. T. Pierson and James Sherwood became the new editors and immediately expanded the *Review* to an 80-page monthly. In their first issue, January 1888, they wrote the following,

One of the editors of this REVIEW, in a book entitled "The Crisis of Missions," proposes in the serene boldness of faith, the plan of holding an Ecumenical Council of a new order, a Pan-Christian Conference on behalf of Missions in every part of the world. A "World's Missionary Council," he calls it. The *Missionary Review* is already in purpose something like a fulfillment of such a notable dream. It offers to be a council in perpetual session, to consult for the spread of the Gospel throughout the whole earth. It will do what it can to bring about, in God's good time, the actual convening of Christendom in council to concert measures for the speedy evangelization of the world (*Missionary Review*, January 1888:48-49).

Oddly enough, a few pages later, an announcement for a General Missionary Conference in London appeared. This was planned as the successor to an 1878 conference, also held in London, which brought together many British mission agencies. The committee convening this convention said they were "most solemnly impressed with the conviction that there has never been a time, since the days of the apostles, when it was of more urgent importance than it is now, that all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity should labor 'in the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace,' in order that 'the gospel of the kingdom of God' may be carried out into all the world and preached 'unto every creature'" (*Missionary Review*, January 1888:62).

In this same issue, A. T. Pierson wrote in his editorial, "Evangelization is the one word that deserves to be emblazoned on the banners of the believing host. The one immediate, imperative duty of every follower is to become a 'herald.' To bring this gospel of life into contact with every living, human soul in the shortest possible time and the best possible way—that is evangelization" (*Missionary Review*, January 1888:35).

In April he wrote, "Paul yearned to press into regions beyond, where Christ had never been named, and so within the life of a generation he carried the cross over the known world west of the Golden Horn. That principle of evangelization must be the law of our Christian life if we are ever to overtake the regions beyond. We must practically feel that the call is

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loudest where the need is greatest and the darkness deepest. Then, while we shall pass by no really needy field nearer home, we shall press with untiring zeal and contagious earnestness into the farthest corners of the earth” (*Missionary Review*, April 1888:242).

Meanwhile, the London conference was widening both its agenda and the spectrum of delegates to be invited. The committee decided to invite American and Continental mission representatives and focus on cooperative efforts to evangelize the whole world. Pierson linked the upcoming London conference with his appeal in 1881 and the appeal issued by the Northfield Convention in 1885. He wrote,

There will be many who will regard this council, now called to meet in June, as the answer to many fervent prayers. This will be an ecumenical council in fact. And think for what purpose they meet who gather there and then! To map out the world—for Christ’s war of the ages! To cover every district of earth’s surface with the network of missionary effort; to plant the cross in every valley and on every hill; to put the Bible in every hamlet and hut; to prevent all waste of men and material and means; to distribute work equally and equitably; to accelerate the progress of missions so that in the shortest time the witness may be borne to all people and to every soul! (*Missionary Review*, April 1888:268).

The London Committee then issued an appeal for prayer that read,

We lament over the feebleness of the efforts put forth by the churches of Christ, and we mourn over the great and increasing mass of heathenism which still confronts the church in this nineteenth century of the Christian era. It is one great object of the Conference to be assembled in June to look this appalling fact fully in the face, and by applying the lessons taught by the past to the conditions of the present, to awaken the church of Christ, by every possible effort, to a due sense of the obligation under which she lies to the perishing heathen and to her Divine Head and Lord... Pray that, under God, the Conference may be the means of introducing a new era in missionary enterprise. That it may hasten the day when “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord,” and when “the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together” (*Missionary Review*, April 1888:300-301).

In May Pierson again emphasized that the immediate evangelization of the world was the “Supreme Question of the Hour”: “Again we hear Prince Albert thunder out, ‘Find out God’s plan in your generation and do not cross that plan, but fall in into your own place in it.’ Has God a plan in this gener-

ation? If so, what is it, and how am I to know it? By every sign and signal God has shown the men of this generation that his purpose is the immediate evangelization of the world” (*Missionary Review*, May 1888:322).

In July 1888 issue of the *Missionary Review* Pierson published “The Great Commission: Facts and Their Philosophy.” He wrote, “The divine scheme was to reach every human soul by the shortest road. Hence, (1) an *oral proclamation* was chosen as the method, and (2) *every believer* as a means” (*Missionary Review*, July 1888:491).

There is no reason, or even pretext, for the present apathy of the Church of Christ. We can gird the globe with a zone of light in twenty years if we have men and money, both of which the church is perfectly able to furnish to-day in abundance. The awful extent of the field need not discourage us. We can reach this thousand millions with the gospel and we can do it with surprising rapidity, if we have the will to do it God’s way. He has gone before us. He has flung the doors wide open, actually challenging the church to enter and take possession... Accordingly God has accomplished within half a century what we should have supposed it would require half a millennium to effect. Talk of “waiting upon God?” God has been long waiting for his people (*Missionary Review*, July 1888:492-493).

Pierson’s addresses

A. T. Pierson was invited, as part of the American delegation, to the London conference in June and was asked to deliver several addresses. In his keynote, “The Field is the World,” he warned his audience not to glory too much in the past but to look to what had yet to be done and ask God for the power to finish the job. “I want to say—and it is a most profound conviction of my being, on this subject—that the world will never be converted or evangelized at the present rate of progress” (Johnston, Vol. I, 1888:182). He went on to pinpoint the main cause of slow progress in the world’s evangelization, namely, a policy of *concentration* rather than *diffusion*. Stanley P. Smith, one of the Cambridge Seven, used this illustration of concentration a year earlier at the Northfield conference:

Imagine the disciples are here distributing the food, and that this great assembly is the hungry multitude that is waiting to be fed. They go to the first row of benches distributing the food, and to the second, and the third, and the fourth, and so on to the eighth row. But at the end of the eighth row they stop and turn back to the first, and feed these eight rows again, pouring bread and fish into their laps and piling it about them, leaving the starving multitudes behind uncared for.

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What do you suppose our Lord would say if He were here? Let us take the parable to ourselves, for this is what we have been doing. We have been feeding these nearest to us over and over again with the bread which our Lord has given us, and have neglected the multitudes beyond (Shanks, 1887:259).

In *China's Millions* Henry W. Hunt explained why he felt the evangelization of China was being held up:

Too much settled work, and too little systematic itinerant work; too much flocking together of the workers in certain places where the blessing has been given in a degree, and too little scattering in other places which have hardly had an opportunity (*China's Millions*, March 1890:31).

This, of course, was Pierson's reason for calling for an Ecumenical Council as early as 1881. He wanted the mission societies to come together to agree and act upon a policy of diffusion. In his London address, Pierson was able to more fully express his concern for this new direction in missions. The *Church Missionary Intelligencer* reported that "two points he particularly emphasized—that success in the work is to be looked for in the descent of the Holy Ghost in answer to prayer, and that the work must be done speedily—by the end of the century, he pleaded. It was a grand speech" (*Church Missionary Intelligencer*, Special Supplement, July 1888:9).

Pierson also proposed that if the world was to be evangelized speedily, laymen would have to become directly involved in cross-cultural evangelism. *The Gospel in All Lands* noted that "the effect of these words, which minimised the value of ordination, was evidently depressing to the Churchmen present on the platform, who preserved a solemn silence, though it was correspondingly exhilarating to the Nonconformists in the area, who cheered and cheered again" (*The Gospel in All Lands*, 1888:379). Later on Pierson wrote, "And as in the apostolic days, so now; no class of ordained preachers can ever meet this world-wide emergency. While the Church waits for such alone to do the work of preaching the Gospel to the world, or for the training of a regular ministry for its official proclamation, whole generations perish" (*The Missionary Herald*, August 1, 1888:321).

Pierson wrote back to the *Missionary Review* during this time, and his letters were published over a period of several months. In his first letter, dated June 11, he wrote with enthusiasm about the possibilities of such an august gathering.

The question is, Can the problem be solved, of reaching with the

gospel the unsaved millions of the race? Of course it must be solvable; for our Lord never would commit to His people an impossible task. If we study the gospels we shall find God's way of solving the problem outlined. It embraces some important factors, which we have comparatively failed to emphasize. Two of them I desire to make very prominent: first, individual call to direct labor for the unsaved; and secondly, the supernatural power of God. Had these been as prominent in the life of the church as they should be, the work of the evangelization might already have overtaken the population of our globe (*Missionary Review*, August 1888:587).

He went on to list his expectations of the meeting. He felt that first of all, hearts needed to be revived and brought to a new level of commitment in prayer. Secondly, energetic action was needed. He cited both the example of the soldier of Queen Victoria who could publish her will in eighteen months and the example of Ahasuerus' decree being published in nine months. He concluded, "What might we not do with the help of the printing-press, steam navigation, the telegraph, and all the appliances of modern invention, if the church would but give herself to the glorious work! We might publish the gospel to all living peoples before the end of the present century!" (*Missionary Review*, August 1888:588).

In his second editorial letter, Pierson enumerated the wonders God had done in opening up the world, evidenced by the diversity of mission agencies present at the conference. He cautioned, "But though we have reached a climax of development, the topstone and capstone have yet to be laid before the pyramid of wonders is complete. *The whole world must now be taken possession of and occupied for Christ.* Without this grandest result, all else is comparatively not only unfinished, but is failure. To this end all else points and tends" (*Missionary Review*, September 1888:641) [Italics his]. Speaking again of the need for haste, Pierson continued, "Another profound impression left by this World Council is that of the marvelous *celerity of movement* in this march of ages. Truly God is marching on, and he who would keep pace with God must not lag behind or lack for energy and enthusiasm.... The celerity of His march is always in proportion to the preparation and capacity of His people to follow. And hence we may expect Him as leader to move onward and forward with more and more astounding rapidity as He gives us facility and opportunity for a corresponding rapidity of advance" (*Missionary Review*, September 1888:643) [Italics his].

H. Grattan Guinness said in his address, "God grant that

Pierson's plan to utilize laymen received hearty support from the Christian community.

this Conference may be, as it ought to be, a turning point in missions—a stage from which the Church will make a fresh start, and push on her glorious warfare against sin and Satan with tenfold courage and energy, resolving by divine help to evangelize the world before the present generation has passed away!” (*Regions Beyond*, August 1888:232). It was clear that this concern was foremost on his mind; the report of his address in *Woman’s Work For Woman* referred to Guinness as the man “who feels that the Church of Christ might evangelize the whole earth during the present century” (*Woman’s Work for Woman*, 1888:201).

But the question “Is it possible or desirable to map out the whole heathen world among different missionary societies or churches, so as to ensure its more rapid evangelization?” came up only as a minor topic of discussion at the conference. To make things worse, the answers given were generally in the negative. “The very attempt at such a project would probably lead to a historical repetition of the tribal feud of ancient times, when ‘Judah vexed Ephraim and Ephraim envied Judah’” (Johnston, Vol. II, 1888:469). On this same question, Reginald Radcliffe of Liverpool said, “We cannot withdraw our beloved Missionaries, honoured servants who are amongst us, and those that have lived in the field, God bless them!” (Johnston, Vol. II, 1888:478). He suggested, rather, that American, British and German laymen go into the unoccupied fields and, like Caleb and Joshua, bring back a report of what could be done. Evidently Mr. Radcliffe felt that the societies already had their hands full.

Thus the great London conference failed to achieve one of its major objectives. Because it was hastily organized and because so many speakers were on the platform, there was no opportunity for genuine strategic planning. “Dividing up the world” was pushed aside as the delegates tended to focus on what was being done and not on what remained to be done. Pierson’s rallying cry fell on an auditorium of men and women just learning to listen to each other, not on Christians ready to plan the final conquest of the world.

The moderator of the discussion on comity, William J. R. Taylor, an American, closed by suggesting that the London Conference prepare the way for a still greater conference “to be held, towards the close of the nineteenth and the opening of the twentieth century, in some capital city of the old world or the new world, not to frame new creeds, not to fight over old battles, but to organize more completely, and to start more

powerfully, the most extensive and practical system of Gospel propagation that the world has ever seen since that day of Pentecost which was the type and promise of the conversion of all nations, under the Great Commission, and by the power of the Holy Ghost” (Johnston, Vol. II, 1888:469-470).

After the Conference

As soon as the conference ended, reviews poured out through denominational and non-denominational mission magazines. The *Church Missionary Intelligencer* wrote, “It was perhaps a mistake to call it the Centenary of Protestant Missions. Such a phrase raises expectations which certainly have not been fulfilled. Excellent as the Conference has been, it has been very far from enjoying the *eclat* of a centenary” (*Church Missionary Intelligencer*, July 1888:425). The editors felt that perhaps the high point of the conference was meeting with the American delegates who “were able and cultivated men, whom it was a privilege and an honour to meet” (*Church Missionary Intelligencer*, July 1888:429). *The Evangelical Magazine* reported,

They “were of one mind and one soul” in desire and purpose, to “preach the gospel to every creature.” How best this could be done was the dominant thought. Much information was given. Difficulties and obstacles were stated with great candour. Many statements were made of a most encouraging and stimulating character. But the meetings were deliberative, not executive. Therefore it was that many questions of great practical and doctrinal interest were hardly touched, and others were ventilated only, not decided. The conference was not a council, and was too large, miscellaneous and popular to develop into true practical deliberative forms, or to elicit much boldness of speech or freedom of opinion. This, no doubt, was felt by many to be a want, but it was inevitable” (*Evangelical Magazine*, August 1888:374-375).

Others were greatly encouraged. Mrs. Guinness wrote in *Regions Beyond*, “We are filled with the hope, and deeply impressed with the expectation, that the next few years will witness such ingatherings from among the heathen, as the world has never seen” (*Regions Beyond*, July 1888:199).

After the conference A. T. Pierson and A. J. Gordon, another American pastor known for his missionary zeal, traveled throughout Scotland together taking up the great theme of the evangelization of the world. The American preachers were evidently quite successful as gauged by the response of their otherwise pessimistic audience. “We are longing and praying

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for such a new departure, for a revival of missionary zeal in the churches throughout our land; and we gratefully acknowledge that your presence amongst us, and the solemn appeals you have made to us in your public addresses, have kindled our missionary enthusiasm and revived our drooping faith” (quoted from a letter to Pierson and Gordon in *Missionary Review*, October 1888:735).

A year after the conference Pierson published an article entitled, “A Retrospect of the World’s Conference.” Here, now over the first enthusiasm generated by this momentous congress, Pierson felt the freedom to criticize the outcome and make a few suggestions. Among his major recommendations was the idea of a standing committee that could carry on the work that was started at the conference. Pierson lamented the fact that “there were certain bonds of comity and unity, of counsel and cooperation, which might have been perpetuated, and thus have given also a certain perpetuity to the conference itself” (*Missionary Review*, June 1889:407). Since Pierson’s recommendation of such a committee bore no fruit, he later would suggest another world council, perhaps in 1892, that would continue this work and see the world evangelized by the year 1900.

The Report of the Conference

The report of the Conference, published in 1888, reflected the disappointment felt by many. The stated purpose of the Conference had been “to stimulate and encourage all evangelistic agencies, in pressing forward, in obedience to the last command of the risen Saviour, ‘Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all nations,’ especially in those vast regions of the heathen world in which the people are still ‘sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death,’ without a preached Gospel, or the written ‘word of God’” (Johnston, Vol I, 1888:viii). This led many delegates to expect that strategic planning to complete world evangelization would be the central theme. Yet, because of the various concerns of other delegates, this was not the case.

Johnston, the editor of the report, anticipated criticism based on the varying expectations of the delegates. Trying to appease those who looked for greater planning to finish the task of world evangelization, he wrote,

We shall refer again to some of those questions on which rules and regulations have been desired by some of our friends, especially those from foreign parts. It is not impossible, and it would be in many

ways desirable, that a future Conference of a similar kind should not only arrive at such complete unanimity of opinion, but at such an intimate knowledge of one another's character and habit as to enable it to pass rules and form an executive body for carrying them out (Johnston, Vol. I, 1888:ix). A few ardent minds have expressed disappointment at not seeing at once the ripened fruits of such a great gathering of able men from many lands. It would have been looked upon by some as a great triumph, if the Conference had passed resolutions calling upon the Churches to double their contributions to the cause of Missions, and had urged the Societies to multiply the number of Missionaries and portion out the dark and unoccupied regions of heathendom to be evangelised by different Churches (Johnston, Vol. I, 1888:xxiv).

Chapter 13

The Crisis Continues (1888-1889)

Outside of the London Conference there was still plenty of enthusiasm for what could be done. Rev. Judson Smith of the American Baptist Missionary Union wrote, "What hinders the immediate effort to plant the Gospel in every nation and island and home in all the earth with the next few decades? nothing but the faltering zeal and purpose of the mass of Christian believers now on earth. That precisely is the critical question... it is possible now, as never before in the world's history, to preach the Gospel to *all the nations*" (*Regions Beyond*, June 1888:168) [Italics his].

In October 1888, Pierson published an editorial entitled "A Crusade for Missions" in which he called on pastors to set themselves apart for a special ministry of missions devotion. "The evangelization of the world is a problem so grave and so great that it demands men, in a peculiar, if not an exclusive sense, devoted to it. The church needs to be aroused, quickened, stimulated, to new endeavor, prayer, consecration, giving, if we are to overtake the present generation with the gospel" (*Missionary Review*, October 1888:721). Because the local church was the key link in this chain, it was pastors who needed to carry this special burden if the task was to be completed.

In January of 1889, Pierson published his landmark "Christian Missions as the Enterprise of the Church," the article that most fully embodied his philosophy for reaching the world by the year 1900. Pierson wrote,

Pierson vigorously advocated a policy of diffusion to replace the policy of concentration.

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Christian missions represent the most colossal undertaking ever presented to the mind of man... Here are fifteen hundred millions of perishing people to be overtaken with the gospel message, if at all, within the life-time of a generation. Yet Christ says to a comparatively few disciples: "Give ye them to eat," and yet what we have seems hopelessly inadequate provision for such a vast multitude. But there is the authority of the King; He certainly will not command what is impossible or even impracticable. With proper organization and distribution of this multitude into companies; with our few barley loaves brought to Him to be blessed, broken and multiplied as broken; with simple faith in His power and presence, and with implicit obedience to His Word, we may not only feed all these millions, but find fragments left in abundance; for the gospel provision strangely multiplies as it is divided (*Missionary Review*, January 1889:7).

Pierson then continued with the theme of celerity of movement, saying that part of our loyalty to Christ's commands is to carry them out immediately. He yet again gave the example of Ahasuerus' decree and the haste with which it was borne to everyone in his realm. This he contrasted with how the church was treating Christ's commands.

We have not yet felt that the King's command is urgent and the King's business requireth haste. Were true, sound, sensible, practical business principles applied to this problem, no hindrance would be huge enough even to *delay* the prosecution of the work solemnly committed to the Church of Christ. And once more we record our solemn conviction that, with thorough organization, sanctified resolve and practical co-operation throughout the Church, the gospel may be preached as a witness, not only among all nations, but to every living creature, *within the lifetime of the present generation, or even before the present century closes* (*Missionary Review*, January 1889:8) [Italics his].

Pressing this last point home, Pierson revealed the true conviction of his heart, "This thought of a possible proclamation of the Word of life to every living creature *before this century closes*, we have sought to trumpet forth by tongue and pen for twenty years; and it has never yet been shown to be either impossible or impracticable. It *can* be done; it OUGHT to be done; it MUST be done" (*Missionary Review*, January 1889:9) [Italics his].

Finally, turning to some simple calculations, Pierson once again underscored the feasibility of finishing the task by the year 1900.

There are, perhaps, in round numbers, thirty millions of Protestant

church members in the world. Could each of that number somehow reach thirty-three of the unsaved, the whole thousand million would be evangelized; and could each be brought to give one cent a day, our missionary treasuries would overflow with over one hundred millions of dollars every year. Of course we cannot depend upon enlisting in this work all church members. Nominal Protestants include millions of mere professors, members of state churches, formalists and ritualists, and millions more who, while they profess to be disciples, are actually immoral and infidel. But let us suppose that there are *ten millions* of true disciples who can be brought into line, and who by systematic effort can be made to furnish men and money for this work, even *with this tenth part of Christendom the world may be evangelized before the twentieth century dawns...*

We repeat, that it is our solemn and mature conviction that before the close of this century the gospel might be brought into contact with every living soul; for if we could so organize and utilize ten millions of disciples as that every one should be the means of reaching with the good tidings one hundred other souls, during the lifetime of this generation all the present population of the globe would be evangelized; or, if the sublime purpose should inspire the whole Church to do this work before this century ends, each of this ten million believers has only to reach between eight and nine souls every year for the twelve years that remain (*Missionary Review*, January 1889:12-13) [Italics his].

Chapter 14

The Canon Taylor Controversy (1888-1889)

In 1888 an Anglican canon wrote an article entitled “The Great Missionary Failure” which stirred up a huge controversy. Among other things, Canon Taylor wrote of the waste of money on the mission field and the inevitable slow progress of the gospel. Taylor assumed, based on current statistics, that it would take between 300,000 and one million years to convert the world. Pierson replied, “What if it can be demonstrated that, notwithstanding the Herculean labor of temperance reformers, it would take, at the present rate, a million years to make every man a total abstainer or even to clear the world of drunkards, would that prove the temperance work a failure or lessen the value of individuals already rescued and homes already redeemed from this curse?” (*Missionary Review*, February 1889:84).

Echoing back to the controversy over the terms *evangelization* and *conversion*, Pierson defended his own position by

assuring readers that preaching the gospel to every creature “means no superficial, hasty, formal proclamation of the good news of grace.” Once all had heard, evangelization was meant to lead to “thorough work, the implanting and erection of all the institutions of Christianity. Everywhere men are to be confronted with the Christian church and home, school and college, society and civilization. They are to see demonstrated before their eyes, and by the logic of events, what the gospel of Christ can do for the man, the woman, the child; what it can do to elevate labor, dignify humanity, abolish cruelty and even discourtesy, supplant caste by a true equality, and lift all society to a higher level” (*Missionary Review*, February 1889:87). And yet for Pierson the gospel should not be concentrated in one place before it was diffused to all peoples.

Not everyone agreed with the emphasis on diffusion. The great British missiologist, Edward Storow, argued that new workers should be deployed to areas that were most promising. “Of course the gospel should be preached to every creature and nothing short of a supreme attempt to win the whole human race for Christ can satisfy Him or absolve His church from its solemn responsibility; but seeing that there is no probability of this being done in our day by united and well advised effort on the part of any considerable number of Christian communities, it may be of service to consider where missionaries may be sent with the greatest probability of finding ‘a great door and effectual opened unto them,’ and with the fewest adversaries to oppose their entrance and impede their endeavors” (*Missionary Review*, April 1889:264).

Once again Pierson responded, this time in an article entitled “The Mission and Commission of the Church.”

Christ says: “The field is the world,” and no part of it is to be left untilled and unsown. If we wait to “convert” our hearers, we shall never put our working force into the whole field. *Just here has been the great mistake of the church even in her missionary era!* Christ’s principle is DIFFUSION; our practice is CONCENTRATION. We emphasize conversion, while he emphasizes evangelization; and so our human philosophy counsels us *to convert as we go, and so increase the converting force.* The effect is that we keep tilling a few little corners of the world field, sowing them over and over, until the soil loses power to yield, while tracts a thousand miles square have never yet borne the tread of the sower! Even disciples are asking, “Are there not heathen enough at home, that we send the flower of our youth to the ends of the earth?” (*Missionary Review*, May 1889:327) [Italics his].

H. Grattan Guinness could not understand why Canon

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Taylor would make his criticisms. He felt they were not helpful to the cause of world evangelization and wrote, "Our duty to prosecute missions in no way depends either on their hopefulness or their success...So that even if Canon Taylor's anticipation were correct, which happily they are not, it would in no way alter our duty as Christians to obey Christ" (*Regions Beyond*, January 1889:5-6).

Even the German missiologist Gustav Warneck could not resist a rebuff of Canon Taylor: "The apostles, Herr Canon, were probably not, like yourself, great arithmeticians, but they were heroes of *faith*. They *believed*, with full and firm conviction, what is written in the last of Matthew concerning the omnipotent omnipresence of their Saviour with them. Therefore, they said: 'To a minority with Jesus belongs victory and the future'" (Quoted in the *Missionary Review*, May 1889:360).

In another article entitled "Serving our own Generation," Pierson wrote,

We owe to our Lord an infinite debt; we can never pay it; all we can do is to acknowledge it by our service to our generation according to His will and in His name. Obviously so far as that debt can be paid, it can be paid only during the period which limits the generation of which we form a part. This proposition seems so simple and obvious as to need no argument. Yet, practically, it has never been accepted and acted on by the church in modern times, nor at any time since the apostolic age" (*Missionary Review*, July 1889:481).

Pierson conceded that there was much work to be done by Christians outside of evangelization, things that would provide for future generations certain inalienable rights. "But, meanwhile, we must not overlook what is even a more pressing duty and privilege, viz.: *we must not permit this generation to die unsaved*, so far as our consecrated labor can prevent it. No activity in providing for *future* generations can atone for our inactivity in providing for our own generation, which first of all we are to serve, by the will of God, with the gospel" (*Missionary Review*, July 1889:482) [Italics his].

Pierson challenged, "In simple obedience to that last command, without a secular spirit, a calculating hypercaution, a dependence on worldly patronage, a distrust of adequate support, without waiting for the whole church to recognize her obligation or attempt to discharge it, those who do feel the mighty pressure of these great facts and truths must covenant with God and each other, that *this generation shall*

One magazine assessed the London conference in this way: "The meetings were deliberative, not executive.... The conference was not a council, and was too large, miscellaneous and popular to develop into true practical deliberative forms...."

not pass away till all this work is done!" (*Missionary Review*, July 1889:487) [Italics his]. He then concluded, "This conception of evangelism grows upon the writer until it is difficult to think of anything else" (*Missionary Review*, July 1889:487).

The Victory Assured

That victory was assured was not a question in the minds of many. Rev. E. T. Curnick wrote, "The present is emphatically a missionary age...In the light of present developments the reign of Christ on earth is beyond doubt; the only question is as to the time of his coronation" (*The Gospel in All Lands*, 1889:311).

At the International Christian Endeavor convention held in Philadelphia in 1889, Pierson was quoted by Francis E. Clark as saying,

I pray God to let me live long enough, after having given twenty years of the best of my life to the study and advocacy of this great proposition, to see this enterprise of Christian missions taken up by the Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor, by the Young Men's Christian Association, by the Young Women's Christian Association, by the Young Women's Temperance Union, by the great Missionary Crusade in the college, as well as by the churches of Christ in general, with a determination that before this generation shall pass away the world shall have known that Jesus Christ died for sinners (Clark, 1895:286).

Robert Arthington wrote to the *Missionary Review*, exhorting the editors, "How I wish you felt it your duty to write yourself in humble, simple, but prevailing language and *keep to it*, keep it up month after month, of those parts and populations of the world which never, since our Saviour's ascension, have had—and have not now—the Gospel according to Luke or John or the Acts, in their hands, perpetually in print!" (*Missionary Review*, December 1889:942) [Italics his]. Pierson's response revealed the broader purpose of the *Review*. "The *sole aim* of its editors has been to arouse the whole Church of Christ to breathe messages of life to the regions beyond...We are persuaded that in order to bring about that holy enterprise which will lead the Church to bear the tidings to every unsaved soul with the utmost possible speed, we must scatter information about every field, present every aspect of the work, appeal to every class of motive, in a word, consult every variety of temperament to be reached and study every variety of hindrance to be removed" (*Missionary Review*, December 1889:943) [Italics his].

Chapter 15

Entering the Final Decade (1890)

As 1880-81 precipitated much thought about what could be done in twenty years, 1890-91 gave rise to many reflections about what could be done in ten years.

Julia B. Schauffler, in the opening editorial of *Woman's Work for Woman* in 1890, wrote,

Only ten years of this century remain, and on the way in which we improve this passing opportunity depends in a large degree the progress of the world in Christian life and thought for many years to come. Think of the possibilities of the future as Dr. Pierson shows them in this grand word picture: "Never was the whole field of missions so inviting or the harvest so promising. Never was the Church of Christ furnished with facilities so ample and abundant for the speedy and successful accomplishment of her work. The next decade of years will witness not only evolutions, but revolutions that even now seem incredible within so short a time. The Church of Christ must push all the forces to the front and lay a molding hand on the plastic material of social life. The anointed tongue and consecrated pen, the printed page and the loving epistle, the church and the school, the Christian family and the Christian home, must unite their witness to the power of the Gospel, in the eyes and ears of every creature" (*Woman's Work for Woman*, January 1890:4).

Following Pierson's lead, in 1890 Dr. D. McEwen gave a major address at the Evangelical Alliance Conference. *China's Millions* reported that he said,

The special work of the Christian Church to-day is the immediate evangelisation of the whole world. Conversion, whether of the few or the many, is the work of God Himself; but it is committed to the Church to take the Gospel message to every creature; and the time has come, in the providence of God, when this ought to be done, not in a halting, tentative way, but by sweeping measures. Through the march of discovery, the progress of international commerce, and the translation of the Scriptures, the speedy evangelisation of the human race has come within the region of practical Christian politics (*China's Millions*, January 1890:13).

He went on to outline that it would take only 50,000 workers and the expenditure of 15 million pounds sterling annually, for ten years, in order to preach the gospel to every

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creature. McEwen pointed out that this kind of planning worked in war; why should it not work in the Christian conquest of the globe?

In January 1890, in his editorial "Is There to Be a New Departure in Missions?", it was obvious that Pierson was beginning to sense the rush of time as the new century approached.

It will no longer do to act and talk as though we had countless years and even centuries before us wherein to evangelize the world. We have often said, what now we calmly and deliberately repeat with emphasis, that with one tittle of the 'dash' and 'push' with which all worldly enterprises are carried forward, the thirty millions of Protestant church members now on earth would not let ten years pass without belting the globe with the missionary effort and bearing the good tidings of the gospel to every family of man! We yearn to see the church of God take up this work as though she felt that the time is short and eternity is only long; that millions of unsaved souls die every year, and a whole generation in less than forty years; as though she saw that God has given her opportunities and facilities that multiply her responsibilities a hundred fold (*Missionary Review*, January 1890:2).

Hudson Taylor's Plan

J. Hudson Taylor also was well aware of the time passing in relation to the generation he was trying to reach. At the end of 1889 he wrote an article entitled "To Every Creature." He observed,

In 1877 the Conference of Missionaries assembled in Shanghai appealed to the Christian Church to evangelize China in the present generation, and many hoped it would be accomplished in the present century. More than half the time before the close of the century passed, and not one-hundredth part of the people have been reached, yet this generation is the last of sixty since our Saviour gave the command, which, as Dr. Pierson has well pointed out, has laid the responsibility on the church of each successive generation to give the gospel to each individual living in its own period. There is no impossibility in our Master's command. Were the Government of England to determine on the conquest of a distant land they would think it a small matter to land 10,000 troops in any part of the world's circumference; and the Church of God to-day could easily, within the next five years, effect the evangelization of every one of China's millions (*China's Millions*, December 1889:171-172).

Taylor went on to outline a plan in which 1000 evangelist would take two years for preparation and then within a three-year period bring the gospel to every family in China!

He obviously had not lost enthusiasm for what could be done in the closing decade.

Taylor's appeal was reprinted in the *Missionary Review* and other publications. *Regions Beyond* said of Taylor, "The Rev. J. Hudson Taylor, speaking of the great missionary command, 'Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature,' said that during the last fortnight those words had acquired a new meaning to him; he had been considering them in the light of the *possibility of practically obeying them*, and reaching every individual in the world. He believed it was our duty to make the attempt" (*Regions Beyond*, November 1889:402) [Italics theirs].

Still, there were detractors. William Ashmore, a retired missionary to China, wrote to the *Missionary Review* in May 1890, disapproving of Taylor's plan and protesting that sufficient time was not allowed for the Chinese to not only hear the gospel but to understand it. Oddly enough, William Ashmore's name was listed on the Interdenominational Permanent Committee associated with the plan!

Geraldine Guinness, in a few years to become Taylor's daughter-in-law, made a special appeal to the Student Volunteers on behalf of Taylor's plan to evangelize China. She referred back to the document of the Shanghai conference of 1877, calling it "a most memorable, noble, pathetic paper" and claiming that "it is impossible to read unmoved the burning words of that eloquent and pathetic plea." She went on to say,

We believe that no impossibility is enjoined in our Master's clear command to "preach the gospel to every creature;" but that *it can be done*,—and done in this present generation... Shall a task which one thousand workers might accomplish in three years of steady labour, after two years of preparation, be thought of as chimerical and beyond the resources of the Christian Church? (*Regions Beyond*, November 1890:400-401) [Italics hers].

In February 1890, Taylor called for an upcoming conference of Protestant Societies meeting in Shanghai to seriously address the question of evangelizing China. "We would ask for much prayer that this Conference may be made a time of great blessing, and that such steps may be taken as shall hasten the day when the Gospel shall have been brought within the reach of every creature in China. We have already entered on the last ten years of this century; surely, ere its close, we shall see this accomplished" (*China's Millions*, February 1890:17).

Mrs. H. Grattan Guinness also spoke of the close of the

Pierson frequently cited the example of Ahasuerus' decree as a contrast to the Church's lethargic response to the command of her King.

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century. In the January 1890 edition of *Regions Beyond* (pp. 3-4) she wrote, "As our century draws to a close, the increase of missionary activities, among other signs of our times, indicates the near approach of that *end* which shall be such a glorious *beginning*. But let such activities increase still faster for the time is short! How can we make this last decade of the century *its best* in this respect?...Let us not be timid in our petitions and expectations, but aspire to great things. Let us pray that the whole heathen world may be evangelized before the century ends." [Italics hers].

Pierson, writing this time from Scotland, enthusiastically agreed. "No man can show a sensible reason why within the next ten years the Word of God should not be published throughout the world. Thirty millions of Protestant disciples can evangelize the world if each one will become responsible for fifty other souls...This decade ought to be the most glorious of all history in the progress of the gospel" (*Missionary Review*, March 1890:165). He added, a few pages later, "I want to live long enough to see this world mapped out for God, to see a definite organized movement for the occupation of the whole world for Christ" (*Missionary Review*, March 1890:198).

Presbyterian Support

By now other voices began taking up the challenge. In early 1890 J. L. Stevens, a Presbyterian, addressed the presbytery of Athens, Georgia on "The Gospel Can and Ought to be Preached to the Whole Heathen, Jewish and Mohammedan World in the Next Ten Years." Quoting Mark 16:15, Stevens said, "Since it is our imperative duty and to our highest interest that this command be obeyed, why delay it?" The substance of his appeal was a detailed look at how many men and how much money would be required to accomplish the task by the year 1900. Stevens concluded by challenging the Presbyterians to do their part to serve as an example to other Protestants. Afterward, he sent his article to many missionary magazines to widely circulate the idea.

Pierson, meanwhile, rejoiced to see the new champions of the vision. In the April edition of the *Missionary Review* he wrote, "The thought of evangelizing the world in this generation is taking hold of various persons and various plans are forming to carry out the project...This duty and privilege of reaching the whole world with the gospel during the present *generation*, and even century, has been often urged on the readers of this *Review*. We rejoice to see that thought working

in many other minds throughout the church, and cropping out in so many directions” (*Missionary Review*, April 1890:310).

Pierson often told the story of German Christians in Hamburg who saw amazing results in their evangelism because they came together in prayer and dedication. He insisted that the same type of dedication on an international level would yield phenomenal results.

Give us twenty-five hundred men of like consecration, and in another quarter of a century we can have 175,000 new churches, 1,875,000 gospel stations, 25,000,000 converts; we will scatter 160,000,000 Bibles, 3,000,000,000 pages of tracts—and, with these twenty-five hundred such men, we will tell the good tidings to the whole population of the globe within the remaining ten or eleven years of this nineteenth century! To evangelize this race is a load that will crush the few; it can be lifted only by the many (*Missionary Review*, July 1890:514).

Writing from China, Geraldine Guinness wrestled over how the gospel might be preached to every creature. In the paper her parents edited in London, she wrote, “Dr. Pierson’s words often come to mind in this connection; they were to this effect...‘If God will show me *anything* that I can do for the salvation of the world, that I have not yet attempted, by His Grace—I *will do it at once*.’ It is a great problem—the problem of the nineteenth as of the first century how *best*, how most surely and most quickly, to carry the gospel of Jesus, to EVERY creature” (*Regions Beyond*, June 1890:237) [emphasis hers].

One result of all this enthusiasm was the creation of the “Extra-Cent-a-Day Band,” which encouraged church members to set aside an extra penny every day for missions. This unusual way of raising extra money for missions was initiated in direct response to the appeal for the speedy evangelization of the world. One participant commented, “Let the Church, followers and representatives of Him whose earthly life was a mission to a lost world, resolve that ere this century closes the story of the Saviour shall indeed be proclaimed to every creature. That will make our age sublime!” (*Missionary Review*, July 1890:552).

Prayer and Missions

As if to place his advocacy of organization and business-like zeal in proper perspective, in his editorials and books Pierson wrote a great deal about prayer and missions. “Every time the Church has set herself to praying, there have been stupen-

dous movements in the mission world. If we should but transfer the stress of our dependence and emphasis from appeals to men to appeals to God—from trust in organization to trust in supplication—from confidence in methods to importunate prayer for the power of the Holy Ghost, we should see results more astounding than have yet been wrought” (*Missionary Review*, August 1890:585-586). “There is too much dependence on appeal, on organization, on human instrument, on Governmental patronage, on the influence of education and civilization; and too little simple looking unto that real source of success, the power of God in answer to prayer, first to open doors of access, then to raise up and thrust forth laborers, and then to break down all opposition and make the truth mighty in converting, subduing, saving and sanctifying” (*Missionary Review*, August 1890:630). “Eliminate God from missions and you have nothing left but a human enterprise; all the grandeur and glory are gone; for the one supreme charm and fascination of this work is that, in idea and plan, in origin and progress, it is divine” (*Missionary Review*, September 1890:653).

The editors of the *Illustrated Missionary News* agreed. In referring to the work of the China Inland Mission and its goals to preach the gospel to every person in China, they commented, “Let us not forget that to preach the Gospel to every creature is not a ‘mere human project, but a *Divine command.*’” (*Illustrated Missionary News*, Feb. 1, 1890:24) [Italics theirs].

Chapter 16

The Continuing Possibility (1890-1892)

Over and over Pierson pressed his point home. “There is no lack of money nor means to compass the evangelization of the world within the present century,” he said, “if there were but the spirit of enterprise to dare and undertake for our Redeemer” (*Missionary Review*, August 1890:587). And yet, how difficult it seemed to arouse the church.

With profound and solemn conviction we record once more our testimony, after more than a quarter of a century of the study of missionary history and biography, that only from a divine point of view can the mystery of missions be interpreted or the significance of mis-

sions be appreciated. Higher up than the level of the most self-denying heroism must we get to command this true horizon; and our constant effort with tongue and pen is to awaken and arouse sluggish believers to behold this march of God and fall into line under His leadership and take up the march with Him (*Missionary Review*, September 1890:656).

Speaking to the annual meeting of the China Inland Mission, Pierson said, "It is time that the Church of God should awake to her responsibility. We have been acting as though we had an eternity in which to do the work, and the people whom we seek to reach had an eternity on earth in which to be reached; whereas the fact is that our term of service and their term of life must both very soon expire" (*Regions Beyond*, September & October 1890:353). He went on to say,

There never was such an opportunity. We are living in days that are more augustly awful than any in previous human history. I say, deliberately, that I would rather live in the year 1890 than have lived in the time of Christ Himself, not because it would not have been a transcendent privilege to see the Lord in the flesh, and to be among the number of those who were closely associated with His life, but because this is a grander day of opportunity and a more magnificent day of privilege (*Regions Beyond*, September & October 1890:354).

A missionary from Thailand, D. McGilvary, wrote to the *Review* in October 1890, "You might be interested to hear another *voice from the field* in response to the standard raised pre-eminently by your *Review* for a crusade to evangelize the whole world during the present century. The idea is a grand one. Possibly, the faith of but few has reached the standard of Christianizing the whole world during the next decade. We all know it is not beyond the *divine power* to effect it" (*Missionary Review*, May 1891:325) [Italics his].

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century American politicians spoke of the "manifest destiny" of America. It was not surprising, then, that a pastor in Washington D. C., Rev. A. W. Pitzer wrote,

The providential mission of this nation is to give the blessed Gospel of the Son of God to all peoples of the earth...We hold the Gospel, not merely for ourselves but in *trust* for a lost world. We have the men and the money, the missionaries and the agencies, methods of transit and transportation, in more than abundance, to give the Gospel in ten years, as God's witness, to every nation under heaven. The supreme duty of this nation is to realize her sublime providential mission, and bear the blessed light of the Gospel to all the dark places of the earth,

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to the habitations of men now filled with cruelty. There is no second Columbus to be born, nor any new continent to be discovered. This is the "last days," and this "ends of the earth," the light that shines across the Pacific from San Francisco and Portland reaches to the very lands where that first light was kindled. "Now or never," is the world to be evangelized by us (*Missionary Review*, November 1890:825-826) [Italics his].

The Regions Beyond

But the strongest voice was still that of A. T. Pierson. In February 1891, in his editorial titled "The Regions Beyond", he repeated, "The motto of the great apostle of the Gentiles was, THE REGIONS BEYOND... The motto of Paul is the true watchword of the Church in this new age of missions. After all the work of a century, we have only just begun. We are not even at the midway pillar; and God says, 'Speed ye! Make haste! Forget the things behind and push for the Regions Beyond.' And this we will do by the grace of God!" (*Missionary Review*, February 1891:81-82).

His constant harping on this same theme irritated some. The Rev. Canon D. D. Stewart, in an article entitled "The Greatness of God Shown in the Slow Christianizing of the Earth," wrote, "A thousand years are with the Lord as one day...All nations will, in due time, come and worship before God, and, in God's estimation, that time is rapidly approaching, though, according to man's arithmetic, there is a protracted delay" (*Church Missionary Intelligencer*, July 1891:473-474). Pierson concurred but also observed that "'one day is with the Lord as a thousand years,' and there have been single historic 'days' in this period, in which He has wrought the work that ordinarily would have taken a millennium" (*Missionary Review*, February 1891:84).

Pierson defended the need for speedy evangelization in his new book, *The Divine Enterprise of Missions*. Reviewing this book in *The Church Missionary Intelligencer*, Eugene Stock commented, "Dr. Pierson, notwithstanding his principle of diffusion rather than concentration, has no sympathy with the scampering notion of a 'witness' just telling the tidings of salvation once, and then boasting that Matthew 24:14 is fulfilled" (May 1892:381). Pierson wrote, "Is 'witnessing' then, so superficial, artificial a process, that we are to picture to ourselves some flying courier, galloping on horseback through village after village, announcing the good news, and then hastening away elsewhere? To bear testimony unto all nations is no such short, hasty, inadequate proclamation of the Gospel

message” (Pierson, *The Divine Enterprise*, 1891:69).

But Pierson was not locked into looking to the end of the century. He suggested that another international meeting like that in London be held in 1892. There Christian leaders could review results of missions and take stock of what was left to be done. What would need to be done in the second century of modern missions? He asked, “Is it too much to hope that this next century of missions may not have passed until the whole world shall have been acquainted with the Gospel?” (*Missionary Review*, February 1891:142).

Once again he stressed the strategic need to divide up the world for evangelistic purposes. Rev. J. Murray Mitchell, also writing in the *Missionary Review*, admitted, “It might, perhaps, be possible to form an international committee, representing all Protestant missions, to map out the great battlefield and suggest a plan of campaign; at present, each mission, each regiment chooses its own field and fights its own battle, with little or no reference to others” (*Missionary Review*, March 1891:173-174). But this kind of strategizing could only be done at a world-level conference. And when Pierson asked for opinions on whether a London-type conference should be held in 1892-93, most of the responses from mission agency directors were negative. The comments of Dr. M. H. Houston of the PCA (Southern) Foreign Missions Board were representative:

My opinion is that the London Conference is so recent that it would not be well to attempt another World’s Missionary Convention in 1892, at least for the discussion of those general subjects which were before the London meeting. I would be glad, though, to attend a World’s Convention at any time to consider the urgent practical question, “What can be done more than we are now doing to evangelize the present generation of men?” (*Missionary Review*, July 1891:527).

The First SVM Conference

That same year Pierson was asked to speak at the first Student Volunteer Movement Convention in Cleveland. No one was surprised when his subject was “The Evangelization of the World in This Generation.” Pierson began,

The supreme question of the hour is the immediate preaching of the Gospel to every creature...I am afraid that the seeds of a great apostasy are in the Church of God today, that in the midst of this century and its closing decade it should even be questioned whether we could evangelize the world in our generation, when the luxuries alone that crowd our homes, that cover our persons, that are hung upon our walls

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and stuffed into our library cases, the gold and silver, the jewelry and the ornamentation, the costly furniture in our homes, would of themselves suffice to make the Gospel speed its way around the earth inside of a decade of years. It is a pretty solemn question whether we ourselves are saved if we allow this state of things to go on much longer (*Report*, 1891:82).

Later in the same address he said,

I want to say to you, that with the 40,000,000 Protestant church members in the Church of God, with the \$12,000,000,000 in her treasury, with all the capacity for carrying on the work in business methods, according to the very best and wisest and most sagacious suggestion, I have not the slightest idea that we shall see the world evangelized in this generation, nor that it will be evangelized in ten, twenty, or a hundred generations to come unless the supernatural element enters into it as it has never entered into it since apostolic days (*Report*, 1891:85).

Pierson let the students know how deeply his convictions ran:

For I solemnly believe, and I say it with the emphasis of a dying man, that if the Church today should resolve that the year 1891 should not go by until she had sent at least one representative of Christ and His Gospel into every destitute district on the surface of the earth, so that there should be no district a hundred miles square that should not be represented by one witness for Christ, before the year 1891 passed by, there would be an outpouring of the Holy Ghost to which even Pentecost would be simply the first drops of a coming latter rain (*Report*, 1891:88).

By July of 1891 Pierson was able to report,

This conviction of the duty and feasibility of giving the whole world the Gospel in the present generation has taken possession of countless men and women in all parts of the globe. Hence the simultaneous calls for increased laborers, enlarged means, and higher consecration. Let us keep this cry echoing, and let us press the Lord's enterprise until not a lethargic church or apathetic disciple remains—until not a child of Adam remains without the knowledge of the Second Adam, who is able to repair the ruin wrought by the first. No believer can tell how much depends upon his activity joining in this crusade of the ages. Every voice and pen, every heart and hand and purse, should be enlisted constantly and unreservedly to secure the immediate proclamation of the Gospel to every soul. To this end the pages of this *Review* are pre-eminently and prayerfully devoted (*Missionary Review*, July 1891:540).

*J. Hudson
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the Great
Commission
and "the
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In spite of all that had happened in the previous ten years, there was still formidable opposition to the cause of missions. Rev. A. A. Pfanstiehl, a defender of missions, wrote, “It has been figured out by those who look upon this work from a political-economy point of view that it costs about \$1000 to make a single convert in heathendom, and that at the present rate of progress it will take two hundred thousand years to convert the world!” (*Missionary Review*, September 1891:683). Because others had already dealt with the inaccuracy of these statistics, Pfanstiehl went on to show the value of these “expensive” converts both from an historical and biblical viewpoint. Pierson also added a comment to this article: “The only real discouragement in the work of missions is the slowness and sluggishness of the church to fall in line with the command and the leadership of our Royal Captain. The church has numerical force and financial resource sufficient without a doubt to bear the Gospel message to every soul before the century ends” (*Missionary Review*, September 1891:685).

Chapter 17

The Greatest Work in the World (1891-1893)

Pierson’s most concise statement of what could be done by the year 1900 was *The Greatest Work in the World: The Evangelization of All Peoples in the Present Century*, published in 1891. By this stage Pierson was dealing not with twenty years as he had in 1881, nor with fifteen years as when “An Appeal” was authored. Now there were ten short years left before the turn of the century. *The Greatest Work* was thus his last-ditch attempt to wake up the church to her God-given responsibilities and opportunities. He began by stating, “The supreme enterprise of the age is the immediate preaching of the Gospel to every creature,” adding that there was no lack of resources for the job—either men or money—nor lack of opportunity or access to the world. The hindrance was “unhesitatingly, that the Church of God is trifling with human souls and with her own duty” (Pierson, 1891:7). He went on to convincingly outline the marvels God had done in the nineteenth century to prepare the whole world for the Gospel. And he irrefutably showed that the church needed to go to the re-

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gions beyond, not only geographically, but in faith, prayer, power, giving and holy living. In conclusion, he said,

The grand duty of the hour is, therefore, as plain as an unclouded sun at its zenith: faith in the duty and so the possibility of doing it; energy of action, courageously and promptly doing the King's business; and prayer for power from above. Give us these, and before this generation passes away, the world shall hear the Gospel (Pierson, 1891:56).

The entire text of this book appeared as a serial in the *Missionary Review*, thus bringing these views before public scrutiny.

In 1891 Pierson also published *The Divine Enterprise of Missions*, in which he outlined his philosophy of mission:

Now of the things which we have spoken, this is the sum: Every saved soul is called to be a herald and a witness; and we are to aim at nothing less than this: to make every *nation*, and every *creature* in every nation, *acquainted* with the Gospel tidings. This is the first and ever-present duty of the Church: it is the heart of the whole missionary plan. God will give us souls as our hire and crown; large results in conversion of individuals and the transformation of whole communities will follow, as they always have followed, a godly testimony. But we are not to *wait for results*: we are to regard our duty as never done while any region beyond is without the Gospel. Let all men have a *hearing* of the Gospel at least; then, when *evangelization* is worldwide, we may bend our energies to deepening the impression which a first hearing of the Gospel has made. But, again, let it peal out, as with a voice of thunder, to be heard wherever there are believers! The first need of the world is to hear the Gospel, and the first duty of the Church is to go everywhere and tell every human being of Christ, the world's Saviour. To stop, or linger anywhere, even to *repeat* the rejected message, so long as there are souls beyond that have never heard it, is at least unjust to those who are still in absolute darkness. Instead of creating a few centres of intense light, God would have us scatter the lamps until all darkness is at least relieved, if not removed (Pierson, *The Divine Enterprise*, 1891:99-100).

The year 1892 marked the centennial of the founding of the Baptist Missionary Society and thus ushered in a new century of Protestant missions. Many believed that the next few years would be the greatest in the history of the world's evangelization. *Regions Beyond* heralded, "It is possible for us in the few remaining years of this decade to do more towards evangelizing the heathen than has been done in the whole century since Carey's days. This is a fact, and one which throws on us all most solemn responsibility" (*Regions Beyond*, January 1892:6).

In February of 1892, A. T. Pierson asked the question,

“What is the Next Step?” in relation to the task of world evangelization. “I think we need first of all to realize that the *evangelization of the world in this generation is not a mere wild dream*, but may be made a fact if the Church of God will have it so, and use the means God has given to her” (*Missionary Review*, February 1892:141) [Italics his]. Pierson continued,

Who can tell how rapidly the Gospel message might be diffused over the habitable globe if all this available material could be utilized? After twenty-five years of constant study of this subject, and conference and correspondence with hundreds of students of missions and missionary workers, I am more and more satisfied that if the Church would but imitate the laudable “push” and “dash” of the men of this generation, the children of light would flood the world with the Gospel in as little time as Ahasuerus dispersed his royal decree from the Bosphorus to the Indus. Will any one tell us why not? (*Missionary Review*, February 1892:141).

Perhaps a prayer conference might be of value, Pierson suggested. If mission leaders were to come together for a prayer conference, they could lay before the Lord the whole problem of whether their dreams for the end of the century were feasible.

Robert Arthington persisted in his advocacy of dividing up the unoccupied fields. “To partition the world for evangelistic purposes would seem quite easy and without material expense: by interviews in London for preparation; meeting in their rooms for apportionments; correspondence with a few eminent societies abroad for work among the actual heathen. The work of division should be accomplished with urgent prayer and dispatch. I deem it the first and best thing to do and be done in Christ’s Kingdom,” he declared (*Missionary Review*, February 1892:143).

In the next issue of the *Missionary Review*, the President of the Boys’ Brigade, J. Q. Adams, stated that the role of young people’s societies could not be overemphasized. As was true of Christian Endeavor, the YMCA, and the YWCA, the Boys’ Brigade in the United States at that time emphasized missions. “Moreover, it is safe to say that these boys will go into the Church knowing not only that there are heathen, but that it is the duty of every Christian to pray, labor, and give in order that the Gospel may be preached to every creature” (*Missionary Review*, March 1892:197).

As the months passed, the *Review* hammered away at what it would take to do the job. That the church’s idleness was the primary cause of the slow progress of missions was a

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widely accepted premise. In April, someone signing his name as W.C.C. wrote, "It is generally admitted that the worldliness of the Church is the only obstacle to the immediate evangelization of the whole world. The work is well within our spare ability, and there is nothing in the way of doing it and doing it at once; only the people who profess to be doing it are not doing it, but, as a whole, are devoting nearly all their time, labor and money to the pleasures and vanities of this world 'as the heathen do'" (*Missionary Review*, April 1892:280).

That same month it was announced that a Congress of Missions would be held in conjunction with the World's Fair in Chicago in September 1893. The initial suggestion was A. T. Pierson's, but the congress would be taken over by others and applied to different purposes than Pierson intended.

Immediate Evangelization

In May 1892 Pierson once again called for the immediate evangelization of the world.

Obedience to our Lord's will should be *immediate*. It has been long delayed, and the time is short. We firmly believe, and the conviction enters into the very marrow of our being, that the disciples of Christ should at once organize efforts and occupy the whole world; that the whole field should be mapped out, and the whole force be massed together; that we should then proceed carefully to divide the field, so that no part should be overlooked, and then to distribute the force, so that no part should be unprovided for (*Missionary Review*, May 1892:326).

In June he wrote, "We are not to wait for results; we are to regard our duty as never done, while any region beyond is without the gospel. Let all men have a hearing of the Gospel at least; then when evangelization is world-wide, we may bend our energies to deepening the impression which a first hearing of the Gospel has made" (*Missionary Review*, June 1892:406).

In July Pierson wrote an article entitled "Discerning the Signs of the Times." In it he portrayed the hand of God in the historical development of missions. "Now observe what follows," he said, "God having a definite historic plan, and the fitness and fulness of times being the determining law, we have only to study carefully and prayerfully the events of the present day to see the plan revealed and read the forecast of the future, and especially the near future" (*Missionary Review*, July 1892:505). "Are we at such a time in history?" he asked, then concluded, "At this centenary of William Carey; God's signals flash like lightning and boom like thunder around the

whole sky. By every mightiest argument and most persuasive appeal; by every motive drawn from a world's need and our opportunity; by every open door and loud cry; by every Scripture prophecy and promise, and by every unfolding of Providence Christ is just now saying to His Church, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature!" (*Missionary Review*, July 1892:508-509).

The August issue included an article by a young volunteer on his way to Africa. In reference to the unfinished task of world evangelization, he wrote, "Gazed at in the light of the great white throne, what do the words mean to present-day Christians? Simply this, that if the trust is not yet discharged it is for us, the Christians of this generation, to rise up at once in the strength of the Lord and with loving obedience carry out His great parting command.... Have the believers in Christ sufficient men and means to send the required numbers? Yes; probably so" (*Missionary Review*, August 1892:574).

The Forward Movement

As the result of the centenary, the "Forward Movement" was born, emphasizing greater giving to missions, more laborers for the field, and greater facilities for educational and medical missions. The editors of *Regions Beyond* were excited about the possibilities of this movement and wrote,

In these closing days of the dispensation the Church of God will see a "forward movement" for the evangelisation of the world, so wide, so deep, so swift and strong and prevailing, that the achievements of the century that lies behind us will be seen to be but the foundation and beginning of a final mighty God-inspired work. If we each are but faithful to our Lord, the Gospel may yet be preached "to every creature" in this generation. Let us seek that faithfulness which will make this possible (*Regions Beyond*, December 1891:485).

Pierson was not satisfied with this assessment and wrote in response,

We have thought a true forward movement will include much more than this. First of all the occupation of hitherto unoccupied fields in the regions beyond—nothing is more imperative than that there should be no part of the world-field absolutely lying in neglect; and, secondly, a true forward movement will include the rapid and world-wide proclamation of the tidings of redemption, evangelization in distinction from conversion, and the various machinery of an organized Church of Christ. The first need of the race is to hear the Gospel message, and when this has once reached every creature, then the way is open for a more thorough work of conversion, organization and edu-

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cation. And, thirdly, a true forward movement will include a systematic and united prayer on the part of the constituency at home for definite results on the individual fields of missions (*Missionary Review*, December 1892:881).

But again, Pierson was not primarily worried about strategic planning or lack of it on the part of mission agencies. His greatest concern, as always, was for the lack of consecration in the church. Again he warned that the Church was not serious about obeying Christ, particularly his last command; they were simply trifling with their faith. When church leaders tried to excuse their disinterest by accusing him of shallow mission strategy, he repeated with increasing force,

It is so much the more imperative that this work should be immediately undertaken and with all possible promptness accomplished, because even when done, it is but the *beginning*, not the *end* of evangelism. Had every human being to-day heard the Gospel, with every pendulum stroke one dies and another is born; and so, within thirty years a new generation must be taught, or we have again earth peopled by the unevangelized; so that, unless the Church of Christ keeps up her holy activity, and reaches one new soul every second this work will not remain done, though once accomplished. Moreover, evangelization is not conversion, but only the first step in preparation for it (*Missionary Review*, February 1893:84).

Chapter 18

Decline (1893-1894)

By 1893, many leaders had already begun to look beyond the year 1900 into the twentieth century. Time was short, and some, like Rev. Josiah Strong, author of the influential book, *Our Country*, spoke of the nineteenth century as one of preparation, saying that God had opened up doors in science, education, medicine and politics, and all of these had facilitated the spread of the gospel.

In London, James E. Mathieson in "Missions, the Salvation of the Church" already spoke in the past tense, lamenting the fact that so much more *could have been done* in the worldwide proclamation of the gospel had the church risen to the occasion. But now,

It does not seem likely, now that we are drawing near to the close of the second millennium of Christianity, that anything will arise in the

conditions of mankind in the leading Protestant lands, or in the phases of theology which largely govern the minds of men in lands ruled by Bible principles, to greatly alter the proportions which now obtain between the various sections of the Church in their numerical strength and social influence and power...Is it beyond hope that we may one day see a pause in this hitherto endless strife for mastery in seeking to gain the first or second or third place in membership, in edifices, in revenues, which now engages the ceaseless watchfulness and activities of leading men in every denomination? and instead of this feverish race for supremacy in an age which seems governed largely by statistics, a more prayerful pondering of our Lord's parting command, a turning to a more excellent way and to a nobler strife, in a determination to keep in the foremost place the vast neglected work which her Lord has set before His Church, 'Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature'" (*Missionary Review*, March 1893:175-176).

Some knowledgeable missionaries, on the other hand, still believed that great things could be accomplished by the end of the century. Bishop Thoburn of India wrote, "I am confident that before the year 1900 every missionary body in India will be found fully committed to the great work of gathering in the converts by the score and the hundred and nurturing them for God and heaven. I shall be surprised and disappointed indeed if the ingathering of the next eight years does not exceed that of the previous ninety-two" (*Missionary Review*, January 1893:47). A missionary to Burma felt that the numerous signs of the times and progress of the gospel "leads us to believe that the time is near when a nation shall be born in a day. Yes! The day is dawning, and God's weary workers may well congratulate each other, for all these things betoken a speedy proclamation of the Gospel to all nations of the earth, and then cometh the end" (*Missionary Review*, January 1893:50).

It was not a missionary, but a pastor, Francis E. Clark, also founder of Christian Endeavor, who in his speech before the CE convention in Montreal in 1893 said,

Who will join me this year in a pledge of proportionate giving of at least one-tenth of what God may give us? Do you want a larger mission, Christian Endeavorers? Do you want a new crusade? Here it is. Could anything be larger? It reaches the ends of the world. It embraces every nation and people and kindred and tribe. It means salvation, *yours* as well as theirs. It means the filling of our missionary treasuries; for we will always give, as we have done through our own wisely directed denominational channels. It means no more worthy cause at home or abroad will suffer. In time, as we grow more numerous and richer, it will mean thousands where there are now hundreds,

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and millions where now are given thousands. It means obedience to our Lord's last command. It means that the twentieth century, yes, that this little remnant that is left of the old nineteenth, *will usher in the glad era of an evangelized world which has heard in its remotest corners the gospel message* (Clark, 1895:478) [Italics mine].

In March of 1893 *Regions Beyond* published a plea for its readers to set aside time on the Lord's day to especially pray for the evangelization of the world to hasten the Lord's coming. They wrote, "There is no reason why *in our own time* the Word of God should not be carried within reach, substantially, of all the peoples of the earth, provided we use the resources at our disposal" (*Regions Beyond*, March 1893:181) [Italics mine].

However, faith that the task could be completed by 1900 was beginning to grow dim. Some, like Luther Wishard of the YMCA, believed that the job would only be finished with the help of native workers. "The missionaries believe that when these men are fully charged with this spirit they will accomplish more in the evangelization of their people in a decade than foreigners can do in a century" (*Missionary Review*, August 1893:584). Cyrus Hamlin, speaking to the International Missionary Union in 1891, had already clearly expressed this view.

Fifty years ago the prevailing idea was that the world is to be converted by the preaching of missionaries. That idea is no longer held by anybody. The native Church is to be the true missionary Church. Native preachers and helpers are to go everywhere preaching the Word. They are to do the chief work of evangelization. The great work of missionaries is to bring forward, to educate, to train the native laborers and native churches unto this work, and give the whole over to them as soon as possible. This is the only way in which the great work of the world's redemption from sin and darkness can be accomplished. It is the most effective and economical way (*Missionary Review*, January 1892:55).

That cooperation with national leaders was essential to finishing the job of world evangelization was self-evident to A. T. Pierson. He also expected this sort of cooperation to extend beyond proclamation to the social mission of the church. "To proclaim the simple Gospel to man as man is the great commission. To reach this world-wide destitution, to prevent overlapping, waste, and friction in the work, and build up society after a celestial pattern, there must be cordial, sympathetic, universal co-operation among disciples. To rescue from flood

or fire, the whole body must move, or vainly will the heart yearn or the hands stretch out to help. The heroism of some members of Christ's body may be hindered and made ineffectual by the inactivity of the rest. Co-operation there must be if this problem is to be solved" (*Missionary Review*, March 1894:170).

The Second SVM Conference

By 1894, Pierson was talking less about the year 1900 and more about the present generation. At the SVM quadrennial in Detroit his talk was entitled "The Evangelization of the World in This Generation." Mott introduced him by saying that Pierson had been placing special emphasis on this particular phrase in the last two years. But Pierson commented that the inspiration for the motto had come to him 20 years earlier (1874) from Acts 13:36.

What is a generation? A generation is that lapse of time that extends between the cradle and the grave for the average population of the race. Three generations pass away in a century. A generation covers the generating of the population during the period of a mortal existence, and their continuance on the sphere of their mortal experience—thirty three years, or in that neighborhood. Remark that that was the life of Christ, and that that was the period of the Acts of the Apostles, as though to show you what could be done by one generation when the spirit of God dwelt in the midst of God's people. Your service is to your generation. You cannot affect past generations; your influence does not move backwards. You can only remotely affect future generations; and the best way to serve the next generation is to serve this generation to the fullest of your ability. Lay the foundation for the usefulness that will survive (Moorhead, 1894:114).

Pierson went on to explain that there were seven great wonders that indicated that the fullness of time had come in relation to evangelizing the world in that generation. These were developments like world-wide exploration, communication, assimilation and the like. He concluded by saying, "Seven fingers of God laid on the work of evangelism, to take hold of it with the grip of God and help us to move the world inside of thirty years for God" (Moorhead, 1894:115). This was indeed a major shift in Pierson's thinking. In spite of his indefatigable work, his efforts had not been sufficient to awake a church surfeited with the luxury and pleasures of the "gilded age" and now caught up in the "gay nineties."

In July 1894, Robert Arthington again wrote a letter "to the Church of Christ Jesus" admonishing Christians every-

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where to help to bring about the fulfillment of Revelation 5:9 and 7:9, that all nations and tribes might be represented at the throne of God. He proposed first of all, that certain tribes and peoples—namely, those with a population greater than 100,000 who had never heard the gospel—be strategically targeted. The Word of God should be translated, and then workers should “preach the gospel throughout that Tribe, carefully noting the several eligible central positions and terminal borders of each” (*The Missions of the World*, July 1894:237). Regardless of what anyone thought of *his* plan, Arthington urged the church to ensure that it had *some* plan to finish the job of world evangelization.

If the various societies would commit their present fields and circuits of preaching to the Lord in charge, and, in His Spirit, to the most advanced members of each native Church, dividing the rest of the heathen amongst them in wise arrangement without overlapping, always welcoming other workers in harmony,—to parts of their several spheres not yet occupied,—they might undertake all parts of the globe where the art of reading is not known,—and, with the aid of bible evangelists, the whole world might be evangelized (*The Missions of the World*, July 1894:237).

Chapter 19 **The Death of the Vision (1894-1900)**

By 1894 very few people saw the feasibility of evangelizing the world in the remaining years of the nineteenth century. Arthur Smith, a veteran missionary to China, wrote an article entitled “Time as a Factor in Christian Missions.” Here he laboriously expounded the slow progress of the development of any great idea. He asked, “How long does any reader, who has a sufficient acquaintance with China to form an intelligent opinion, think it would require in that empire to bring about such a change of practice that every man, woman, and child should take a bath at least once a week and put on a clean undergarment? As yet most of them take no baths at all, and underclothing is unknown. Yet which is easier, to cause such an alteration of customs as this would imply, or to upset all the religious assumptions slowly accumulated by the wisdom of ages?” (*Missionary Review*, August 1894:576). He went on to say, “The plain truth is that *as yet the Christian Church at home has no adequate conception of what is meant by the evangelization of a heathen nation or tribe*, and this despite the

experience of an hundred years of modern missions” (*Missionary Review*, August 1894:577) [Italics his].

Smith used another example of how time was required to win the heathen.

An experiment was once tried to test the rock in one part of the Rammelsburg Mine, in the Hartz Mountains. A man was directed to bore for a blast. After working assiduously for eighty-eight hours, in periods of eight hours each, *he had only reached the depth of four inches, but had worn out one hundred and twenty-six borers, and dulled two hundred and twenty-seven others!* Heathenism is a rock harder than any which encases copper. It can be excavated only with Divine implements kept sharp at the forge of a heavenly fire (*Missionary Review*, September 1894:670) [Italics his].

But Smith’s greatest criticism of the idea of a speedy evangelization of the world was embodied in the following words: “We live in an age of ‘push’ and ‘dash’ when it is the fashion to attempt great enterprises with a limit fixed beyond which they are not to be delayed. There is great temptation to set about the evangelization of heathen lands in this ‘around-the-world-in-eighty-days’ spirit, and the result must be inevitable disappointment. ‘They say,’ remarks Emerson in one of his lectures, ‘that by electro-magnetism your salad shall be grown from the seed while your fowl is roasting for dinner; it is a symbol of our modern aims and endeavors, of our condensation and acceleration of objects; but nothing is gained; nature cannot be cheated; man’s life is but seventy salads long grow them swift or grow them slow’” (*Missionary Review*, September 1894:671). Smith then went on to assert that Christianity cannot really be known for what it is until three generations pass. In a period shorter than this, i.e., the present generation, Christianity could not hope to achieve all it could ultimately achieve. With this, he concluded that the task of world evangelization had been given to those who were still young and, perhaps, to their children.

As additional months passed, bringing the years ever closer to the century mark, others began to theologize why it was not even “Biblical” to hope for speedy evangelization of the world. Rev. H. C. G. Moule of Cambridge was one of these. In 1895 he spoke on the need for a balanced view of evangelization. Jesus’ words in Matthew 28:18-20, “turn all the nations into disciples...cannot be reconciled with the idea of only an elementary evangelization, only an itinerant witness, only as it were a mechanical hastening of the Return” (*The*

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Church Missionary Intelligencer, December 1895:896). But in speaking of the SVM motto “The Evangelization of the World in This Generation,” Moule said,

The thought is, distinctively, of a primary evangelization. The aim is, that competent messengers of the Name of Christ, true to their Lord, should be sent into the non-Christian world in such numbers, and so distributed, that the sound of the saving Name should within no long period be a known sound practically everywhere. In such a programme much will instantly occur to the thoughtful Christian for correction, or for caution, in the proposed or possible details. But I cannot but own that the idea seems to me nobly true and reasonable. And the extraordinary development, with just this decade, of the missionary consciousness, so to speak, in the student-world of both America and Great Britain, suggests the hope that within another decade we may see such numbers of well-equipped messengers in the vast foreign field as to make the proposed distribution seem no visionary prospect (*The Church Missionary Intelligencer*, December 1895:897).

Pierson declared, “I am more and more satisfied that if the Church would but imitate the laudable ‘push’ and ‘dash’ of the men of this generation, the children of light would flood the world with the Gospel in a little time as Ahasuerus dispersed his royal decree from

Optimistic Outlook

Although the goal of completing the task by 1900 seemed hopeless by now, the outlook for evangelizing the world in that generation was still very bright in most people’s minds. The first century of missions was over and the results had been spectacular. Now, as the dawn of the twentieth century approached, the evangelization of the world could not be far off. “So, as the second century of modern missions is about to dawn, in tones more imperative and more thrilling than ever before, the heavenly call sounds out: Lo, I am with you! Into all the world! To every creature!” (*Missionary Review*, November 1894:836-837).

Rev. Hugh Goldie, of the Old Calabar United Presbyterian Mission, expressed the confidence of many when he wrote, “Now the various bodies are stirred up each to claim its part in the evangelization of the world—as a duty for which it exists. Methods of effort, not formerly contemplated, are now successfully employed, and every appliance is made to raise up the degraded races of our kindred. In these, Christians feel themselves inspired with a new hope—which grows, the more that they realize the vast enterprise before them—of winning the world to Christ” (*The Missions of the World*, September 1894:292).

Pierson, meanwhile, like a prophet who begins to doubt his own vision when a sinful world refuses to respond, wrote with a certain discouragement:

The old "statistical" solution of the missionary problem has been tried and found wanting. No doubt the combined churches of Protestant Christendom could, from 40,000,000 communicants, supply 500,000 missionaries, or one for every 2000 of the unevangelized, and could furnish sinews of war in the shape of \$600,000,000 a year for the support of this army of missionaries. But in view of the fact that, with all the tremendous facts of human need before the Church of Christ, and all the inspiring history of missionary labor and triumph to incite zeal and sacrifice, we have as yet less than ten thousand foreign missionaries, and less than \$14,000,000 a year to apply to the whole work, and even now are hampered by immense debts which threaten the whole work with collapse; we are compelled to abandon the hope of bringing up the Church to the point of supplying fifty times the present working force and forty-three times the present money basis for the work (*Missionary Review*, September 1895:642).

Though the year 1900 was quickly fading out of view as an evangelistic deadline, other plans were brought forward. In 1895 Luther Wishard published a book entitled *A New Programme of Missions* in which he suggested that colleges around the world be set up as training centers for evangelism. He made specific suggestions as to how this might be done in a country like Japan. But even this seemed like a man-inspired dream to Rev. E. H. Jones, a missionary in Japan. He commented,

It was said by some one not very long ago concerning the evangelization of Japan, that "if we could send one thousand workers at once to Japan the country would be Christian in ten years." I thought at the time of the number of people in the home land who think the Christianization of the world is largely a matter of men and money. They forget the word which says, "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord." I take it all these plans make too much of man's part in this work of the extension of the kingdom. We are not to find any new way of bringing men or nations to Christ (*Missionary Review*, May 1896:362).

Regions Beyond, however, recognized Wishard's plan as a valid one to evangelize the *next* generation. In November of 1895, an article on the Student Volunteer Movement put it in these terms, "What sign of the times is there of greater promise than the spiritual union of the students of all continents to lead the forces of their own generation in a great forward movement to carry out the last command of Jesus Christ?" (*Regions Beyond*, November 1895:468).

The Passing of the Old Generation

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But the recognition that the generation that Pierson, Taylor and others had hoped to evangelize was now passing away brought a certain sadness to these aging pioneers. In speaking of the 31st anniversary of his mission, J. Hudson Taylor said, "Now a generation has passed away; time enough to test the correctness of these principles" (*China's Millions*, July 1897:85). He referred to George King's article published fourteen years earlier and commented that, "nearly half the generation of Chinese then living have passed away, but their places have been taken by others who equally need the Gospel" (*China's Millions*, December 1897:155).

As early as 1893, Edwin Schell, General Secretary of the Epworth League, had spoken of a new generation that "has not yet had time to develop its great souls" (Schell, 1893:16). In speaking of Hudson Taylor, A. T. Pierson and other great men of the nineteenth century, Schell admonished his young Methodist readers that they had heard "the last counsels of the fathers to this new generation. The hands of a great generation have been laid upon their heads; the shadows are behind them, light and hope are beckoning onward, and the portals of a new century stand open before them" (Schell, 1893:216).

Like a ship tacking into the wind, Pierson now readjusted his sails and moved forward with the new, younger generation. He had by no means given up on the hope of evangelizing the world in the *new* generation. At the beginning of 1896, after describing some of the advances in missions, he wrote,

These are but a few of the hopeful signs on our horizon. They indicate both the fitness and fulness of times for the speedy occupation of the whole world for Christ, which never before could have been accomplished within such a brief space of time, and make especially emphatic the motto which should be emblazoned on the banners of the Church, "The Evangelization of the World in This Generation" (*Missionary Review*, January 1896:3).

At the Liverpool convention in 1896, Pierson spoke of the great wonders that might come out of that meeting. "Who can forecast the work, service, self-denial, heroism, martyrdom, which the next thirty years may develop out of the raw material here gathered? What wide dispersion over various fields of service and suffering, what testimony to Christ, what missions founded, what schools, hospitals, orphanages, and training institutes for the education and salvation of souls!" (*Missionary Review*, April 1896:246). Pierson told the students attending this meeting that they could evangelize the world in their generation if only they would consecrate them-

selves wholly to the Lord. Would they?

Lest there be discouragement over unfulfilled goals, Dr. Judson Smith of the American Board, when he looked back over the nineteenth century, wrote,

Nothing is more deeply embedded in the Gospel than its universality; nothing is more central in Christ's work and claims than that He is the Redeemer and Lord of all nations and generations of the earth, and that "of His kingdom there shall be no end." The expediency or the success of this movement is not to be judged merely by what has happened within the present generation or even within the present century, but by the recorded facts of eighteen hundred Christian centuries (*Missionary Review*, September 1896:700).

Consecrated at Home

One writer, concurring with Pierson on the primary reason for the lack of completion of the missionary task, commented in *Regions Beyond*,

The greatest need of missionary work to-day is not at the foreign, but the home end. If the people of Great Britain and America were one quarter as true to the evangelization of the world as the workers on the field are, the work would be accomplished in a generation. It is one thing to stay at home because we do not go; it is another thing to stay for the sake of heathendom (Quoted in the *Missionary Review*, November 1896:869).

"To stay at home for the sake of heathendom." That was a new thought. It was magnificently embodied in the life of A. T. Pierson. Could anyone claim that Hudson Taylor did more for missions than he? Because of him and others he had influenced there still existed a great deal of optimism about what could be done within a few years if the Church were to more obediently respond to Christ's command. And Pierson, typically, continued to reiterate the grounds of such optimism.

God has now unquestionably, for the first time in the centuries, removed out of the way every obstacle to the immediate evangelization of the world and given to the Church everything needed for the completion of the work of preaching the Gospel to the world. The whole world is open and accessible physically, geographically, politically, to the Gospel messengers, and waiting for them. The Church has the means, the messengers, and the promise of the Spirit at her command, and seems dangerously near to suffering eclipse of faith and blight and life because of her failure to avail herself of them in fulfilling her great and pressing need (*Missionary Review*, December 1896:921).

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By this time, Pierson was well into a renewed emphasis on holy living. He had mentioned it before as one of the essentials for the church to move forward. Now it became his central theme: the church would *fail in its commission* if it was not completely renewed. Perhaps that was why it had failed in its response before. “It seems too plain to need demonstration that, if we are to sweep a wider circle of missions around the now unoccupied territory, and have it a real achievement rather than an apparent and superficial advance, we must be sure that the compass of our plan plants its foot in the firm pivotal center of believing prayer and higher holiness that is bound up inseparably with such devout and privileged communing with God” (*Missionary Review*, January 1897:4).

Meanwhile, the Student Volunteer Missionary Union of Great Britain accepted the watchword “The Evangelization of the World in This Generation” as its own in 1896, defining the watchword to mean “that the Gospel should be preached intelligibly and intelligently to every soul in such a manner that the responsibility for its acceptance shall no longer rest upon the Christian Church, but upon each man himself.” They also recognized that this watchword was impossible “unless the Church ceases to be so engrossed with things of time”—a clear reflection of Pierson’s new emphasis and that of the Keswick movement with which he was involved (*Missionary Review*, January 1898:59).

Plans to evangelize the world were still published regularly. In May of 1898, the *Missionary Review* carried the story of an English clergyman who gave a paper suggesting that the world could easily be evangelized in thirteen years. He came up with this figure by looking at Paul’s ministry in Acts 13-20 and estimating the territory he was able to cover in that period. If the church were to send out 1500 laborers into the unoccupied territories and they were to imitate Paul, the whole job could be finished in thirteen years!

Though Pierson had given up on the year 1900, he still believed that the world could be evangelized in a short time. He hoped that the great Ecumenical Council, planned for April of 1900 in New York City, would build on the London 1888 Conference. He suggested in an 1899 editorial, “Of all these questions [that could be discussed], none is more weighty than the practical division of the world-field with reference to the speedy evangelization of the world in this generation” (*Missionary Review*, August 1899:566).

Chapter 20

After the Turn of the Century (1900-1910)

What happened after the year 1900? In January we find Pierson's pen once again striking a clear chord, "There is no reason why the evangelization of the world should not be attempted and accomplished in our generation" (*Missionary Review*, January 1900:18). This was Pierson's theme at the New York Conference, in April, and he was supported by John R. Mott and Robert E. Speer—but once again no comprehensive plans to finish the job of world evangelization were developed.

In 1901 Pierson, referring to the men of the successful German Mission, wrote, "Give us two hundred and fifty men of equal consecration, and in twenty-five years the Gospel may be borne at least once to every living soul. Give us twenty-five hundred such workmen, and before the new century is ten years older, every inhabitant of the world may have heard the Gospel!" (Pierson, 1901:139).

The famous German mission strategist, Gustav Warneck, was not quite so optimistic. He wrote, "It is true, in view of the gigantic number of 1,000,000,000 of non-Christians the missionary achievements thus far seem small; but what is thus far done is essentially foundation work, and foundation work goes slow.... The work done yet is the seed of coming harvests. Missionary results are not to be reckoned by years, but by centuries" (*Missionary Review*, April 1900:260-261).

And perhaps in direct response to Pierson, in a letter to the Ecumenical Council, Warneck warned,

The mission command bids us "go" into all the world, not "fly." The kingdom of God is not like a hothouse, but like a field in which the crop is to be healthily grown at a normal rate. Impatient pressing forward has led to the waste of most patient toil, and more than one old mission field has been unwarrantably neglected in the haste to begin work in a new field. Patience fills a large space in the missionary program, and to patience must be added faithfulness in steadily continuing the great task of building up in the old mission fields. Here are ripening harvests calling for reapers. The non-Christian world is not to be carried by storm. Mission history should also teach us not to specify a time within which the evangelization of the world is to be completed. It is not for us to determine the times or the seasons, but to do

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in this our time what we can and to do it wisely and discreetly (*Missionary Review*, June 1900:415).

His words were echoed by John P. Jones, a famous missionary to India: "This enterprise is not only the greatest that the world has ever known; it is also the most difficult of achievement. Let us not fall into the error of thinking that Christianizing the nations and bringing the world to the feet of our Lord is the task of a day or of a generation" (Jones, 1912:251).

During this first decade of the twentieth century the SVM had still not reached the peak of its influence, the Laymen's Missionary Movement was gathering momentum, and the Missionary Education Movement was enlisting thousands of laymen and students (175,000 in 1908 alone). William T. Ellis, writing in *Men and Missions*, showed how certain denominations had already set up a sort of comity on how many unevangelized people they would be responsible for.

The Distributed Responsibility

Most of the mission boards of North America have accepted a certain distinct responsibility for a share of the mission field. This has done much to remove the vagueness from missionary presentation. It has been figured out also by the men best informed how much money it will take to meet this responsibility. Consequently, some churches have determined the amount they should raise. The figures in the former case, so far as they are available, are given below.

Denomination.
Canadian Societies
Congregationalists
Dutch Reformed
Foreign Christian Missionary Society
Northern Baptists
Northern Methodists
Northern Presbyterians
Reformed Church in the U. S.
Southern Methodists
Southern Presbyterians
United Brethren
United Presbyterians

Chapter 21

A Word on Missions and Eschatology

In November of 1892, a scorching criticism of A.T. Pierson and the *Missionary Review* was sent to the editors of the *Missionary Review*. The writer said, “Dr. Pierson’s views on missions are utterly at variance with those of almost all missionaries. More than once it has been said to me that there was danger lest he do the cause of missions more harm than good. The reason for this is that he is a strong premillenarian, and believes that the sole duty of missionaries is to preach, without any reference to conversion or the establishment of churches. He is opposed to missions having anything to do with education, the development of literature, etc. This was brought out last week at Northfield, and every foreign missionary that spoke attacked his position most earnestly” (*Missionary Review*, November 1892:863).

Pierson defended his position and that of the magazine by first stating that according to W. E. Blackstone, author of *Jesus is Coming*, most missionaries were premillenarians. He then refuted the view that premillenarians were opposed to missionary work beyond preaching. “Dr. Gordon and myself firmly believe that ‘preaching the Gospel as a witness among all nations’ means setting up churches, schools, a sanctified press, medical missions, and, in fact, all the institutions which are the fruit of Christianity and constitute *part of its witness*; but that our Lord’s purpose and plan are that we should not wait in any one field for the full results of our sowing to appear in a thoroughly converted community before we press on to the regions beyond, where as yet the name of Christ has not been spoken; and that our duty is to sow everywhere and as shortly as possible the simple message of the kingdom, that it may everywhere be followed up with every other agency that helps to transform a community” (*Missionary Review*, November 1892:864) [Italics his]. “Not at Northfield, or anywhere else, ‘last week,’ or any other time, has the editor of this Review affirmed anything else than what he here boldly reaffirms, that our duty is to go into all the world and within the limits of our own generation preach the Gospel to every creature; that our first duty is *contact*, and that *conversion* is something we cannot command, but must leave to God” (*Missionary Review*, November 1892:864) [Italics his].

Pierson also linked the second coming of Christ with the missionary zeal of the Church. “The fact is itself an argument

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present
generation.*

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and an appeal that, so soon as the Lord's coming ceased to be felt to be imminent, and was projected indefinitely into the distance, the remarkable evangelism of primitive days which fed on this truth, declined and decayed, and has never been revived" (*Missionary Review*, May 1894:322).

A. B. Simpson wrote a landmark book, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, in 1890. He made it clear that his reason for writing the book was to hasten the Lord's coming. He also affirmed Pierson's belief that the world could be evangelized by the year 1900.

Sent forth at the opening of this last decade of the century, may it prove indeed to be the Master's own Message to His Bride, and a harbinger of His own appearing. Blessed indeed if before this decade shall have closed, the feeble rushlights of our prophetic literature shall be lost in the full dawn of the Sun of Righteousness, and THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM superseded by the COMING OF THE KING (Simpson, 1890:6).

The second coming is a doctrine that motivates, according to both Simpson and Pierson. Pierson wrote,

Because the blessed hope of our Lord's return has so refining an influence on character it is very mould and matrix of missions. Its whole tendency is to make us unselfish, to relax our grasp upon material treasures and carnal pleasures; to fashion us "not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life." It makes all time seem short and the whole world seem small; dwarfs the present age into insignificance and lifts the peaks of the age to come into loftier altitudes, on a nearer horizon, in a clearer view. It so magnifies the approval of the coming Lord as to make present compensation for service and sacrifice appear trifling (*Missionary Review*, May 1894:325).

After the early 1890's, much of Pierson's mission motivation was derived from a heavily dispensational perspective. Speaking to a sensitive crowd at the Congress of Missions at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, Pierson gave an address entitled "Thy Kingdom Come." Here he outlined the five ages or dispensations of history.

The present age is known in Scripture as an *evil* age, during which evil is dominant, because Satan has usurped control of this world. This is the age of the Church,...., the outgathering of the Body or Bride of Christ from all nations; and this age belongs to the times of the Gentiles, because it is by the preaching of the Gospel as a witness to all nations that the elect are to be thus outgathered (*Missionary Review*, No-

vember 1893:803).

Pierson was heavily criticized for the dispensational and eschatological flavor of this address, but he later defended it on the basis of its popularity among most missionaries.

But by far, the greatest proponents of a link between the missionary enterprise and prophecy were not Americans but British. Mr. and Mrs. H. Grattan Guinness, the founders of the Regions Beyond Home Union and the editors of the monthly *Regions Beyond*, continually set before the public an eschatological view of completing the task of world evangelization. "Simply and honestly reading the words of the Book, we cannot, therefore, but see a close connection between the Foreign Missionary work of the Church and the second Advent of her Lord and Saviour" (*Regions Beyond*, May 1888:139). The Guinneses also saw the London Conference in 1888 as fulfillment of prophecy. They would be hastening the return of the Lord by looking at completing the task of world evangelization as speedily as possible. "Look up, therefore; lift up your heads, and be of joyful courage, for the coming of our Jesus is very close at hand; we live in the last hours of the world's long, dark night, already over heathendom the dawn is beginning to rise, it will not be much longer before the Sun of Righteousness shall shine forth. Hasten, hasten to gather in the last lost sheep to the fold of the tender Shepherd, to finish the work of the Lord, and so to be ready to meet Him when He shall appear!" (*Regions Beyond*, February 1889:48).

Pierson also spoke of the Lord's return as a motive to mission. "This was, no doubt, the foremost of all motives, hopes and incentives, which moved early disciples to zeal and activity in missions; and to revive this hope—to make it practically the mighty motor to us that it was to them, is to provide a new impulse and impetus in the work of a world's evangelization" (Pierson, 1895:414). This hope, beyond mere incentive, provided disciples with a reason to finish the task as quickly as possible. "So soon and so long as that hope was dim, and Christ's Coming was pushed in the far-off future, the Church began leisurely working, then flippantly playing at missions, as though vast cycles of time lay before us to witness to the world. Revive this hope of the Lord's Coming and it begets hourly watching, ceaseless praying, tireless toiling, patient waiting" (Pierson, 1895:416).

*By 1894
Arthur
Smith, a veter-
an
missionary to
China, would
say, "As yet
the Christian
Church at
home has
no adequate
conception of
what is meant
by the evan-
gelization of a
heathen na-
tion or tribe."*

Chapter 22

Conclusion

From 1881 to 1895 a pastor tirelessly promoted the idea of finishing the task of world evangelization by the year 1900. What he and many others saw as a feasible goal never came about. Perhaps A. T. Pierson could be criticized for highlighting a goal that would not be accomplished. On the other hand, perhaps his enthusiasm for preaching the gospel to every creature was instrumental in helping the church accomplish as much as it did in the final years of the nineteenth century.

Goals that are not met are not always goals that are unattainable. In Pierson's case, his goals were feasible—given a revival in the church and cooperation among mission agencies. Just because the world was not evangelized by the year 1900 does not mean it was not possible. By every indication, knowledgeable, level-headed Christians were sure that finishing was feasible within their lifetimes. The fact that it did *not* happen only points to the chief reason that these men and women gave themselves: The church did not take this opportunity seriously; she shirked her responsibility. The crisis of missions came and passed. Another generation of non-Christians passed into a Christless eternity.

Bishop Thoburn of India believed the task could be completed in his lifetime. Yet, with the eyes of faith, he gazed into our day and spoke with prophetic boldness,

A century hence there will be, possibly, seven hundred million, and certainly five hundred million, English speaking people on the globe, all subject to Christian law, maintaining Christian civilization, and exhibiting a much higher standard of morals than is seen in either England or America to-day... The English language, already a potent factor in many mission fields, will have become the lingua franca of the world, and will assist wonderfully in perfecting the later stages of the missionary enterprise. In such an age, with a world so revolutionized, and with all the terms of the problems so changed, the final conversion of all nations will no longer seem a far-off vision of a few enthusiasts, and the mention of a million converts will no longer startle timid or doubting Christians. We talk in hesitating tones of the possibility of seeing a million converts now; but those who will fill our places a century hence will look out upon a scene where not a million converts, but a million workers, appear (Thoburn, 1895:72-73).

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*Like a ship
 tacking into
 the wind, Pier-
 son readjust-
 ed
 his sails and
 moved for-
 ward with
 the younger
 generation.*

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*By 1896
Pierson was
well into
a renewed
emphasis on
holy living.*

*In agreement
with many
others, Pier-
son linked
the
second com-
ing of Christ
with the mis-
sionary zeal of
the Church.*



*Goals that are
not met
are not always
goals that
are unattainable. Just because the
world
was not evangelized by
the year 1900
does not
mean it was
not possible.*
